

THE BLESSINGS OF TRIALS
James 1:2-4

INTRO: Our text this morning is James 1:2-4 (read). The testings of life are nothing new to any Christian who has sought diligently to live for the Lord. Peter says in 1 Peter 4:12, "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you..." I wonder if this morning some of you think the trials that you face are strange. These fiery trials are there to test us.

If you look at James 1:2, the first word is 'James'. James was the writer of this book. The word for James here is Iakobos. It is the Hebrew name Jacob, Iakob, made into a Greek name, Iakobos. So Iakob is translated Jacob in the NT and Iakobos is translated James. The name Jacob means a supplanter or heel catcher. He is one who by treachery takes the place of another. There is a bit of Jacob in every one of us, and what we must have to be refined from such impurities is trials. No doubt, James, the half brother of Jesus, who I believe is the writer of this book knew about that. And so, when he writes to his Jewish people who have become Christians, the first thing he addresses is the trials that he knows they too are facing.

Now James, like the rest of his brothers, had a hard time believing that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah (Jn. 7:5). How could it be? He was their half brother. They grew up with Him. But James not only became a solid believer, he became the head of the early church in Jerusalem. He became a great man of God, just like Jacob, the first supplanter in the OT. That is the encouraging thing. We may have a very sin troubled nature, like Jacob of old, from before birth; but by faith we can become giants of the faith and how we handle trials is one of the things that will determine that. And so James will write to these Jewish believers about that first in his letter to them.

Jesus ascended to heaven somewhere shortly after 30 AD. This letter, according to Ryrie, is written somewhere between 45-50 AD. So that is only 15-20 years after Jesus left this earth. Many Jews had converted to the Messiah, while the majority rejected Him. And these Jews, according to James 1:1 were scattered abroad.

We will consider verses 2-4 under two points: 1. how to consider or think about the testings of this life and 2, how to benefit from the testings of life. The testings will be there, but how to handle those testings is the crucial thing.

So we begin with point I, how to consider the testings of life.

I. HOW TO CONSIDER THE TESTINGS OF LIFE

A. What We Are To Do

As we do this, let us note that James addresses this letter to, "My brethren..." These were not his blood brothers because verse 1 says he is writing to the 12 tribes of Israel. So he is addressing, no doubt, Jewish believers. These were spiritual brethren. And what he writes to these believers applies to us as well and we can take great comfort in what James writes.

Now notice what James tells these believers to do. He says, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials." The word, to count, in the original language has the primary idea of leading. Vines Dictionary says it means to 'lead before the mind.' When we fall into various testings, we do not naturally experience joy from them. When we win a prize or receive a greatly desired gift, we have no trouble experiencing joy. We do not need to be told to 'count it all joy', it naturally brings joy. But when we experience trials, troubles of various kinds, now we must stop and do some calculating. We get naturally depressed when we experience various trials.

Our children got a gift for us. It was a GPS so that we would be able to drive in the city like you younger folk do. It is a wonderful gift. But even then, sometimes when I miss a turn, it says, "Recalculating." You see, when in life, we fall into various trials, and we get depressed James says, "Recalculate." He doesn't say, "Count it all depressing." He says, "Count it all joy." And you might well say, "I don't get it. Could you explain how to do that?" We will get to that yet.

And so, when we go through various testings and trials, we are to lead before the mind these thoughts, "This is something to rejoice in. This is something that ought to cause joy." The words; joy, rejoice and thanksgiving all have the same root. In my notes on the letter to the Philippians I said this: "How do I know if I am experiencing the grace of God in my life? The test is two-fold: 1. Am I a rejoicing Christian? And 2. Am I a thankful Christian?" And James now is telling Christians who are going through various trials to count it all joy. That is incredible!

Now notice further, our text says, "My brethren, count it all joy..." May I ask you this morning, is there anything you have fallen into that is troubling and you say, "How can I rejoice in this thing?" Our text says, "Count it all joy."

Let me read for you the song we learned earlier. It says:

God never moves without purpose or plan
When trying His servant and molding a man.
Give thanks to the Lord though your testing seems long;
In darkness He giveth a song.

Chorus:

Oh rejoice in the Lord. He makes no mistake.
He knoweth the end of each path that I take.
For when I am tried, and purified,
I shall come forth as gold.

(Now this song is written by Ron Hamilton and is copyrighted in 1978. When we learned this song in Bible school we were told, and I am not sure if it was between verses 1 and 2 or between verses 2 and 3, but the writer went blind. After he was blind, it took some time before he was able to finish the song. And verses 2-3 read like this☺)

I could not see through the shadows ahead;
I looked to the cross of my Saviour instead.
I bowed to the will of the Master that day;
Then peace came and tears fled away.

Chorus:

Now I can see testing comes from above;
God strengthens His children and purges in love.
My Father knows best, and I trust in His care;
Through purging more fruit I will bear.

And if we had been there when James wrote this book, we might have said, "James, you say we are to count our various trials all joy?" And he would say, "Yes, count it all joy."

Now notice that he says we are to count it all joy when we 'fall into' various trials. Most of us do not go about looking for trials. We 'fall into' them. Circumstances bring us into them. When we fall down, it is generally too late to change the circumstances. Sometimes, by rare chance, we may reach out and take hold of something to keep us from falling. But when we fall into various trials, we are there. We cannot reverse the circumstances. And what James is talking about is falling into trials, various trials.

So let us consider the word 'various'. The KJV translates it as 'divers' or 'manifold.' So the NT speaks of divers diseases. That is different kinds of diseases. The NT speaks of the manifold wisdom of God. It is of all different kinds. It speaks of the manifold grace of God. The grace of God fits all kinds of different situations. And then Peter speaks of 'manifold temptations' or testings. That is all kinds of different testings. Some of us are hard learners and God allows us manifold testings.

Hezekiah was a good king, for the most part. And one day he got sick. And Isaiah went to him and told him to set his house in order because he was about to die. Then Hezekiah wept bitterly and the Lord told Isaiah to go back to him and tell him the Lord had heard his prayer and seen his tears, and that He would heal him and give him 15 extra years. And Hezekiah asked for a sign that this was true. And Isaiah said, "Choose between these two signs; shall the sun go forward 10 degrees or backward 10 degrees?" And Hezekiah thought about it and said, "It is harder to make the sun go back 10 degrees, so I will choose that sign." And that happened and Hezekiah recovered.

The king of Babylon heard about this and sent some ambassadors with some letters and a present to Hezekiah. And when they came something very instructive happened to Hezekiah. Turn to 2 Chronicles 32:31 (read). My wife pointed this verse out to me a while ago. God withdrew from Hezekiah to test him. And when God had withdrawn, and these ambassadors from Babylon came, Hezekiah showed them all the treasures of his kingdom. Then Isaiah the prophet came to Hezekiah and asked him about what the men had wanted and what Hezekiah had showed them, and Hezekiah told him that he had showed them everything. So, turn now to 2 Kings 20 (read 16-18).

I believe that God had discovered that there was pride in this king. And if God did not root it out, it would destroy Hezekiah. And so God tested Hezekiah. He left him on his own. And when Hezekiah was on his own, he failed God. One commentator said he felt that Hezekiah's failure had been to not give the God of heaven the glory for his healing as well as showing these ambassadors all his kingdom. The king of Babylon had sent his ambassadors to congratulate him on his recovery, but it seems Hezekiah did not give God the glory.

From that I gather that some of our trials are due to some area of unbiblical character in us. And so God allows us to go through trials and by this He seeks to refine us and grow godly character in us. And it may well be that like Job of old, if God did not expose that weakness in us, we might go to hell. And God, in His great mercy, allows these trials into our lives. Maybe God has found in some of us some selfishness, bitterness, or tendency to stretch the truth or even lie, or some tendency to slander, subtly tear down someone else's character in order to get our own end etc... And maybe God is seeking to root this evil out of us, but we stand with our heels dug in.

So, let us return to our verse once more. "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials." Let us consider this word 'trials'. The KJV translates this as 'temptations'. Now look at James 1:13 (read). The words translated 'tempted' and

'tempt' are the same as the word translated trials in verse 2. So how this one word speak of both testing and temptation? To deal with this difficulty, the NKJV has translated this word 'trials' in verse 2 and 'tempted' in verse 13. And we might question if this is correct?

Note in verse 13 that it says God cannot be tempted or tested by evil. When this word is used to describe being tested to do evil, in English we call it a temptation. But when God tries us, it is not to tempt us to evil; it is to build godly character or test our faith for genuiness. Temptation is to bring out the worst in us. Testing or trials are to bring out the best in us. So, when the devil trys us, it is to bring out the worst in us. When God allows us to be tried, it is to bring out the best in us. It is to purify us and make us like Christ. The devil tries to get our sin nature to come out. God allows us to be tried to purify our faith. We will see more of that that in a moment.

B. What We Know

So, James now informs us that there is something we know. He writes in verse 3, "Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience." Here we get a glimpse into why God allows trials into our lives. It is to test our faith in order to produce patience. Patience is a virtue that God wants us to grow. And He does so by trying our faith.

When we come to this word, 'testing' we have a different word from that of trials or temptation. The word here is 'dokimos'. Of this word Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse says, "In the ancient world there was no banking system as we know it today, and no paper money. All money was made from metal, heated until liquid, poured into moulds and allowed to cool. When the coins were cooled, it was necessary to smooth off the uneven edges. The coins were comparatively soft and of course many people shaved them closely. In one century, more than eighty laws were passed in Athens, to stop the practice of shaving down the coins then in circulation. But some money changers were men of integrity, who would accept no counterfeit money. They were men of honor who put only genuine full

weighted money into circulation. Such men were called "dokimos" or "approved" (Donald Barnhouse; as taken from the online Bible).

Now this word dokimos, translated 'testing' indicates that the trials of verse 2 are not temptations to evil. They are testings to bring about approval. Let us say I want to sell you my car. And you say, "Would you mind if I take it for a test drive." Now why would you take it for a test drive? Well, you want to see if you are getting a car you approve. So you could call it a test drive or, an approval drive.

Go with me here to 1 Peter 1 (read 6-7). Peter tells us that if need be, and I might add that the original wording indicates that it is necessary, we have been grieved by various, manifold trials, or testings. And he says that we experience those in order that the genuineness of our faith which is much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. When it says, "though it is tested by fire" the word is dokimazo, the word in our text in James.

There are some very important things to notice in that passage, which closely parallels our text in James. This testing or approving is regarding the genuineness of our faith. How genuine is our faith? Let us say now that God has found something in our lives that needs some divine surgery. Let us say, like Hezekiah, it is some pride. And God has allowed us various testings, and yet we do not bow ourselves to Him. And then He allows something big into our lives and we say, "Ok, I am done." And let us say I become bitter. What has happened is that some weakness has been discovered in my faith. I may blame others or my circumstances, but the facts are my faith is not what I put it forward to be.

Peter talks about our faith being like gold. And yet, as much as we treasure gold, it will perish. How is our faith, which, if it is genuine does not perish; like gold that perishes? Let me quote from a message I did some time ago on this passage in Peter:

"...I want us to notice one more thing here in our text which says, "...that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, *though it is tested by fire...*" Let me give you an illustration of testing gold from Amy Carmichael, missionary to India's underprivileged. She writes in her book *Gold Cord*, "One day we took the children to see a goldsmith refine gold after the ancient manner of the East. He was sitting beside his little charcoal fire." (Let me mention here that Amy Carmichael then inserts this part of a verse, "He shall sit as a refiner". She also adds that the gold or silversmith never leaves his crucible once it is on the fire.) She then goes on to say, "In the red glow lay a common curved roof-tile; another tile covered it like a lid. This was the crucible. In it was the medicine made of salt, tamarind fruit and burnt brick-dust, and embedded in it was the gold. The medicine does its appointed work on the gold, then 'the fire eats it,' and the goldsmith lifts the gold out with a pair of tongs, lets it cool, rubs it between his fingers, and if not satisfied puts it back in fresh medicine. This time he blows the fire hotter than it was before, and each time he puts the gold into the crucible the heat of the fire is increased: 'It could not bear it so hot at first but it can bear it now; what would have destroyed it then helps it now.' 'How do you know when the gold is purified?' we asked him, and he answered, 'when I can see my face in it [that is the liquid gold in the crucible] then it is pure.'"

"As gold is tested by fire, faith is tested by trials. No fire, no pure gold. No trials, no pure faith. Now it is simply instructive to know how the goldsmith determines whether the gold is pure. He looks into the crucible, and when the gold reflects his image like a glass mirror, he knows it is pure. As long as it does not do that, it is not fully genuine. God knows His trials have purified our faith when He can see His Son Jesus Christ in us. When we reflect the image of Christ, which He is seeking to conform us to, then the trials of life have brought about that which God sought."

And so, as we value gold, which is perishable, so God values a faith that endures; and it is imperishable.

Hebrews 11:6 says, "But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

But our text will now add one more thing in James 1:3. It says, "Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience." The KJV has translated the original word translated 'patience' as *patience* 29 times, *enduring* 1 time, *patient continuance* 1 time, *patient waiting* 1 time. Other literal translations render it as *endurance*. The original word is 'hupomenee'. It comes from 'hupo' meaning 'under' and meno, meaning to remain or abide. It is to abide under. I think that *endurance* is a good translation.

And when endurance has been achieved in us through the trials of life, we are not yet done. So we want to look at verse 4 to see what remains to be done. In verse 4 James will show us how to benefit from the trials of life.

II. HOW TO BENEFIT FROM THE TESTINGS OF LIFE

A. Let Patience Work In You

So look at verse 4 (read). When we have experienced trials and have come through them victoriously, endurance will have been produced in us. So James now exhorts us to let endurance have its perfect work in us. How do we do that? Well, go with me to Romans 5 (read 3-4). This verse says that we glory in tribulations. Tribulations are one brand of the manifold trials we go through. And tribulations can also be manifold. And this verse says we glory in them. That is if we learn to count it all joy when we fall into various trials. Now notice that it says that tribulation produces perseverance, or it might be translated 'patience' or 'endurance'. Here is the word of our text. This is what God is seeking to come out of our trials. But according to this passage, endurance is not yet the final thing that is produced in us by trials. Endurance, when it has been produced, produces character. The KJV translates this word as experience. The NKJV translates it as character.

Now you will be amazed to know that this is the word, which has been translated as *experience* or *character* is the word *dokimos* we looked at earlier. It produces God's approval of us, which is what godly character does. I heard a part of a message by Chuck Swindol the other day and he said, "Greatness of character is developed in the crucible." I think he is right. Character is developed by trials. No wonder James says, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials." One trial allows for some character growth; manifold trials allow for much growth. The more trials the greater the potential for character development.

B. Let Patience Perfect and Complete You

Now notice that verse 4 goes on like this, "But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. From Romans 5, here, it seems to me, is how it works. We are allowed by God to experience trials in life. These trials are designed to produce endurance. When the Lord has achieved endurance in our lives by trials, and has found us faithful then our faith or character is approved by God. We, like the good money changers we mentioned earlier, have become *dokimos*, or approved. And when we are approved, hope is produced in us. And it seems to me that when true hope is ignited in us it will just bring about greater ability to endure greater trials which will in turn bring greater approval which will in turn increase our hope and so we grow in Christlikeness, the very thing God wants to produce in us.

CONCL: So let me read our verses once more as we close (read James 1:2-4). We have been instructed by Scripture this morning to count it all joy when we fall into various trials. There is a reason for this instruction. We have a sin nature and sinful tendencies and may have things within that need rooting out. We are in the process of being conformed to the image of Christ, but we begin the Christian life anything but like Christ. And God, in His great mercy, uses trials to bring this about.

Our faith is of inestimable value to God. It is MUCH, MORE precious than gold that perishes. God esteems it of highest value. Gold and pearls are among the most sought after

commodities in this world, but genuine faith is the most sought after commodity by God.

Trials may bring out of us that which would otherwise destroy us; that is our benefit, and they can purify our faith if we respond right and we grow in godly character, which is what God desires above all else. When the trials of life are done with us, we are to be perfect, complete, lacking nothing. So:

God never moves without purpose or plan
When trying His servant and molding a man.
Give thanks to the Lord though your testing seems long;
In darkness He giveth a song.

I could not see through the shadows ahead;
I looked to the cross of my Saviour instead.
I bowed to the will of the Master that day;
Then peace came and tears fled away.

Now I can see testing comes from above;
God strengthens His children and purges in love.
My Father knows best, and I trust in His care;
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Oh rejoice in the Lord. He makes no mistake.
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