

Perseverance through Trial

James 1:1-12

Preached: 8/2/2020; Germantown – Online Message

Welcome: Welcome to Germantown Church of God. We are located in Cascade, MD. I am Mark Hosler, and I serve as the pastor of this Church. THANK you for joining us today for this time of Worship, Prayer and Study.

Scripture:

Psalm 57

Opening Prayer:

Scripture James 1:1-12

Message

We have been doing a sermon series on the topic, “Becoming the Image of Christ”, looking at some stories in the Gospels where the disciples learned from Jesus what He was like and how they were different from Him. Because our Sunday morning Worship Gathering this week will include a concert by DayStar, we won’t be having a Sermon Study as we usually do. So we are going to leave our series today for this Online Service. We will return to that study next weekend. We’ll be looking at the story of Jesus and the Man born blind in John 9. There was very clearly a difference of opinion between Jesus’ followers and Jesus, regarding this man’s blindness.

So for today, I want to look at this passage from James. This last 6 months have shown us that this world is not always a safe place. There are difficult days. There are days of hardship. Many people have experienced hardship as a result of the pandemic – sickness; job loss; financial strain; changes in lifestyle; restrictions. But we are aware that there are times of hardship that come into everyone’s life that are not related to this Virus. We get a call from the Dr. after a visit, telling us the doctor wants to see us again. A relationship breaks down. A traffic accident, A friend betrays us. We have all faced times of hardship and difficulty. And as followers of Jesus, we are not exempt. Everyone. Some people are just not able to recover from a time of hardship. They may become depressed. They may withdraw from family and friends, become reclusive. Some may give up their faith, turn their back on God, or at least become angry with God and live their life as if God doesn’t exist. They question whether God is a loving and kind God. They never experience intimacy and warmth in their relationship with God.

But some people are able to navigate their way through a time of hardship and come through it as a stronger, better person. In my years of ministry experience, I have encountered people who have been struck by something painful or hard, and they immediately start to question – What did I do to deserve this? Why is God doing this to me? And I have encountered people who are able to take the hardship, and continue to trust God. They do not become angry or bitter. I don’t doubt that they have questions, and sometimes wonder “why?”. But they do not become obsessed with being negative. The second group of people are able to make the most of it. They are able to encourage others. They are able to be a blessing to others.

In this passage, James addresses the matter of facing hardship. He helps us to see that hardship and suffering can actually have a good purpose. And if we understand that, our outcome will be better.

In verse 1 the author of this letter is identified as James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are several men by the name of James mentioned in the New Testament. Most Commentators believe that this James is a half-brother of Jesus. A son of Mary and Joseph, born after the birth of Jesus. This James became a believe in Jesus after the resurrection. He eventually became the leader of the Jerusalem Church. James addresses this letter to “the twelve tribes scattered among the nations”. The 12 tribes is a reference to God’s people - Jews. The Jewish nation was made up of 12 tribes, the 12 sons of Jacob. In chapter 2, vs. 1, he further identifies his readers as “Believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.” So James is addressing this letter to Jewish Christians who are now scattered among the nations. When the Church in Jerusalem began to experience a time of persecution, many of the Christians fled from Jerusalem into other regions of the world, primarily in the Roman empire. So James is writing this letter to his friends, people who had belonged to the Church at Jerusalem. He was their pastor. And he is writing them this letter to encourage them and teach them while they are living their lives in other places.

Vs. 2 – Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds. As James begins this letter, the first thing that he addresses with his beloved Church members is difficulties and hardships - trials. James was aware that many of his beloved “children” were facing hard times. He refers to them as trials of many kinds. James was aware that life in this world has days of hardship. For some of them the trials were just the ordinary hardships of life in a fallen and broken world. But for many of them, the trials they were facing were the result of persecution for their faith. For James to start his letter with this reference to hardships, we must understand that James knew that this was the biggest threat to their faith and growth as followers of Jesus. His pastoral advice to his readers is that they adopt an attitude of Joy about the hardships that they were facing. It is true that we may not be able to change our circumstances, but we can change our attitude about that circumstance. And our attitude will determine the success with which we manage a difficult situation.

It may sound strange for us to hear a pastor say to this people who are going through a painful time, “Well, chin up!” or “Rejoice because of this situation.” James’ counsel is not saying “Laugh it off.” Trials are painful. The fire that burns away impurity in metal is hot and painful. But even though they are unpleasant, he is suggesting that times of trial can have a positive purpose. It’s not pleasant or joyful to go through a hard time. But when you understand that it can be helpful, you can have a different attitude about it.

Vs. 3 BECAUSE YOU KNOW that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. James says that the reason you can have a positive attitude about a time of trial is because YOU KNOW that it has a purpose. Its purpose is to produce perseverance. Another word for perseverance is endurance or steadfastness. When faith is tested, it will become stronger. Perseverance is that quality that enables someone to withstand difficult days, without giving up or turning back. William Barclay says it is the quality that enables a person to stand on his feet facing the storm. If we are going to make it through this life to the end with our faith still intact, we will need to develop perseverance. And perseverance will come from hardship.

Vs. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. So, trials have a purpose – to build endurance, or perseverance. And Perseverance has a purpose – to produce maturity and completion. When we are able to endure times of hardship without giving up or turning away from our faith, our character will develop and we will be able to display those characteristics that are intended to set us apart from those who do not know Jesus.

James concludes his thoughts about suffering and hardship in verse 12. The person who is able to endure through the hard times will be rewarded with the gift of eternal life. As John writes about heaven in Revelation 21, he speaks to those who endure (**Revelation 21:1-7**). I read this text at funerals to encourage those who are grieving with this image of heaven. If their loved one was a believer in Jesus, they have been rewarded by going to his beautiful place. But I also read it as a way of encouraging those who are suffering this heavy blow of grief to remain faithful to the end so that they too will inherit this heavenly reward.

James assures us that times of hardship can be helpful. Scott Hubbard in an article entitled, **Fortified by Fire: How Suffering Makes Us Strong**, challenges us with this thought: ***“We need to recognize our suffering for what it is: not ultimately a thief who steals our best years, not a murderer who kills our dearest dreams, not a madman who wields his weapons at random. Our suffering is rather a servant from God, sent to make us steadfast.”***

CONCLUSION: When the times of trial come, what makes the difference between people. Why will some people give up and be overcome, and why will some people survive and even thrive. James suggests that if we understand that a time of suffering can have a positive effect on us – it can develop endurance, which will bring us to maturity, and ultimately will guarantee our final victory – then we can accept and withstand that time of hardship. We will not be overcome. May God give you the strength to endure.

Prayer