

STRENGTH THROUGH TRIAL

James 1:1-15

We assume that the writer of this epistle, which deals with matters of deep and abiding interest, was James the half brother of the Lord Jesus. He simply styled himself "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ," which indicated that he worshipped and served Him as his Lord.

This letter was written to James' fellow countrymen and fellow Christians who were scattered in various parts of the world outside of Palestine. Sorely afflicted by poverty and greatly distressed because of the oppression which followed their dispersion, these believers were in great need of instruction and encouragement, so James reminded them that God's care of His own is constant and neverfailing. Although they were persecuted, tried, imprisoned, robbed and urged to renounce their faith in Christ, James urged them to live consistent Christian lives, even under the most adverse circumstances.

These dispersed people were the "brethren" of James both by nature or according to the flesh, and by grace or in Christ. In was to their brotherhood in Christ that James referred primarily.

Quite likely James startled his readers when he bade them to rejoice because they were hedged in by various trials. He sought to encourage them by pointing out the fact that satanic onslaught is a sure sign of spiritual activity. He taught that, instead of trying to shun them, Christians were to meet their trials joyfully because of their beneficial results.

Trials discipline a child of God and aid him greatly in the development of his Christian character. Misfortunes and adversities test the reality and the strength of the Christian's faith. The endurance of trials often results in the full surrender of the believer to the perfect will of God. Anything that brings one nearer to God, or that aids him in the development of the grace of patience, is certainly a blessing. Patience is developed most effectively by the trials of life. Patience is learned best in the school of affliction. Nobody is born with patience; neither is it bestowed upon us when we become Christians, but it is gradually wrought in us by the discipline of experience.

James emphasized the need of wisdom. Surely each of us is painfully aware of his lack of wisdom. We need to be reminded frequently that there is a difference between knowledge and wisdom. One may have an abundance of what is called knowledge and yet be sadly deficient in wisdom. We we lack, need and desire wisdom, we should always remember that God is the source of wisdom, and that the means by which we obtain it from Him is through asking Him for it in genuine faith. To "ask in faith" means to expect to receive. One certainly will not receive the wisdom for which he asks unless he expects it. We must never doubt God's ability or willingness to give us wisdom. He had an unlimited supply of wisdom, and He is very desirous of imparting it to His children. His liberality in giving us wisdom is the absolute guarantee that the needed supply will be provided when it is desired, requested and expected.

Both the poor and the rich are sharers in affliction. Frequently the poor, or those who are shunned by society, think the rich are free from all trials, but such is not the case. Those who are rich are brought face to face with the fact that earthly possessions mean nothing so far as eternal salvation is concerned. Wealth has a tendency to make man self-sufficient, but we must never forget that "our sufficiency is of God." Christianity has a great leveling effect. It causes the poor and humble to rejoice in that they are exalted, and it causes the rich and proud brethren to forsake their self-trust and rejoice that they are brought low.

Non-Christians do not know anything about the peace, love and joy that thrills the hearts of the faithful Christians whom the Lord enables to rejoice in the midst of their trials, knowing full well that they help to strengthen them. "The crown of life" awaits the Christians who endure trials for Christ's sake.

A danger that sometimes arises out of trials is the tendency to accuse God of tempting one to sin. By temptation is meant the solicitation to sin. Let it be understood once for all that temptations do not come from God. He has never enticed anybody to sin. To tempt a person to sin is contrary to the very nature of God, because He hates sin, and therefore does not have any desire to get anyone to do wrong. Nobody has any right to think or to say that God is the author of sin.

Satan is the one who tempts us to sin. One of his most effective allies is sinful human nature. Many temptations spring from our human desires. Satan brings numerous allurements before our eyes and tries to entice us to sin, but that is all he can do. He cannot compel us to sin. The solicitation to evil does stimulate the desire, but the responsibility for doing wrong most assuredly rests upon the individual who yields and sins against God, against others and against himself. Because this is true, you should not attempt to lay the blame for your sins on Satan, on others, or on God, but you should place it where it actually belongs, and that is on yourself, and you must render an account for your deeds. You are free to choose the evil or the good, and it is your choice of the former that constitutes sin.