

JOY IN TRIAL

James 1:1-6

We are beginning a series of messages on one of the short but outstanding epistles of the New Testament, which was written at Jerusalem about 43 or 49 A. D. This Epistle, which deals with matters of deep and abiding interest, has not been read, studied and obeyed as it should. From our study of it together we hope to derive much practical help and personal benefit.

I. The Writer. James 1:1a.

We assume that the writer of this Epistle is James, the brother of our Lord. This remarkable man simply styled himself here as "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ," and rejoiced in that title. He claimed no distinction whatever except that which the rest of them possessed in substance. His description of himself as "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" indicated that he worshipped and served Jesus Christ as his Lord and Master.

II. The Readers. James 1:1b.

James wrote this letter to his fellow countrymen and fellow Christians who were scattered in various parts of the Gentile world outside of Palestine. They had accepted Jesus Christ as their Messiah, but, with their imperfect grasp of the gospel, they were in sore need of help. It is not at all surprising that God through James sent a letter to the saints who were scattered abroad and in such great need of instruction and encouragement.

James understood the Old Testament and sought diligently to interpret Christianity more fully to the Jewish Christians of his time. He urged them to live in accordance with their Christian profession. Most of them seemed to be poor, and to be suffering from the selfishness and oppression of those among whom they were living. They were persecuted as apostates, dragged before the judgment seats, imprisoned, deprived of their goods and tempted to renounce their faith. They sought the friendship of the world, were at strife among themselves, and lacking in Christian love. James sought to correct their errors and to admonish them for their failures. He did not attempt to teach Christian doctrine, but tried to stimulate Christian living. He assumed the great truths of the Christian faith and upon them as a foundation he urged his readers to build the necessary superstructure of consistent works.

This Epistle suggests some of the temptations by which Christians are beset, and shows how they may and should live in days of discouragement and persecution. It is an epistle of practical wisdom for perilous times and guides their actions when trials abound. It demands reality in religion. It rebukes all sham, pretense and hypocrisy. It insists that faith shall be tested by works and that character must correspond to profession.

III. The Exhortation. James 1:2-4.

There is the tone of an elder brother in this Epistle, and we see it in his statement, "my brothers." That was not a perfunctory phrase with him. They were his brethren by both nature and grace. The scattered Israelites were the brethren of James according to the flesh, but they were also his brothers in Christ. In the words before us, he referred to the latter kinship primarily. They were actually brethren. They were begotten of one Father and members of one family.

Evidently these early Jewish Christians had their share of trial. Who, alas, does not have his portion? Trials of any kind, such as earthly losses, bodily afflictions, domestic sorrows, or spiritual assaults are painful in their nature. For the present they are not joyous, but grievous.

James startled his readers by bidding them to "count it all joy" when they were suddenly overwhelmed by misfortunes of every possible kind. He did not mean that we are to court disaster, to seek for trouble, or to deny the reality of pain and sorrow, but that we are to regard all of these adversities as tests of faith and as a means of moral and spiritual growth. We are to rejoice, not because distresses come, but in view of their possible results. It is not in the trial itself that we are called to rejoice. It is in the purpose for which God sends them that we are called to be joyful. Trials test the reality, the steadfastness and the strength of faith. The faith that is tried by them is faith in the wisdom, faithfulness, love and power of God. It is faith in His wisdom, as incapable of erring; in His faithfulness, acting in perfect accordance with His promises; in His love, that is unchanging; and in His power, which is unfailing. Anything that is "all joy" has nothing in it of regret, no place for complainings. Anything that is "all joy" is certainly something to be coveted and not shunned; sought, and not cast away.

The trial of faith worketh patience. It brings it into exercise. There cannot be any patience unless there has been trial. Trials are necessary to its very existence. They are the scenes that call it forth. It is by repeated sufferings that we learn to bear them. It is only in the school of affliction that the lesson of patience can be learned. Let not the exercise of patience be hindered by any rebellious murmurings or expressions of discontent.

God has grace for every trial whatever its color. The way to face trials is with joy in the heart and a smile on the face. Joy in suffering is possible, as many of God's children can testify. It is well to remember that patience is the product of trial. We are not born with a supply of patience. It is not bestowed in fulness upon us at the new birth. We need a fresh supply of it daily. But patience is gradually wrought in us by the discipline of experience. The climax of our trials is our full development as children of God.

IV. The Need. James 1:5.

James here reminds us of our need of wisdom. Who is it that does not feel his lack of wisdom, at times with painful intensity? Wisdom is more than knowledge. It is more than mere intelligent apprehension of acquired knowledge. Wisdom is far more than the accumulation of knowledge. It is the right use of one's opportunities in holy living. It is doing the proper thing at the right time and in the right manner. It is living in accord with the will of God.

Where is wisdom to be found? James tells us that the source of wisdom is God. So, when our supply of wisdom runs short, we are to ask God for more. When we apply to a person for any favor we want, two things are always required for our encouragement in making the application. They are ability and willingness. We never seek where we are sure the needed article cannot be had. At the source to which we are directed to apply, there is neither want of ability nor lack of willingness. God is the Banker whose supply of wisdom never runs short. Unlike other bankers, He asks no security save the name of Jesus Christ. That name gives us full credit at the Bank of Heaven.

How is wisdom to be obtained? James answered, "Let him ask of God." It is to God that we are directed for everything. To Him the Bible sends us in every time of need; for strength in temptation, for protection and deliverance in danger, for wisdom in perplexity, and for comfort in affliction. This is at once a duty and a privilege.

"Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering," suggests some important things. It suggests that we must not doubt that God possesses the wisdom we so much need. We must not only believe that God possesses all wisdom, but that He holds it for us; that He is interested in our special needs; that He is deeply concerned about us, insignificant as we are. It also suggests that we must not doubt God's ability to give us wisdom. He

not only has a storehouse of wisdom, but He is able and anxious to turn it loose. His channels are not closed. However, our faith must be steadfast, "nothing wavering." The ability and the readiness to give, and the liberality in giving are affirmed in the strongest and most cheering terms.