

# **Count it all Joy**

Sermon 2 in the James Series

## **James 1:2-12**

As we mentioned in our first message – the Book of James is structured differently than the epistles of Paul or even the books of Peter or John.

I think it is helpful to look at James as NT wisdom literature, much like our OT Book of Proverbs.

James is not primarily writing a theological treatise – although there is good theology throughout the book.

Instead, he is giving practical pastoral advice  
(This is why James is a favorite with so many believers)

- He gives Christians encouragement in the face of difficulties
- He exhorts believers to persevere in the faith

- And he constantly warns unbelievers along with those who profess to be believers, but whose lives do not line up with their profession.

### **He doesn't waste any time – as we see in verse 1**

He introduces himself  
– He doesn't even say that he is the brother of the Lord Jesus Christ  
– James – a servant of God

#### **He addresses his audience**

Primarily those who likely had been part of the congregation in Jerusalem but now have been scattered.

Remember, that church received phenomenal growth on the day of Pentecost and later. The Lord was adding daily to the church those who would be saved.

But eventually, some were scattered by persecution – or economic conditions forced others to go back to their original homelands.

Greetings – in the Greek, the common greeting, but also a form of the word JOY – which he uses immediately in v. 2.

## **I. God's Purpose in Our Trials 1:2-4**

BE GLAD! – COUNT IT ALL JOY

Right away, we can see Pastor James teaching something so very practical that Christians have quoted it and held it dear for centuries.

Our own Chelsey Blu – in the hospital Friday– posted this very verse on her Facebook – it's something we cling to and it brings us through.

Difficulties are not experienced the same way for the Christian or the Lost person.

WILDFIRES devastate a neighborhood.

The wicked man's house burns.

The Christians house burns.

It could be – God will use that providence to awaken the lost man turn the wicked from his sins.

However – it might only further harden him – either in bitterness against THE GOD WHO WOULD LET THIS HAPPEN – or harden him in his own SELF-RELIANCE – “I can overcome this. Whatever doesn't kill me makes me stronger! I'll pick myself up by my own bootstraps”. And he becomes more proud and arrogant.

The Christian suffers the same difficulty – but with the full knowledge that God did not send this for his DESTRUCTION – but even this comes from the hand of a loving Heavenly Father.

The Christian does not necessarily need to know WHY it happened – maybe in time that will be revealed – or at least partially revealed – but the Christian needs to TRUST GOD – and believe there is a purpose behind it all.

### **A. Count it all Joy my Brothers**

Happiness and Joy can be synonyms – but in my mind they are not exactly the same thing – at least in my mind.

It's hard to be HAPPY in the midst of extreme difficulty.  
It is possible to have JOY in the worst of conditions.

James calls us to joy in the midst of trial.

Why?

Because – for the Christian – there is a PURPOSE in trials.

This is not living IN DENIAL.

This is living BY FAITH and trusting God

This is believing that the God who loves me so much

– that He chose me

– and gave Christ to die for me

– and has sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in me

– has a plan and a purpose for my good – just like Paul says in  
Romans 8:28 -- *And we know that all things work together for good  
to those who love God, to those who are called according to His  
purpose. 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be  
conformed to the image of His Son,*

There's the grand purpose.

-- James calls it steadfastness and being made mature or perfect.

-- Paul calls it being conformed to the image of His Son.

Both agree that it won't happen fully until the final day.

But both also agree that the process has already begun – for the  
Christian – here on earth – right now!

One of the methods God uses is TRIALS.

## **B. What kind of Trials is James Referring?**

Is he talking about temptations to sin?

Should we joy in that?

No – we'll deal with that next week.

But we don't rejoice when we are tempted to sin – or drawn  
away into sin or blame God for our sin.

The temptation itself is not the problem.  
The problem is our AGREEMENT with sin.  
The problem is our DESIRE for sin.

We don't blame God for this desire to sin.  
The problem rests IN HERE (heart).

The trials James refers to here are the various and normal trials that come upon us all.

Sickness – financial reversals -- loneliness – poverty -- persecution.  
Difficulties of any kind -- VARIOUS trials.

He is talking about the things that could shake our faith  
– but they don't -- instead – by God's grace -- we preserve through these trials – and become stronger in our faith.

Have you ever heard someone say, “Come to Jesus and all your troubles will be solved?”

They should be sued for false advertising! ☺

James doesn't say that.  
Yet James speaks right to the very heart of the Christian.

What would be worth giving up Christ for?  
For what would you be willing to sell the Lord Jesus Christ?  
Judas sold Him for 30 pieces of silver.  
Men have been selling Him more cheaply than that ever since.

The true Christian would not sell the Lord for ANYTHING.  
The true Christian is willing TO DIE for His Lord.

### **C. The Result of the Trials of this Life**

ENDURANCE – *hupomone* --

You keep going – just like the distance runner whose lungs feel like they are about to burst – and every muscle says STOP NOW.

He keeps going – and gets his second wind – and finishes the race.

I use that illustration on purpose – because it is a good way to describe the Christian Race.

Run with endurance – the race that is set before us.  
Every Christian WILL endure to the end.

This is the truth of the perseverance of the saints.  
This is the truth of our on-going progressive sanctification.  
This is the truth of our final glorification – which in the mind and purposes of God – has already been completed for the Christian!

## **II. Our Responsibility in the Midst of Trials 1:5-8**

### **A. Our Need**

When we think we are SUFFICIENT to the task is when we are in trouble.

When we are SELF-CONFIDENT is when we are about to fall.

We need wisdom – what we need is GOD’S WISDOM which is found in God’s Book.

God speaks to us by REVELATION.  
As we learn HIS WORD we learn HIS WILL.  
He also speaks to us through circumstances – specifically OPEN DOORS and CLOSED DOORS – but these are always subservient to the WORD of GOD.

In our own life and ministry here at SGBC, many things have been accomplished by planning – and many things have come about in an entirely different way than the plans that were made.

That’s true in a church – that’s true in a ministry – and that is true in the life of each and every individual believer.

**ADMIT YOUR NEED.  
AND THEN ASK GOD FOR WISDOM!**

## B. God's Supply

He gives – and this promise is based on the character of God Himself!  
Liberally – generously – freely – with an open hand.  
God loves to give – it's a part of who He is.

But this word can carry with it another sense – and many good scholars think that it does – and the context backs that up.

God gives – without reservation – without hesitation – he gives  
SIMPLY – in ONENESS OF PURPOSE -- in the sense of not having  
a DIVIDED MIND.

God knows what is best and gives us what is best.

And the “undivided mind” – contrasts well with the unstable man – who asks w/o faith – and is double-minded and unstable.

James finishes it off with an earthy illustration.

The waves of the Sea.

Hort – “*The restless swaying to and fro of the surface of the water.*”

God could never be like that.  
His purposes are sure and right.

But we – as men – especially if we lack wisdom – doubt God and refuse to trust in him completely are unstable – unreliable – and untrustworthy.

*Put no confidence in princes  
Nor for help on man depend.  
He shall die – to dust returning  
And his purposes shall end.*

We can sing that concerning MAN – but we could never say that about our Great God – who made the universe – and controls the universe!

## **C. The Requirement**

Faith – absolute trust.

Turn to

### **Romans 4:19-22**

Paul says the same thing using the illustration of Abraham.

Abraham is the great OT example of faith.

Both Paul and James use Abraham as their prime example.

How unwavering was the faith of Abraham?

He believed God for the impossible – Sarah was past child-bearing years – but he believed.

When Isaac was put on that makeshift altar – and he readied himself to plunge that knife deep into Isaac’s chest -- he believed that God would even raise Isaac from the dead – since Isaac was the son of promise.

Unwavering faith – but

Faith is not the magic token to put into God’s Vending Machine to get anything you want.

Faith is the STABILITY we have to TRUST THE ABSOLUTELY STABLE GOD – and believe that He will work all things for our good – even if it doesn’t look that way.

## **III. The Trial of Poverty 1:9-11**

This was a real situation for these dispersed ones – and still it is a relevant and global problem faced by so many Christians.

### **A. Observations on Poverty and Riches**

#### **1. There is no shame in being poor.**

The vast majority of saints through the ages have been those of the poorer classes.

From the tenor of the entire epistle, we can suppose those to whom James writes were poor.

## **2. The circumstances of poverty.**

These Christians were suffering because of being displaced.

v. 1 – the dispersion.

Now, in a land that was foreign to them – or even if they had gone back to their homeland – they were subject to persecution.

They would be shunned as outsiders by the typical idol worshippers that inhabited most of the west.

Since these of the dispersion were primarily Jewish, they would normally fit into the Jewish communities that abounded throughout the west – BUT – their allegiance to Jesus Christ – who was hated by the Jewish community would make them to be hated too.

We are talking about REAL social ostracism and persecution – like goes on today – especially in Hindu and Islamic countries.

Difficulties in finding jobs.

Outcasts in their own communities.

Outcasts in their own families.

Finding relief only in the church – but the churches were by and large small – many meeting in homes – and most of those attending were themselves poor also.

Even those who stayed in Jerusalem with James and the other elders suffered severe poverty.



Things were so bad – that we find Paul raising an offering for the saints in Jerusalem from the Gentile churches – 2 Cor.

### **3. The natural pride of wealth**

The inherent pride that can come with wealth is its own trial or temptation.

It is part of the human condition that those who are rich often (not always) but often THINK they are somehow better than others – simply because of the wealth they have attained.

### **4. The conditions of those in poverty or wealth**

James turns it all around.

The “lowly” brother should rejoice that he is exalted.

He must be “a brother” to qualify.

If he IS a brother – His father is a King and he is a joint-heir with Jesus Christ – who himself lived a life of poverty – but is now exalted at the right hand of the Father.

The rich man must be humbled.

From the context – we can assume this “rich man” is not a brother – but is probably part of the Jewish or Gentile persecuting and ruling classes that are making life difficult for the brothers.

What happens to rich and poor alike?

Death.

Death is the great equalizer.

It doesn't matter how much money, power or fame one accumulates – HE WILL leave it all behind – and then there is the afterlife.

So much of what James says shows forth the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ – his half-brother in the flesh.

Christ's Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

The Good Samaritan – and the wealthy religious leaders who went by on the other side of the road.

The rich fool who planned to tear down his barns so he could build bigger barns.

Poverty is a trial as James says.

Riches themselves can be a trial – but that's not really James point.

But in this case – the end result of the rich who are persecuting them is set forth as an example to the poor Christians – and they are reminded that things will not always be like they are today.

#### **IV. Passing the Test 1:12**

This takes us right back to verse 2.

“**Blessed**” is the Greek word MAKARIOS – occasionally translated HAPPY – but generally translated BLESSED.

In the OT

**Psalm 1:1** –

**Blessed** is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked  
– nor stands in the way of sinners  
– nor sits in the seat of the scoffers  
But his delight is in the law of the Lord...

**Or the beatitudes of our Lord.**

Blessed are the poor in Spirit  
Blessed are those who mourn

Blessed are the meek  
Blessed are the merciful  
Blessed are the pure in heart  
Blessed are the peacemakers  
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake

It is more blessed to give than to receive – Acts 20:35  
Romans 4:7-8 – Paul quotes David from Psalm 32

<sup>7</sup> *“**Blessed** are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,  
And whose sins are covered;  
<sup>8</sup> **Blessed** is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.”*

We will pass the test – by the grace of God – if we know God through His Son Jesus Christ.