

Endurance

Text:

James 1:1-18

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Introduction:

We have been thinking about what James says about the role of trials in the Christian life. He says that they are good and that they should cause us to rejoice because they produce endurance which is an essential quality if we are to reach the goal that God has set for us. We

have seen that James is not alone. This idea is found all through the teaching of the New Testament. Furthermore we have seen that to properly understand what James and the other New Testament writers are saying we must be sure that we are correctly understand what they mean by the terms “joy”, “trials”, “endurance” and “perfection”. We have been examining each word. We began with joy. We saw that joy in the biblical sense is more than pleasure; that it a gift of God that accompanies salvation; that it is not dependent on the circumstances of our lives, because it does not derive from them. The joy that we have in facing trials is the joy that God gives us in the assurance that he has not abandoned us; that he is at work in our lives transforming us into the image of Jesus Christ. After joy we looked at trials. First we made a clear distinction between trials and temptations. We saw that temptations come from the enemy, and that their goal is our destruction. They are to be immediately resisted. Trials, on the other hand, are things that God allows in our lives for our spiritual strengthening. They are to be joyfully endured. In fact, their chief purpose is to teach us endurance. This brings us to today’s word, endurance.

I want us to first understand what the word means, then look at some biblical examples of endurance and finally think about how we acquire it.

I. Endurance or Patience

We have already noticed that the word that I am referring to as “endurance” is sometimes translated by “patience” and sometimes by a more active word like “endurance”, or “steadfastness” or “perseverance”. A first hint as to how we can best translate it is that it has both and noun and a verb form. The verb is always translated “to endure”. You see this in our text. In verses three and four where we have the noun, it is translated “patience” in the KJV, but in verse 12 where the verb is used, it is translated “endures”.

“Patience” fails to communicate the full force of the word because it is too passive. This is an active word. It means to “stay put” to not abandon one’s post in a time of danger. In the months following 9/11 President Bush often used the expression “to stay the course”. The task that had befallen him was not easy, but he understood that he could not be slack; difficult as the trial that had fallen upon him and the nation might be, we had no alternative but to persevere in our mission. It was more than just being patient until it passed. It was being actively involved in doing all that was necessary to make sure that it did not happen again.

Alexander Maclaren illustrated the difference between “patience” and “endurance” by likening them to two ships in a storm. Patience is a ship securely anchored in a safe harbor. It goes through the storm, but has nothing to do except wait and see if it survives. Endurance, on the

other hand is a ship at sea that must be navigated through the storm. Its captain and crew must use all their sailing ability to stay the course and keep their ship on course until the storm has exhausted itself. This is what the New Testament writers mean by “endurance”. It is that ability, acquired by experience, to stay spiritually on course in the trials of life.

II. Biblical Examples

We have seen that endurance is an active quality. It is understanding, by faith, what course of action we must take in life and then sticking to that course in spite of all the trials and difficulties that may arise. The Bible is filled with examples of individuals who endured. We may begin with the example that James himself uses. This will give us an image of what he has in mind in the verses we have been reading. At the end of his letter he comes back to this subject with which he begins. This is what he says: “Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful” (James 5:4). The endurance of Job is proverbial. No human ever endured greater trials, yet it is twice specifically stated in the book of Job that in all that he suffered he did not sin against God.

Listen to what the Apostle Paul says in Acts 20. He is meeting with the Elders of the church of Ephesus at the end of his third missionary journey. He is on his way to Jerusalem where he knows that a great trial awaits him, but he is convinced that he must go; to do less would be to disobey the Lord. He says:

“And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. “

His primary concern was not to avoid trials but to “finish his course with joy”. So he continues his journey to Jerusalem where he will be arrested and thrown into prison.

The final and greatest example is our Lord, himself. In Luke 9:51 it is stated of him: “And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.” Jesus knew what awaited him in Jerusalem. At least three times on the way he tells his disciples that in Jerusalem he will suffer many things at the hands of the Jewish leaders and be put to death, yet he sets his face steadfastly toward Jerusalem. He knows what he has been sent into the world to do and he does not flinch before his task.

In all of these cases the person involved understands his calling and he understands that he cannot fulfill that calling without enduring trials. They all speak to us. As they endured, so we are called to endure.

III. Endurance as a Christian Virtue

This is the reason that endurance finds itself among the essential Christian virtues in the New Testament. Without it we simply won't make it. This idea is illustrated in Jesus' parable of the sower especially as it is recorded in Luke. The concluding verse of the parable reads: "As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15). The difference between those who at first receive the word but bear no fruit and those who do is that they hold the Word fast and bear fruit with patience or endurance.

Listen to what Peter says:

"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins" (1 Peter 1:3-9).

Notice that Peter includes steadfastness or endurance among the virtues that we must add to faith. The only way we can do this is by experience. We learn to endure by enduring. We face a trial. We seek God's wisdom to know what to do. Once it has been made clear to us what course of action we are to take, we stay the course. Just as a sailor that faces his first storm at sea we may be terrified, but once we have stuck to our post and made it through the storm, we realize that storms can be weathered, and the next storm is less frightening than the one before. Each time that we, by faith, remain steadfast under pressure we learn more and more of the faithfulness of God. Each trial endured equips us for trials yet to come and in the end as Paul says endurance produces proven character.

