

Let Patience Have Her Perfect Work

Text:

James 1:1-8

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man *is* unstable in all his ways. (KJV)

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. (ESV)

Introduction:

Often when a particular trial befalls us God gives us a precise word of Scripture to enable us to understand the experience through which we are passing. It is rather like someone handing you a flashlight to help you find your way through a dark place. This light, that is a gift of grace, is an invaluable aid. It does not take the pain out of our experience, but it helps us understand where we are going and why we are going there. I say this to explain why I have chosen this text. One of my first clear and coherent thoughts after surgery was the opening line of verse four as we read in the Authorized Version: "Let patience have her perfect work."

Not everyone gets to have the same surgery twice, but the advantage, if you can call it an advantage, of the second time through is that you know, more or less, what to expect. I knew that, at best, I had a relatively lengthy time of discomfort and limited activity ahead of me. The first time, not knowing what to expect, and having believed too much of what others had told

me after their own memories of similar experiences had been dulled by the forgetfulness that naturally comes with the passing of time, I had begun my recovery with the illusion that it would be quick and easy. No such illusions this time. I knew what was ahead of me, and I knew that it would require patient endurance. James was there to tell me that patient endurance is a good thing; that it performs a necessary work that it alone can perform. So as my mind began to clear, and little by little I regained my powers of thought and reflection, I began to study, reflect upon, and pray the passage that we have read together this morning.

Notice, first of all, that it comes right at the beginning of James' letter. He has barely finished his greeting and he jumps right into this exhortation about trials. He does this because he wants his readers to know that the severe trials that they are facing are not abnormal. Trials are normal and necessary. All who set out to follow Christ will experience them. We should not be surprised by them, but embrace them with joy, because they give us opportunity to learn endurance and without endurance we will never achieve the goal that was set for us when we were called to become followers of Jesus Christ. That is a rough paraphrase of what James says in verses two through four.

You may want to disagree with what he is saying. You may prefer another model of the Christian life, but what I propose to show you this morning is that this is the universal and consistent model that we find all through the New Testament. Once you become aware of it, and have a clear image of it in your mind, you will begin to see it over and over again, not just in the New Testament, but all through Scripture. In order to develop a precise image of what James is telling us in these three verses we need to examine and clearly define his four major terms: joy, trials, endurance, and perfection. Once we understand clearly what he means by each of these four things and how they relate to one another, we will no longer be overwhelmed when trials befall us. In order to do as much justice to this text as I am capable of, I want to examine one of these terms each of the next four weeks. Before we do that, however, I want to show you that this model of rejoicing in trials because they produce endurance, and endurance leads to perfection, is not unique to James, but is the consistent model of the entire New Testament. To do this I want us to quickly examine several other New Testament passages.

I. Jesus

Jesus, himself, lays the foundation in the last two beatitudes where he says:

Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say

all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. (Matthew 5:10-12)

Paul gives us an idea of how these words of Jesus work out in life in Acts 14:22. It is at the beginning of his second missionary journey. He is revisiting the churches that he and Barnabas had planted during the first missionary journey. His advice to these new believers is summarized in this verse where we are told that he: “Confirmed the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorted them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” The normal path to the kingdom of God passes through much tribulation. But Jesus says, as does James, and does Paul, as we will see in a moment that these trials and tribulations should be a cause for joy because they are a necessary part of a process that anticipates a glorious end.

II. Paul

Many of you are aware that Paul and James are sometimes seen as being at odds with one another, especially in their understandings of faith and works. That is a subject for another time, but what I want you to see now is that regarding the present subject they are in perfect agreement. In Romans 5, Paul says almost exactly the same thing as James, even using some of the exact same words as James. Listen to what he says:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Romans 5:1-5 ESV)

Paul says that “we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” Our destiny is assured because we have been justified by our faith in Jesus Christ. However, for the present we are not in glory, but on the way to glory, and the road we are travelling is preparing us for glory. The process by which this takes place is the same process that we have seen in James. We experience trials, Paul uses an even stronger word and, these trials, in turn, teach us endurance; this endurance produces proven character so that when we arrive at our destination we will not need to be ashamed. We don't have time to do so, but it would be interesting to look at all the passages where Paul talks about not being ashamed when we finally reach our destination, and we are

standing in the presence of our Savior. Let me give you just one example. In Philippians Paul prays that our:

“love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that we may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” (Philippians 1:9-11 ESV).

Paul is always more focused on the last day than the present day. This is the reason he can rejoice in the sufferings of the present world. He knows that they are producing “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. (II Corinthians 4:17).

III. Peter

James, Jesus, Paul have spoken on this subject with a unanimous voice, but we are not yet finished. Peter too has something to say about how we should understand and react to our trials. This is what he says in the first chapter of his first letter:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith--more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (I Peter 1:3-7).

What is interesting in these passages is that it is obvious that James, Paul, and Peter are not quoting one another or even a common source, yet they share a common vision of the present life of the believer. Trials are to be received with joy, because they produce endurance, and endurance produces that genuine faith and tried character that prepare us for the day we are moving towards, and living for—the day we meet Jesus Christ.

IV. Hebrews

I have one final passage and I am finished. It comes from the Epistle to the Hebrews. This New Testament book is especially fitting for our discussion because its main purpose is to encourage

its recipients to endure in the face of extreme testing and persecution. Its major exhortation is found in chapter 10 verse 36: “For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.” Having thus exhorted them the author then turns to the Old Testament in chapter 11 to give them numerous examples of those who by faith endured. Then at the beginning of chapter 12 he gives us his concluding example when he writes:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

Our primary example in this matter as in all others is our Lord, Jesus Christ. The writer holds him up to this church that is growing weary in well-doing, that has “need of endurance” and says: “Look at Jesus who for the joy that was set before him, endured something that we will never come close to enduring, the cross, and having endured it he is now entered into his glory. There is the model. All of the elements are there—joy, trials, endurance, perfection—perfectly demonstrated in the life of our perfect example.