**“JAMES” SERIES**

**#2: “The Joy of Testing”**

**SCRIPTURE:** James 1:1-18

 ***1James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.***

***2Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.  4And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.***

***5If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.  6But 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.  7For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.***

***9Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, 10and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. 11For 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.***

***12Blessed 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.  13Let 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.  14But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.  15Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.***

***16Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.  17Every 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. 18Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.***

**INTRODUCTION:**

 In Deuteronomy 28 God, through Moses, pronounced judgment upon his chosen people, the Jews, because of their disobedience. Listen to verses 64 through 66:

 ***“And the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known. And among these nations you shall find no respite, and there shall be no resting place for the sole of your foot, but the Lord will give you there a trembling heart and failing eyes and a languishing soul. Your life shall hand in doubt before you. Night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life.”***

 This dispersion of the Jewish people came in four stages:

1. The Babylonian stage;
2. The Syrian stage;
3. The Egyptian stage; and
4. The Roman stage.

It was these stages of dispersion that prepared the way for Christianity to be a worldwide faith. On the day of Pentecost, in A.D. 30, when the church was established with the 3,000 converts who were baptized, along with the one hundred and twenty who had gathered in the upper room, the body of Christ consisted entirely of Jews from the four segments of the “Diaspora.” As these Jews who had gathered in Jerusalem returned to their homelands, they took the message of the apostles with them. They formed the nuclei of the churches the Paul and other evangelists established and set in order.

Now, let’s get into James’ message…

In these first 18 verses, James wrote about “The Joy of Testing.”

First of all, in the first 12 verses, he clarifies

***THE PURPOSE OF TRIALS.***

 He doesn’t say, “If trials come…” No, he knows as well as his readers know, and as well as ***we*** know, that trials are a part of living for Jesus. Do you agree?

 So, he begins with ***“…when you meet trials…”*** Then he equates these trials with ***“…the testing of your faith…”***

 What are these ***“trials”***? Where do they come from? Does God send them? Does He contrive them just to test us like He tested Abraham?

 I assure you God doesn’t send them; they don’t come from Him. I’ll give you a clue: Jesus said in John 16:33, ***“In this world you will have tribulation.”*** Our trials come from this evil world we live in!

 James says that we should ***“Count it all joy”*** when we ***“meet trials of various kinds.”*** Is he saying that we should be joyful that there are ***“various kinds”*** of trials? I don’t think so. No, he’s saying that we should be joyful when trials come, regardless of what kind they are.

 But wait a minute. What does he mean by ***“joy”***? Is he trying to be sarcastic? Is he joking? No. The Greek of the original text here is ***CHARA***, which is translated “joy” or “delight.” It can even indicate “benefit.” I believe that to be the case here.

 So, James is saying that there are benefits from experiencing tests of our faith.

 The first benefit of trials that test our faith is that we have the opportunity to develop steadfastness or endurance. And as we develop this endurance, we grow spiritually – we mature in Christ – we get stronger in the faith. We become more complete, more mature, lacking less than before the trials.

 Yet another benefit of trials is the opportunity to develop ***“wisdom.”*** What is ***“wisdom”***? The word in the Greek is ***SOPHIA.*** It’s “insight into the true nature of things” – being able to see beyond the apparent outward appearance. A good definition is “seeing life from God’s point of view.” “Wisdom” and “understanding” are often used together, and rightfully so, because they go together – like a horse and carriage. “Wisdom is the theoretical side; “understanding” is the practical side. “Wisdom is seeing life from God’s point of view; “understanding is responding to the experiences and circumstances of life from God’s point of view.”

 Our need for “wisdom” surpasses our need for “knowledge.” Modern man has the “knowledge” to do so many things, but he lacks the “wisdom” to utilize these things for good. By the same token, it’s one thing to be knowledgeable of the Scriptures and yet another to be spiritually wise.

 He says that we should ask God for this wisdom. The context indicates that he is referring to the wisdom to endure the trials he talks about. It takes wisdom to understand why God allows such trying situations, how we can endure them, and how they can help us be more what we should be.

 To ask God for wisdom is to pray for it. Prayer is “not twisting God’s arm but discerning what God intends and cooperating with Him.”

 But we can’t be doubters as we pray for wisdom. He says such are ***“double minded, unstable.”*** The Greek translated ***“double minded”*** means, literally, “two souled.” Such a person has a “civil war” going on inside him. God can’t use him; wisdom would be wasted on him.

 Who is ***“the lowly brother”*** in verse 9? The NIV translates it ***“the brother in humble circumstances.”*** This is the Christian who isn’t considered ***“rich.”*** How is ***“the lowly brother”*** in an exalted position? How is ***“the rich”*** in a humble position?

***“The lowly brother”*** is the Christian of low social status, perhaps that of a slave or bond servant or simply one with little in the way of financial resources. Such have little problem living by faith, while ***“the rich”*** have to strive for the humility to depend on the Lord; he gets caught up in his pursuit of wealth to the weakening of his trust in the Lord.

 Verse 12 says that ***“the man who remains steadfast under trial”*** is blessed with ***“the crown of life.”*** This ***“crown of life”*** is what Paul spoke of in his 2nd letter to Timothy, chapter 4, verses 7 and 8: ***“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearance.”*** The ***“crown”*** the apostle refers to is the “head wreath,” the laurel crown of the winner of a race or contest, the crown awarded to someone deserving an honor.

 This is the ***“eternal life”*** that all faithful believers will be given when Jesus returns for His church. Peter spoke of it in 1st Peter 5:4 – ***“And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”***

 Jesus promised ***“the crown of life”*** to those who are ***“faithful unto death”*** in Revelation 2:10.

 I think of my brother and friend, Mark Worley, who recently went home to Jesus after battling pancreatic cancer for several months. He was ***“steadfast under trial.”*** And ***“stood the test.”***

 Then, in verses 13 through 18,

***JAMES CAUTIONS US ABOUT BLAMING GOD FOR THE TEMPTATIONS TO BE UNFAITHFUL.***

 In other words, the trying times we face don’t come from God. On the contrary, he says, ***“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.”***

 In trying times, we tend to want to shake our fist in God’s face and ask, “Why are you doing this to me?” James says, “Don’t do that!”

 The trials we face in this wicked world often tempt us to give up the faith – to stop assembling with our fellow saints – to stop reading the Word and praying – to live like unbelievers.

 In verses 14 and 15, James describes something I call spiritual L-S-D. He speaks of the ***LURE*** of ***SIN*** which leads to spiritual ***DEATH***. L-S-D.

 And where does this temptation come from? Our ***“own desire,”*** not God’s, but our own. It comes from our sinful nature, our “bent” to sin that has been with us ever since Adam’s and Eve’s sin in the garden. Some temptations may come from Satan, but this isn’t the case here.

 When we go fishing, we dangle bait. When the fish goes for it, it becomes “hooked.” When someone uses drugs in some kind of regular fashion, we say they’re “hooked.” Our sin nature “dangles bait,” trying to “hook” us. What’s the “bait”? It could be ill-gotten gain, sexual fulfillment outside of marriage, or some other attraction that leads to sinful behavior.

 James uses the metaphor of conception, birth, and growth to adulthood to describe the path to spiritual death. Desire is not sin, but when we respond to that desire with action, sin is committed. And if that sin is allowed to continue – if it’s not repented of in seeking forgiveness, it will condemn us to spiritual death.

 Finally, in verses 16-18,

***HE WARNS OF THE POSSIBILITY OF DECEPTION.***

 He says, ***“Do not be deceived… Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights…”***

Coming on the heels of his words regarding temptation, he’s insinuating that we could be deceived into believing that it’s God sending trials and other temptations to get us to be unfaithful. And isn’t this what we do sometimes? We say, “God, why are you doing this to me?” You’ve said that haven’t you? Sure.

Satan wants you to blame God, just as he did Eve. But God sends only good things.

So, where do the bad things come from? Well, like temptations, they pretty much come from our own desires and actions. In Galatians 6:7 the apostle Paul wrote: ***“…whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”*** So, many of the bad things that come our way are the results of our own actions.

Of course, bad things come from our enemies and enemies of the faith; God doesn’t send persecution our way, but worldly people and systems will.

In verse 18 he says, ***“Of his*** (God’s) ***own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”*** What does that mean?

 *The Simple English Bible* has this verse: ***“God decided to give us life again through the message of His truth, so that we may be the first-fruits of His creation.”*** What are firstfruits? Firstfruits consist of the first fruit (or grain) that is harvested. The Israelites were to give the “firstfruits” to God as an offering. We who are saved are the “firstfruits” of God’s saving grace.

**CONCLUSION:**

 As you can see, James writes about down-to-earth practical stuff, contrary to the more complicated writings of the apostle Paul. Next week we learn about hearing and doing and the word of God as a mirror. I hope you’ll be here.