

09.19.10 / James 1:2-8

Passage Insight

James encourages us to count even the trials of life as joy. This is often one of the toughest pieces of Scripture for anyone to accept, particularly those who have faced trials the likes of which most of us have never experienced. My hope is that this passage does not harden us toward one another and encourage us to adopt the “suck it up” mentality when caring for others who are going through hard times, but would rather remind us that Jesus is sufficient in all things, regardless of our personal understanding of them, and that this would encourage us to constantly direct one another’s attention to the source of all joy, whether that joy comes through pleasure or pain.

There are some key truths that at first glance when we read this passage. First off, we see that God is there, regardless of our circumstance. Simply experiencing difficult times does not at all imply that we have abandoned by God, but rather should remind us that our God is constant, and that nothing is wasted on Him when our hearts are inclined toward Him. Secondly, we are reminded that steadfastness is a virtue, something of tremendous value. Psalm 13 echoes this sentiment. It is a lament, and following cries of distress and prayers for deliverance, David concludes the psalm with these words in verses 5-6, “But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me.” Third, we see that God values wisdom. What God values, we should value as well. It is a good and healthy discipline to constantly pray for wisdom for others within the body. Fourth, the Lord is generous and ready and willing to provide what is good for His children. We should fear nothing when asking for wisdom, and we have every assurance that the Lord will provide, simply because He says He will do so.

Key to this passage is that the story of our lives is not ultimately about us. We are simply not at the center of our own lives, or at least we shouldn’t be. The constant nature of God, the fact that all provision comes from Him, the fact that ultimately purpose itself comes from Him, all these things point to the fact that our lives revolve around God, not the other way around. When asked what is the greatest commandment, Jesus responds in Matthew 22:37-38 with these words: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.” Clearly, our focus should be nowhere near ourselves, but rather on Him who never changes. God knows we need to change, and He doesn’t leave us alone to pursue moral character. He instead plays an active role by using the trials of this world to shape us, refine us, and encourage us to put our full attention on Him, which is complete alignment with the first and greatest commandment of Christ. When we do this through trials, we are responding in obedience to Jesus.

1 Peter 1:3-7 echoes the sentiment found in today’s passage. It says this:

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.

Ultimately, the goal of having our faith tested and proven genuine is the glorification of Jesus. As slaves to our wonderful master, who is Love itself, what joy we should have in seeing Him who saved us from death glorified at our expense. Only, our expense is in reality our gain because of the Lord's great mercy and generosity, as He uses the trials of life to make us more like Him. Praise God that nothing is wasted on Him and that He is the lavish provider of all good things.

Application Questions

Where Do You Run?

- 1) When you realize that you are facing a trial, what's your first response (fear, anxiety, prayer, action, seeking counsel, etc.)?
- 2) What's the healthiest response according to this passage?
- 3) In order for us to look to God, our hearts must be inclined toward Him. Where is your heart inclined toward something other than God?

Things Will Be OK if...

- 1) We often tell ourselves that everything will be OK if something happens or if we find ourselves in a particular set of circumstances. What's your "if only" statement (if only we can make more money, if only we can get settled in, if only I could find a spouse, if only my kids would behave, etc.)?
- 2) God is the same regardless of our circumstance. Do you believe this?
- 3) If this is true, how does it change your "if only" statement?

Jesus Is Glorified

- 1) As we see in 1 Peter 1:6-7, Jesus is glorified when our faith is tested and found to be genuine. Does this truth evoke joy or confusion in you?
- 2) If joy, what is at the root of this joy for you?
- 3) If confusion, what is at the root of this confusion?
- 4) We saw in verse 1 last week that when we follow Jesus, we literally become slaves – slaves to all that is good and pure and perfect and holy. Is there a connection between your confusion and the concept of being slaves to Christ?
- 5) Who in your group can help you work through this?

Sources

- Prayer
- Word Bible Commentary