

Bibles???

The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

I was recently reflecting back on some of my past Christmases – especially the ones where I was a little boy.

One of the most memorable Christmases was the one I received my first box of Star Wars action figures.

I played with those action figures all day and all night.

I would take a two or three of them with me to school every day so I could play during recess.

I would even take them to mass with me and play with them while my grandmother was not looking.

One day, when I was about 12 years old, I realized that I hadn't played with my Star Wars action figures for a while – so I opened up the box where I stored them and I made the attempt to play with them again –

I got down on the ground, started to put all the action figures in their place –

Separating the good guys and the bad guys –

and then I realized that it was not as much fun to play with them as it had been a few years earlier.

I even felt self-conscious about having my family members and some of the neighborhood kids seeing me playing with them out in the yard.

So I boxed them up again and eventually they were given away or were destroyed with firecrackers by my younger brothers.

I should have saved them – but that is another story.

The Star Wars action figures never changed – the only thing that changed was me, As I grew older, it became evident that playing with action figures in the back yard, while I was laying on my belly – is not something I should still have been doing at that age any longer – it was considered childish.

That is what maturity is all about.

And ideally age and maturity should go hand and hand, as we age, we should become more mature.

The problem is that many people grow old but never grow up –

This is true in our physical lives but also in our spiritual lives as well.

There are many people who have gone to church for 15,20,30 years or longer and they are still playing with their spiritual Star Wars action figures.

I should know – because I was one of them.

Growing old in the church but not growing up in the church.

This problem is not a new problem within the church – this problem has been around since the early church.

And as we go through our study, over the next few weeks on the epistle of James, we will see that the issue of spiritual maturity is what James addresses in his letter to the early church.

And the first thing that Paul addresses is trials.

Let's pray...

**[Jas 1:1-4 NKJV] 1 James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings. 2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have [its] perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.**

This epistle of James is one of the earliest books that we find in the New Testament.

It was written during a time period where the early church in Jerusalem was being severely persecuted under King Herod Agrippa.

So being inspired by the Holy Spirit, James writes this letter to offer encouragement and provide practical teachings, as he shares his wisdom with the early church.

We will see that James will draw much of his letter from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, as well as the book of Proverbs.

In fact, this Epistle is sometimes referred to as the "Proverbs of the New Testament."

Because it has so much wisdom.

**[Jas 1:1-4 NKJV] 1 James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.**

So, this letter opens up with the author identifying himself.

We know that James wrote this epistle.

But, there were many people named James in the New Testament.

James was a popular name during this time – after all, it is the Greek form for the Hebrew name Jacob.

**This James is no other than the half-brother of our Lord and Savior.**

Remember, after the birth of Jesus, the scriptures tell us that Joseph and Mary had other children.

We know Jesus had at least four half-brothers and two half-sisters.

They grew up in the same house as Jesus –

Yet, the scriptures tell us that when Jesus began His ministry – His own half-brothers and sisters did not even believe Him.

They thought that He was crazy. They even began to mock Him – even urging Him to go away.

Turn with me to John 7,

**[Jhn 7:1-5 NKJV] 1 After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him. 2 Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. 3 His brothers therefore said to Him, "Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. 4 "For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world." 5 For even His brothers did not believe in Him.**

But something changed in the life of James.

Because in the book of Acts, we find James at a prayer meeting with Jesus' disciples in the upper room. (Acts 1:14)

Something caused that shift from unbelief to faith.

Paul tells us that Jesus appeared to James after His resurrection. (1 Cor 15:7)

And this event convinced James that Jesus truly was the savior.

This event changed the life of James – and he began to share his faith with others and eventually became the leader of the early church in Jerusalem.

I had you make a note of the word bond servant.

Because I find it interesting how James identifies himself.

He doesn't draw attention to the fact that he was Jesus' half-brother.

He doesn't say, pay attention to what I am about to say because I grew up alongside Jesus.

He humbly identifies himself as a bond servant.

The Greek word that is used here for bond servant is "doulos"

A better translation would be one of a slave.

Not one who has been forced into slavery –

but one who has chosen – by his own free will, a life of servitude toward someone else.

We have an example of this in scripture in the book of Exodus 21,

**[Exo 21:2-6 NKJV] 2 "If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. 3 "If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he [comes in] married, then his wife shall go out with him. 4 "If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or**

daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. 5 "But if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' 6 "then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.

There are amazing benefits to identifying as a bond servant.

Have you thought about that?

Usually we concentrate on all the serving and sacrificing. But there is a big up-side to bond serving.

Think of it: Your master was responsible for room and board, and to clothe you, and to educate and train you.

He was responsible, even liable, for your health and well-being, and for your protection.

And that is exactly what we do when we identify ourselves with being a bondservant of God.

We place our trust that He will provide for all of our needs because that is what He said He would do (according to His will – not our will).

When we start to worry about what we are going to eat or what we are going to drink or what we are going to wear – we no longer identify as being a bondservant of God.

At the end of verse one, it tells us who the letter was written for - James was writing to Jews; but they were Jews who had received Jesus as their Messiah.

The first Christians were all Jews.

It all started on the Day of Pentecost when the 120 disciples gathered in an upper room received the promise of the Holy Spirit and began praising God in languages familiar to all the pilgrims gathered in and around the Temple.

And the scriptures tell us that about three thousand Jews were saved as Peter presented the Gospel.

Not only were they all Jews, they were scattered Jews.

This was a result of the persecution around Jerusalem.

The word that is used here for scattering carries the idea of scattering seed.

And that is exactly what happened as God used this persecution to sow seed in other places and as we find out in the book of Acts – a lot of that seed eventually bore fruit.

**2 My brethren** *(this is a phrase that James uses 17 times in his short epistle – and it*

*means that he considered them a part of his own spiritual family)* , **count it all joy**

when you **fall** into various trials,

I want to start off by reminding us of the following –

**God is perfectly capable of delivering us from our trials. Repeat it!**

It's OK to ask Him to.

But most of the time, in the age in which we are living, the trials run their course.

It's strategic; it's part of our victory, intended to reveal the strength of the Spirit-filled life over living without the Spirit.

And of course, there is no better example of this than the apostle Paul.

He was suffering a severe trial.

He called it a thorn in his flesh, and "the messenger of Satan."

He sought the Lord to remove his affliction three times.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 12

**[2Co 12:9-10 NKJV] 9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

Church, whether like it or not, God is most revealed when in our weaknesses He is made to appear strong.

It is not weakness when God chooses to not heal you and me; it is strength - or it is intended to reveal a strength that can only be the result of God in us.

Now, James is talking about trials here – we will see him address temptation in a few weeks.

They are two totally different things.

We are told to avoid temptation but notice what James writes here regarding trials – he says when you fall into them.

Listen to what Jesus says in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

**[Luk 10:30 NKJV] 30 Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain [man] went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded [him], and departed, leaving [him] half dead.**

Now, did the certain man go looking for trouble on his way to Jericho?

No, he was minding his business and all of a sudden, he gets ambushed by these thieves. He was surrounded – he didn't know it was coming.

The Greek word that Jesus used for fell among - is the same one that James uses for fall.

And the idea is that we will be ambushed by our trials.

Notice that it also says that there are various trials –

**There isn't just one flavor of trial – they come in all sorts of shapes and sized.**

It might be illness, financial, relationships, or even outright persecution.

When James was head of the church in Jerusalem, life was very hard. He knew all about “trials”.

There was persecution of the church.

The apostles had been arrested several times.

James the son of Zebedee, John's brother, had already been killed.

Peter had been imprisoned for a time.

There was a famine that impacted Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30)

In fact, a few years after James writes this epistle, church history tells us that he was martyred.

The Jewish leaders tried to stop James from telling everyone about Jesus – so they took him up to the top of the temple and they threw him down – he didn't die, so they

proceeded to try to stone him – he didn't die so someone with a big club beat him to death.

Not only are we going to get ambushed by trials, James says that these trials are inevitable.

When you fall into them – not if you just happen to fall into them.

How should we respond to our trials???

James says – count it all joy –

Does this mean that I make a choice to rejoice in my trial?

Do I praise God for my trial?

Maybe; but I think it goes beyond that.

“Count” is a word that encourages us to determine how we are going to think about our trials.

It suggests that we need to adopt a certain mindset about how we view our trials.

And James says that we should count it all joy –

We should consider trials – joy.

Why joy? Here are two reasons...

1. Joy is the settled assurance that God is at work conforming me into the image of Jesus;
2. Joy is the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to work together for the good;

As a result of those two things, it is my determined choice to surrender to the will of God in every situation.

I believe, that God is doing a work in my life. I believe that He has begun a good work in me, and that He has promised to complete it - despite my frequent lack of cooperation.

That is the joy that James is speaking about.

Our values determine our evaluations.

If we value comfort more than character, then trials will upset us.

If we value the material and physical more than the spiritual, we will not be able to "count it all joy."

If we live only for the present and forget the future, then trials will make us bitter, not better.

Without trials – we can't have a settled assurance that God is at work, and a quiet confidence that all things work together for good, unless those beliefs are tested by

circumstances that seem otherwise.

Without trials in our lives – we will never know whether our spiritual garden is producing “joy”.

I think many of us here, at the start of trials – we understand that eventually all things work together for good.

We understand that God has a plan for us with this trial.

The problem for us many times is – what happens when the trial start to linger???

It is then that we lose our joy by becoming impatient.

It is then that we convince ourselves that there is no way our trial could ever produce something good.

It is then when we convince ourselves that God is no longer changing me into His image – especially if we are going through a bad trial.

And then we try to every which way to get out of it.

And James must have had the same feeling because he addresses it in the next two verses.

**3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have [its] perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.**

James refers to these "trials" as tests of faith.

One of the things that the believer has to remember is that Faith is always tested. Faith is always tested.

When God called Abraham to live by faith, He tested him in order to increase his faith. God always tests us to bring out the best; Satan tempts us to bring out the worst.

The testing of our faith proves that we are truly born again.

And the testing of our faith is done through trials.

You see, trials reveal what faith we do have; not because God doesn't know how much faith we have, but so that our faith will be evident to ourselves and to those around us.

Trials are a good thing - these tests are not given to us to see us fail - that is not why God allows these test or trials into our lives.

The reason that we undergo these tests or trials is so He can produce fruit in us.

One of those fruits is longsuffering or patience.

Patience is the characteristic of a person who will not bail on their faith, but who will continue clinging to Jesus even when things are hardest.

How do we develop patience?

By going through trials.

It's like building muscle – we have to stress the muscle if we want to build it – we need to exercise.

But the Lord needs our cooperation.

We should not cave-in to impatience.

We need to keep on believing that joy is being cultivated through the trials and tests in our lives.

Patience in trials (testing) gives joy the greatest chance of maturing.

When the believer learns to wait on the Lord, then God can do great things for him.

We have many examples of people in the scriptures that were impatient and suffered consequences.

Abraham ran ahead of the Lord, married Hagar, and brought great sorrow into his home (Gen. 16).

Moses ran ahead of God, murdered a man, and had to spend forty years with the sheep to learn patience (Ex. 2:11ff.).

Peter almost killed a man in his impatience (John 18:10–11).

There was a man who was asleep one night in his cabin when suddenly his room filled with light and the Savior appeared. The Lord told the man He had a work for him to do,

and showed him a large rock in front of his cabin. The Lord explained that the man was to push against the rock with all his might.

This the man did, day after day. For many years he labored from sun up to sun down, his shoulders set squarely against the cold, massive surface of the unmoving rock pushing with all his might. Each night the man returned to his cabin sore and worn out, feeling that his whole day had been spent in vain.

Seeing that the man was showing signs of discouragement, Satan decided to enter the picture placing thoughts into the man's mind such as; "You have been pushing against that rock for a long time and it hasn't budged. Why kill yourself over this? You are never going to move it? etc."

The man began to think the task was impossible and that he was a failure. He was discouraged and disheartened. "Why kill myself over this?" he thought. "I'll just put in my time, giving just the minimum of effort and that will be good enough."

Yet one day he decided to make it a matter of prayer and take his troubled thoughts to the Lord. "Lord" he said, "I have labored long and hard in your service, putting all my strength to do that which you have asked. Yet, after all this time, I have not even budged that rock a half a millimeter. What is wrong? Why am I failing?"

To this the Lord responded compassionately, "My friend, when long ago I asked you to serve me and you accepted, I told you that your task was to push against the rock with

all your strength, which you have done. Never once did I mention to you that I expected you to move it.

Your task was to push. And now you come to me, your strength spent, thinking that you have failed. But, is that really so? Look at yourself. Your arms are strong and muscled, your back strengthened, your hands are callused from constant pressure, and your legs have become massive and hard. Through opposition you have grown much and your abilities now surpass that which you used to have. Yet you haven't moved the rock.

But your calling was to be obedient and to push and to exercise your faith and trust in My wisdom.

God doesn't always remove the rock.

But we must remember that we do grow as we keep pushing.

Spiritual maturity only comes from enduring difficulty.

Many of us have been pushing against the rock for a while.

We may not understand why we are going through a difficult time, but we can count on the fact that God loves you, He knows what He's doing, and He's working to grow us through it.

Amen.

Let's pray...

To Receive Christ do the following:

Admit, "I am a sinner."

Confess and be willing to turn from your sin.

Believe, by faith that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross.

Receive, through prayer, Jesus Christ into your heart and receive eternal life.

Dear Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins. Please forgive me for my sins and cleanse me by Your blood. I accept You by faith as my personal Lord and Savior. Give me a thirst for Your Word and Help me to follow You all of my days. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.