

Count it all Joy

The letter begins with a basic introduction, “James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.” We have already discussed the author of the letter and now we will discuss to whom it was written. There are two main schools of thought when it comes to whom the letter is written: to the church in Jerusalem and to Jewish Christians that were scattered around the world. As we look at this letter, we will look at it from the stand point of it being written to Jewish Christians for several reasons. First, at the time of this letter being written, most of the mature Christians would have been Jews converted from Judaism. This letter contains instruction on secondary principles. Secondly, the first verse address it to “the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad.” There can be a case made that this is metaphorically speaking to the church in Jerusalem, but it would seem out of place in your basic introduction. James was one of the leaders in the church in Jerusalem. At this moment in time a persecution began to scatter the Jewish brethren in Jerusalem. James would have known many of these brethren and would have been sensitive to the problems they would be encountering.

After the introduction, James begin to discuss trials. He writes to “count it all joy when you fall into various trials” (vs 2). This seems false at first but upon further examination it becomes a clear paradox. No one wishes bad things or evil to happen to anyone, but trials due produce good things. This is what James goes into a discussion of in the following verses. “knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (vs 3-4). We must have the proper mindset. As everything does, everything we do or become all starts in our minds. In the proverbs it says, “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). If we go into our trials with a bad mindset, we will not come through it with positive results. We must remember that trials “produces endurance.” Our trials draw us closer to God. God promises that “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own,” and “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it” (Matthew 6:33-34, I Corinthians 10:13). He promises to take care of us. He promises that we CAN make it through ALL trials. It is impossible for God to lie (Hebrews 6:18). We should draw great confidence that no matter what happens to us, we will not only be taken care of if we draw closer to God, but He has promised that if we look for the way He would want us to go that He will provide that way.

In order for this to work, we must be submissive. We must be willing to do what God requires. Sometimes it is hard to do what is required of us, but it is possible. If we are unwilling to humble ourselves, then our mindset is not correct. In both of the promises mentioned above, a common theme precedes the promise. In Matthew 6, He promises to take care of us IF we seek His kingdom first, and in I Corinthians 10:12 we are told to examine ourselves “lest we fall.” Being submissive, being humble is a state of mind

where we put our own thoughts and desires behind God's. We live our lives in service to the almighty God and everything else comes after.

We have discussed these promises that come to those that put God first, we must now also believe them. This seems like a very simple step, but still James address it:

“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:5-8).

In order to go through our trials and tribulations, we must have wisdom. Wisdom is the application of our knowledge. Part of developing into mature Christians is wisdom. When we are brand new creatures in Christ, sometimes we still view sins as something that we would like to do, but can't. This is our immaturity. A mature, wise Christian no longer views sin as desirable but something that is evil and can cause us eternal punishment. One way to develop wisdom is ask of God. The only way we receive wisdom, is to ask of faith. What is faith? “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). When we pray, we should not expect to receive anything from God if we ask something not according to His will, or we ask something not of faith. If we ask for things that we do not expect to receive, then we will not receive it. James tells us that we've become “a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”