

James

Sunday, June 24, 2021

by Pastor Patrick Curley

1:2-8

When do you celebrate? Winning the lottery, a birthday, an anniversary? I'm sure those times and a whole lot more come to mind. But what about suffering? I think any rational person would say "heck no". Yet, this is the time that James tells us as believers is the time of "pure joy" (v. 2). This is one of those many paradoxes presented in Scripture. It is a beautiful promise that through faith in God's love in Christ for us, we can rejoice in hard times. We see this same truth in Matthew 5:11 and Philippians 1:21. Turn there with me now.

The word "trial" in the Bible is sometimes paired with "tribulation". In a general sense these words mean a time of trouble causing sadness and even despair. Some trials can even be life-threatening such as we see expressed by David in the Psalms. James helps us understand, however, that the trial is not some arbitrary circumstance of fate. Rather, God is at work through it as a time of testing to see if we measure up to His truth. This will then create a stronger and so more enduring faith in the heart of the afflicted. "Perseverance" James calls it (vv. 2, 3). Moreover, this time of testing must "finish its course so that you may be mature and complete". That's the hard part. We must simply wait on the Lord. What help do we find, though, in the perspective given in Romans 8:18 and 28? Let's look.

Right from the start we find a quality of true faith which is the main theme for this entire epistle. The faith that saves us eternally must also be a faith that lasts even when things aren't going well. If we truly believe in God's love, it just doesn't matter what is going on around us. We always count on God's love to strengthen us. Ultimately, we trust that God vindicates the just. That's the good that God is working that is revealed on the Judgment Day. We will all present the stewardship of our lives before God, and He will review what we have done with the gifts He's given us. To see what I mean, let's turn to 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.

Why tests? Can't God just let us coast to heaven? As we trust that He is good and works for our good, we must conclude trials are a necessary part of a faith journey. In school, tests show what we understand. They reveal what has sunk in. Without them, one could arguably say that a person could go all the way through college without having learned a thing. So instead of looking at trials as bumps in the road, we should look at them as necessary pitstops to refuel our hearts for the long journey ahead. Persevering through trials helps us confront doubt. Over time and testing, our doubts subside. Peter has his way of explaining this truth in his first epistle. Let's go there now in 1 Peter 1:6-9.

As we close today, I have this assignment. A test of sorts. Fold this page in half the long way and write "Patient" on one side and "Impatient" on the other. Below each word write things you are patient about and things you are impatient about. James says that the testing of our faith produces not only perseverance and so a stronger faith, but also testing builds patience. The things in the second column, "impatience", are the things that will test your faith. They will bring trials. But, says James, rejoice in them! In the end as you work through these, your faith will be refined as pure gold.

Amen.