

## Sincere Faith:

*An Exposition of the Book of James*

**Sermon Two:** Sincere Trials

May 30, 2021

**Opening ILL:** “Lord, please let the result of this test be an accurate display of what we have learned.” I actually prayed that in Seminary once. Why? Well, because I was very confident that I would do well. After all, I studied like crazy for that test. I wanted that test to be an accurate display of my hard work (Read: “My arrogance” here). As soon as I prayed that, I heard a groan in the room. It wasn’t that “Amen” groan...it was a “Oh, please sweet Lord, No!” groan. Why? Because some of the other guys in the room were working full-time, with families, or they hadn’t studied...and they knew that if this test was an accurate display of what they had learned, they were in deep trouble!

This morning we are going to try to convince ourselves that what the Bible says about trials or suffering is true. We will bring the truths of this well-known text to our hearts and demand that our minds and our hearts submit to the truth of God. Simple, right? Yes, but not easy (more on this later).

**Quote:** "If your Lord calls you to suffering, do not be dismayed, for he will provide a deeper portion of Christ in your suffering. The softest pillow will be placed under your head though you must set your bare feet among thorns. ... The greatest temptation out of hell is to live without trials. . . Lay all your loads by faith on Christ, ease yourself, and let him bear all. He can, he does, and he will bear you. Whether God comes with a rod or a crown, he comes with himself. ‘Have courage, I am your salvation!’ Welcome, welcome Jesus!" - Samuel Rutherford 1600-1661

**Point:** Remember, when the Devil tempted Jesus, he did so by promising a kingdom without suffering. See Mark 4:1 and ff.

### I. An Invitation to Sincere Trials

#### A. What do you mean by “sincere trials”?

1. Let’s remind ourselves of what James is writing to correct: double mindedness (diyucoi)
2. Why do Christians complain?
  - a. If Christians believe that there is a God,
  - b. If Christians believe that God is sovereign,
  - c. Why on Earth do we complain?
    - i. Answer: Because we are all double souled. Remember, this phenomenon that James called being “double minded” is true of all of us at some time. That’s just being (sinful and) human. On the other hand, it may be true of some of us all the time. That’s scarier.
    - ii. Sometimes we want to be single-souled, but cannot find the strength and wisdom within us to be so. In these moments, in our submission to the sovereignty of Christ, we cry out, “I believe...help my unbelief!” (see Mark 9:24)
    - iii. Sometimes we have no desire to single-souled. We want Jesus and we want a good (external) life, and we demand that He submit to us.
3. What are we after, here?
  - a. A life in which we honestly (read “sincerely”) rejoice in God and honor God in the bad times as much as we do in the good times.
4. What are “trials”? What does this word mean?
  - a. It can mean 2 different things, depending on the context.
    - i. This is the Greek word group peirazw, which has 2 different uses.
    - ii. It can mean “temptation”
      - a) This (most of the time) refers to an inward desire to sin.

**ILL:** BBQ food truck right across the street from my office in MO. The more I smelled it, the more tempted I became. I felt like a ravenous dog...or like any puppy...feed me!!

iii. It can mean “trial”

**ILL:** An alcoholic sitting in a bar, even if he doesn’t drink, being there may draw out from him a desire to drink. That, then, becomes a temptation.

- a) This would refer to difficult circumstances.
- b) This would refer to adversity, or situations in which we may be tempted to sin.
- c) It is in this way (and this way only) that Jesus was “tempted.”
  - 1) **James 4:15** For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.
  - 2) **Matthew 4:1 and ff.** (Also parallels)

### **B. The difference between easy and simple.**

**Quote:** The life of faith seems so simple and easy in theory, that I can point out to others in few words; but in practice it is very difficult, and my advances are so slow, that I hardly dare say I get forward at all. John Newton

- 1. The opposite of simple is complicated.
  - a. The Christian life is often simple, and very rarely complicated.
    - i. Believe
    - ii. Obey
    - iii. Read
    - iv. Repent
    - v. Pray
    - vi. All of these things are (most often) simple. But are they easy? NOPE!
- 2. The opposite of “easy” is difficult.
  - a. The Christian life is rarely easy. In fact, I think it is, most of the time, very difficult.

## **II. The Acquisition of Sincerity in Trials (James 1:3-8)**

### **A. Sincerity in trials requires a certain perspective (v. 2).**

- 1. We must recognize that trials are inevitable
  - a. This is not “if” you encounter trials, but “when” you encounter trials.
  - b. Remember, too, that this passage says that we will encounter “various” trials.
    - i. Word study ποικίλοις
      - a) This word basically means, “varied, multicolored.”
      - b) This tells us that the trials we face are not always going to be the same.
      - c) This tells us that the trials we face may not be the ones that others face.
        - 1) We will see in the book of James that rich and poor both face trials, but the trials that they do face are totally different. **ILL:** “first world problems”
- 2. We are told to “consider” [ἡγήεομαι] our trials to be joyful. What does this word mean?
  - a. BDAG: “to engage in an intellectual process, think, consider, regard.”
  - b. What does this NOT mean!
    - i. This does not mean that we begin to confuse pain and pleasure, like a masochist.
    - ii. This does not mean that we put a Pollyanna smile on our face when we are in the midst of the fight of our lives.
  - c. What, then, does this tell us?
    - i. This tells us that all we have to do is change our perspective on suffering! Simple, right? Yes, but not easy.

### **B. Sincerity in trials requires a certain understanding (vv. 3-4).**

- 1. That trials are good for us.

**Quote:** A child of God cannot but greatly desire a more enlarged and experimental acquaintance with his holy word; and this attainment is greatly promoted by our trials. John Newton, Works 1:535

- a. How are they good for us?
  - i. Trials develop our character. **ILL:** Weight lifting—resistance builds strength.
  - b. Trials reveal our character. **ILL:** Tests—whether you get an A+ or an F, you learn something about yourself.
- 2. That trials are necessary
  - a. This is particularly tricky!

- i. We cannot develop patience (or endurance) without trials. Patience (or endurance) is a learned behavior!
- ii. This was even true of Jesus Himself!
  - a) **Hebrews 5:8** Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.
  - b) Wait, didn't Jesus know everything? How could He learn?
    - 1) Simply stated: His human consciousness learned just like any other human. He faced trials. He overcame them every time. He never failed. However, in doing this he learned experientially what we face and how we face it.
    - 2) We will have to unpack the doctrine of the hypostatic union of the 2 consciousnesses in Christ in the future, but we can't today.
- 3. Trials are necessary in order to make us complete (v. 4)
  - a. If we approach our trials a certain way, we come out the other side complete.

### C. Sincerity in trials requires wisdom (vv. 5-8).

- 1. Can we just make ourselves think a certain way?
  - a. Hey, consider all of your trials all joy...simple, right? Maybe, but it is not easy.
  - b. If we are going to think this way, consider our trials this way, we need something. We need wisdom.
- 2. A wisdom we are often lacking.
  - a. Let me ask you this, "Do you face the trials in your life this way?" I think I know the answer:
    - i. Sometimes, yes.
    - ii. Most of the time, no.
    - iii. What made the difference in those moments? Wisdom.
      - a) When you handle your trials correctly, you are showing wisdom.
      - b) When you don't, you are showing your need for wisdom.
- 3. A wisdom that is available upon request.
  - a. Wisdom like this...the wisdom we need...comes from God.
  - b. To put it a slightly different way:
    - i. If we are going to truly benefit from our trials, then we must face each trial with a sense of dependence upon God to provide the wisdom we will need in the moment.
    - ii. We must cry out to Him, "Lord, I am already lost in the weeds here. If I am to persevere, let alone prosper by these trials, I need you to give me wisdom."
- 4. A wisdom that is offered free from disdain.
  - a. When you lift up your hands to God in desperate need of wisdom, He will never slap your hand away. Never.

**ILL:** Have you ever tried to take something out of a dog's mouth? They resist, they bite...they test your resolve. Sometimes, you just give up and say, "Ok...eat that rock!" The closer you get to them, the more aggressive and defensive they get. Is God like this? No. NO!! We are not wrestling wisdom out of God's hand in the hope of overpowering Him enough to get it. He WANTS us to ask for it...and He never ever looks down on us for asking.

- 5. A wisdom that must be pursued in faith (v. 6).
  - a. Now, this doesn't mean that God has to do what we really believe He will.
    - i. That "word of faith" doctrine is a lie.
    - ii. God is never obligated to us. He may be obligated to His own promises or His word, but He never owes us anything.
  - b. What does this mean, then?
    - i. God will not honor half-hearted, insincere, double-souled, anemic, prayers of afterthought. Do you want wisdom to truly benefit from your trials? Ask for it.
      - a) See James 4:2-3
    - ii. To pray anything in this way is to be like the waves of the ocean. All over the place.
- 6. A wisdom that must be pursued with a sincere expectation (vv. 7-8).
  - a. To ask God something that you don't believe He will give you is self-defeating.
  - b. God will not honor an insulting prayer!

**ILL:** How do you feel when somebody asks you for something like this, "I know you are probably going to say no, but..."? If you are anything like me, 1 of 2 responses come to your mind: (1) Then why bother asking me? Or (2)

What have I done to give you the impression that I don't want to help you? Now, sometimes you are asking for another person and you already know the answer, but apart from that, isn't this a little insulting?

**D. Simple, right? Yes, but not easy!**

1. Because we are so very prone to resist suffering.
  - a. This is natural.
  - b. This can keep us alive.
  - c. This can be deadly.

**III. A Sincere Call to Action—Applications/Implications**

- A. Make up your mind right now that you will embrace the love of God in trying circumstances.
  1. Sometimes what is best for us are things that feel the worst.
  2. **William Cowper** [God Works in Mysterious Ways]: Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, But trust him for his grace; Behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face.
- B. Make up your mind right now that when you find a lack of necessary wisdom within your heart, that you will humble yourselves and ask for it.
- C. Make up your mind right now that the gospel is worthy of any inconvenience, imposition, challenge, or even sickness.
  1. Your soul will be stronger as the result of these trials.
  2. Your soul will be saved at the end of these trials.

**Ending Quote #1:** In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, <sup>7</sup>so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; <sup>8</sup>and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, <sup>9</sup>obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

**1 Peter 1:6-9**

**Ending Quote #2:** Methinks, if we might go to heaven without suffering, we should be unwilling to desire it. Why should we ever wish to go by any other path than that which he as consecrated and endeared by his own example? Especially as his people's sufferings are not penal; there is no wrath in them; the cup he puts in their hands is very different from that which he drank for their sakes, and is only medicinal to promote their chief good. John Newton Works: 1:535-536