

"Reading the River" - James 1:5-12

Pray:

As we saw last week in James 1:2-4, the...

Thrust: ...of this section, and really a theme throughout The Letter of James is that...

God is sovereign over our trials, which are designed to bring us to maturity. By recognizing this, having the proper attitude, and asking God for wisdom; we are able to endure the trials of life through His grace and to His glory.

Last week, we touched on the just the first of four things that we can learn in trials that should cause us to rejoice (David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in James*, pgs 6-9):

- 1) We learn to grow in His likeness. (v.3-4)
- 2) We learn to trust in His wisdom. (v.5-8)
- 3) We learn to rely on His resources. (v.9-11)
- 4) We learn to live for His reward. (v.12)

² Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Maturity (Complete in Christlikeness)



Endurance



Faith put to the Test



Faith

1) We learn to grow in His likeness.(v.3-4)

...in other words, that we might be conformed to the image of Jesus himself.

2-4 When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives my brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends! Realize that they come to test your faith and to produce in you the quality of endurance. But let the process go on until that endurance is fully developed, and you will find you have become men of mature character... - The New Testament in Modern English by J.B Phillips

Now, if we're honest, if we're realistic, then it is not easy, nor is it natural, to adopt this kind of perspective when going through particular trials. As we put it last week, with our whitewater analogy, it is not our natural response to "lean into" the waves that are crashing down upon us.

It is on account of that, I believe, that James moves so quickly to the statement in verse 5.

Bringing us to the second thing in the midst of trials that allows us to rejoice,

2) We learn to trust in His wisdom. (v.5-8)

5 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.

Now the truth of v5 stands alone, apart from the surrounding context, and many of us have quoted it in relationship to making different decisions.

But when we look at the context, we recognize that what he's saying here about wisdom is directly tied to what he has just said about trials.

Again, I think Phillips is really helpful here...

⁵And if, in the process, any of you does not know how to meet any particular problem he has only to ask God—who gives generously to all men without making them feel foolish or guilty—and he may be quite sure that the necessary wisdom will be given him.

The implication here is clear: we're not there yet when it comes to wisdom. We are lacking something, and that something is wisdom, which is what we need when we walk through trials.

It is healthy at these times to realize how much we don't know...My Chemistry students will soon be hearing me ask them, "What do you do when you don't know what to do?"

James' answer:

⁵ But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, "ask God"

As in the OT, wisdom is a God-given and God-centered discernment regarding God's world and how to best live in it. In other words, it is seeing the world and your circumstances as God sees them and then acting in accord with that knowledge. (Greg Gilbert, *James*, pg 13)

<Analogy – "Reading the River">

In relation to the wisdom of God, Platt would suggest that, our own wisdom grows through three different factors: knowledge, perspective, and experience. Our limitations in all three of these areas lead to limited wisdom. When we walk through trials we realize we don't know all that is going on (knowledge); we don't see our situation from every angle (perspective); and we oftentimes lack experience in what to do (experience). God, on the other hand, possesses all knowledge, He has an

eternal perspective, and in Christ He has experienced every kind of test and has prevailed. (David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in James*, pg 8)

⁵ 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.

Notice what James is doing here. He's reminding us of what we already know about God. This is key. As we approach Him in times of distress and confusion, we need to remind ourselves of who we know God to be-of who He has shown himself to be.

James encourages prayer with four successive phrases in v5. He says we should ask God (1) who gives (2) generously (3) to all (4) without reproach. (“gives sincerely, without hesitation”)

As Doriani puts it, “When God gives, he acts according to His nature or character. He delights in giving; it is in His nature to give without calculating the return. God is generous to all His children, and God gives without adding a rebuke; He simply gives.” (Daniel Doriani, *James*, pg 25)

This is not an unqualified statement that everything we ask for will be given to us, but rather that we will receive the practical knowledge and understanding we need to endure our trials when we ask the God whom we know gives without hesitation.

In fact, Moo argues that James is not trying to show God's generosity in giving but rather God's “single, undivided intent to give us those gifts we need to please him.” (Moo, *The Letter of James*, pg 59)

Now, notice, James not only explained *what* to ask for, but he also explained *how* to ask.

⁶ 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. ⁷ For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸ being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Again, Phillips's paraphrase is helpful to me:

‘But he must ask in sincere faith without secret doubts as to whether he really wants God’s help or not. The man who trusts God, but with inward reservations, is like a wave of the sea, carried forward by the wind one moment and driven back the next. ⁷That sort of man cannot hope to receive anything from God, ⁸and the life of a man of divided loyalty will reveal instability at every turn.

James is using the word “doubt” in a very specific way here... (Lit. “dispute”). He uses the word to refer to a person disputing within one’s own self!

In other words, as Gilbert puts it, to doubt, is to be a person of a fundamentally divided mind and a fundamentally inconsistent attitude toward God. It’s a reckless and wavering distrust—a refusal to trust God. The point is not that a Christian never has doubts; it’s that a Christian never allows his mind to become so divided and self-disputing that it welcomes those doubts. A Christian will always strive to take the side of God and truth against doubts when they arise. (Greg Gilbert, *James*, pg13)

The doubter, here, thinks they can switch between worldly wisdom and God’s wisdom at will and get the best of both. They do not clearly believe that God is the source of all wisdom; thus, they waver between dual allegiance to God and some other “idol.” (James 4:4)

The double-minded person (4:8) is like an unfaithful spouse: he wants to love both God and the world. We cannot be wavering between two masters; here, this implies trusting God and not depending on other things to get us through. Too many of us turn to God only when we have exhausted every other option.

James does not demand that a believer never question what God gives them; rather, he maintains that we should not doubt the *character* of God as one who gives without hesitation.

To doubt His character can also imply that a person is unwilling to trust God with their life or that they do not believe that He is who He claims to be. (Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, pg 52)

So, rather than pretending we know God's will in perplexing situations, James teaches us to be sure of whom we are trusting for the answers to our questions

And we need to be as sincere about receiving God's wisdom as He is about giving it to us. If we are-if we genuinely seek to go God's way in a difficult time, trusting His way to be the right way – we can be assured that He will give wisdom to us. He promises to. (Sam Allberry, *James for You*, pg 23)

Thirdly,

3) We learn to rely on His resources. (v.9-11)

⁹ But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; ¹⁰ and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. ¹¹ For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

I'm increasingly convinced that James is not introducing a new theme. It would appear that what he's doing is giving an illustration of the way in which wisdom will change the response that we have to the circumstances of our lives. If we have heavenly wisdom, then we will think about our status in life, our material circumstances in life, in a way that is different from that which is the perspective of those who do not know the wisdom of God.

James applies this principle to two kinds of Christians: the poor and the rich, and he is going to come back to them on a number of occasions. (2:1-7, 15-16; 4:1-3, 13-17; 5:1-8)

Warren Wiersbe put it this way: “God’s testing has a way of leveling us. When testing comes to the poor man, he lets God have His way and rejoices that he possesses spiritual riches that cannot be taken from him. When testing comes to the rich man, he also lets God have His way and rejoices that his riches in Christ cannot wither or fade away. (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Mature*, pg 28)

In other words, it is not your material resources that take you through the trials of life; it is your spiritual resources.

⁹ But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; ¹⁰ and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation,...

James reminds us of our universal tendency to boast in ourselves and to rely on our own accomplishments.

How fitting, as we celebrate the Lord’s Table today, is it to be reminded of what we should be boasting in:

We, just like the “poor believers,” are called to rejoice in our lofty spiritual position; that is, in what God has done in Christ, along with all the privileges that God promises us.

¹⁵ For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. Hebrews 9:15

There is an incredible inheritance to look forward to. All that the Father has for His Son has been extended to those who are Christ’s. It is an unfathomable prospect, and one that begins spiritually now with our standing before the Father in Christ.

We also, just like the “rich believers” are called to rejoice in our lowly spiritual position. We have to acknowledge before God that we are utterly bankrupt spiritually. We are only saved because God has been generous, not because of any of our own achievements or accumulations. Spiritually, we have what we have because God has shown us grace.

Now, James goes on...

... because like flowering grass he will pass away. ¹¹ For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

Basically, unless we recognize the utter transience of this life and the potential suddenness of its end, and unless we live each moment for Christ with a sense of urgency about redeeming the time (Ephesians 5:16) we risk tacitly worshipping the world. (Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, pg 64)

So, we need to reflect on the certainty of heaven and boast in Jesus: what He has done, remembering exactly where we would be without Him...knowing that the only thing of solidity and permanence in this world is the love of God shown in Christ.

Lastly,

4) We learn to live for His reward. (v.12)

¹² Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

The basis of the blessing is the promise of eternal life that God has given to all believers, defined here as those who continually love Him.

He is not saying that we are saved by enduring trials. He is saying that the believer is rewarded by enduring trials. ...most original readers would

have immediately thought about the laurel wreath that would be put on an athlete's head at the end of a race he won. (Moo, *James*, pg 70)

...the crown (“the crown *which is life*”) is actually a symbol of receiving the glorious reward of eternal life. At the end of these trials, God meets us with life, eternal life. So, consider it Joy because trials remind you that you are living for a reward to come.

Paul puts it this way:

¹⁷ For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 2 Corinthians 4:17

¹² Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

(...we need to remind ourselves of who we know God to be...(v5))

Every promise is built upon four pillars: God's justice or holiness, which will not let Him deceive; His grace or goodness, which will not let Him forget; His truth, which will not let Him change; His power, which makes Him able to accomplish. (Thomas Manton, *James*, pg 54)

⁶ For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6

Finally,

¹² Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Those who love God are those who have responded to God's amazing love towards them in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Love is the spiritual motivation behind every imperative in this section.

19 We love, because He first loved us.

1 John 4:19

The Christian who loves God, and who knows that God loves him, will not fall apart when God permits trials to come. He is secure in God's love.
(Warren Wiersbe, *Be Mature*, pg 32)

1Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.
Hebrews 12:1-3

May we look to Christ as we pursue this goal. Jesus faced trial after trial in this life. Satan tried him directly in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). Jesus had "no place to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20), so he also faced the trial of poverty. Later he faced hatred, verbal abuse, and physical abuse of every kind. Above all, he endured the trial of crucifixion before God the Father raised Him to life and to glory. Thus, He became the prime example of "the man who perseveres under trial" and then receives "the crown of life" (1:12)
(Daniel Doriani, *James*, pg 28)

Prayer