

God-Centered Thinking in Trials – Supernatural Joy in a Sovereign God (James 1:1-4)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on May 17, 2009

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¹ James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.

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.

As always, we need to first understand the context and original readers and their situation to rightly interpret and apply to ours. In verse 1, James mentions the “twelve tribes,” but more specifically, in verse 2, he says “my brethren.” This term goes deeper than mere countrymen by Israelite ethnicity, this is a term for *believing* Israel. Jesus spoke of a Jewish disciple as “a true Israelite,” and Paul wrote “not all Israel is Israel” – in other words, not all *physical* Israel is part of *true spiritual* Israel (only those who trust Christ).

This is important to start with, because what James calls these readers to do cannot be done without Christ within. This joy in trials is impossible for a natural man, and it’s not even automatic or natural for a Christian, but it is possible by the *supernatural* power of Christ. James is writing to *believers* in Jesus as Messiah and Lord, Christians from the 12 tribes. Note how he uses *brethren*:

¹⁸ In the exercise of His will He [God] brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. ¹⁹ This you know, my beloved brethren ... 2:1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. ² For if a man comes into your assembly ...

So when James uses the term “my brethren,” he’s using it for those who are spiritually related to him, not merely ethnically. These are brothers and sisters in the church/assembly, Jewish Christians (at least professing). Of course James knows as well as any other NT writer that not everyone in a local assembly has true saving faith, and so he also writes later to challenge easy-believism and false faith, but for now just know James 1:2 is a command for Christians

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials

What were some of the “various trials” these original brethren encountered? Persecution, poverty (and exploitation by rich we’ll see in future weeks), prejudice (chap. 2), personal conflicts caused by sin on the inside (4:1-2) and the tongue on the outside (ch. 3), personal sickness (5:14) or suffering in general (5:13). The KJV for James 1:2 has “*divers temptations*” but the better translation is “various trials” – I tend to agree with most commentators that 1:2 is talking about “external trials of affliction, in contrast with internal temptations to sin ... internal ‘temptations’ with which one is tempted (1:13-15) are not occasions for joy.”¹ You may not feel like trials can be considered joy, either, but we’ll get to that later. And external trials of course often overlap with internal struggles.

The term “various” (v. 2) for these trials was the same word used of the *multi-colored* coat Jacob gave to his son Joseph, a story the writer of James probably knew well since his own Hebrew name was Jacob and his father’s name was Joseph. Joseph in the OT certainly fell into various trials, literally falling into a pit, then falling into the hands of slave traders (both done by his brothers), then being unjustly accused by Potiphar’s wife and being thrown in prison for years. Our trials differ in severity and circumstances, but James has all types in mind, with this word “various” – variegated, manifold, multi-faceted, many-colored. The analogy is given how:

‘God, the Master Painter, works in the entire spectrum of problems through which you pass in life. He is busy making you into a new person by the fiery reds of affliction, the icy blues of sorrow, the murky browns of failure, and the sickly yellows of illness and disease. God is at work; on His palettes is every hue and intensity of the rainbow.’²

Or another analogy you may have heard before:

‘The trials of life are not all alike; they are like variegated yarn that the weaver uses to make a beautiful rug. God arranges and mixes the colors and experiences of life. The final product is a beautiful thing for His glory ... the undersides of the rugs were not very beautiful: the patterns were obscure and the loose ends of yarn dangled. “Don’t judge the worker or the work by looking at the wrong side” ... In the same way, we are looking at the wrong side of life; only the Lord sees the finished pattern. Let’s not judge Him or His work from what we see today. His work is not finished yet!’³

John Calvin said it this way: ‘The Lord then afflicts us in various ways, because ... [various sins] in which we abound, cannot be cured by the same medicine.’⁴

God is sovereign, and He is good. He is the Great Physician. What a merciful Savior He is. The Lord is the Wonderful Counselor, and the Good Shepherd, and His rod and staff should comfort true sheep even though rods and staffs hurt. And as we saw a couple weeks back in Isaiah 45, God is not only *aware* of all things, and not only *allowing* all things, and not only *able* to work things for His purposes, but He *actually is* doing so, He *always* is working all things for His glory and our good, in that order (Eph. 1:11, Rom. 8:28). God not only permits trials, He plans them and all things. He is not just capable of *using* trials for good, but God *intends* trials for good, even sinful acts of men who intended evil (Gen. 50:20).

If you don’t have this high view of God’s sovereignty, that God is large and in charge of all things at all times, He’s Almighty, all-supreme, all-encompassing, all-glorious, and all-satisfying, if you have a lesser view of a god made in your own image, you’re not going to be able to make a lot of sense out of this passage (or a whole bunch of other passages in Scripture). And you will never experience the joy found here in the sovereign God who created you for His glory *and* to enjoy Him forever. And God is glorified in us when we enjoy *Him* in our trials. And we receive much good and blessing when our joy and focus and satisfaction is on whatever brings God much glory. Trials are not enjoyable, but there is God-centered joy here that cannot be moved by trials. Not a superficial happiness or mere natural emotions, this is a supernatural joy in a sovereign God; a joy that is of God, from God, and through God, to God be the glory forever as we focus our joy in Him forever.

God-Centered Thinking in Trials: Supernatural Joy in a Sovereign God.

Each of those words in the title are important to understand the text

- “*God-centered*” -> if you read James 1:2 but look at your trials from a self-centered perspective, the joy it commands will be impossible as long as you think it’s about you, and of you, for you primarily, rather than something far bigger and more important than you at work: God and His glory
- “*Thinking*” -> the key word in v. 2 is “consider” and in v. 3 it is “knowing” – thinking, not feelings is the focus here
- “*In Trials*”-> v. 2 says “*when* you encounter trials” not *after* and not *if* – trials are inevitable and joy is commanded not only despite our trials but during our trials
- “*Supernatural Joy*” -> not a natural feeling that comes and goes based on circumstances, but a supernatural deep God-rooted God-centered, God-produced, God-glorifying JOY
- “*In a Sovereign God*”->God’s will is sovereign in good/bad

James 4:13 *Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.”¹⁴ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, “**If the Lord wills**, we will live and also do this or that.”*

Nothing can be done if it is not the Lord’s will, that’s the sovereign will of God there that governs and determines all things. Making plans is not wrong, but we must depend on God and not presume we can do anything apart from His plan, power, and Providence.

James 1:17 ***Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.¹⁸ In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.***

Verse 17 makes clear every good thing we have or can do is from above, not within. There’s no little island of goodness in the human heart, or anything good that originates from us, not even our salvation as v. 18 says. Whose will does v. 18 say caused us to be brought forth / born again? Ultimately it was *God’s free will*. Only a God sovereign over man’s wills can fulfill Romans 8:28. There is supreme joy in a truly supreme God. If we don’t have the same high view of God and low view of self that James had, we’re not going to get past verse 2 of the book of James without thinking “this guy is from another planet.” And he’s not of this world; this is other-worldly truth for those whose true citizenship is elsewhere

OUTLINE: Keys to God-Centered Thinking in Trials:

1. A Slave Attitude (back to James 1:1)

The original language word-order is “James, *of God* and of the Lord Jesus Christ, slave.” Letters in the ancient world began with your name, and then usually some title or description, but the first thing James wants you to know about him is *God*. He is “of God” – everything about James is *of, through, to, from* God – the phrase can indicate He is owned by God, definitely the meaning of the term *slave*. This word *doulos* in the Greek world indicated one who had a Master with complete sovereign rule and control over him.

Notice v. 1 says “slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” In the grammar as well as historical context, there’s a recognition that Jesus is not only Lord, but He is God. In fact, Jesus taught no one can “serve two masters” [verb form of *slave*] – and James knows there are not two different deities he serves, only One true God.

A high view of God as sovereign and in charge, not only of all molecules and matter in the universe, but as Master and in charge of me and my life every day, that’s where we must begin and end. And a high view of God and a low view of self go together and are essential to Christian living: God must increase, I must decrease.

As I said last week, the original readers knew well that a *doulos* / *slave*

- Was owned by and totally possessed by his master.
- Existed for his master and no other reason.
- Had no personal rights.
- Was at the master’s disposal "24/7".
- Had no will of his own but was completely subservient to the Master.

This mindset of subservience and utter submission to the Lord, this way James introduces himself is the attitude his readers needed to have in various trials, where maybe even some of their perceived rights were being taken away. Lowly servants can have joy in earthly trials if focused on future heavenly words: “Well done, good and faithful **slave** ... enter into the **joy of your Master.**”

I ask again: How can you tell if you have a lowly-servant attitude? By how you respond when you’re ... treated like one.

Where is Paul writing Philippians from? He mentions his chains in 1:7, 13-15, 16 – he was certainly being treated like a lowly servant, even treated worse than a slave, but his joy could not be shackled by any earthly prison, because he took every thought captive and obedient to his Lord and Master.

*Philippians 1:1 Paul and Timothy, **bond-servants [slaves]** of Christ Jesus ...*

*⁴ always offering prayer **with joy in my every prayer for you all** ... ¹⁷ the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, **thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.** ¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, **Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice ... [it was all about Christ not his comfort]** ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all **for your progress and joy in the faith ...***

2:5 Have this attitude [mind / mindset] in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus ...** ⁷ [who] emptied Himself, taking the form of a **bond-servant [slave]**, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross **[and He did it ultimately for the glory of God, end v. 11, and as Hebrew says, “for the joy set before Him].

*¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing **[remember this is Paul writing from a place where humanly speaking he had far more reason to complain or grumble than we do] ...***

¹⁷ *But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.* ¹⁸ *You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.* ¹⁹ *But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition ...*

²⁸ *Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you.* ²⁹ *Receive him then in the Lord with all joy*

3:1 *Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord ...*

4:4 *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!*

Chapter 4, and really all of Philippians is great to study further on this first point, how this SLAVE ATTITUDE is essential to joy “in the Lord” though trials aren’t joyful, chap 4 describes a deep peace and contentment from dwelling on and applying God’s truths.

Mabel Williamson was a missionary to China who powerfully described the sacrifice of her rights to a normal standard of living, ordinary safeguards of health, private affairs, marriage, and even a home life. She was human like you and I and just like us she struggled with suffering and self-denial and the fact that she had to give up so many of what she thought were her “rights”. But she finally came to the conclusion that part of serving and becoming like her Master Christ was becoming like one who had no rights [though He as God did have rights that we don’t, He still laid them aside; Phil. 2], as epitomized by the picture of a bond-servant. In her book *Have We No Right?* (Chicago: Moody, 1958) she wrote

- [Jesus claimed] *no rights, No right to a soft bed, and a well-laid table* [“Son of Man had no place to lay His head”]

- *No right to a home of His own, a place where His own pleasure might be sought.*

- *No right to choose pleasant, congenial companions, those who could understand Him and sympathize with Him.*

- *No right to shrink away from filth and sin, to pull His garments closer around Him and turn aside to walk in cleaner paths.*

- *No right to be understood and appreciated; no, not by those upon whom He had poured out a double portion of His love.*

- *No right even never to be forsaken by His Father, the One who meant more than all to Him.*

His only right was silently to endure shame, spitting, blows; to take His place as a sinner at the dock; to bear my sins in anguish on the cross ... And I?

- *A right to the “comforts” of life? No, but ... the love of God for my pillow.* [Spurgeon called God’s sovereignty his pillow at night]

- *A right to physical safety? No, but ... the security of being in His will.*

- *A right to love and sympathy from those around me? No, but ... the friendship of the One who understands me better than I do myself.*

- *A right to be a leader among men? No, but ... to be led by the One to whom I have given my all, led as is a little child, with its hand in the hand of its father.*

- *A right to a home, and dear ones? No, not necessarily, but a right to dwell in the heart of God [as a child of God].*

- *A right to myself? No, but oh, I have a right to Christ.* [John 1:12 “as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to be called children of God, even to those who believed ...”]

*All that He takes I will give. All that He gives I will take.
He, my only right! He, the one right before which all other rights fade into nothingness. I have full right to Him. Oh, may He have full right to me!*

You can turn back to James now, but I wanted to start the way James starts, before jumping right into the command of joy in trials, because as long as we are thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought, as long as we are thinking in terms of our rights, and what we want, and what we feel someone like us should deserve, it's going to be very difficult to have joy when we are encountering various trials we don't think we deserve! It may very well be impossible without the attitude of an undeserving lowly slave below a Sovereign Master who loves us and is good.

What do we truly deserve? Death and damnation long ago! Any thing other than that, any day we are alive is an undeserved grace that we don't have a right to presume upon, but we should be thankful for and rejoice in. If you weren't here when we began our study of Titus and talked about this word *slave*, you really should get or read that message (Titus 1:1) where we saw that the NT:

- *calls believers slaves far more than it calls us Christians!*
- the word "slave" is used more times than servant, saint or even believer, or just about any title we use of Christians
- the epistles don't even use the word "disciple" which was common in the gospels and Acts, but in the rest of the N.T. one of the most dominant words and images for everyday believers was a slave. This is basic to the N.T. message.

Lordship and slavery means the end of our self, our will, our control, our life – that helps us understand why Jesus said "If anyone will come after me, *let him deny himself.*" That's slave talk. It's the end of you, and everything is about the Lord now. It's not about you. That may not be American Christianity, but it's biblical.

If you've never bowed your knee in surrender of your life and will and soul before Jesus as Lord, you're a slave of sin (John 8 says). The Sovereign Almighty Master of the universe in His Word commands you to repent and believe the gospel, deny yourself, confess He is your Lord/Master, meaning *you're His slave*. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus is Lord– if you don't in this life, you will in the next before this same Sovereign Lord who will send to eternal hellfire all who rejected Jesus Christ.

The slave-Master relationship *believers* have is not to be confused with slavery in America or in world history. Our slavery *to sin* was horrible, but Jesus is a loving Lord and merciful Master to us:

- He's not a harsh tyrant, He's not abusive like some human slave-owners were, He's a gracious kind compassionate King who condescends to rescue those enslaved to sin!
- He Himself comes to the slave market of sin and purchases us with a price, the highest price, the death of His only begotten Son in exchange for us slaves that hated Him!!
- While still sinners and enemies, Christ died to buy back with His own precious blood these chosen slaves as His own possession, for His own glory, not because we were so great but because God's sovereign grace is so great!!!

- Unlike a human Master who might choose a slave based on desirability or goodness, we were all undesirable, no good.
- The slaves God chooses of His own will and pleasure He also redeems, which is language of buying back a slave.
- And all these slaves will be taken to His house, they are exclusively owned, no rights of their own or autonomy
- no independent living apart from their Master's direction
- constantly available to the Master's will, not their own
- singularly devoted in obedience to this One they love
- completely dependent upon their Master for everything (provision, protection, etc., which is a blessed good thing)
- knowing that discipline and reward come from Him
- now our only goal in life should be to please our Master.

Not only did God's Son give His life as ransom for many slaves, paying in full to redeem them from the slave market at the price required, but He frees all His slaves from eternal bondage in hell, forgives all the sins we were enslaved to, gives us the grace to conquer the sins that still so easily entangle us as we serve Christ:

- God takes His slaves and also makes us His sons (as some benevolent Romans did) and gives us privileges of sons!
- God counts us *in Christ* and calls us joint-heirs *with Christ*
- God adopts us into His own family and blesses us so much!
- Hallelujah, what a Savior!!! What a Lord we serve!!!!

Keys to God-centered Thinking in Trials:

1. Slave Attitude (v. 1)
2. **Joyful Mindset (v. 2)**

Consider it all joy, my brethren when you encounter various trials ...

Consider/count is a financial term for evaluating. Wiersbe writes

'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 ... So, when trials come, immediately give thanks to the Lord and adopt a joyful attitude. Do not pretend; do not try self-hypnosis; simply look at trials through the eyes of faith. Outlook determines outcome; to *end* with joy, *begin* with joy.'⁵

James is not commanding us to walk around with a silly grin all the time, or a plastic smile, or an attitude that denies every difficulty and ignores the realities of a fallen world and the suffering of ourselves and others. This is not superficial feelings of happiness, but there is a supernatural fullness of joy intended here.

This is not a verse he intends us to just quote glibly or flippantly to a brother or sister in Christ going through tragedy or trials, but there is a profound deep truth that is vital for us to grasp. James speaks of a "pure joy" – a joy unmixed by bitterness or sinfulness.

Exegetical Commentary on the NT says on v. 2: “all” (*pasan*) does not mean “everything” in this context, but functions adverbially here, implying “pure” or “entire.” In other words, it does not form part of the direct object (“Consider *everything*”) but identifies the type of joy one should have. “Joy” (*charan*), in turn, speaks of a state of being rather than an emotion. Joy proves quite different from happiness ...[it’s rather] a settled contentment in every situation or “an unnatural reaction of deep, steady, and unadulterated thankful trust in God ...” – deep profound inner joy.⁶

So this is not just “the power of positive thinking” like Norman Vincent Peale or Robert Schuller or its modern re-packaging in Joel Osteen’s books. This is not psychobabble or a superficial emotion cooked up in a clappy-happy church service. This is not theology from Bobby McFerrin or the Lion King. (For those who don’t know, just “Don’t worry, be happy” or “Hakuna Matata” [no worries]). The joyful mindset James is speaking of comes from biblical thinking, not earthly positive thinking or mere optimism. It is rooted in theology, a supreme view of a supreme sovereign God. As the modern church in many quarters seems content to be shallow and shallower, I pray your great desire is to go deeper and deeper in theology of God, because that’s where deep true joy is.

We need to gird our minds to be prepared to “*encounter* various trials”(v.2) often refers to falling into something, usually a connotation of something unplanned and undesired. It is used in a couple other places, in the story of a Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30) when the travelling man falls into or encounters robbers and is beaten. The other place is Acts 27:41 where the ship encounters rough waters in the seas.

What is our first thought and first response when we encounter rough trials in life? Do they toss us to and fro like a boat at sea? Do they beat us down so we can’t do anything like the man in Luke 10? The natural response many of us have to various trials is more likely another word that starts with “c”

Complaining – this was a chronic sin of the Israelites when they went through various trials in the wilderness. 1 Corinthians 10:10 says we are never to murmur or grumble or whine or complain as they did, which God takes very seriously and we even see Him *take out* many of the complaining Israelites by His wrath in the OT. If God is sovereign, who ultimately are we complaining to? God – that’s why He took so serious the Israelite complaints to Moses or others, because ultimately the trials came by the hand of God.

Collapse – Hebrews 12:5 says when under the heavy hand of God we must not faint or fall in weariness or lose heart as discouraged.

Jas. 1:2 is written so we would neither collapse nor complain in trials, but so that we can *consider it / count it joy*. I’m calling this second point “joyful *mindset*” not “joyful *feelings*” because this command has more to do with volition and decision and a mindset more than mere emotions. James does not say “*always feel joy*” or “*trials are all joy*” – he says “*consider it all joy*.” The phrase “all joy” is intensive in the grammar, but not exclusive. In other words, joy is not the only type of emotion allowable in difficult times.

We know that sorrow and grief are not wrong or sinful because Jesus Himself was a man of sorrows and grief. Jesus wept. In fact, there are times when it would be a sin *not to* mourn or weep because Scripture commands us to mourn with those who mourn and weep with those who weep. And yet the Christian's sorrow is not inconsistent with or independent from a deep inner joy in trials.

In 2 Cor. 6:10 Paul says he's "*sorrowful yet always rejoicing ...*"

In 7:4b Paul again explains this further "*... I am filled with **comfort**; I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction.*"

In 7:9 he says "*I now rejoice, **not that you were made sorrowful [he wasn't sadistic or masochistic, he had no twisted pleasure in pain]**, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God [he rejoiced not in the sorrow of man but in the will of his sovereign God; his joy was in Him], so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us.*¹⁰ *For the sorrow that is according to **the will of God** produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the **sorrow of the world** produces death.*"

The pain was not a joy, but the purpose of the pain was *considered* joy. There is a worldly sorrow that we are NOT to have, a self-centered joyless grief like the rest of the world who have no hope. Paul says in another place we don't grieve like them, without hope. We have a hope that is supernatural and unexplainable to natural men and should prompt them to ask us the reason for the hope that is within us. We have a peace that surpasses all understanding, transcending all comprehension as to how we can have it in difficulty, or at least we should and can as we pray and choose to dwell on what is good, true, etc. (Phil. 4). And Christians can have a joy that is untouched by circumstances and unexplainable by the natural man and unconquerable as long as a sovereign God is in the center. This joy isn't overpowered by trials, it overflows in trials.

2 Corinthians 8:2 "*... **in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed ...***"

Because joy begins in our thinking, don't think it doesn't come out, because the Corinthians knew this joy overflowed. Don't think our faces and demeanor can be almost always unhappy and gloomy and we can say "Oh, I *do* have joy, it's just no one knows or sees it." This joy overflows and is evident to others! It's not a superficial happiness or emotion, but it is a supernatural joy that begins on the inside and must affect our outside as well. Because James 1:2 is a command, it's a sin not to have a joyful mindset.

We who believe in the sovereignty of God the most should be the most joyful of all people! That's why the Psalms which spend so much time exalting this attribute of God also spend so much time calling believers to exult in and rejoice in these truths! We who embrace the doctrines of grace should be full of grace and warmth and love and joy. If God is truly sovereign in all things from salvation to glorification, shame on us (and me) if we're not joyful!

If you don't have a slave attitude, a low view of self and a high view of God, to just jump to James 1:2 will not give us the full strength we need for trials that we only find through a full trust in a fully sovereign good God. "*Consider it all joy*" will be a phrase we find annoying if our focus is comfort more than Christlikeness, but the end and aim of v. 4 is Christlikeness ("*let endurance have its perfect work that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*"). In other words: to be as much like Jesus as possible. We can rejoice in the Lord always when we understand that the Lord is always doing whatever it takes in our life to make us more like Him (also the context following the promise of Rom. 8:28).

John 15:20 "*Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you ...*

There's one for your *Bible Promise* book. Jesus had to remind His disciples this and those who follow Him and want to be like Him. If we don't think we deserve persecution and trials, do we think we're better than Jesus? Are we greater than Him and that's why we should have a greater life? That perspective won't bring joy.

Matthew 5:10-11 "***Blessed [happy]*** are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "***Blessed*** are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. "***Rejoice and be glad [some versions say "exceedingly glad"; Lk 6:23 adds "leap for joy"]***, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

This is a command, "rejoice, be glad greatly," not because the trial feels great, but because your reward in heaven is great, and your Savior is great and you have the great privilege to share with Him. God's Word not only gives this command to rejoice and count trials all joy, but it also gives real life examples of those who did:

Acts 5:41 *So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, **rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.***

They didn't think "I don't deserve this trial of persecution." They counted it a privilege and joy that God considered them worthy of it. Their focus was His name, His sake, not *their own ease*

Acts 13:50, 52 *But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a **persecution** against Paul and Barnabas, and **drove them out** of their district ... And the disciples were continually **filled with joy** ...*

They were filled with joy because they weren't full of themselves or focused on themselves, but were Spirit-filled, Christ-centered.

Acts 16²² *The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods.* ²³ *When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely;* ²⁴ *and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.* ²⁵ *But **about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them***

- They weren't complaining, they were considering it all joy.
- They didn't have a pity party they threw a persecution party
- There was no place for "poor me" self-pity talk, all was *pure joy* instead
- Trials were not a time for complaining but for a concert and the Paul-and-Silas duet brought the house down – literally!

Alistair Begg shares how he heard this story expounded this way:

'It was midnight. Paul says to Silas, "Hey, brother, how you feelin'?"

Silas says, "Ok."

Paul says, "You know, I feel a song comin' on."

Silas says, "Go for it."

Paul starts singin' and Silas starts singin' and soon they got they're singin' going and it's right throughout their cell. And they sing a little louder and it goes right throughout the jail. And as their spirit lifts within them, they sing some more. And it wafts out through the bars of the jail and into the streets of Philippi. And soon their songs can be heard throughout all of the immediate region. And they begin to ascend ... and they ascend and they're moving up into the atmosphere, and they go into the stratosphere, and they go into the ionosphere, and their songs are reaching up and UP and UP! To the very heaven of God!

God says to one of the angels, "What is that I hear?"

And the angel says, "Oh Lord, that's Paul and Silas singin'"

And the Lord listens for a little and he begins ever so gently to tap His foot. For the earth is His footstool. And as He taps His foot the [earth quakes and] shackles fall off and the bars fall down and the jail springs free. And they walk out and they praise God.

Somewhat fanciful? But it preaches ;) ⁷

My mom used to hum hymns in her trials (some of which may have been caused by me).

God is sovereign in all things. James commands us to have joy *in God*, not in an evil event itself.

1 Corinthians 13:6 says we are not to "rejoice *in iniquity*, but rejoice in the truth." We rejoice in the truth about God and from God's Word. We're to rejoice in the Lord, not in sin itself. The joy is *focused on truth, not how we feel*. This is so critical to get.

Kent Hughes writes: 'James is not ordering *all-encompassing joyful emotion* during severe trials; nor is he demanding that his readers must *enjoy* their trials, or that trials are *joy*. He knew, as did the writer of Hebrew, that ["All discipline seems for the moment not to be joyful, yet sorrowful..."] (Hebrews 12:11).

James is not commanding that we exult upon hearing that our career position has been given to our secretary, or that the neighbor's children have leukemia, or that one's spouse is adulterous. Rather, James is commending the conscious embrace of a Christian understanding of life which brings joy into the trials ... James says, "*Consider it pure joy*," which means to make a deliberate and careful decision to experience joy even in times of trouble. Is this possible? Yes ... Several years ago the Presbyterian pastor Lloyd John Ogilvie underwent the worst year of his life. His wife had undergone five major surgeries, plus radiation and chemotherapy, several of his staff members had departed, large problems loomed, and discouragement assaulted his feelings. But he wrote,

The greatest discovery that I have made in the midst of all the difficulties is that I can have joy when I can't feel like it – artesian joy. When I had every reason to feel beaten, I felt joy. In spite of everything, [God] gave me the conviction of being loved and the certainty that nothing could separate me from him. It was not happiness, gush, or jolliness but a constant flow of the Spirit through me. At no time did he give me the easy confidence that everything would work out as I wanted it on my timetable, but that he was in charge and would give me and my family enough courage for each day: grace. Joy is always the result of that.’⁸

The gifted blind hymn-writer wrote these lines as a girl of eight:

O what a happy soul am I Although I cannot see;
I am resolved that in this world Contented I will be.
How many blessings I enjoy That other people don't.
To weep and sigh because I'm blind I cannot and I won't. (F. Crosby)⁹

1 Robert Greenlee, *Exegetical Summary of James*, p. 14-15.

2 Jay Adams, *A Thirst for Wholeness*, p. 20.

3 Warren Wiersbe (1989). *The Bible exposition commentary*. (Jas 1:2). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

4 John Calvin. *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (182).

5 Wiersbe, *Ibid*.

6 *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, Craig Blomberg, Zondervan, 2008, Vol. 16, p. 48.

7 Alistair Begg, “Prayer” (from series *Seven Marks Of an Effective Church*, available from Truth for Life ministries)

8 Kent Hughes, *James*, p. 18-19.

9 *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* (Jas 1:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.