

The Epistle of James

Sermon #3

Scripture Reading: James 1:4-12

Testing Of Your Faith – *Producing Steadfastness*

May 7, 2017

Submissive Will

We begin this morning at verse 4 of James chapter 1, “[And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.](#)” It has been said, “A wise man learns by the experience of others. An ordinary man learns by his own experience. A fool learns by nobody's experience.” Also personally I hope to learn from the mistakes of others. It is too painful to make them all myself. For believers in Christ we learn from our Lord and steadfastness is found in a submissive will to the Christ of the Bible and their lessons, standards and demands inspired by God. We are able to relate what we learn from the Bible to our life and reduce the mistakes and gain wisdom. It is the fool who is determined to forge his own path by his own intellect and not give their life over to Christ.

The middle to the end of verse 4 we observe the result of steadfastness is “[that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.](#)” Understanding what this means can take a little explaining by going back to the Greek. The word “[perfect](#)” does not mean perfection or sinlessness but carries the sense of being fully developed or made mature. The word “[complete](#)” does not mean everything is done and finalized, but means being made whole. The words “[lacking in nothing](#)” mean that there is no room for misunderstanding. So to paraphrase what James was saying, as trials are experienced the one who relies on Christ and the Holy Spirit will result in spiritual maturity and spiritual maturity makes a person spiritually whole in Christ and being spiritually whole means one will not lack spiritual wisdom needed to understand what God is teaching them. God voice is found in the scriptures and prayer and this brings light to our souls.

There are many other voices in ones life and if we do not work at keeping our focus on the Word of God these other voices will derail our lives. We are called to lived for God’s glory and under His protection. However, the voice in the mist and darkness can put us on a path leading to destruction. It reminds me of this simple story. The captain of the ship looked into the dark night and saw faint lights in the distance. Immediately he told his signalman to send a message, “Alter your course 10 degrees south.” Promptly a return message was received, “Alter your course 10 degrees north.”

The captain was angered; his command had been ignored. So he sent a second message, “Alter your course 10 degrees south--I am the captain!” Soon another message was received, “Alter your course 10 degrees north--I am seaman third class Jones.” Immediately the captain sent a third message, knowing the fear it would evoke, “Alter your course 10 degrees south--I am a battleship.” Then the reply came “Alter your course 10 degrees north--I am a lighthouse.”

In the midst of our dark and foggy times, all sorts of voices are shouting orders into the night, telling us what to do, how to adjust our lives. Out of the darkness, one voice signals something quite opposite to the rest - something almost absurd. But the voice happens to be the Light of the World, and we ignore it at our own peril. If we do not listen to the Lord we may soon find ourselves upon the shoals of destruction. Submitting to the Lord in living our lives is the only sure way to make the safe harbor for our lives and make anchor in heaven.

Last week we talked about the trial that Abraham had as he prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham did not challenge God and he did not question God, he simply submitted himself to God’s will. Abraham could have asked God how he would fulfill his promise to Abraham if Isaac died. Abraham did not look for a way out in order to save Isaac, but he was obedient, believing God is right and his promises

true. Are you living as Abraham? Are you seeking God as the Light directing your life? Is your will submissive to God, trusting him to be right and true? Set your own direction at your own peril for you will end up crashing upon the rocks. Or choose, as verse 4 says to let the steadfastness of God and your submissions to him “have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” Like the lighthouse God will guide you through the turbulent waters of life and bring you to safe harbor.

Believing Heart

In order for one to have a submissive will towards God one must have a believing heart. So James continues, reading at verse 5, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” Satan works to instill doubt, the world that for a time belongs to Satan works to instill doubt and the unsaved who are under his influence live in doubt and work to instill doubt in others. Thomas believed when he saw. What is it you must see to believe? There is a poem dealing with this very problem of doubt. Listen and think about your heart’s condition towards God.

DOUBT

Let me meet you on the mountain, Lord,
Just once.

You wouldn't have to burn a whole bush.
Just a few smoking branches
And I would surely be ...your Moses.

Let me meet you on the water, Lord,
Just once.

It wouldn't have to be on *Elephant Butte* Lake.

Just on a puddle after the *quick and hard New Mexico* rain
And I would surely be...your Peter.

Let me meet you on the road, Lord,
Just once.

You wouldn't have to blind me on North *Highway 14*.
Just a few bright lights on the way to *Canyon Bible Church*
And I would surely be...your Paul.

Let me meet you, Lord,
Just once.

Anywhere. Anytime.

Just meeting you in the Word is so hard sometimes

Must I always be...your Thomas? *Adapted from Norman Shirk, April 10, 1981, Dallas Seminary*

God shows himself to us and has proved who he is, the only one God, throughout history and yet we doubt and ask him to prove himself over and over. A believing heart trusts God for he made people's hearts as the dwelling place for the Holy Spirit and this is a miracle greater than the burning bush of Moses, Peter walking on water, Paul meeting Christ on the road or Thomas seeing and felling the wounds of Christ. God has brought you to spiritual life through Christ and this is a miracle and upon it one has the firm foundation to believe.

Solomon had his struggles; he had times of great wisdom as well as times of blindness and doubt towards God. Solomon wrote words of wisdom in the Proverbs, ⁵“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. ⁷Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.”

(Proverbs 3:5-7) Trials should be by their very nature, if one has a believing heart, turn us towards God. The natural result of trials is we should seek God and his wisdom in the meditation of God and whom we are in God found in the Bible and prayer. Do you believe that God will guide you and give you his wisdom, strength and patience when you ask him with a believing heart? The answer is, of course and

should be “yes” and this is what James assures us of, that God is gracious towards his children and He “gives generously to all without reproach” as we read in verse 5.

God is willing to supply his children with all they need, as he is a gracious father, but we as his needy children must have a believing heart. James makes this clear by writing in verse 6, “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.” When one prays but does not fully trust God, which means one is asking but doubts God, how can one expect God to work through a doubting heart? Joyce prayed for over 11 years that I would let God into my heart and believe. I am sure she had doubts at times for 11 years is a long time, but she did not give up and over came her few moments of doubt by praying, seeking and believing in God. God is forever faithful and provided my salvation.

Christians are not to be double-minded. The prophet Elijah confronted the chosen people of God and said to them, “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” (1 Kings 18:21) Jesus spoke in Revelation saying, “So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.” (Revelation 3:16) If one is double minded he is serving two gods and this will never work. God is a jealous God. Moses brought down to the core of what it means to have a believing heart, he wrote, “for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.” (Exodus 34:14) The Lord our God requires jealous or exclusive relationship with those he calls his children. God does not tolerate those who claim him as Lord and also worship other gods, the gods of fame, money, comfort, their spouse, their children, etc. God says if you want me you must give all of yourself to me, you can have no others before me. God directs beginning in verse 7, “For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” If one is double minded, he is

unstable and cannot expect God to work in his heart for in truth it does not believe. To receive the wisdom, guidance and blessings of God one must have a submissive will and to have a submissive will one must have the single-minded belief in God through Christ because God the Holy Spirit cannot work in a heart that is divided.

Humble Spirit

To allow God into ones heart and have a believing heart begins with the admission of who God is and who we are. God is the only perfect being that has ever existed and it eternal - past, present and future. God is the Creator of the universe from the trillions of galaxies down to the 37 trillion cells that makes you who you are. God does not need us and we desperately need him!

James continues laying out his argument that we need to submit to God with a believing heart based on a humble spirit, reading at verse 9, “[Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,](#) ¹⁰ [and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.](#) ¹¹ [For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.](#)” James introduces the reversal of worldly status that comes with fellowship with Jesus. Matthew will take up this theme later when he wrote his gospel account where he recorded the words of Jesus, “[But many who are first will be last, and the last first.](#)” (Matthew 19:30) The world is always telling people they need to be first, it is all about them, and the world promotes “me worship”. On the other hand God teaches we are to worship him only and live lives of sacrifice to serve others.

The person in the humblest condition should boast in the high position that will be his in the future with God. For James there was a close relationship between being humble in status and being humble in spirit, at least within the context of genuine faith. Low social standing usually comes with being poor. James exhorted those of

low social standing that as believers they should boast or to “take pride” in their coming exaltation. The poor had brothers in the church who were of high socioeconomic standing and the opposite exhortation was directed toward them. Although these poor men and women had nothing visible to boast in, their boast was nevertheless greater than those who boasted in themselves.

James continues in verse 10 the spiritual exercise for the rich. Knowing that in the judgment the rich of the world will be stripped of their perishable wealth and influence, rich believers should “take pride” in their “low position”; that is, they should humble themselves now before God and have a servant heart. The condemnation of those whose pride is in their wealth is a commonly found in the Bible. Such pride is an overwhelming temptation focused on the present. This danger is expressed in the proverb “A rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his imagination. ¹² Before destruction a man’s heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor.” (Proverb 18:11-12)

A surprising irony is contained here, since what is imagined to be so powerful is so obviously a delusion. The rich do not need to work to survive; they invest and earn their wealth off of the work of others. Thus in the midst of a world of misfortune and flux, they boast in the semblance of their security and undisturbed comfort. Yet death comes to rich and poor alike, and faith acts now in view of this common destiny. The shadow of death already hangs over the poor. Their lives are full of trouble and woe. But the rich bask in the artificial light of the borrowed time their wealth has brought them. In truth they should be humbling themselves to guard against the temptation of trusting in wealth. Without a humble spirit they will worship the world and themselves. God calls the rich to be concerned with the plight of the poor.

The faith of a rich man must be expressed in a radically different way from that of

the poor man. Because the life of the rich is so radically different, they must exercise self-abasement. This self-denial of the rich believer is their way to participate in the total trust required by God. The church must guard against the faithless influence of those who are rich – trusting in themselves and controlling the church. The rich must consider very soberly that the distinguished position they have enjoyed above common people will disappear in the kingdom of God.

James compared the rich to a wild flower; a familiar Old Testament image of man's brief life. This metaphor of the falling flower is part of an apocalyptic vision of dying creatures under the judgment of God. James as well as other New Testament writers sharply applied to the rich the quick passing away of people in their bodily lives. Wealth and social position is like the transitory beauty of gold as Peter wrote, “so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 1:7) The rich will pass out of earthly existence in submission to the God who holds life and death.

James began by explaining the purpose of trials in a person's life is to build one spiritually. As trials are experienced the one who relies on Christ and the Holy Spirit will result in spiritual maturity and spiritual maturity makes a person spiritually whole in Christ and being spiritually whole means one will not lack spiritual wisdom needed to understand what God is teaching them. The proper attitude is for a person to have a submissive will towards God based on a believing heart that humbly recognizes who God is and our desperate need for God to give us life in Christ. Understanding that a believer's life is to be lived in submission to God and that God is a jealous God and there is not room in one's heart for God and the world. Understanding these principles humbles one to be a servant of the Living God.

James now comes full circle that by living steadfastly in the trials of the world gives

evidence of one's submission, believing heart and humbleness. Reading verse 12, "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him." Rich or poor the crown of life awaits those who truly love God.

Look at your life and its purpose, which is to glorify God, do you have a submissive spirit, believing heart and are you a person of humility before God? Does this describe you? We cannot change yesterday, but we can live today fully loving God and serving His people. Live today and each day for Christ's glory. Amen.