

Studies in James - Part 2

by W.F. Anderson

The sermon explores the distinction between happiness and joy, emphasizing the importance of commitment and perspective in facing life's trials as a Christian.

Scripture: Genesis 3:3, Acts 26:1-2, Philippians 2:3-17, James 1:12

Topics: "Faith Testing", "Joyful Suffering"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of choosing which set of facts to focus on in our minds. He uses the example of the apostle Paul, who chose to focus on the positive facts and have joy, even in difficult circumstances. The speaker also highlights the deliberate act of counting it all joy when facing trials and challenges. He discusses the testing of our faith and the opportunity it provides to demonstrate our commitment to Jesus Christ. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the need to have a genuine, wholehearted faith that is evident in our daily lives.

Transcript

We pray that you will help us in our study, in our response to you and to your words. We pray that you will give us a good half-hour together, and that each of us will be gladly changed. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Okay, let's pick up a little bit of a review. Yesterday we talked about the word belief, the verb in New Testament.

And you have this kind of a construction in the New Testament, believe that. We call that the intellectual faith. And then you have believe in, on, and upon.

And I call that the position. Okay, let's turn to chapter 12. And all the way through the book is that we have just what I said.

Now, that's only true for the non-Christian. That's also true for the Christian. The non-Christian can believe all about Jesus Christ, and believe the facts of the gospel, but I don't commit himself to Jesus Christ, and therefore he's not Christian.

And we as Christians believe a great deal up here, but we don't believe down here. And we can recite many truths that we believe, and whether we admit ourselves to Jesus Christ, about that truth is something else. What James is concerned about, in many areas of life, is that this be true of us, as well as

this.

Now, what shows that a second, this original faith, is true of us? If the only way that that can be demonstrated is in the testing situations of life, that they're only consumed. Now, we are not to think just of extraordinary tests, the great trials that come on us. But throughout this epistle, James talks about ordinary tests in life.

You talk about things like money, and to have it or not to have it, gives us an opportunity to demonstrate the reality of our commitment to what we say we believe. People we meet, people of different cultural backgrounds, people of different races, they provide tests whether or not we are committed to what we say we believe. And, throughout James, many of the ordinary circumstances we face in life are really tests of the reality of our commitment to Jesus Christ on the basis of what he has said.

Now, this division between an intellectual faith and an aboriginal faith is not just for the non-Christians, it's also true of us. We may not even be aware of some of those testing situations that we face every day, but there they are, and they show whether or not, in regard to this teaching, we have committed ourselves to Jesus Christ. And, this is what James is talking about.

So, we're not to think just of those extreme tests, those great trials, but if we had time to go through the epistle, we would see those ordinary everyday situations we've all faced, they are, in reality, tests of our commitment to Jesus Christ in regard to the truth that we say we believe. But, now, James is talking about something else that I've heard. I've read, in a sense, about joy.

Now, I think all of us are aware of the difference between joy and happiness. Happiness depends upon what happens to me. Is that right? And, that's what happens to me.

That is, therefore, controlled by things outside myself, over which I have no control. Now, what is there in me that makes that kind of response? If the sun is shining, the temperature is warm, I'm happy. If the sun is not shining, the temperature is low, it's raining, and I came to Florida for a vacation, I'm not happy.

And, what is outside myself is controlled by rebellion. So, what kind of an attitude is within me that makes that possible? It could be. Rebellion where we live.

Now, rebellion is what? Rebellion in the God who? Amen. Amen. And, I have trouble with that son of a gun.

If I saw him standing behind me with rocks and with snow and that kind of thing. Yes, all right. Anybody else? Selfishness.

Selfishness. Why? I want to please me. Go with it.

Hey, we're talking about pleasure. James will have something to say about pleasure later on in this. It's what pleases me.

And, if my external circumstances please me, I'm happy. If they don't please me, I'm unhappy. And, therefore, I am really controlled by something outside myself.

All right? And, that should be. We were made in the image and likeness of God to do it. We have been redeemed and brought into God's family.

And, things outside I should not control. Are we following? Do you remember Romans chapter 12? Paul is saying, Don't let the world around you squeeze you into this world, but be transformed from within. What is outside me, whether it's the ideas of my society or my circumstances, what is outside me should not control me.

And, happiness depends on what is outside me. What brings me pleasure? And, all I'm saying then is that I am committed to a pleasure principle. That's the way I live.

And, that's the way a Christian is supposed to live. Pleasure. Pleasure principle.

On the other hand, I want to talk about joy in a moment. What are you going to say about joy? Joy must come from within. It's got to come from within.

Sure. So, it's pleasure and it's external. Happiness is external.

Joy is internal. Therefore, it's not what is outside me that determines that. I'm going to put down again, to some degree, it is intellectual and volitional.

It is really a viewpoint. Whether or not I have joy depends on my viewpoint. And, I am the one who determines whether or not I have joy.

Circumstances determine whether or not I have happiness, but I determine whether or not I have joy. Now, listen to what James says. Count it all joy.

When you fall into various trials, or when you meet various testes, count it all joy. Now, what I want to look at is that word count, because that's key to the whole thing. Whether or not I have joy hinges on that word count.

Now, if I keep writing on the blackboard, we're going to run out of time, but I will put new stuff up there from time to time. Now, if you were to look at this word count in bindings, pausatory, sectionary, and new testament words, you would discover that it means originally to lead the way. Then, the secondary meaning means from that inside, that being of leading to the mind.

And, finally, this word count. It's an intellectual process to begin with. It's whatever I read into my mind.

That's what I count. Alright, so let's see how it's used in these testaments. Let's go back to the Book of Acts, chapter 26.

And here's Paul before Agrippa. Verse 2, Paul says, I did find myself happy. He has another translation of that expression.

I did find myself happy. He has another translation. I think myself fortunate.

He has another. Any other translation of the word think? Ponder? Ponder. Oh, yeah.

It's the same word change used to count in all sorts. I count myself fortunate, he would reference, because I granted for myself this day before, and he was long, long ago. Now, Paul says in those circumstances, I count myself fortunate.

Now, let's think about the fact that Paul would think. Alright? We're going to look at a couple of sets of facts, and we'll see which one is really important. Think of Paul's circumstances.

What can you write down about Paul's circumstances right now at this point? In Acts 26. Alright, he's in prison. Is he in justice? Is he in prison? Arrested? Okay.

So, it's a matter of injustice. What else can you say about Paul and these circumstances of Paul? Alright, there seems to be a delay of his mission to cover that Roman Empire with the gospel of Jesus Christ. And it's not only a delay of his mission, but you know that there's been a delay in his trial.

These Roman officials keep pointing it off, hoping to win favor with the Jews, not wanting to stir up trouble. And Paul is a captain, captain, captain, captain of the mighty Ecclesiastes. And here is this man who is bursting to get out into the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and he's confined.

Now, you can look at a number of other things. And if you look at those circumstances, what is your response to them? Yeah. Although stirred up with an unhappy and miserable, right? Yeah.

Alright. You see, all frustrated. Are there any other facts about Paul that we can put over here? Okay.

And this was an opportunity for him. What had been the Lord's commissions of Paul? Remember? Fear before kings. Loathing of authority.

Paul, that's the way I'm getting a hold of you. You're going to stand before kings, before people in authority. And you're going to bear testimony to what he means in those circumstances.

I'm going to get you there. Sure. Which side should we put that on? We can put a negative up there and a positive up here.

Should we also put it over here? So we're going to appear on both sides. But that's all the more. Any other facts about Paul in these circumstances that we can put up there? We can say, here he is falsely accused.

We have that up there. Now he has an opportunity to answer for himself. Yes, that is just Paul's accusation.

So, if he has time to be honest with those two things, you've got two sets of facts. Now, if I'm in those circumstances and I can look at those two sets of facts, and I can see only this over here, that I'm going to be miserable, or I can look at this, I count myself fortunate. It depends which set of facts is more important to me, which set of facts I leave into my mind.

I cannot stop thinking, but I can determine what I think about. And, if I let these facts fill my mind, I'm going to be unhappy. If I let these facts fill my mind, I'm going to have joy.

And, Paul let these facts fill his mind, and here's a great opportunity. Who else is going to get to talk to Peter Griffith about Jesus Christ? And, just the way Paul looked at it, I have the opportunity to tell Peter Griffith, remind him about Jesus Christ. So, Paul can say, I count myself fortunate.

Now, we can do the same thing in our circumstances. You can list down the facts of where you are, what's going on in your life right now, and you can put the negatives and the positives, and you can fill your mind with the negatives and you're going to be miserable. Now, this is not incase, because on the positive side, we are dealing with facts.

This is not a daydream world. These are facts. It all depends which I count more important.

What I leave into my mind. And, if I leave these into my mind, I'm going to have joy. And, if I leave these into my mind, I'm going to be unhappy.

Got it? Alright, look in chapter 2. You can only look at a couple times where this word, count, is used. Look in chapter 2, verse 3. "...let nothing be done for strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than themselves." And, that word, esteem, is the word count. Listen to me, Jews.

I am to count other Christians better than myself. Again, that is a deliberate, mental, and volitional act on my part. Yes, yes.

Now, how do we do this? And, you don't do it by saying, Whoa, he's so much better than I am. Huh? That doesn't mean anything. Except, if you want somebody to tell you no, he's not.

You're just looking for a pat on the back and somebody to boost your ego. That's all we're doing when you say that. True.

And, if I were to tell you, Oh, I can't play the piano as well as so-and-so. That's not you, Billy. That's a fact.

I can sit down at the piano, and in five seconds, I can convince you that this is legit. That's not you, Billy. That's a fact.

How do you count others better than yourself? How did our Lord, in one sense, count his disciples better than himself? It has nothing to do with who they are, but our Lord counted his disciples better than himself. Watch and repeat. He counted them better than himself.

He took the position of the servant. Now, as far as what they are, no one would ever say they are better than he is. But that's something he counted.

That's something he deliberately decided to do. And it had nothing to do primarily with him. Now, this is what Paul's telling us.

It's not to say that somebody is better than I, or I am better than somebody. All those comparisons are odious. It's that I deliberately decide to take the position of the servant, and I come to help you.

You decide to take the position of the servant, and you come to help me. That's counting the other person better than myself. I put myself in the position of the servant.

That's a deliberate act on my part. Use in verse 6. Let's look at verse 6. It says in verse 5, And with this mind being you, which was also in Christ Jesus, and being in the form of God, thought, if not rather in the nature of God, but making self of no reputation as such. That word thought is our word now.

A deliberate decision on his part, not to hold on to all that he had as equal to God, but to empty himself, make himself of no reputation, and come down here as a servant. It was a deliberate act on his part. This was a deliberate act on Paul's part.

A deliberate evaluation. James chapter 1. Count it all sore. It is a deliberate, mental, and volitional act on my part.

Count it all sore. When you, all you various tribes. But, what does James say? Knowing.

Knowing. But, you see, I am the one who decides whether I have joy or unhappiness. I'm the one who decides that.

By my own choice of outlook. What is important to me? That I have to make up my mind what my values are. Look.

Knowing meant, in verse 3, that the testing of the faith worketh patience while the word is endured. First of all, I have to make up my mind. Is endurance important, or is a life of ease important? I sit there and make up my mind.

And, if I make up my mind that a life of ease is important, pleasure principle again, then I am going to be unhappy when I fall into trial. If Christian virtues are important to me, endurance is important to me, and love is important to God, if I count that important, then as God works that into my life, I am joyful, because that's what I want. I want those Christian virtues working with me.

And, trial is one of the things God uses to produce endurance. I don't rejoice in the trial, but I rejoice in the endurance that God is producing. So, I can, again, if I were to fill the two sides, what was on this side is long life of trial.

Now, if I come back to James, what is on this side is endurance, which is important to me. Is endurance important to me, or is the absence of trial important to me? It's not that I want the trial of death, but which is important? I have to make up my mind. Now, we're not going to try to cover all this, but this is exactly what James is saying further down this chapter.

In verse 6, Let him ask in faith that asking wisdom, which I take as in the trial, I need wisdom to see the outcome, or how to handle it. If any of you act with me in this verse, I have let him ask through God against all men suffering, not great as not as it should be given him, but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, or nothing gouging. He that wavers is like a wave in the sea, driven with the wind and tossed, let not that hand If any of you receive anything of the Lord, a temple-minded man is unsafe on all his ways.

And that's the man that has to have his mind restrained on himself. And until I make up my mind that these Christian virtues are more important than my pleasure, I'm in that temple-minded state, and I have to ask the wisdom even to give me, because I have made up my mind this is pretty important, and give me the wisdom so that this is the result of the trial. But, if I haven't made up my mind that that's the way I really want to go through this.

So, when he's talking about doubting in this chapter, I don't understand that to mean if you trust and never doubt, he will surely bring you out. It's making up my mind which way I'm going. I'm tossed this way and that way because I haven't made up my mind.

So, it can tell that if I make up my mind which way I am going to go through this. And, if the things that are important to God are important to me, then I see those and I rejoice that God is doing what he's doing. That's when I rejoice.

It's not in the trial, but in what God is doing in the trial. I rejoice in the work of God, and I can count it all joy when those trials come to me. Know it! Does the trial of my faith work in your life? Now, we come back to our whole idea of faith.

I believe that. I believe that endurance is important. Is that an intellectual statement, a propositional truth that I get out of the Scripture? Now, this is what James is coming to.

Have I committed myself to this? Is that the way I really live? There's no use talking about this. Yes, I believe that endurance is important. Unless I am committed to that, and so in trial, I can count it joy because I know God is working in my life.

There's a great deal of our discussion, we talk about the Bible, we talk about these beautiful passages. We believe them. We believe that they are true.

But are we committed to them? That's the whole test James is talking about. Are we committed to them? Yes. In Galatians chapter 5, how does the Spirit work that in my life? Does He work that against my beliefs, against my moral principles, or do I make a profit of it? Yes.

And I can decide which I'm going to do. I can rejoice in the Lord, or I can complain about the circumstances. Right? Sure.

But whether or not I have joy is right in my own hands. I cannot control my circumstances, but I can determine my outlook. And I have a responsibility to read before my mind the truth of God in any circumstance in my life.

And so count it all joy. I can do that. It's up to you.

And then He produces endurance. Well, we can't talk about endurance this morning. All of you know what that is.

But there is no way to endure unless there's something to endure. Isn't that right? You've got to have something to endure. If you're going to have endurance, then God thinks it's very important that you build endurance in your life.

Aren't you glad about that? That's the way it comes, isn't it? Endurance only as we are under the test. And we develop endurance. And we have to put that together.

What's that? For endurance. Absolutely. And I determine whether or not I am through, or whether or not I collapse under it, or whether I quit.

I decide that. Doesn't the Bible, the Hebrews, tell us that's the things we can do if God's chasing us? We can feign under them. We can rebel against God.

Or we can go on in faith and develop endurance. I quit. I get mad with God.

Or I develop endurance. Oh, of course, Jesus is not talking about that. But all of us understand that, humanly speaking, there is no way to do this on our own.

But, on the other hand, the Spirit of God will not automatically do it. He does want to force you to do it. Or else there would be no Christian faith in the trial.

Or no Christian rebellion against God in the trial. If it were automatic. But these are the kinds of things that we see as change that make it possible for the Spirit of God to do very much of it.

Yes. None of us is going to say, I did that. No.

You're exhausted. You haven't got all night. Yes.

And that's why I need to hold those things before my mind. The real values of life. Pleasure in life.

Let me close by a statement from C.S. Lewis. It's a very hard statement. God really doesn't care whether we are happy or not.

God really doesn't care whether we are happy or not. What he cares about is that we are good. And it's hard for you to think that way.

I'm not happy. Do I want to be happy or do I want to be good? Being good. Being good.

Sure. Okay. Right.

Yes. All right. Very good.

I suppose we want to be holy and God cares if we are holy. That's what C.S. Lewis said. It has to be that way.

And it gives us the opportunity to develop. Yes. Right.

Look, there are changes coming in psychology, by the way. There's reality therapy where if I went to class a number of years ago and that person was picking up like Jay Adams, he was affecting the world more and more. The idea of our being responsible is coming to them.

I rejoice in that. Because we are not stimulus response beings. We are not imprisoned by our past.

We are responsible individuals capable of making choices and determining things. Under God. All right.

Let me show you where we're going to go. All right. Well, this is what's finished at this point.

Let me show you. Our Father, we realize that when we stand before our Lord Jesus Christ, our whole viewpoint of life will be different. Now we pray that as that viewpoint is revealed in your words, we will embrace it and make it ours.

Not only in this moment where we agree that it is true, but in those moments and hours and days and weeks and months and years of testing. Now we thank you for this time together. And we pray a blessing upon each one of us in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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