

“Your Lifestyle Matters”

Brother James

Ապրելակերպի Կարեւոր Է
Յակոբ Եղբայր

James 1:1-4

Do you watch M.A.S.H.? It is a TV show about a medical unit operating close to the war zone in the Korean War. I love the show because I have lived through a war and I have hated it. War is destructive and I hope you will never experience the pain it causes. One of the characters in MASH is called Frank Burns. “Brother James” would describe this man as a false Christian. Frank is a married man and he reads his Bible every day. Yet his ongoing love affair and his self-centered life do not reflect anything about his faith. Brother James would say: “Your lifestyle matters.”

Last week I started a new series of sermons based on James letter. I would like to call him “Brother James” (Hagop yeghpayr) or “Brother Jim.” James is practical and direct. There are 54 commands in 108 verses. James does not talk about dogmatic themes. There are no references to **the fall, the cross, the resurrected Jesus**, nor any other major Biblical themes. Yet, Brother James takes topics dealing with the fact that a sinful life without Christ will destroy our relationships with God and each other. James is about practical wisdom based to the teachings of Jesus.

You lifestyle matters; your behavior speaks louder than your words. **Do our lives reflect our faith? This is the main question.**

Who is James?

There are two disciples of Jesus who are called James: James of the son of Zebedee and James the brother of Jesus. The author of this book is almost certainly James the brother of Jesus. “James the Just” (as he was called), the brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55), one of the 12 disciples and the leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15).¹

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion (scattered): Greetings. (James 1:1 ESV)

James addresses “the twelve tribes in the Dispersion, scattered among the nations.” The 1st Century Jews believed that the sign of the coming of the God’s kingdom was when the tribes would gather as one nation. However, they were not gathered; they were scattered all over.²

I believe this is used as a metaphor. James’ letter is addressed to all believers scattered all over the world. It reminds me of the Armenian Diaspora. Wherever you go in the world, you find a few Armenians who come together and form a new Armenia, as William Saroyan puts it. Christians are not called to live in a secure, closed community. They are called to live their lives scattered among the nations to spread the aroma of their Lord. **“For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.”** (2 Cor. 2:15)

James’ first message:

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, (James 1:2 ESV)

When you face trials or tests, consider them all, (pure and great) joy.

How in the world tough situations should be considered as pure and great joy? Can you pass those words to a person who is suffering? Can you share those words with someone who lost his job? Can you share those words with anyone who is in pain?

It is not IF you meet trials, but WHEN you meet trials. So it is only a matter of time until each of us faces those days. What will you do?

Go to Google? To Alexa? To Facebook? To Oprah or Dr. Phil?

James was raised in a tough home. We think his father Joseph passed away early when he was a child. So Jesus, James and the other siblings were born and raised in tough times.

James is challenging us. “Count it all joy” or in the NIV translation **“Consider it all pure joy.”** Can you look at these trials in a new way? Can you consider looking at them from a different perspective?

Why this is important? Because if you know that trials and difficulties have a purpose in your life, then you can look at them from a different perspective.

Brother James is saying, “Whenever negative things appear in your life, look at them from a different perspective. See whether God is shaping you or teaching you, teaching us as a community, as a family.

- The Greek word for trials is *pierasmos*, which means the **testing of something**, a trial of something, a trial of man's fidelity, integrity, virtue.

It literally means a situation, a struggle, an adversity that will reveal one's true character. It's almost like how a stress test can reveal the state of your heart. We have a stress test to know how our heart is working.

-Abraham was tested when he was asked to sacrifice his son.

-Moses was tested many times when he was leading the Israelites to the Promised Land. The Israelites were tested in the desert.

-The gardener will prune the vine (John 15:1-2)

-The wise parents will discipline their child (Heb 12:7-9)

-Gold will be purified by fire (1 Peter 1:6-7)

“Pruning, disciplining, passing through the fire” Those words are not very pleasant words. They are there to teach us **to have a stronger faith in God.**

What can we learn from this?

1. Trials help us trust God

We need to understand that **God is not testing our courage; He knows we will fail.** This is not like a boxing match when Ali Clay is knocking out at the first round of the match. No way, we will fail, no doubt. God knows how fragile is the “macho –man” who thinks he can handle anything. **God is testing our ability to accept these trials so our FAITH will be stronger. We learn to trust Him.**

Consider Job’s trials. He lost everything, his family, his possessions, his health. His friends said it was his fault; God was punishing him. His wife said, “God is the problem, curse God.” Yet in all these Job struggled and although he did not find answers for many his questions, yet he refused to surrender to hopelessness and

despair. He stayed firm in his faith. His faith was stronger, because he learned to trust God.

-When trials and tests come, (they will come definitely) we **should face them** and **not move away from them**. We should move towards them. Again, this has nothing to do with our human strength, (I can do it). This is submission to God and allowing Him to shape us. If we avoid them, we are missing an excellent opportunity of growth.

2. They reveal my real character

How do you measure a machine if it is durable? You put it under pressure.

for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. (James 1:3)

-Perseverance, steadfastness...³

The Greek word is *hupomone* (remain under.) “*Hupomone* is not simply the ability to bear things; it is ability to turn them to greatness and to glory,” says William Barclay. “*Hupomone* is the quality which makes a man able, not simply to suffer things, but to vanquish (conquer) them.” It is the ability to continue, survive under pressure.

It comes from the words *remain* and *under*. Pastor Chip Ingram gives the example of the weight- lifter who keeps lifting under pressure. The pressure remains but his muscles become stronger.

Illustration: “The King’s Speech” is a very good movie I recommend you to see. Perseverance was an important word for King George (Junior). He used to stammer and that was a tremendous obstacle for a king. He became king in a tough time during WWII. Along with his perseverance, his wife and teacher helped him tremendously to speak better. His first speech played a crucial role at the time of war in unifying England in the face of Germany.

Paul Tillich says, “Suffering takes people beneath the busyness of life and reminds them they are not who they thought they were.”

You know there is joy in knowing who you are and you can do with the help of God. Oh yes, I know what I am saying. I experienced that in my life many times.

3. We become mature (perfect) and complete, and we learn to face the next trial.

And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:4 ESV)

Mature, complete, perfect are the words used for sacrificial animals. One had to bring a perfect animal to God; it should have been a fitting offering for God.

In Genesis we read that God created us perfect, to worship Him. But we sinned and fell from that image. In the OT people brought “perfect” animals to make sacrifices to the Lord.

Jesus became the new perfect sacrifice. He was the example of completeness and perfectness in his life. He became the perfect sacrifice.

Trials and tests can assist us become Christ-like persons, back in the form of our original creation. It is a process of transformation and starts here in this imperfect world.

It does not say our marriage becomes perfect; our jobs becomes perfect; our home becomes perfect...no. **We become perfect.** Our character is shaped and become Christ-centered.

God is not interested in shaping your circumstances; God is interested in shaping your character.

Dallas Willard says, "The main thing God gets out of your life is not the achievements you accomplish. It's the person you become."⁴

New Bible Commentary summarizes well:

The believer becomes *mature and complete, not lacking anything* (4). The Greek term for ‘mature’ is also often translated as ‘perfect’. This is the virtue that Noah exhibited in Gn. 6:9 (translated ‘blameless’ in the niv). This is what

Jesus intends when he calls his followers to be ‘perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect’ (Mt. 5:48). It indicates a character like God’s. This type of maturity is produced by holding fast to the faith and Christian virtue while in the fire of persecution. The impurities in one’s character will be burned off. The end result will be not just maturity, but completeness, which means that not a single part of a God-like character will be lacking. If this is the end result of the readers’ trials, difficult as they may be, there is indeed something to rejoice about. (New Bible Commentary)

²⁻⁴ Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don’t try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way. (James 1:2-4 MSG)

Conclusion:

Brother James is inviting us this morning to consider it all joy when we face those trials. It is not easy, but it is possible with help of God. Our lifestyle matters. We do face those trials and how we face them is expressed in our daily life.

Perseverance : under pressure ...hold on... keep going... don't give up... learn to trust God...

Let us accept with joy all our trials because God is working in our lives even we don’t realize it. It will ultimately be for our good. That is joy. But let us not put a fake smile on our face. When we are hurting, we are hurting. I can never forget what Sevan said after having babies; the labor is painful and not fun. But once they were born, the joy was so big that she forgot all about the pain of labor.

May God comfort you today. May God strengthen you today.

1 ESV Bible Commentary

2. ‘The twelve tribes’ no longer existed physically, but the title had become a way of describing the regathered and spiritually renewed Israel that God would create in ‘the last days’ (see Ezek. 47:13; Matt. 19:28; Rev. 7:4–8; 21:12). *Diaspora* (*Dispersion*) was the technical name for the Jewish community that lived ‘dispersed’ among the nations outside of Palestine (see 2 Macc. 1:27; John 7:35). Whether these terms retain a specifically Jewish orientation, and whether *diaspora* is to be taken literally or figuratively,

is not clear. Certainly 1 Peter, which appears to be directed to Gentiles, uses *diaspora* in the latter sense: Christians are those who live as 'exiles' from their true, heavenly homeland (1:1). (Tyndale Commentary)

The readers are *the twelve tribes scattered among the nations*. The phrase *the twelve tribes* probably does not mean that the readers were all Jews, but that James thought of them as the people of God, the true Israel, whether they [p. 1356] were Jews or Gentiles (so also Gal. 6:16; 1 Pet. 2:9). The readers are scattered just as the Jews were scattered during the exile, which probably indicates that the readers were not living in the Holy Land. There is, however, another use of 'scattered'. 1 Pet. 1:1 uses the same term to indicate that since becoming Christians his Gentile readers were no longer at home in their native countries; their real home was heaven. (New Bible Commentary)

3. Perseverance is an important Christian virtue, mentioned often by Jesus (Lk. 8:15; 21:19; cf. Mt. 10:22) and Paul (Rom. 5:3-4; 8:25; 2 Cor. 6:4; 12:12). For those readers who knew their Scripture, as James certainly did, the importance of this virtue is underlined by the fact that Abraham is the first person in Scripture to be tested (Gn. 22:1).

4 <http://www.azquotes.com/quote/797208>