

Place: Lurgan Baptist 31: 8: 2003

Reading: James 1:1-11

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

2. TURNING TRIALS INTO TRIUMPHS

I heard the story of a fellow who rode into a western town on a stage coach. He was hired as the local saloons' bartender. The owner gave him a word of warning, "*Remember, if you ever hear that Big John is on his way to town, drop everything and run for your life.*" Things went fine for several months, until one day a big strong cowhand with a ghost like face burst through the swinging doors shouting, "*Big John's a coming, Big John's a coming.*" The patrons scrambled to get out through the door, knocking the bartender to the floor, running over him as they rushed out through the doors and windows. The bartender gathered his senses got up off the floor, and was dusting himself off when a giant of a man suddenly came through the saloon doors. Riding bareback on a buffalo, using a rattlesnake for a whip, he rode through the doors, splintering the doors and the doorframe. The man flung the snake into the corner, knocked over the tables as he walked up to the bar, and then with his huge fist split the bar in half.

"*Give me drink,*" he yelled. "*Y-y-y-y- yes sir,*" said the frightened bartender. The man bit the top of the bottle off with his teeth downed the contents in one gulp, and let out a belch that shattered the saloon mirror, and then turned to leave. The bartender said, "*W-w-w-would you like to have another d-d-drink ?*" The man roared as he jumped back on his buffalo, "*I ain't got time. Big John's a coming to town.*" There may be some of you this that feel like Big John's come to town. You have found that troubles and trials have bullied their way into your life and you are surrounded with adversity and affliction. Well, in the opening verses of James, he speaks to us about our trials and shows us *how we can turn our trials into triumphs, how we can turn defeat into victory.* Now remember James wrote this letter to Jewish Christians who had been dispersed during the first century. Do you recall that after Stephen was killed outside the Lion's Gate of the city of Jerusalem, believers were scattered throughout the Roman world ?

Do you remember the persecution under Herod Agrippa in (Acts Ch 12) ? You see, James was writing to Christian Jews scattered outside Palestine. He was writing to those who had been dispersed, to those who had to leave their homes, their jobs, their property. He was writing to those under persecution in order to teach them how to deal with the stress and pressure of trials.

My the people who read this letter were literally hanging by a thread. Men had lost their jobs and their sense of dignity. Women were at their wit's end.

Consequently, James's first words to them were about

how to deal with stress, pressure, and trials. You see, James seeks to show to them and to us that trials should not be viewed as foe but as a friend. Now if we are going to turn trials into triumphs there is:

(1) A REALITY WE OUGHT TO FACE

Did you notice what James says, “ *My brethren count it all joy when,*” not **if** but **when** ! You see, the Christian who expects his Christian life to be easy is in for a shock. The Lord Jesus warned his disciples, “ *in the world ye shall tribulation.*” (Jn 16:33) Paul told his converts that “ *we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*” (Acts 14:22) Because we are God’s “ *scattered people,*” and not God’s “ *sheltered people,*” we must experience trials. The fact is there are three kinds of people in the world, those going into a trial, those coming out of a trial, and those right in the middle of a trial. There’s a popular teaching today that states, “ *Once you become a Christian, its all honey and no bees, all flowers and no trees.*” But being a Christian doesn’t exempt us from troubles and trials.

Now it may be that the word translated “ *temptations,*” here would be better translated “ *trials.*” Of course there is a difference between the two. Temptations are sent by Satan to make the *Christian stumble*, trials are sent by God to make the *Christian stand*. In *Testing you, God is aiming at your maturity, in Tempting you Satan is aiming at your misery.* God always tests to bring out the best, Satan always tempts to bring out the worst. Now in (1:2) James is using the word “ *trial,*” to mean outward trial or test. James tells us that these stressful trials:

(a) **ARE DEFINITE:**

“ *My brethren count it all joy when*” (1:2) The point is that trials are predictable, inevitable, inescapable and unavoidable. Some present day preachers are propagating a theology that is foreign to the Bible. They tell their followers that the cause of sickness in their life, trials in their life is all due to sin or the classic one is a lack of faith. Yet all the N.T. writers remind us that trials will come. Peter put it like this, “ *beloved think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.*” (1 Pet 4:12) Peter tells us not to think it strange or be surprised when trials come our way. Do you recall what Paul says to young Timothy ? “ *Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra, what persecutions I endured but out of them all the Lord delivered me.*” (2 Tim 3:11) You see, the Lord delivered Paul “ *out of,*” trials, not “ *from,*” trials.

My we will never grow out of the possibility of facing trials. Joseph was a man of unquestioned integrity, yet he was thrown into prison for a crime he did not commit. Job was a blameless, upright man who feared God. Yet, in one day he lost everything, his family, finances, fortune, fitness and his friends. Daniel was a man totally committed to God, who prayed three times a day. Yet, he all got for praying was a free trip to the lion’s den. You see, trials are unavoidable, indeed the better the Christians we are the more severer the trials we may have to face. My do you realise that no matter who you are, or how long you’re on the pilgrim pathway you’ll face stressful trials ? And the sooner we realise that the more quickly

we will be able to deal with them. (a)

(b) ARE DEVASTATING:

James uses an interesting word in (1:2) when he talks about “ *falling into,* ” (*peripipto*) it’s the same word as that used by the traveller in the story of the Good Samaritan. We read that he “ *fell among thieves,* ”

(Lk 10:30) Here was an attack that was not only savage and serious but sudden. There was no warning, no time to run away, to avoid the issue. He rounded a corner and suddenly wham ! Now the word “ *fell,* ” in that story and “ *fall,* ” in (1:2) are the same word. My is this not how trials come ? We’re sailing through life, without a care in the world and then we turn a corner, and wham ! And naturally we are devastated ! A knock at the door, a phone call, a visit to the doctor, the sudden death of a loved one, a slip on Friday to say we are no longer needed and our calm and peaceful sea is gone. So these trials are (a) (b) and

(c) ARE DIFFERENT:

“ *divers temptations,* ” simply means “ *various trials.* ” The Greek word translated “ *divers,* ” means “ *various, varicoloured.* ” Peter uses the same word when he says, “ *Ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.* ”

(1 Pet 1:6) You see, the trials of life are not alike. Some trials are job-related, some are financial, some are domestic. The point is that we are faced with trials of all sorts and stripes. Now some trials are Natural, they come from sickness, accident, disappointment. These trials are Natural because we live in fleshly bodies in a sinful world. But some trials are Supernatural, they come on us because we are believers (1 Pet 4:12) for when we line up with Christ, we line up against this present world’s system. My we will be tested as believers, but there is hope ! For these trails are transitory. Peter uses the phrase “ *for a season.* ” (1 Pet 1:6)

Do you know what one of the most common phrase’s in the Bible is ? “ *And it came to pass.* ” Are you faced with stressful trials right now ? Is it something to do with your job, home, children. My it will come to pass. Longfellow said, “ *the lowest ebb is the turn of the tide.* ” But there is (1)

(2) A MINISTRY WE OUGHT TO FIND

You see, even in the midst of our trials God is ministering to us. A crippled woman, came to her pastor, trembling, weeping and said, “ *Why has God made me like this ?* ” He wisely replied, “ *God had not made you, He is making you.* ” Through the trials of life the Lord is making us into the kind of Christians He wants us to be.

Do you see what James says ? “ *Knowing this that the trying of your faith worketh patience.* ” (1:3) The word “ *knowing,* ” speaks of understanding. James is saying, “ *I want you, to understand that when trials come they are not without rhyme or reason. God*

always has a purpose in the trials that come our way.” Well, what is the purpose of trials in our life ? What is God doing ?

James explains three things that trials produce in our life. They produce:

(a) SPIRITUAL PURITY:

The word “ *trying or testing,* ” speaks of the purging effect of trials. Its found only in two places in the N.T.

(1 Pet 1:7) The word conveys the picture of a precious metal being heated until it is liquid and its impurities rise to the top and are scraped off. Only pure metal is left. As George Sweeting has said, “ *A Christian is like a tea bag. He is not worth much until he has been through hot water.* ” You see, God put us into the fire in order to purge our lives of all impurities. Trials are often God’s way of getting us to deal with things in our lives that are displeasing to the Lord. They have a purifying effect. But this word conveys something else. This time it’s the picture of a lady who goes to a fabric store, picks up a piece of a fabric, and pulls it this way and that way to see if it will take the proper strain. My do you recognise that your trials are for a purpose ? Is God placing you in the melting pot to remove the dross, to make you more like Christ ? Is God pulling you this way or that way to see if you can hold up under pressure ? My *God does not use these trials to make us Bitter, but to make us Better.* (a)

(b) SPIRITUAL STABILITY:

Look at (1:3) What is James saying ? Simply this, the testing of your faith develops perseverance. What does God want to produce in our lives ? Patience, endurance and the ability to keep going when things are tough. That’s what this word “ *patience,* ” means “ *endurance, steadfastness or perseverance.* ” Now please notice what is on trial here ! Us ? No ! *Our faith. Yes !* James is talking about the testing of our faith. There are many who misunderstand the book of James thinking that it is an epistle of works, but before James ever mentions works he talks about faith. Its our faith that is put to the test. The Bible says, “ *Without faith please God.* ”

(Heb 11:6) Are you undergoing this process of testing ?

As far as you are concerned is the heat on ? Do you recognise that God is doing something in your life ? An old dog fell into a farmers well. After considering the situation the farmer decided that neither the dog or the well was saving so he decided to bury the dog and put it out of its misery. When the farmer began shovelling the dog went hysterical. But as the farmer kept on shovelling, and the dirt hit the dog’s back, a thought struck the old dog. Each time a shovel of dirt hit the dog’s back he would shake off the dirt and step up. No matter how painful those shovels of dirt were, the old dog fought pain, he just kept shaking it off and stepping up.

Finally, the dog, battered and exhausted stepped triumphantly over the wall of that well. *What he thought would bury him actually benefited him because of the way he handled it.* My

perseverance is the ability to shake it off and step up when a load of trials are dumped on you !

Trials produce (a) (b)

(c) SPIRITUAL MATURITY:

Do you see (1:4) ? James uses the word “ *perfect*,” twice in the verse. It’s a word that means “ *complete, full grown*.” He is talking about spiritual maturity ! He does not want the believer to be lacking, but complete and living a full Christian life. The thought conveyed here is that of a mature, complete Christian,

“ *conformed to the image of His Son*.” (Rom 8:29) Do you see the purpose of your trials now ? To make you more like Christ ? Oswald Chambers that great devotional writer of a past generation once said, “ *every humiliation, everything that tries and vexes us, is God’s way of cutting a deeper channel in us through which the life of Christ can flow*.” The Lord wants us more like His Son and to do that He uses many means. The Word, prayer, fellowship, service, trials, disappointments, and difficulties ! My we don’t arrive at the goal of spiritual maturity by some great ecstatic experience but through the ordinary everyday trials of life. (1)
(2)

(3) A SPIRITUALITY WE OUGHT TO FOSTER

You see, James not only tells us that trials can be expected, and that they always have a purpose, but he tells how to view our trials. How do we react to stressful trials ? Do we grumble ? Complain ? Question God ? Do we fail to see that every trial is a God-given opportunity to become more like Christ ? What should our attitude be concerning trials ? Well, James says, we should have:

(a) A PROSPECTIVE ATTITUDE:

He tells us to “ *count it all joy*,” when we are facing trials. You say, “ *Preacher, it is hard to have joy when you are going through a trial*.” I agree ! Most of us would say that it’s a joy when we escape trials not a joy when we encounter trials. What is James saying ? Well, that word “ *count*,” is a word that means “ *to look ahead, or look forward*.” James is telling us that our joy comes from looking ahead. Looking ahead at what ? Looking ahead at the end result of our trials. My James is not suggesting some kind of masochistic happiness in the hurts and losses of life. He is not saying that we are to enjoy being sick, or losing a loved one, or getting laid off work. Its not being happy about the trouble. Its finding joy in what the trial produces ! If I asked you this would you like to go through that severe trial again you would say, “ *No way*.” But if asked, “ *Are you grateful for what that trial produced in your life ?*” You might say, “ *I would not trade the lessons learned and the character developed in that trial for anything*.”

Samuel Rutherford said, “ *Whenever I find myself in the cellar of affliction, I always look round me for the wine*.” My if you are in the cellar of affliction this , your wine is what God is doing in your life, and what He will do for you as the result of the trial ! We are to have (a) but not only that,

(b) A COOPERATIVE ATTITUDE:

Do you see what James says in (1:4) ? “ *Let patience have her perfect work.* ” He is calling for our cooperation in what God is doing. No one likes trials. No one enjoys trials. Yet we must allow God to do what He wants in our lives. We must trust Him. We must yield to His plan. We must submit to His work in our life. The roses taken from the Balkan mountains produce some of the world’s finest perfume. But in order to get that lovely fragrance the workers must gather the roses in the darkest part of the night. Therefore they start shortly after midnight, and conclude their picking within two hours. The brevity of the work period is based on scientific tests that show during this interval the blossoms gave their most pleasing scent. Forty percent of the aroma fades with the coming of the day. *My we will face dark times in our lives, but we must never forget that if we want to experience the sweetest aroma, the dark times are necessary.*

“ *Count it all joy,* ” do we ? Do we recognise that there is a purpose behind our trials and a blessing in them ? Could it be that you are here this and you feel almost overwhelmed by stressful trials ? My “ *God is faithful ... above that ye are able ...,* ” (1 Cor 10:13) A pair of little arms were one day stretched out while father piled up goods for his small son to carry to the other end of the shop. As the wee fellow still waited for more, an onlooker said, “ you can’t manage anymore.” Do you know what the little boy said, “ *Father knows how much I can carry.* ” Myyour Heavenly Father knows how much you can take. Trust him, for what He is doing, He is doing for your good.