**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes 5-15-2022
Finding Joy in Testing**

Friends, I have a confession to make. I have never really enjoyed tests, with the possible exception of basic math tests in elementary school, which I found rather fun and exciting. Even for subjects that I enjoy, I am not very thrilled about tests. But testing is not something that I look forward to and get excited about. In fact, my favorite part of a test is when it is done, especially if I thought I did pretty well on it.

But I suspect I am not alone. How about you? Do any of you enjoy tests? Most of us do not.

Testing can make us feel nervous and worried. Whether it is school tests or medical tests or skill tests with sports.

But tests are not meant to be a bad thing. They are not meant to be something to be afraid of. Rather, tests are meant to help us to understanding where we are at more clearly in some way.

And this is also true when it comes to the testing of our faith. When our faith is being tested in some way, when we are going through some kind of trial or challenge or struggle, most believers aren’t excited about that. I know that I’m not really excited about it either.

But tests do serve a purpose. Tests are meant to help us. They are meant to help us see what is going well and what may need some improvement. So tests are not bad things in and of themselves.

And the same is true when it comes to the testing of our faith. These tests are really opportunities in disguise. it is an opportunity to ask how things are going in our walk with God.

One man in the Bible who clearly understood tests was a Christian by the name of James. And today, we begin a sermon series exploring the book that God inspired him to write, which we can find in our New Testament.

James’ life and his faith were filled with tests. And the biggest test for him, like all of us, is how do we respond to Jesus and His claims?

James was failing this most important test for a long time. He was not responding to Jesus well. But perhaps it’s understandable. I think that it would be difficult to believe that my sibling was the long-awaited Messiah and Savior of the world. I think it would be hard to grasp that the One that I shared meals with each day and who grew up in my household was God with us.

It was perhaps this reason that Jesus’ siblings seemed to all be failing this critical test. We are told from the Bible that they didn’t believe in Him – these people so close to Him.

In fact, it appears that some of them may have even thought Jesus to be out of His mind. They were blinded by their familiarity from seeing Jesus for all that He is.

In fact, there is no mention of Jesus’ siblings even being present at His crucifixion.

*But in this season of Easter, we are reminded of how everything changed with the resurrection of Jesus*. We are told in 1 Corinthians that among those who saw Jesus after He had risen from the dead was James.

And what an encounter that must have been. I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall for that one. Wouldn’t you?

And it appears from this encounter onward, James was a changed man. James went from failing the biggest test to passing with flying colors.

James was now all-in for Jesus. Jesus was no longer just his brother, but now also His Lord, His Master, His King, His God.

We are told from the Scriptures that James was present in an upper room in Jerusalem when on the Day of Pentecost Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit. We also learn that James became a leader in the early church, particularly in the city of Jerusalem.

In fact, James presided over the Council of Jerusalem writing about in Acts chapter 15, as the church was discerning how to respond to non-Jewish people coming to faith in Jesus. Do they have to become Jews before becoming Christians? And James said no. It is Jesus who saved, not the Old Testament Law.

So even as a Christians, James continued to experience testing of many kinds, from how to lead well in the church, to how to respond to opposition and criticism and everything in between.

But James was a man of faith, he was a man of prayer. He became known as *James the Just*, because he so wanted to live a just and righteous life and to help others do this as well. It was also said of James that he became such a man of prayer that his knees became hard like a camel, with all that time on his knees in prayer.

But as you might expect, some of the unbelieving Jews did not look fondly towards James. In fact, church tradition holds that James was actually beaten or stoned to death in the year 62, by some of the angry Jewish religious leaders that became tired of his boldness in proclaiming the good news of Jesus.

What a life! His transformation reminds me a good bit of Paul the Apostle’s transformation as well.

So friends, as we turn to the epistle of James itself, we find a number of striking things right at the beginning.

First, let us consider how James introduces himself in verse 1.

**James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,**

**To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations:**

**Greetings.**

 It is important to note that James begins his letter, not by highlighting the fact that He is Jesus’ brother, but instead, highlighting the fact that He is Jesus’ servant.

In fact, the same word translated as servant could also be translated as slave.

Clearly, James is a humbled man. James knew Jesus as His Lord, His master. He wasn’t just big brother to him. He clearly has passed the biggest test.

And then James lists the recipients, “**To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.**” This is likely a reference to Jewish Christians, of whom the church was largely made up of at this time. There were Jewish believers in Jesus in many places as the church began to grow and as people shared the good news of Jesus in various places. This letter of James may have been only about 15 years or so after Jesus’ resurrection that James writes this letter to help instruct the early church.

By the time of this letter, the church had been born and was growing. But the church also was facing trials and challenges. It was illegal to be a Christian during this time. It was illegal to profess Jesus as Lord, rather than Caesar.

And so James begins the body of his letter. And of all the topics he could begin with, he chooses to start with how Christians should respond when their faith is tested, when trials and challenges and sufferings come. What are they to do? That was a big question then and it remains a big question today? What is the proper response?

Let’s look at verses 2-4 together to hear how James calls believers to respond when our faith is tested.

**2Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James+1%3A2-4&version=NIV" \l "fen-NIV-30269a" \o "See footnote a)] whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.**

This is startling, isn’t it? He tells them to consider it pure joy when facing trails of many kinds.

This seems so backwards. Why would someone want to consider it pure joy when going through trials of many kinds?

He answers the question in the next verse. He states **because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.**

Perseverance is a very important thing. Perseverance is a great quality to have. Perseverance is still-with-it-ness, you could say.

Perseverance is seeing the course on something to the end. Perseverance is not throwing in the towel at the first challenge.

James is saying that when believers go through trials and their faith is tested, it is an opportunity to grow in their perseverance.

I do not think that James wishes trials on anyone. But trials of many kinds are a part of this world. They’re unavoidable. Christian faith is tested in walking through those trials. And when they stay strong in the faith, it helps produce maturity. The more mature Christians become, the more they will respond to additional trials and challenges in Christlike ways. James lives this out himself as he would endure his own martyrdom.

So friends, what are we to make of this for our lives today? And I think that it is simply this. We must choose to consider it pure joy when we are going through trials of many kind. When we are having one of those days, one of those weeks, one of those years.

This doesn’t mean that we are to be fakey. And this doesn’t mean that joy will be our only emotion or our primary emotion.

It is an act of the will - Considering it pure joy even when we are feeling no joy. That is our role. God’s role is to bring us His joy in His time. It is a supernatural thing that only God can do.

James would not say “consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kind” if that came naturally.

But when the trials come --- whatever they may be, it is an opportunity to choose to let God’s joy be stronger than the trials.

In His presence, there is fullness of joy – we are told in the Scriptures. We are told to let the joy of the Lord be our strength.

We may not feel joy, at least not right away. But we are called to look to Christ and to ask that His joy would be found in the midst of this situation.

I’ve heard it said that joy is 1/3 of the kingdom of God. We are told elsewhere in the New Testament that the kingdom of God is love, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Joy is a very important thing. It will easily bubble out when things are good, but God wants it to even overtake us in the midst of the trials and challenges of life.

And as this happens, we grow in our perseverance and we mature in our faith.

So I ask you today, what are the trails that you may be going through today? You may not be going through any and that’s great. But there are many kinds of trials. There can be health trials or relationship trials or finance trials and so many others. What is God inviting you to consider pure joy today as an act of faith?

I encourage you and I encourage myself, to do just that. And then trust God that He is going to take it from there. He will give you His joy. He will develop perseverance in us. And He will mature us to look more and more like Jesus. Amen.

Let’s pray…

Resources: <https://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-Mary-John.html>

<https://www.gotquestions.org/life-James.html>

<https://www.christian-history.org/death-of-james.html>

The Letter of James: Douglas J. Moo

The NIV Application Commentary: Mark – By David E. Garland

Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: James – By Craig L. Blomberg & Mariam J. Kamell