

Count It All Joy - James 1:2-4

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *The Moth*

1. A man found a cocoon of an emperor moth and took it home to watch it emerge.
2. One day a small opening appeared, and for several hours the moth struggled but couldn't seem to force its body past a certain point.
3. Deciding something was wrong, the man took scissors and snipped the remaining bit of cocoon.
4. The moth emerged easily, its body large and swollen, the wings small and shriveled.
5. He expected that in a few hours the wings would spread out in their natural beauty, but they didn't.
6. Instead of developing into a creature free to fly, the moth spent its life dragging around a swollen body and shriveled wings.
7. The constricting cocoon and the struggle necessary to pass through that tiny opening are the way of forcing fluid from the body into the wings.
8. The man's attempt at *assistance* was in reality *cruel*; his mercy doomed the moth.
9. Sometimes the struggle is exactly what we need.

B. *Today*

1. We're taking a look at the value of trials this morning.
2. As we do, let's read James 1:2 . . .

II. TEXT

A. *Vs. 2-3*

2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,

3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

1. Let's be honest; at first blush, what we read here seems *nonsense*.
2. How can trials be the cause of joy?

3. Is James saying that Christians are to be *spiritual masochists*; that we're to *enjoy* pain?
4. Not at all! It's not the *pain* believers are to take joy in, but in the sure confidence that the pain is producing something *positive* in them.
5. Think about *physical* pain.
 - a. God created us with the capacity to experience pain as a *warning* that something wasn't right.
 - b. I feel heat when I set my hand on the stove so that I might take action and move my hand quickly before worse damage is done.
 - c. pain is the body's way of informing me of imminent danger.
 - d. if, for some reason, I don't possess the capacity to feel pain, then I might put myself in all kinds of dangerous situations and not realize it.
 - e. this is what leprosy is – the body loses it's ability to feel pain.
 - f. and as a result, over time, fingers, toes, and other appendages are whittled away.
6. So pain is the body's way of warning us something's wrong and needs attention.
7. The same is true of *emotional* pain.
 - a. emotional pain warns us that something is not right with our behavior or attitude.
 - b. something is broken, either inside us or in a relationship with another.
 - c. and just as physical pain motivates us to take action to remove the physical problem –
 - d. *emotional* pain moves us to set right what is wrong in our soul.
8. The reason we don't like *trials* is because they're *painful* in one way or another!
9. But here is where Christians can have a *completely different* attitude toward trials than others.
 - a. you see, while most people think trials just happen at random –
 - b. Christians believe in a God Who's sovereign over all things and that *nothing* comes into their lives that doesn't first have to pass through His hands.
 - c. indeed – Christians believe that trials are *ordained* by God to affect something good in them!

10. So we don't rejoice in the *pain* of trials, but in the knowledge that God is at work, *using* the trial and the pain that goes along with it, to change us, to produce something in us nothing else could.
11. I took a few *kung fu* classes as a teenager because kung fu was all the rage.
 - a. our instructor was a real kung fu master who'd immigrated from China
 - b. to begin each session, we'd spend 20 minutes stretching – and the exercises really hurt!
 - c. as we sat there on the mat doing our stretches we'd grunt and groan while he walked around and cooed, “Ah – This pain good!”
 - d. we thought he was nuts!
 - e. but he was right – the pain we felt was a sign our tendons and ligaments were tight and if not loosened, could be damaged when we started learning the moves he planned to teach us that day.
12. Let me apply that to what we're looking at here: Trial is a kind of *stretching*.
 - a. it's a way for us to discover where we need to grow
 - b. the pain of a trial is good in that it lays a finger on the very point we need to become more Christ-like in.
13. And that is God's whole purpose – to conform us to the image of His Son.

Romans 8:28-29a (NKJV)

28 We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

- a. what good, what purpose?
- b. next verse . . .

29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son . . .

14. This is why James says we are to count it all joy when we fall into various trials!
15. Trials in the life of the Christian are evidence that God is at

- work to shape and mold us into the image of Christ.
- 15a. Most people deal with pain by simply trying to *mask* it.
 - a. if they have a physical pain they take an aspirin or other pain killer
 - b. if it's emotional pain, they mask it by some diversion, denial, or the use of drugs and alcohol.
 - c. this is not the way to deal with pain – pain is a sign something is wrong and needs to be corrected.
 16. That word “trials” in v. 2 means *to prove*.
 - a. we could translate it as “testings”
 - b. it speaks of any process that reveals the *true nature* of a thing.
 17. Think of trials as bumps or potholes in the road.
 - a. you're driving down the street with a travel mug in it's little cup holder on your dash
 - b. you can't know what's inside the mug just by looking at the outside
 - c. but as you hit those bumps or holes, the mug is jarred and a bit of the liquid inside splashes out
 - d. oh, it's coffee, or tea, or hot chocolate
 - e. it took the *bump* to reveal the contents of the mug
 18. Trials are bumps and holes in the road of life that jar us and cause what's inside to come out.
 19. There's nothing like a little stress to help us see whether or not we're really growing spiritually mature!
 20. “Ah – This pain good!”
 21. When James says, “**Count it all joy when you fall into various trials,**” he uses highly precise words that lose something in their translation into English
 - a. without getting too technical –
 - b. “count it all joy” is literally, “once and for all, consider it pure joy”
 - c. then the word “when” ought to be “*whenever*”
 - d. so, an amplified translation would read something like this . . .
 - e. as a Christian who believes that God is sovereign and in control over all things, decide right now to make it your mindset to be completely joyous *whenever* you find yourself immersed in some new trial
 - f. and where does the joy come from? Look at v. 3; “**knowing**

- that the testing of your faith produces patience.”**
22. The word “testing” in v. 3 was a word used by goldsmiths and meant “good” or “standard gold.”
- it referred to gold that had been properly refined and purified and come to the place of *acceptance* as the medium for exchange.
 - when gold is first mined, it is usually mixed with other minerals
 - to bring it to the place where it can be used in jewelry or as bullion, it has to be *refined*.
 - this refining takes place in the fire, where the gold is melted and the other minerals are blown away as dross.
 - the fire makes the gold more pure till it passes the test.
23. James says that trials are the *heat* God uses to make us pure and bring us to the place of true godliness.
24. This is why we can be joyous in the midst of trial – because we realize that God is a Master Goldsmith who is holding us in the fire to make us like Him.
- ancient silversmiths would place a small amount of silver in a crucible and then hold it over the flame
 - they would pump the billows below the furnace to make the flame just as hot as was needed to melt the metal.
 - as the silver melted, the impurities rose to the surface
 - the smith would then pull the crucible out of the fire and blow on the top of the silver, driving the dross off.
 - but even this quick act of removing the silver from the heat would cause the metal to set-up and so the smith would put the crucible *back* into the flame.
 - he would do this 3 or 4 times and knew that the silver was finally pure when he could gaze at it’s surface and see his own reflection in the metal.
25. That is what God is doing in our lives – He is refining us till his image is reflected in us.
26. As James identifies in v. 3, the *primary virtue* the testing of God produces in us is *patience*.
- while individual trials may aim at building in us a whole rainbow of different virtues and fruit of the Spirit,
 - there is one virtue all of them teach us – and that’s *patience*.
 - patience is really just one dimension or hue of faith.

- d. patience is faith that holds on to God over the long haul.
 - e. and patience, as we all know, is a sign of maturity!
27. Children live in the here and now and are rarely patient.
- a. if mom or dad makes them a promise – they are there to constantly remind them
 - b. patience is a sign of maturity – a realization that not everything I need or want has to come right now – but everything in it's time!
 - c. the inordinate use of *credit* we see in our nation today is a sign, really, of impatience!
28. As I've seen in my own life and had the opportunity to counsel others, I've come to realize that we need to *wait* on the Lord when we find ourselves in the midst of trial and testing.
- a. when some new trial comes into my life, I have a choice
 - b. I can maneuver and scheme to angle *my* way out of it – or –
 - c. I can look to the Lord in faith and ask Him what *He* wants me to learn from it and how *He* wants me to overcome.
 - d. every trial is an opportunity to discover something new about God and His great love.
 - 1) it's through the trial of illness that I can discover God as Healer
 - 2) it's through the trial of need that I can discover God as Provider
 - 3) it's through a seeming impossible situation that I can discover God as a Miracle Worker
 - 4) it's through the trial of a strained relationship that I can discover God as Reconciler
 - 5) it's in the midst of personal confusion and sorrow that I can find our God is a Refuge and Comforter.
 - e. but these things can only be learned if I hold on to God, if I wait on Him.
 - f. if I'm impatient and take matters into my own hands, I short circuit the lesson God has been intending to show me – and sure as night follows day, I will eventually find myself right back in the trial so that I *can* learn.
 - g. you see, God is *relentless* in His pursuit of us and our perfecting.
 - h. look at v. 4 . . .

B. V. 4

4But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

1. James is making that appeal here!
2. When you find yourself in the midst of trial, don't just seek the way out – Seek God!
3. Wait on Him till He comes and reveals Himself!
4. It's through *trials* that we're refined until we *perfectly* reflect the image of Christ.
5. When will that be? When will we be perfect and complete, lacking nothing?
6. When we step from this life into the glory of heaven!
7. So, in other words, we'll endure trials as long as we live.
 - a. don't think that there's some place you come to in the Christian life where you've arrived at sinless perfection
 - b. as long as we are in these bodies – we will know testing and trials.
8. In the book *A View from the Zoo*, author Gary Richmond tells about the birth of a giraffe.
 - a. the baby giraffe comes into the world by falling ten feet, and lands on its back.
 - b. within seconds, it rolls to an upright position with its legs tucked under his body.
 - c. the mother giraffe then does something that appears incredibly cruel; she positions herself directly over her calf, waits for about a minute, and then *kicks* her baby, so that it's sent sprawling head over heels.
 - d. when it doesn't get up, the violent process is repeated over and over again.
 - e. the baby giraffe's struggle to rise is momentous.
 - f. finally, the calf stands for the first time on its wobbly legs.
 - g. then the mother giraffe does the most remarkable thing. She kicks it off its feet again!
 - h. why? Because she wants it to remember how it got up.
 - i. in the wild, baby giraffes must be able to get up as quickly as possible to stay with the herd, where there's safety.
 - ju. lions, hyenas, leopards, and wild hunting dogs all enjoy young

giraffes, and they'd get it too, if the mother didn't teach her calf to get up quickly.

9. Does it ever seem to you like there's no let up in the trials; that they come one right after another without respite?
 - a. this is God's way of helping us to remember how it is that we get up; by trusting & looking to Him.
 - b. for even above the individual lessons each trial teaches us is the greater lesson that God is our All in all –
 - c. He is the way out of every difficulty.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Rejoice!

1. James's exhortation is a simple one.
2. As Christians who *say* we believe in God, we have to adopt a different attitude toward trials than others.
3. The God of the Bible is Sovereign and in control of all things.
 - a. while He does not will evil or endorse the wicked choices of sinful men and women,
 - b. as the Sovereign God, He still works in such a way that *all things* come together for the accomplishing of His will.
4. Therefore, faith in Him means *resting* in Him and His purposes for us!
 - a. because He is all-powerful, we can trust that nothing can thwart His plans for us
 - b. because He is all-loving, we can trust that He desires the very best for us.
5. The only response to these truths is patient and joyous surrender!

B. Steel

1. Like gold – God is refining us and making us ever more pure and lovely.
2. God's purpose in every testing is to make the us more valuable.
 - a. a \$5 bar of steel cut into ordinary *horseshoes* is worth \$10.
 - b. a \$5 bar of steel cut into *needles* is worth \$350.
 - c. that same bar of steel cut into *delicate springs for watches* becomes worth \$250,000.
3. Next time you get discouraged at what God is putting you through,

think of that bar of steel!