

The Christian Life - Living Joyfully
James 1: 12-27

Perhaps more than any other NT book of the Bible the Epistle of James offers the listener practical instruction on living the Christian life, a life pleasing to God. Just as the Gospel of John reveals to us how to find saving faith in Jesus Christ, James's letter tells us how to live our lives for Him afterwards. Biblical scholars tell us that this epistle or letter was most likely written by the half-brother of Jesus to early Jewish believers. They were like some of the Afghan people we saw this week, scattered and literally on the run from evil. In this instance it wasn't the Taliban but King Herod that caused them to fear for their lives. James is thought to be the earliest of the written NT books, sometimes referred to as the NT book of Proverbs. It is a book of wisdom, filled with a wealth of practical instruction for the hearer. It also contains strong warnings for those who refuse to consider its truth seriously. In that sense James is a "how to" book, a "how not to" book and a "what to expect when you don't do either" book.

Today it has become much more difficult to discern and separate what is true and good from that which is false and harmful. That is especially true for Christians in America, as church leaders continue to abandon long held Biblical absolutes in a misguided quest for survival. The problem for some of us living in the post- modern age of the 21st century is that we will find James's message hard to hear, even though there is nothing physically wrong with our ears. The information age is now behind us, and the age of misinformation has been ushered in. The need for critical thinking, or better said the absolute necessity to think Biblically, is quickly being cast aside and replaced by something the world calls critical theory. At first glance it appears attractive, but once the veil of inequity is lifted by critical thinking one will find it to be a Marxist and humanistic philosophy that stands in opposition to the Scriptures, which includes this inspired epistle to the church that James wrote so long ago.

As we look at some of the many truths in that letter this morning and the next few Sundays our challenge will be hearing and responding to the voice of Jesus as spoken through the words of his brother James. That is a challenge because we are selfish people. We want to do things our way and we typically don't like someone telling us how we should live our lives, whether it is the governor, the president, the preacher or for that matter the oldest half-brother of Jesus.

To help us overcome that we'll focus more on the how- to and how not to things and let those "what happens when we don't" things stand on their own. We will find that those warnings need little exposition, other than they are there to help keep us from sinning. We are witnessing daily the terrible results of the world and the church ignoring those warnings. To put it bluntly, the reign of evil is not a pretty picture. **Above all else, sin will keep us from being blessed and joyful people.**

Most of us have discovered that living the Christian life can be difficult at times. The good news is that our God does not ask us or require us to do something and then leave us to figure out how to do it entirely on our own. Living our lives for Him, which means living our lives for Christ, is not something any of us can figure out by ourselves. We can't watch a ten- minute YouTube video and learn how to do it. We need help, we need power, we need support, and above all we need wisdom. God offers us the power we need by the filling of His Holy Spirit, God offers us the support we need through our relationship with other believers (the church), and God offers us knowledge and wisdom through the Scriptures. The God we worship and serve is a God of grace, a God of relationship, a God of wisdom, and a God of new opportunities. Every day is a new opportunity for God to equip us to become a David fighting the world of Goliath.

The Bible is primarily a book of revelation. It reveals the fallen nature of humanity, and it clearly reveals God's plan of redemption and salvation for His people through His Son Jesus Christ. It is a book of truth and revelation, and at the same time a very practical "how-to" book. In His infinite wisdom, God knew before we were even born that there would be times in our life when we would need such a resource if we are to live faithful lives that are pleasing to Him. As we spend time together in these 5 chapters in the coming weeks my prayer is that we will discover or rediscover how to live for Jesus Christ. We will find plenty of good and practical advice that will help us live joyfully, live faithfully, live gracefully, live peacefully, and live prayerfully as we walk worthy towards eternity. Though none are truly easy, all are certainly possible.

Today we will begin with the one that might seem to be the most difficult. How do we live joyfully in a world filled with pain and heartache? First, let me be clear in saying that when I ask that question, it is not in the context of discovering how we can have a life filled with material blessings and absent from suffering.

In fact, great material blessings can be a hindrance to our faith as we no longer need to rely upon God for our daily bread, let alone forgive us for our trespasses. We do not have to look far to find people with an abundance of material possessions whose words and actions demonstrate they are not living for Christ. We also see those seem to have an abundance of heartache and pain, but their words and deeds clearly reveal they are living for Jesus. How do we reconcile that? Does God bless people for being faithful? Yes. Is it always with a material blessing? No. Contrary to what you might hear from some celebrity preachers, faith and prosperity are only distantly related. Joy is much more than having great material possessions or a life free from pain and suffering. Joy is knowing all is well between us and God.

James reminds us that every good and perfect gift is from above. To say it another way, everything we have is a gift from God. Prosperity and good health can be great blessings, but so can trials and temptations. **1:2-3** God's grace is not dispensed according to our faithfulness or lack of it. If that were the case, it would not be grace but merit. We will look at that in greater detail next week. Unlike a crooked judge or politician, God is perfectly holy and cannot take a bribe and will not offer us a bribe of material riches or good health in exchange for our obedience. What God does do is offer us something much better- life eternal through a relationship with His Son Christ. **We find joy in knowing the best in life is yet to come.**

With that truth in mind let's tackle the question together. How do we live joyful and blessed lives? Obviously, it will take more than one 30-minute sermon to find all the ways, but it begins with our willingness to look into the mirror of our soul through the eyes of Scripture. When we do that, we should see some things we find attractive, and the most attractive is this: Because I am following Jesus, I am a loved and chosen child of God. That alone is the greatest blessing anyone can ever have. **We find joy in knowing eternity won't be taken away from us. John 10:28-30**

While we are looking, we will probably see some things in our soul we don't find attractive. For many of us, it will be something related to love and forgiveness. For others, it might be an undue attraction to pleasure or worldly possessions. If we are honest with ourselves, we will **confront** our flaws and shortcomings, admit that there are some things that need work, there are some things we can do better. That might sound better to our ears than confessing our sins to God and to each other, but we will see in a few weeks when we get to chapter 5 that is something we are required to do.

Rather than pretending that we have no shortcomings, making excuses for them or blaming someone or something for them we will need to admit that they are our own and **confess** that we are guilty of hurting God, hurting others, and even hurting ourselves. How does that bring us joy? **We find joy in knowing that Jesus forgives us for those sins when we ask Him. 1 John 1:9**

Sin will keep us from being blessed and joyful people, and if we are to live a joyful life, we will take **corrective** action to overcome it. We do that by turning to Jesus and His word. **1:22-25**

How do we live joyful lives? Remember those three "c"s. Confront, confess, and correct. If you prefer something easier to hear, try see, admit, and do. As with most things of great value they typically will not come easily or even quickly. Some things in life may only be fixed by the grace of God. Even so, if we make those three things part of our daily lives, we will be blessed for our efforts with a life filled with joy.

James puts it this way in verse 25- we will be blessed in our doing. The exact nature of the blessing is found in the latter part of verse 12- our soul will be saved. There can be no greater blessing than that. How do we live joyfully and blessed? Remain faithful in times of trial, remember that we are children of God, confess our sins to God and each other and know that we are forgiven in Christ. **1 Cor. 15:57 Victory over sin brings us joy.** What are we waiting for? Let's go and be blessed together. Amen.