

Count It All Joy

Introduction

- The letter of James is believed to be one of the earliest of the NT writings (40 – 50 AD).
- It provides very practical ways for believers to live and please God – how to handle trials, temptation, anger, the tongue, etc.
- The initial recipients were Jewish believers who were forced to live away from their homes = poverty & oppression.

I. A Servant's Greeting (v. 1)

A. James' identity & conversion

James was the maternal brother of Jesus (Mt. 13:55; Gal. 1:19). Neither James nor his maternal brothers believed in Jesus during his earthly ministry, but were converted after Jesus' death (Jn. 7:2-5; 1Co. 15:7). Knowing & believing in Jesus cannot happen naturally – hearing, seeing & touching (Jn. 3:3; Rom. 1:16). Humility is one of the traits of true conversion - “a servant” rather than “the Lord's brother”. Kingdom relationships supersede natural relationships.

B. The addressees' identity & circumstances

“the twelve tribes” refers primarily to Jewish believers or Christians (Ac. 21:20; 26:6-7), but the truths apply to all Christians. “in the Dispersion” means that they were forced to leave their homes because of their faith in Jesus...

II. A Servant's Testing (v. 2-4)

A. Our attitude in trials (v. 2)

“Count” (ἡγέομαι) means to engage in an intellectual process/think. “πᾶς χαρά” means complete or wholehearted joy. Thinking about the outcome of trials will bring complete joy – trials have a purpose & are temporary (2Co. 4:17).

B. Our knowledge in trials (v. 3a)

*Your thinking must be based on what you **know** to be true. First you must know that you have saving faith (Eph. 2:8). Then you must know that God has good purposes for any difficult experiences that a believer faces (Rom. 8:28). You must know that testing is absolutely necessary for growth!*

C. The result of trials (v. 3-4)

Steadfastness is the capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty – like a muscle that becomes stronger when it faces resistance. Steadfastness is the immediate result, but complete holy character of God is the ultimate goal. Therefore Christians must not rush through trials, but rather get the full benefit = become more like Christ!

III. A Servant's Prayer (v. 5-8)

A. Honesty in prayer (v. 5)

Wisdom is the ability to apply the knowledge of God in order to do His will. God is willing to graciously give us wisdom to get through our trials & develop godly character, but we must ask for it in prayer – humility & confession.

B. Faith in prayer (v. 6-8)

Praying to God without faith is the same as doubting His ability to handle the request. The person who prays this way is called double-minded because he/she is trusting God & the world rather than God alone. Prayer in faith is trusting God alone to give what is good (Mt. 7:10).

ILL: Resistance training – a form of exercise or training that uses a resistance against a muscle in the body that is contracting or expanding. Elastic, hydraulic or spring tension is often used for the resistance. The goal is to “gradually & progressively overload the musculoskeletal system so it gets stronger”. Research shows that regular resistance training will strengthen & tone muscles and increase bone mass = increases the ability to persevere in life.

APPL: The same is true with us spiritually. Resistance, tests, trials, difficulties, problems, rejections, persecutions, slander, injustice, hardships, sufferings, etc. are all used by God to strengthen us. As we learn when to push back against opposition and when to relax, when to forge ahead & when to go around, when to work harder & when to be still we will actually grow stronger as a Christian. But we must ask God for wisdom. Our example & model is not a body builder on a poster, but Jesus who was on a cross & now in heaven! We want to be like Him!!!!

CONCLUSION

God has proven in every generation that He can take ordinary people and make them faithful saints that can handle the worst opposition from Satan & this world. God has proven that men, women, young, old, wealthy, poor, intellectuals, uneducated, cosmopolitan dwellers, farmers, Jews, Gentiles, etc. can all face the trials of life and find real joy. God has proven that He really can bring out the best character in saints that will trust Him even when the bottom appears to have dropped out of life. So the only real question for us is “Do we believe what we just read?” Will you face your trials based on what you know about God & His power to take care of you? Do you believe that Jesus loves you & nothing can separate you from the love of God...? Will you ask Him for wisdom to persevere in your difficulties & trust Him (not the world) to show you the way through it all?

If you are not a Christian, will you trust God alone to save you today? Will you ask Him to save you today? Will you believe that Jesus died for you & your sin are forgiven in Him? Look to Him; call upon Him...

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