



Leader Guide
Sunday, December 2, 2018

Joy Comes in the Morning

Sermon Text: Psalm 30

Study Texts: James 1:2-12

Sermon Recap: Psalm 30 is a psalm of thanksgiving. In it, David expresses thanksgiving to the Lord, particularly because of the Lord's favor in the midst of trials. We see in Psalm 30 that difficult seasons are used by the LORD for our good and his glory. David points us to the reality of a sovereign and good God who can be trusted regardless of the season or situation we find ourselves in. As God's children, through Jesus Christ, we can rest in the fact that God's "favor is for a lifetime."

Sermon Connection: In the New Testament, James, the half-brother of Jesus, addresses God's people on how to walk through trials with thanksgiving. In James 1:2-12, we get a behind-the-scenes look at the purposes of God in our trials. We are often tempted to view trials as pointless, and therefore we walk through them begrudgingly. James, however, points us to the reality that they are purposeful. Therefore, we must walk through them with gratitude.

Lesson Plan

Lesson Goal: To see our trials as purposeful opportunities to enjoy and trust Christ.

Lesson Points:

Point 1: Trials create growth in godliness

Point 2: Trials challenge us to trust God's wisdom

Point 3: Trials cause us to rely on God's resources

The Context: The book of James is written to "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion" (James 1:1). Who are these people and how can James' instruction to them help us today? Well, the twelve tribes in the Dispersion were Jewish Christians who had been dispersed out of their

land in to the surrounding regions of Mesopotamia, the Mediterranean, Asia Minor, and Europe. They were being horribly mistreated by their Jewish relatives and gentile neighbors. Many of them were homeless, unemployed, robbed of their possessions, being falsely accused of crimes, and experienced less standing than slaves. What's more fascinating than their incredibly awful situation, is James' instruction to them to: "Count it all joy." That's where we find ourselves in this lesson: A people with inconceivable trials and a command to have joy in the midst of them.

Opening Question: How do unbelievers you know attempt to make it through painful circumstances? How do you?

Transition Statement: As believers, we submit to the authority of God's Word in our lives. The beauty of God's Word is that it speaks to us in the challenging and confusing moments of life when things just don't make sense. James 1:2-12 give us a framework for understanding the, "why is this happening to me?" moments of life...

Point 1 - Trials create growth in godliness (vv. 2-4)

What does James *not* mean by his command to, "Count it all joy...when you meet trials"? What does he mean?

He does not mean that trials in and of themselves are to be enjoyed. He also does not mean to simply put a smile on your face and pretend like everything is ok when it's really not. However, he does intend to communicate that though trials are painful, sorrowful, and discouraging, as Christians, we should possess joy in the midst of these trials, because of what they are producing in us. We are commanded to have joy in the midst of trials, because the trials are not pointless. Rather, they are purposeful.

What do trials create?

Steadfastness, which means perseverance or toughness. James affirms here what Paul says in Romans 5:3-5a, "...we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame,"

What does steadfastness produce in us as we patiently endure trials? What does it mean to be perfect and complete?

As steadfastness has it's full effect we become perfect and complete. This means holy and equipped. In other words, as we patiently endure trials we grow in godliness and become further equipped to walk through more trials throughout life. We never arrive at complete perfection in this life, but we are surely being perfected as God grows us in His likeness through the various trials we face throughout life.

Transition Statement: When we faithfully endure trials we grow in godliness *and* are further equipped to face more trials...

Point 2 - Trials challenge us to trust God's wisdom (vv. 5-8)

What are some common things we are tempted to think and pray when trials come into our life?

Why me? Why now? Please, get me out of this ASAP. Trials create “why” questions in our minds and often reveal the impatience of our hearts. It doesn't help that we live in a culture of instant gratification. We are conditioned to “fast track” everything and when things don't go our way we often demand an explanation. We often feel as if God owes us an explanation for why bad things happen in our life, or that He is not good when circumstances are difficult.

What does James encourage us to ask for? How does God respond to this request? How does this encourage you?

James encourages us to ask for wisdom in the midst of trials. He almost assumes we lack it, and we so often do, particularly when navigating and processing through hardship. God responds to our prayers for His wisdom with unbelievable generosity. As His children we can ask anything according to His will because: “He who did not spare His own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32). This reality should encourage us in many ways. Allow your group to share how they are encouraged by the promises of James 1:5 and Romans 8:32.

How are we instructed to ask for wisdom in the midst of trials? Why is this important?

Instead of asking God to get us out of the trial, while *questioning* His goodness. We should ask for wisdom and *trust* His goodness. We must trust that God is infinitely wise, and always good in the midst of our trials. We must not doubt this, for if we doubt this, we are like “a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.” The one who merely prays without trusting the goodness and wisdom of God is like an unanchored boat in the middle of a stormy sea; tossed around and constantly moved by the current surroundings. Prayer must proceed from a heart of reliant hope, not reluctant skepticism.

Point 3 - Trials cause us to rely on God's resources (vv. 9-12)

In this section, James is speaking to Christians who happen to be poor because of their faith, and Christians who happen to be wealthy. He encourages the poor to boast in their advantage (v. 9), and the rich to boast in their hardships (v. 10).

Considering the context of “purposeful trials”, what advantage do poor Christians have?

James is essentially saying that because of this trial they are experiencing (poverty) they are at an advantage because it causes them to depend on the Lord for everything. Therefore,

James encourages them to be glad in their poverty because it's revealing the reality of their neediness. Wealth is a false security (v. 11), therefore the poor Christian is not tempted to rely on one's own resources, but the Lord's.

Why would James encourage wealthy Christians to boast in their hardships?

James could have said to the rich, "boast in your resources and wealth", but he doesn't. He essentially says, "beware of your wealth, boast instead in your hardships and humiliation." He says this because wealthy people are tempted to boast in their riches, and not in Christ. So James says, when humiliation, trials, hardship, comes your way...good! You need it to show you that you need Christ more than your riches. James is not saying that being wealthy is a sin, but he is offering a sobering caution to the one who is tempted to rely on temporal treasures that fade in an instant.

How does knowing and considering our final reward (v. 12) help us endure trials with joy?

Knowing and considering our final reward causes us to zoom out from our trials and see life with an eternal perspective. Often, when facing trials, we get tunnel vision and see our trials as everything. We also begin to see everything else in life through the lense of our current, most pressing trial. When we zoom out and consider the reality that one day we will live with and enjoy Jesus in sinless bliss forever, we begin to see our trials as "light momentary affliction[s] preparing for us and eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (1 Corinthians 4:17). 1 Corinthians 4:17 may be one of the most amazing verses in all of the Bible. If 1 Corinthians 4:17 is true, and it is, then we will look back at our trials in heaven and say, "God, I'm glad that happened. I wouldn't change a thing (except maybe my attitude in the midst of those trials). I can see now that that ugly part of my life was a purposeful, temporary part of the beautiful mosaic of history you are making for your glory."

The Big Picture

Our trials are not pointless. They are purposeful opportunities to enjoy and trust Christ. God desires to grow His children in godliness, challenge us to trust His wisdom, and cause us to rely on His resources. We know that, regardless of what comes our way, "for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). Ultimately, we cannot lose as followers of Jesus because of the victory that He has won on our behalf. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." (Romans 8:35, 37)

Application Questions

- What qualifies as a trial? What about a temptation? What's the difference?
- Why is it crucial to believe in God's sovereignty as we endure trials and persevere in the faith?

- If someone no longer has any interest in being a Christian due to a trial, what should we conclude about that person's faith? How would you counsel that person?
- What are some ways that painful circumstances and unanswered prayers can actually strengthen your faith?
- How does James 1:2-12 help us shepherd our children through challenging and confusing seasons of life?