



TROUBLE: A REQUIRED COURSE

JAMES 1:1-12

Today, we start a journey through one of the most misunderstood -- but most marvelous and meaningful books in the New Testament -- the Epistle of James. The Epistle of James is called a general Epistle -- which means while it is not written to a specific church community -- but rather to the Christian Community at large. While certainly written with an appeal to Christians in Jerusalem in 52 A.D., its message still speaks today with penetrating power and purpose. It offers wonderful words of wisdom for the Christian's walk and witness.

As Eugene H. Peterson shares: "The letter of James shows one of the church's early pastors skillfully going about his work of confronting, diagnosing, and dealing with areas of misbelieve and misbehavior that had turned up in congregations committed to his care. Deep and living wisdom is on display here, wisdom both rare and essential. Wisdom is not primarily knowing the truth, although it certainly includes that; it is skill in living. For, what good is a truth if we don't know how to live it? What good is an intention if we can't sustain it?"¹

The letter of James was written for the second stage of the Christian's journey -- the journey inward. With the doctrine of justification by faith already established as the standard in the Christian community, James writes words of instructions on how our lives as Christians are to make a **positive** difference in the world. We are not working for our **salvation** -- but rather as an expression of, or in gratitude for the gift of salvation we have already received.

There is a story of a devoted Jewish man who visited with a Rabbi to learn more about living right with God. The Rabbi asked, "what have you done to seek God -- and live a Godly life?"

He responded, "I have read the Torah through five times."

"Good," said the Rabbi, "but how much of the **Torah** has gone through to your heart?"

Yes, it is great to have daily devotions and memorize scripture verses -- but have they or will they motivate you to **increase** the love of God and neighbor.

I love the story of a young lad who went back to his last year's Sunday School class

by mistake. He noticed that the tables and chairs were smaller. He said to the teacher, "I don't have anything in this class to grow up into."

The writer of this part of God's word wanted the church to grow into the beautiful picture and pattern that God had laid out in other parts of the Sacred Scriptures. He wanted the church to live out with enthusiasm the lifestyle it was capable of. He wanted them to have the word of God written upon their hearts.

The writer unfortunately saw a gap between what the church believed and what the church lived out in its daily life and existence. The faith community was falling short. So the Holy Spirit inspires James, the half brother of Jesus to write this "**Instruction Manual**" for the living out of the Christian faith for everyday conduct and character building. We must not only **speak** the Christian faith for everyone to hear -- we must try to **live out** the Christian faith for everyone to **see** and feel. I need to share up front that James does not soft-pedal the truth of the gospel. Some of his teachings will greatly challenge us.

The Christian faith not only depends on outward expressions (words) but how far those words went into their inward journey to the **heart**.

So let's dig in and see what **truths** we can unearth for our journey -- both as a church family and as an individual - live out our lives to the Glory of God in 2007. Let us see if we can grow up into the model that James holds up before our very eyes. It is a journey worth taking.

LET US LOOK AT VERSES 3 AND 4.

FIRST IS THE PRESENCE OF TROUBLES AND TRIALS IN OUR JOURNEY OF FAITH

After James introduces himself as a servant (not a celebrity) of the Lord, Jesus Christ, he immediately tackles -- head on -- the reality of "**troubles**" in the Christian journey. Please notice that James does not say -- **'IF' TROUBLES WILL COME** -- but already presupposes that every human being -- whether they are a Christian or not -- will simply experience trials, troubles and temptations in our lives. The biblical perspective on troubles is that it is an ever-present reality. James wants it to be known **up-front** that God does not promise we can avoid it.

As we look at this reality, in **verse twelve**, we are assured that we can **survive** it -- and even become stronger and more sensitive to the troubles of others. The difference in being a born-again believer is **NOT** that we AVOID the times of darkness -- but that the **darkness** is always followed by the **light** -- the cross gives way to the crown -- that death is **defeated** by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I agree that the Christian life is not easy -- and because of that -- it is never boring.

Did you know that almost 70% of the **Psalms** are what we call 'Psalms of Lament?' We know that David and others faced troubles, adversity, disappointment, and death.

They did not deny or soft-pedal any of those difficulties in their conversation with God. David faced everything and he prayed everything to God. Be glad he did.²

Without pain -- our performance level never reaches the ability to move beyond the ordinary and mundane. The triumphant of victory is only known by the constant effort and discipline of denying oneself comfort and pleasure to achieve something greater and bigger.

Zig Ziglar tells the story of a certain general who found himself completely surrounded by enemy troops. He was heard to say to his soldiers, "**Men, for the first time in the history of this military campaign, we are in position to attack the enemy in all directions.**" In other words, they were surrounded by trouble. Have there been moments in your journey of faith that you have felt surrounded by the enemy that threatens to sap and destroy our spirit and will to live?

As I understand the Christian faith -- our faith does not deny or prevent the reality of trouble, but can prevent us -- from having our troubles triumph over us. Our faith gives us the power and perspective not to focus on the trouble, but to focus on how best to overcome the reality of trouble. So James writes whenever you face trials of many kinds.

SECONDLY, FACE TROUBLES WITHOUT YIELDING TO ITS DEVASTATING EFFECTS

I like the story told of a 15 year old lad who said, "did I ever tell you -- I was president of my eighth-grade class -- **two years in a row.**" Failures and troubles were not the last words.

Many of you are aware of the inventor, Thomas Edison. There is a place in my home state of New Jersey which honors his memory. I believe that one of his greatest legacies is unknown to many.

At the ripe old age of 67 -- he saw his treasured laboratory burning down. He thought his son to be in the building -- but soon found him. Thomas Edison said to his son, "Go get your mother and do it quickly. Your mother will never see such a spectacular fire like this again." As a family -- they watched his life's work go up in flames. He went to bed - - got a good night's sleep -- and called his staff together early that next morning. He said to his staff, "**We will begin again. It will be better.**" The next day he was walking with his son near the site of the fire. He picked up an old photograph of himself which the fire had charred on all four sides. He said to his son, "The fire destroyed the **OUTSIDE** -- but not the **INSIDE.**" This is exactly what James is getting at in **verse four** when he wrote, "**Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete -- not lacking anything.**" Thomas Edison lacked a building for a while -- but he did not lack the **right perspective** to deal with this adversity. He yielded his life to those things that mattered the most.

THIRDLY AND LASTLY, TROUBLES OFTEN MOVE US TO LOOK TO GOD FOR HIS ASSURANCE AND DIRECTION -- DON'T OVER-REACT TO TROUBLE.

Many of you know that King David often found himself in the wilderness on the run for his life. What David had to learn was that the wilderness was full of God and not Saul. When David saw the wilderness as a place to run to find God – he did not overreact to the troubles in his life. He allowed God to determine his response.

When we are faced with troubles and trials that exhaust our human strengths and abilities, it is then we reflect the honesty of the psalmist and we cry out to God for strength and stamina to endure the problem we are facing. Only God knows where to direct us to bring us correction and renewal when the circuits of our lives are overloaded and burned out.

When Satan tempts us -- it is to bring out our worst -- when the Almighty tests us -- it is to bring out our best and make us more godly. James writes in **verse 12**, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial -- because when he has stood the **TEST** -- he will receive the crown of life that **GOD** has promised to those who love him."

James himself had moved from being a doubting -- disbelieving younger half-brother of Jesus -- to a prominent church leader because of his **willingness** to tackle the problems the church at Jerusalem had trying to "**grow up**" into the people of faith that God wanted them to be. By entering and tackling their problems -- he also grows up in the Lord.

When I first enrolled as a student in college, declared my major field of study – the catalog stated that there were certain required courses that I had to take. To be a student or disciple of Jesus Christ shares that there are certain required courses that we must take as well. Trouble comes to all people – Christians at least know that the Lord of life can use these experiences to grow us up to be worthy disciples. Knowing the Lord is with us allows us to count the joy and not the troubles.

There is a story told about two brothers who were watching a circus parade but from different perspectives. One looked at the parade through a hole in the fence.

He saw the ringmaster -- then he saw a clown. Then he saw a ferocious tiger and became frightened that the ringmaster and the clown would be eaten by the tiger. The problem was that looking through a little hole in the fence -- he couldn't see the "big picture." He couldn't see the tiger was in a cage. He didn't see that the ringmaster and the clown were protected from danger.

The other brother could see it all because he stood on the roof of a large building looking at the whole parade. He saw the big picture and knew everything was in order.

James knew without this perspective to life -- our tendency would be to count our problems -- rather than count it all joy. In my life and journey -- the reason I can count it all joy -- is from the perspective garnered in from the old black spiritual song sung by slaves:

"Nobody knows the troubles I've seen;

**Nobody knows the troubles I've seen;
Nobody but Jesus;
Nobody but Jesus."**

If Jesus knows -- that counts most of all.

He knows where to touch our hearts and minds.

Amen and Amen

The Reverend Eric S. Ritz

June 10, 2007

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ENDNOTES

¹ Eugene H. Peterson, **THE MESSAGE: The New Testament in Contemporary English**, NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO, 1993, page 478.

² Eugene H. Peterson, **GOD'S MESSAGE FOR EACH DAY**, published by J. Countryman, a division of Thomas Nelson, Inc, Nashville, Tennessee 37214, 2004, August 11th devotional.

NOTE FROM PASTOR ERIC: Pastor Eric will not be preaching on June 17th at either service. Pastor Eric will return to the pulpit on June 24th.