

“Perseverance Must Finish Its Work” – Keep the End in View

James 1:1-4

Invitation: Let us bow before the Word and be changed by it.

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, is on a warpath, passionate to communicate how we are to interface with trials. Why? Because they affect us more than anything else in life. James wrote to scattered believers. Why? Because when we're scattered, we need help. We must have a good theology of suffering in our arsenal and become pain experts, knowing how to persevere through it all. James 1:2 (Phillips translation) “When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives, my brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends.”

There are two ways to respond to trials. One way is to look at them as intruders ... and cry ... “NO, NO! GO AWAY!!” ... when they knock on the door of our lives. We can stack up whatever it takes against that door to keep it closed and not let them in. Another way is to look at them as friends. Our response hinges on our worldview. Who is at the center? If I'm at the center, life will be all about me, by myself, for myself, etc. This is the temporal view that shuts the door, locks it, and won't let the trials in. If God is at the center, we keep the long-range view and see that God uses everything to assist us to the goal. This is the eternal view that welcomes trials as friends.

Pain enters our lives at four levels: As a person, a partner, a parent and a professional. Job experienced pain in all four areas. “What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil.” (Job 3:25-26). In the middle of it all, Job says, “But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I will come forth as gold.” (Job 23:10). This shows the *beauty of tension*. Job is basically saying, “Yes, it is difficult. But God is for me. I will come forth as gold.”

James 1:3 ... “because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.”
“testing” - In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, the word refers to the *process* by which silver or gold is refined. **The process is the product.** Be aware of the push to go south, away from God. Go north instead. When we go south, we play the victim and become *manipulators* and *takers* ... at the center of which is pride. When we go north, we are moral agents who are responsible. This ushers us into a life of service and we become givers ... at the center of which is humility.

If we do not have a clear theology of suffering, our pain will not have a context to be correctly interpreted. Unresolved pain always has pride at its center. A proud person feels a strong sense of entitlement, believing that he is deserving of more and better. He is accusatory, and is a controller of situations and people. An example of this is Adolf Hitler. What was his greatest struggle? The Jews. They were the problem, and he wanted to get rid of them (the problem). See the pride in pain? That's a lesson to us. The average grudge lasts 30 years. Watch out for worldliness and pride (lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, and pride of life).

C.S. Lewis writes, "You and I have need of the strongest spell that can be found to wake us from the evil enchantment of worldliness." We must look within at our attitudes and responses. That is why the Lord will test our faith ... to break the enchantment with worldliness. We can despair, revolt, or consider it pure joy because it develops perseverance.

James 1:4 – "Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

"perseverance" - This word presents the picture of being under a heavy load and resolutely staying there instead of trying to escape. The person who does this is to be brave in confronting and contending with trials. Again, **the process is the product**. Jesus learned obedience through the things He suffered. He is our Savior, Lord, Master, King ... supreme example ... shall we expect any other way?

"I fear our generation has come dangerously near the 'I'm-getting-tired-so-let's-just-quit' mentality. And not just in the spiritual realm. Dieting is a discipline, so we stay fat. Finishing school is a hassle, so we bail out. Cultivating a close relationship is painful, so we back off. Working through conflicts in a marriage is a tiring struggle, so we walk away. Sticking with an occupation is tough, so we start looking elsewhere." (Charles Swindoll) Don't give up or give in!

"must finish its work" - This is a command. The believer is put on notice against the danger implied – allowing the chain of results to be interrupted. Let the goal be attained. Look at the butterfly. It begins in a cocoon and must struggle to develop its wings so it can fly. It must struggle! If the butterfly is freed from the cocoon before the struggle has finished its work, the butterfly will die, and life will be destroyed. It will never fly. So too, we must struggle ... then fly.

"mature" - This means that the believer is responding to God's grace with sincere obedience. I submit to Your will in this situation. This is maturity.

"complete" - We get a hologram from this word, a 360 degree, 3-dimensional depiction of an object. The big picture gives categories to interpret what is happening. The Lord knows. He will help.

"not lacking anything" - Scripture interprets Scripture: I Peter 5:10 - And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To Him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

- Sermon concludes with testimony of Hank and Amy Degarmo.

Closing Prayer: God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardship as a pathway to peace; taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is; not as I would have it; trusting that You make all things right if I surrender to Your will; so that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with You forever in the next. Amen.

(Reinhold Niebuhr)