

FAITH THAT WORKS // Without Doubt

The book of James is probably the most practical and direct letters of the New Testament because what James goes after in this book is a *faith that doesn't just work in us, but a faith that gets to work, a faith that gets after it.*

James, the author of this letter, is the half-brother of Jesus. Mary is their mother, and Joseph raised them both, but Jesus was immaculately conceived, and James was Joseph's biological son. John 7 tells us that when Jesus began His ministry, none of Jesus' brothers, including James, believed that Jesus was the Messiah.

John 7:5, "For not even His brothers believed in Him."

If anybody's going to see our flaws and frailties, or our arrogance and our insecurities, it's our siblings. What would it take for you to believe that one of your siblings was God in human flesh?

But then something happened to change James' mind. Something took the brother of Jesus from unbelief to incredible faith to the point that he became one of the greatest leaders and martyrs in the early church.

1 Corinthians 15:3-7, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles."

James had every reason NOT to believe that his older brother was the Messiah until the resurrection. Until His brother was crucified, buried, and raised from the dead.

The faith of James is one of the most compelling cases that Jesus was actually raised from the dead, that He actually is who He claimed to be. And if His own brother believed the He is God in human flesh, we have an incredibly compelling reason to believe as well.

Here's how his letter begins...

James 1:1-8, "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

THE TESTING OF YOUR FAITH

The immediate audience James is writing to are Jewish believers, Jewish Christians that were scattered all over the first century world. They were driven out of their homeland and living in hostile territory. They were facing tremendous hardship and persecution.

So, his first instruction to this audience is...

James 1:2, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness."

Count it all joy when you face all kinds of trial—from being kicked out of your homeland, facing persecution for your faith, to physical illness and pain, marital problems, financial stress, a setback in your career—James says, count it ALL joy because it's producing something good in you.

One thing I've noticed in my own life, and in the lives of many Christians is...

**We want to be spiritually fruitful
without having to become spiritually mature.**

In other words, we want to make an impact, but we don't want to have to endure the very things that will make us impactful people.

It's in the winter seasons that our roots grow deepest. Where our character is refined and formed. See, a test exposes reality. A test exposes what's true. Our knowledge or lack of knowledge, our skill or lack of skill. So, when tests come into our lives, it allows

us to see what's really there. What's really in us, how far we've come, or how far we need to go.

Some of us are so discouraged that there even is a test, and then we see all the things that aren't the way we want them to be, and we just give up and never grow through the testing.

But "counting it all joy" means that even when life is hard, even in the moments when we're discouraged, or walking through hardship, we can know, *"Even now, God is growing me. God is changing me. He's still forming me, He's not done with me yet. I'm not quite where I want to be, but thank God I'm not where I used to be."*

See, many of us want life to look different, but we don't want to have to be any different. And God allows tests to come into our lives. For the Christian, there's no hardship that is arbitrary or purposeless. James tells us that God is forming us into people who don't just go through trials and testing but *GROW THROUGH* the trials and testing.

Why?

James 1:4, "And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

PERSEVERANCE & PERFECTION

The reason for trials and difficulty in our lives is to help us grow to maturity, to help us fulfill the purpose and potential God designed us for.

Rob, do you mean to tell me that God sent that pain into a family's life to make them better people? What kind of God do you people serve?

And the objection is totally valid, if that's what James is saying, but it's not.

All throughout the Bible we're told that because of sin entering into the world, in Gen 3, the world we live in is horrifically broken, and suffering comes into every person's life. Trials come into every life. But if we're connected to Jesus, if we're drawing our life from Jesus, any suffering, loss, hardship, tragedy won't make us bitter, it will make us better. It won't weaken you, it will strengthen you.

In John 15 we're given the imagery of the vine and the branches, Jesus is the vine, the source of life, we're the branches. If a branch that's connected to the vine gets pruned, what happens? All of a sudden the branch begins to draw more deeply on the vine for life, for nourishment, for strength.

But if we're a branch not connected to the vine, we won't grow, we'll wither. And any suffering or pruning we experience in life, it's totally arbitrary! There's no source of life to draw from. Any suffering that comes into our lives won't grow us, it will make us cold, calloused, bitter, hard-hearted. It eventually will cause us to dry out and wither.

But only if we draw our life from the vine can we become stronger, we can hold more weight, we become fruitful, impactful, we provide life, and shade, comfort, sustenance. Knowing that through testing, we're being made perfect and complete, we can count it all joy.

When hardship comes, do you draw your life from the vine? Do you run toward God or run from God? Do you get bitter? Or Better? Weaker or stronger? Trials, tests, they hit everyone but how we respond to them makes all the difference.

PRAYING LIKE YOU MEAN IT

James 1:5, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."

This is great news! God wants to give us wisdom! He's ready to give wisdom! Eager to give wisdom. Without reproach. He's doesn't give reluctantly or begrudgingly, but generously! He will give you wisdom, direction, insight, whatever resources you need to navigate the circumstances in front of you.

But there's a condition.

"...But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

Now, when James says, "With no doubting," he's not saying that we never have questions. Or that we live at all times with absolutely certainty in what God is up to and are always at peace no matter the circumstance.

James is telling us, "When you go through trials, don't hedge. Don't be double minded." If we're praying for God's help one moment, and not backing those prayers up with action, with follow through, with actually believing that God wants to intervene and help, we're asking God for help with our words while our actions say we don't trust Him. We're not putting any weight behind our faith. It's an empty, powerless faith and it doesn't work.

The moment of decision reveals whether we really are trusting God or not. Are we putting all of our weight on Him? Our confidence in Him? Or are we just hedging, in which case, we're not really trusting Him at all. James tells us that kind of faith, it won't get you anywhere. It doesn't work. And it doesn't work because it's not a real faith.

That's why James tells us...

James 1:7-8, "For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man..."

Real faith, faith that works, is a faith that puts all its trust in and weight upon God! It jumps into the abyss. It stops hedging and commits. Is that how you pray? Is this how you live? And I know I'm talking to some people right now that are facing trials. You're standing on the edge of the abyss debating whether or not you can trust Him.

One thing I want us to do today is to ask God for help and commit. Commit to doing things His way. Do you need wisdom? Ask Him for it, and commit to His ways. Do you need guidance? You need help? You need God to come through? You need His help, His resources, His life to help you to persevere? Ask Him for what you need and commit. Don't waiver. Ask and follow through. God is telling us today, "*Pray like you mean it, and live like you trust me.*"

You know what James tells his audience?

James 1:5, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."