

## "Count it all joy."

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Nowhere has been a tendency in some quarters to look down upon the Epistle of James as being rather below the standard of the other Epistles. It is true of course that it was written rather early in the day, when the full character of that which God had instituted on the day of Pentecost had hardly come to light; and that consequently it is addressed to the twelve tribes, amongst whom the Christians were but a remnant and mainly poor and persecuted, and that mention is made of the synagogue. Still though this is so, James enforces a standard of life and behaviour which is very high, dealing with matters in a severely practical way. To listen to James — and he calls upon us to do so, saying, "Hearken, my beloved brethren" (James 2: 5) — is a profitable and wholesome exercise. It is also humbling, since we discover how far we come short of the standard he sets.

We have only to read the very first remark he makes to be greatly humbled. "My brethren," he says, "count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations. The temptations of which he speaks are the things that try us and put us to proof. They may of course take the form of enticements springing from our own lusts, as verse 14 indicates; but on the other hand they may not. God never entices us but He does permit, and even send, many testings from without, thus working "the trying of your faith;" that is, the putting of faith to the test. Everything that is of value has to be tested, and God sets a great value on faith.

Every year the Patent Office in London passes thousands of applications, but very few of them come to anything. When set before men of practical experience they shake their heads and dismiss the idea as not really workable. If they should suggest that a model be made so that the idea may be put to the test the inventor is glad. And he is far more glad if the test shows that the idea is workable and valuable. The sad thing is when it is not worth even a test. Now faith is eminently worth testing, and we may indeed praise God if we have the genuine article, and confront the testing with joy.

Is this the spirit in which we are meeting the testings of the present time? We must each answer that question for ourselves, and most of us will have no ground for self-satisfaction when we have honestly answered it. The testings are certainly "divers," or "various." For many the winds of adversity seem to be blowing from all four quarters at once. Their homes are damaged and evacuated; their businesses disturbed and perhaps dispersed; their families scattered, some members injured if not killed; their enjoyment of Christian fellowship largely impaired by meetings being broken up. Others have not suffered to the same extent, yet in various ways tribulation has come in, and the old life of quietude and orderly Christian privilege and service quite dispelled. Are we counting these things to be joy?

This trying situation is being met, we believe, with considerable fortitude. But this could be asserted about the populace generally. Is our fortitude definitely Christian in its character? Does it spring from the consciousness of the rich fulness that we have in Christ? We are thankful to bear witness that we have not heard the voice of grumbling and discontent: there has been quiet resignation and acceptance of what God has permitted. This is good, but it is not that of which James speaks. So often are we resigned and quiet and even trustful; yet not characterized by JOY.

What will enable us under such circumstances to rejoice? Only those things of which James proceeds to speak to us. We are to know that all these things are intended to test our faith, and that the

testing is going to work out endurance, which is a quality that God prizes very highly. In the very nature of things it presupposes trials which are long drawn out, and so we are told to let endurance have its fully developed and completed work. The process is one which cannot be hurried, trying though it may be. The end to be reached is well worth the process. It is nothing less than our being ourselves fully developed and complete, lacking nothing. When the testings have been thoroughly carried out we shall be the finished article, turned out as graduates in the Divine university.

"Alas!" we have to exclaim, "how far from such full development we are today." Truth compels us so to speak, and our imperfection is contemplated by James in the very next verse. The objective is that we be complete, lacking nothing; but immediately there follow the words, "If any of you lack wisdom . . ." How often do the testings reveal our lack in this direction! A child howls when things go wrong and it gets hurt, largely because it lacks understanding, and it cannot imagine the reason of what has happened nor its object. The grown-up man in a similar case sets himself to understand and profits by the trouble. But wisdom is more than mere understanding. The wise man is one who can apply with discretion the things that he understands.

Again and again the testings reveal to us our lack of wisdom. Very well then, we are to ask wisdom from God, who gives liberally and without upbraiding, and it shall be given to us. A wise understanding of God's dealings and ways cannot possibly be ours unless it is given to us of God, hence He will not upbraid as though it were something that we ought not to need. Asking, it shall be ours in liberal measure, only we must ask in faith. It is our faith that is being tested; hence of course in our asking, faith is a *sine qua non*.

We make bold to say that if God thus bestows wisdom in liberal fashion He will in the same way bestow all else that we may need as the testings run their course.

In testifying to us of the benefits that flow from the testings of our faith James is not alone. Paul tells us the same thing in even greater detail in Romans 5. No sooner has he spoken of the justification which is ours by faith, than he goes on to tell us of the excellent fruits of tribulation. He mentions not only patience, or endurance, but experience, hope, and the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given to us. So also Peter in the last chapter of his first Epistle; telling us that the God of all grace has called us to His eternal glory after we have suffered a while, and indicating that He can use that very suffering to make us perfect, stablish, strengthen and settle us. We may feel inclined to say, "All these difficulties and this suffering has an unsettling effect on my mind." Turning to the God of all grace however, things would work in just the opposite way, and we should be settled thereby.

The end in view, that we may be "perfect and entire, wanting nothing" is certainly most desirable. Keeping it in view we shall be able to rejoice in some measure. James however is not satisfied with a measure of rejoicing: he says, "Count it ALL joy." It would indeed be no inconsiderable thing if we could count it fifty per cent. joy, but we are exhorted to count it one hundred per cent joy! A counsel of perfection truly! But then the faith of Christ always does set perfection before us.

The high standard which James erects should encourage us to ask in faith from our God who gives so liberally. We shall then pursue our troublesome way not wearily and with dejection, but with courage and joy of heart.