Keeping a Good Attitude in Tough Times – Part 2

Scripture: James 1:1-12

Key Thought: James gives us perspectives to help us in troubled times.

# Intro ideas

## A little parable

Suppose you have a friend that gives you directions to his house in the country. He tells you that since you have a truck, he’ll tell you the short cut over the back road. But he warns you it’s bumpy and rutted. But even so it is a beautiful drive and better than the boring five mile longer main highway alternative. So you take his advice and head cross country. But you find out right away that he wasn’t kidding about the bumps and ruts. Fortunately, he was also right about the views. I guess the trick is to enjoy the scenery while being bounced around by the bumps.

Well, life is a little like that, isn’t it?

## Jesus’ words

After warning his disciples about coming problems, Jesus said,

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. Jn 16:33 NIV

We just need the perspective to be overcomers like Jesus, in spite of the bumps. In the passage we started studying last week, James is trying to give us perspective for that task. We covered the first two elements of the perspective he is giving us.

1. Value the gifts that come to us in and from our trials.
2. Believing will help us through. Believe and don’t doubt , James says.

I only got half-way through the topics last week so we’ll finish it this morning. This morning will uncover two more elements of the perspective we need for perseverance in trials.

# Keeping the right value on ourselves is essential. Vv. 9-11

When it comes to having the right opinion of ourselves, there are always twin dangers.

– thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think – or thinking of ourselves as worth less than God thinks we are.

### 1. The rich man is advised to take pride in his low position.

a. he was not used to rubbing shoulders equally with slaves, or even with artisans and traders. Society then was very stratified, as it is becoming more and more today.

### Radical equality in Christ

1. But the gospel of Jesus Christ introduced a radical equality. And James is talking about that here. In this book, he admonishes the church leaders for giving the rich special seats while seating the poor on the floor. When Paul wrote, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus,” he was pointing out that the class distinctions of this life do not apply in the kingdom of God. The most famous way to phrase that is, “The ground is level at the foot of the cross.” All of us find forgiveness for our sins in the same way – by asking God’s forgiveness and accepting the work of redemption accomplished on Calvary by Jesus Christ for us.
2. James applies this truth by reminding his wealthy readers to rejoice in the evidences of this new equality. Why? First because it is the truth. Second, it leaves us much less vulnerable to changes in our circumstances. If our self-esteem is not wrapped up in our possessions and position, then if we lose some of either, we are not as affected personally by the loss.

### We are not special because of lack of trials

1. As an extension of this equality, we need to avoid thinking more highly than we ought of ourselves because of our lack of trials. It is not our superiority in some way that is the cause of our lack of problems. I think where I am most vulnerable to this is when I find myself easily prejudging a poor person without knowing anything about where they have been in life. In Syracuse there were two or three busy intersections where homeless veterans used to stand with signs identifying themselves as such and obviously hoping for donations. I used to sneer inside at them and say to myself, “Get a job.” Then I learned that 40% of homeless people are mentally ill. The Spirit of God began to chide me for my smug superiority complex. I was admonished to learn compassion. So I started rolling down my window and handing them a dollar, not because I thought it was a great charitable idea, but because I needed to learn compassion.

(1) Rom. 12:3 "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought."

d. This goes for our talents too. Remember, it is God who accomplishes his work through us. When we
are successful, then we need to remember what Jesus said. "So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants, we have only done our duty.’”

## In times of trial and trouble we are more prone to think too poorly of ourselves.

We are on the other end of the equation, so to speak. The enemy of our souls beats us down. He reminds us of sins we have already confessed to God. He reminds us of our failures in other areas too. He makes us very aware of all our inadequacies compared to our peers.

He takes advantage of all the inner voices we inherited from all our most demanding ancestors and tries to pound into our brains with their internalized voices that we just don’t measure up.

But the principle is the same. “The ground is level at the foot of the cross.”

To counter his attack, we need to remember our Biblical value before God.

Put your name in John 3:16 - because Jesus did it for you. That’s how valuable you are. Peter says you are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:19). If God thought that much of you, you are extremely valuable to God.

### The poor man, the one-talented, and the afflicted one can all keep their heads up in Christ.

2. So James says, the poor man is advised to be proud of his high position or in the original - his exaltation-- God has seated all his people in heavenly places, according to Paul; Eph 2:6

“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.”

So God is not a respecter of persons. There is a grave danger of our times of trial is that we will think less of ourselves that we ought to because of the trial.

c. Another example is in I Cor. 12. What humans consider the lesser gifts are no less important.

d. God needs and uses the smallest work for him.
(1) boy with the loaves and fishes
(2) the widow's two mites (pennies)

### How can we summarize how we ought to think of ourselves?

a. We are of infinite value to God

 (1) Psalm 139 he knit us together in our mother's womb

 (2) John 3:16 with your name in it – he loved you so much that he sent his Son

(3) James 1:12 "he chose to give us birth through the word of truth" We are his
spiritual creation.

b. We are of equal value before God.

(1) All come to God through Christ

(2) Each has his or her gift and place.

# **Look past the trial to the reward God has promised**. V. 12

Doing things for reward is a powerful part of our make-up. We have a common saying that reveals this perspective. "Is it worth it?" We recognize that our reward is often not material. We do things for many kinds of rewards.

(1) We do things for recognition
(2) We do things for inner satisfaction
(3) We do things for a future pay-off

We already talked last week about looking for the gifts that come to us during and even because of our earthly trials. Now we need to look at what perspective we need when the trials we face don’t really seem to have a pay-off in this world. Ill. Farmer who bragged to his neighbor about a field tended entirely on Sunday that was giving a great harvest. While his Christian neighbor was in service he had been out tending that field. Now it was yielding a bumper crop. The Christian neighbor just leaned on the fence and drawled, “Ya know, God doesn’t settle all his accounts at harvest time!”

Some things are not worth it by human reasoning, but God will provide the reward!

In our times of trial, often one of the things we need is a perspective that includes eternity; that realizes what God will ultimately reward.

c. All of our lives are subject to death and we must all give an accounting before God.

(1) James 1:10,11 The illustration of the short-lived desert wildflowers.

In I Cor 3:12-15 Paul teaches that the character of our works will be tested by God's fire of judgments. Some works will be shown to be silver and gold even though they had no reward below.

(ill. Mark Cable's song "It's just a question of when.")

Consider these verses.

Mt 10:41-42 NIV “Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. 42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

Mt 6:3-4 NIV “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

Mt 5:11-12 NIV "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Jas 1:12 NIV 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.

# V.Conclusion

Story of Ed Crandall’s having to leave seminary for lack of money – God with Us p. 139