

These are trying times—times of trouble, struggle, sadness. “Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward” (Job 5.7). Preaching should edify, exhort, and comfort God’s troubled people (1 Cor 14.3). This text in James 1 does that wonderfully. Its godly counsel can be summarized:

*In trying times, trust in the Lord and await His deliverance.*

But there are many aspects of “trusting the Lord.” James elaborates.

- I. Know Your Spiritual Identity (1). Of first consideration and importance.
  - You are God’s chosen people, “the twelve tribes.” “Christian Jews [were] chiefly, if not wholly, in view” (WPNT, Robertson; cf. Jas 2.1), but “these are not here to be considered as contrasted with the *Gentile Christians*” (Huther). Also, “the designation becomes symbolical [for] the true people of God who, like James, were now slaves of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, were Christians” (Lenski). You are James’ “brethren” (v. 2), “the Israel of God” (Gal 6.16), His covenant people, heirs of the patriarchal promises. To know we are God’s elect, beloved, comforts us in trying times.
  - You are God’s scattered people. “Scattered abroad.” As the early Jewish Christians were scattered from Jerusalem by persecution (Acts 8.1), so all Christ’s people are “strangers and pilgrims” in this world (1 Pet 2.11). We face perpetually trying times until Christ returns (Jn 16.33; Acts 14.22; 2 Tim 3.12). Soft, easy, carefree Christianity is not biblical Christianity! Remember who we are: cross-bearing followers of Christ in a fallen, wicked world. You must know this first and accept your hard lot (1 Pet 4.1).
- II. Rejoice in God’s Purpose Toward You (2-4). Counterintuitively, joy!
  - Rejoice when you are tried. Alt., “you must find the greatest joy in being involved in various trials.” Not in the trouble *per se* (we admit we hurt; we do not enjoy pain), but rejoice in the instrument of further blessing from God; exult in it (Rom 5.3)!
  - Know why you are tried. Alt., “the testing of your faith leads to steadfastness.” No steadfastness without repeated, painful trials. Like the athlete: no pain, no gain. You are spiritual champions in training. You will win the race and be crowned victors in the end.
  - Be patient while you are tried. Alt. “steadfastness must have full play, so that you may be fully and perfectly developed without any defects.” You return willingly to a hundred painful physical therapy appointments because you’re better off with them. “Run with patience the race that is set before us” (Heb 12.1).

This is just the mark of difference between the Christian and the worldling. The worldling blesses God while he gives him plenty, but the Christian blesses him when he smites him: he believes him to be too wise to err and too good to be unkind; he trusts him where

he cannot trace him, looks up to him in the darkest hour, and believes that all is well. O Christian, if your heart is right, you will understand this spiritual satisfaction, and your soul will be satisfied in times of drought (Spurgeon, “The Happy Christian,” MTP 736).

- III. Pray for Wisdom (5-8). As the heavy burden of becoming king provoked Solomon’s craving for wisdom, so trials do to us (1 Kgs 3.7).
    - Wisdom (5a) from God is what you need most, not relief. Relief may be asked “if it be thy will,” but until it comes we need wisdom. We all “lack” sufficient wisdom = God’s gift to live righteously under fire, to keep His commandments at any cost, to persist as loyal to Him and His church against all threats and seductions.
    - Wisdom is what you must ask of Him (5b-8). Powerful encouragements: He gives wisdom, He gives it abundantly, He gives it to all indiscriminately who ask in faith, He does not “upbraid” (scold) us for asking, He guarantees He will give it. The one requirement of us to receive it is an unwavering faith.
    - Wisdom shall certainly be yours. Prov 2.1-9 describes the one to whom the LORD gives wisdom. God promises it through James.
  - IV. Rejoice in the Ways of Providence (9-11). These verses puzzled me for a long time. V. 9 seems reasonable but not vv. 10, 11. I missed the point!
    - Providence exalts us and makes us low. A poetic celebration of divine providence comparable to other places (Deut 32.39; 1 Sam 2.6, 7; Job 5.17, 18; Psa 102.10, 11; Luke 1.51-53). All trials and all blessings come to you from God for your ultimate good (Rom 8.28). Your suffering is not for nothing; it is part of His redemptive plan.
    - Providence makes our trying times to be short-lived. Good times and bad times are fleeting (1 Cor 7.29-31; Jas 4.14). Even the young do not have much time left in this world. It’ll be over soon.
- All this (I-IV) is part of “trusting God.” Those who trust Him have hope (V).
- V. Expect Your Great Reward (12). So important to *know* now (Josh 1.6).
    - A benediction is yours who endure, trust, and love the Lord. “Blessed is the man” is a stock saying that means that he has God’s saving favor and shall finally be saved from all ills unto all wholeness and happiness. Such a person is here described as one who “endures temptation” or trial, trusting in God through it. Also described as one who “loves” the Lord (a fruit of faith, Eph 6.24, alt., “who have an unflinching love for our Lord Jesus Christ”).
    - A gracious reward of life shall be given you. Grammar indicates the crown consists of [eternal] life—a comparison of rewards. Eternal life is, here, consummate fellowship with God, perfect blessedness.

Dear Christian under trial, don’t despair, don’t go it alone. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and await His deliverance. “He knows the way that you take: When He has tried you, you shall come forth as gold” (Job 23.10). Ω