

✠ James 1:1-12 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

The book of James is the earliest New Testament book. It was written by James, the brother of our Lord, to those we read of in Acts chapter eight, those scattered from Jerusalem by the intense persecution that arose by the hand of Saul. He wrote to them that they would endure the suffering to which they were exposed.

James, then, wrote to endure suffering for the sake of Christ long before St. Paul felt the cold steel of shackles or the lonely life of solitude among the crowds. Perhaps St. Paul read James' epistle when he traveled about, drawing great strength from his fellow apostle and heir in Christ. Certainly we see parallels and echoes of James' letter in the writings of Paul. It's not hard to imagine that Paul, upon journeying to Jerusalem to first visit the apostles, sought James out to thank him especially for his encouraging letter and valiant faith.

Faith that endured murderous threats and hardship and finally martyrdom by stoning. James faced trials and suffered at the hands of men for professing Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God. But these trials did not beat James down. They did not lessen his zeal for the truth or weaken his resolve to speak and live the truth. Rather, James counted these trials as joyful occasions. Occasions to relish and take to heart. For in these occasions the apostle knew that God was strengthening his faith so as to produce steadfastness that would lead to the crown of life. Blessed are those who suffer for Christ's sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God (Matthew 5).

But that is what servants do. They suffer for their master for a slave is not above his master. A servant does not belong to himself. He belongs to the one who has purchased him. A servant is not one who exerts his own will, but is one who submits to the will of his master. If the master sends his servant into enemy territory, the servant goes, counting it as a joy and blessing because the master is testing the servant to produce steadfastness in discipline and devotion.

Trusting in God, we have nothing to fear. But what do we trust God for? For one, you can trust God to test you and discipline you. For He tests you to produce steadfastness and He disciplines you as one He loves, as a father disciplines a son. But more than that, you can trust God to give you life after death, for so He has promised in His Son, Jesus. For that is the hope of which our faith is the assurance of (Hebrews 11:1).

But you can't trust God to let you out of every situation unscathed, for He baptizes you with fire. Nowhere is it promised that you will avoid hardship and tribulation. In fact, just the opposite is promised. You will face hardship and tribulation. Count it all joy. If you believe that God will deliver you out of every trouble, then you best believe that He does so in the resurrection of the dead. For in this life, there are many troubles that assail the Christian.

The apostles really were martyred and exiled. The church Fathers really were burned at the stake and drawn and quartered. Missionaries really do die at the hands of tribal warlords. They really are imprisoned and beaten. How do they do it? How do they remain faithful?

Because they have such great faith? Yes. Not because they are super-Christians or are the super-pious, but because their faith is rooted in Jesus' death and resurrection and not in their own worth or abilities.

So also, husbands really do hate their wives. Children really do dishonor their parents. Spouses really do die. Friends and family really do leave the Church and laugh at your perceived weakness in coming week after week. We do not endure such trials by reasoning our way out of them or by trying to convince ourselves that it'll all be okay. No. We ask God for wisdom.

And God gives His wisdom generously. He generously pours out His Holy Spirit on you through Jesus Christ, so that, having been justified by His grace, you become an heir of the hope of eternal life. That is the wisdom of God. That through death comes life. Or do you not know that you who are baptized were baptized in the death of Christ? And if you are so united with Him in a death like His, then will you also be raised with Him in a resurrection like His (Romans 6:3-5).

When trials and tribulations come, and they are bound to come, remain steadfast by clinging to God's promises in Christ. He has not promised an easy life. But He has promised eternal life. Let this bear weight when the going gets tough.

We live under the cross. That means that we live a life of pain and sorrow. Yet God is in the pain, He is in the trials. He did not reveal Himself in great feats of majesty, but in a lowly manger in Bethlehem. He did not display His power by defeating kings and ruling countries, but by withstanding temptation. He did not gain victory over sin and death by out-muscling Satan, but by dying Himself. God's power is made perfect in weakness.

In the weakness of water, there is the power of God unto salvation. In the weakness of preaching, there is the power of God unto salvation. In the weakness of bread and wine, there is the power of God unto salvation. In the weakness of confessing sins, there is the power of God unto salvation.

Trials are sent, not to discourage you, but to draw you closer to God in Christ. When we doubt whether or not God is in control and whether or not He really means for things to be going the way they are going, then we are in danger of doubting the resurrection. When we doubt, we try and exert our own control and we end up faithless and without hope.

But at the beginning of trials and in the midst of trials, we should ask God for His wisdom and He will strengthen our faith. Not by removing the trial, but by comforting you in the midst of the trial with His promise of life in Christ.

Remain in Christ, hear His Word and seek Him where He may be found, and there will be no trial that will not strengthen your faith and leave you better for having endured it. And this is especially true of the final trial. For the last trial is death itself.

The final trial is faith in the face of death. But there also, do not lean on your own understanding, for that will leave you in doubt and fear, susceptible to being tossed around by the wind of false comfort and false hope. Rather ask God for wisdom and He will grant it abundantly. Not wisdom to cope or deal with it, not wisdom to answer the question of why, for you know why, but wisdom to accept God's purposes. Whatever happens so happens for the good of those who trust in God.

That means that everything that happens is meant to strengthen your faith, not cause you to doubt. Doubt is harmful and wicked, and leads to the path of destruction. Faith is good and profitable, securing salvation and eternal life. Therefore, when you face trials of various kinds, count it all joy, for the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And on the Last Day, God will raise you from the dead, perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠