

Preparing for the Trials of the New Year

James 1:1-18

INTRO

No one knows what a year will bring. I'm sure as you look back on 2013, or perhaps on other more significant years in your life. You could not have imagined what that year would have brought you. I hope you can remember the good things that 2013 brought you. But for some of us it just multiplied our griefs and added to our sorrows.

A new year is a time to look forward to new possibilities, new opportunities. We can hope for positive things and great blessings in 2014. Some may be wondering if we'll make it through 2014 and beyond or not. Maybe Christ will come in 2014. Wouldn't that be good though? What can we look forward to in 2014?

Well we can't be certain. We know that some say there are only 2 certain things in life: death & taxes. Death isn't as certain for us believers as taxes!! But there is something I'm sure will meet all of us in 2014. It's something we may not want to think about, but thinking about it will help us be ready when it befalls us.

I can't promise you much in 2014, but I can promise you that trials will come upon you in 2014: new trials, unexpected trials. Hopefully not trials that are too heavy to bear – but for some of you it may seem that way when they come.

This may seem like a depressing way to close out 2013 and prepare for the new year. But I trust when you turn with me to James 1 that we will find some joyful and hopeful truths here from considering life's trials. James started his epistle with this news. And his book is

one of the most treasured books in the Bible. So perhaps I'm not too crazy to pick this topic to speak on as we look forward to 2014.

PRAY, READ: James 1:1-18

Title: Preparing for the Trials of the New Year.

I. The Trials of Life (vs. 1-4)

A. INEVITABLE “when”

1. All of life is a trial:

- Each stage of life has its own trials
- Always looking for when things will be easier
- Hardships are trials, but so are times of prosperity

2. Scripture promises trials for Christians

1 Pet. 4:12 “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.”

2 Tim. 3:12 “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

Acts 14:22 “Strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”

1 Thess. 3:3 “That no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this.”

John 16:33 “...In the world you will have tribulation....”

Luke 21:16b-17 “Some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name's sake.”

B. VARIABLE “various kinds”

1. Trials come in all shapes and sizes:

- We're not talking about overt persecution for the faith only here.
- Hebrews 12:4 – “struggle against sin”

2. Trials in James:

- Poverty or Riches (we'll see this in 1:9-11)
- Knowledge
 - i. Knowing of a need means we must meet it (2:15-17)
 - ii. Knowing enough to teach, means more strict judgment (3:1)
 - iii. Knowing of a moral obligation, means we must meet it (4:17)
- Suffering for the faith (5:7-11)
- Taming the Tongue (3:1-9) *can do good & bad*
- Our energy and ambitions/plans tempt us (4:13-16)
- Illness of body or mind tries us (5:13-18)

C. REJOICEABLE "count it all joy"

1. A repeated pattern in Scripture.

1 Pet. 4:13-14 "But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."

Rom. 5:3-5 "More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

Matt. 5:11-12 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

2 Cor. 7:4b "In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy."

2. Should we be "Joyful" in Trial?

- Not a glib joy about the trial.
- Not happy-go-lucky.
- Not denying it (this isn't a mind game).
- Finding a way to see this as a joyous thing. (1 Pet. 1 – we still grieve, but noticing the fruit of trial we are happy)

D. VALUABLE (or productive)

TRIALS – Seen as a TEST – produces ENDURANCE (toughness) – leads to MATURITY – leads to PROVEN GENUINENESS OF FAITH – gives ASSURANCE & JOY

If you desire maturity, and assurance, then count trials as Joy.
REJOICE in trials.

II. Wisdom for Trials (vs. 5-8)

"Lack" ties vs. 5 to vs. 4 (thematically this continues the thought)

A. MAN

1. Natural reactions to trials:

- Guilt "if only".
- Confusion "Why is this happening? Is God punishing me? Does God love me?"
- Fear "What will become of me?"
- Anger "How can they do that to me?"
- Envy "Why aren't they suffering like I am?"
- Self-Pity "Won't somebody feel sorry for me?"
- Hopelessness & Despair "There's nothing I can do, I'm doomed. I'm trapped and will never get out."

B. GOD

1. Focus instead on our Great God.
 - The “Giving God”
 - Gives to all.
 - Generously gives.
 - Doesn’t begrudge us.

Amplified Version (1987) = “If any of you is deficient in wisdom, let him ask of the giving God Who gives to everyone liberally and ungrudgingly, without reproaching or faultfinding, and it will be given him.”

C. SIMPLE PRAYER

1. Simply ASK.
2. Ask in FAITH (or from a standpoint of faith)
 - Not how well you ask, but how genuine you are asking (sincere, faithful)
 - Perfect faith not required – faith is a gift (2:5), trials grow faith, cf. Mk. 9:25 “I believe, help my unbelief”
 - Constant “wavering”-lifestyle not momentary doubt

III. Gospel Hope (vs. 9-12)

A. Economics in light of Eternity (example of handling trials)

1. The Rich Poor – perspective on ultimate riches/standing in Christ.
2. The Poor Rich – mindful of their constant need of Christ (like everyone else), bend low at feet of cross
3. This Transient Life – life is fleeting
4. Based on the Gospel ultimately – only those born again (Jm. 1) and saved by faith ultimately are exalted in the last day (2:5 – “Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of

the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?” also “mercy triumphs over judgment” 2:13 & 1 Pet. 1:3-5 roots 6-8)

B. The Ultimate Test

1. All of life ultimately is a test – passing this test (endurance with faith) gives the crown of life.
2. RECAP of vs. 1-11 “blessed (i.e. happy)” “steadfast under trial”, “stood the test”,
3. Crown of life is not just an optional reward – it is LIFE – ETERNAL LIFE Rev. 2:10 similarly see 2 Tim. 4:8
4. LIFE is won by those who Endure but who also LOVE (ultimate Hope in the Gospel and God’s Spirit – Rom. 5:5) – trials produce endurance (in the godly), endurance produces maturity, (not just our efforts)

IV. God and Our Trials (vs. 13-18)

A. Note on context

1. “Test” and “Tempted” are from the same word
2. God does “tempt” people – Abraham, Israel, many OT examples, (Gen. 22:1, Ex. 16:4, Deut. 8:2, 16, Judg. 2:22, 3:1)
3. So what’s going on here? The key is to see how this fits the context of what goes before and after. Vs. 16a connects 13-15 & 16-18, and birth terminology does as well.

B. Two Responses to Trials

1. We’ve seen the first response already: *gifts*

--See Trials as TESTS – ENDURANCE – MATURITY – GENUINE FAITH – ASSURANCE & HOPE or an alternative to this:

2. 2nd response to trial: *traps*

--See Trials as TEMPTATIONS (God is out to get me. This is an impossible situation – a set-up to fail.) – which leads to SIN – bringing forth ultimately DEATH (as we shipwreck our faith)

3. **The biggest danger of the trial is not what it can do to us, but what it might do “By us”** – by our reaction to it (bitterness, hatred, envy, abandoning the faith).

--This starts subtly – “God must not love me. Maybe God doesn’t care about me. God must be punishing me. God isn’t trustworthy. How could this happen to me. This isn’t fair.”

--WAIT – James says. “DO NOT BE DECEIVED”. God doesn’t intend our failure through his tests – he gives them to us as GOOD GIFTS.

C. The Giving God (vs. 17-18)

1. God is GOOD (he gives good gifts).
2. God doesn’t change (hasn’t stopped loving you).
3. God IS in control. (he is “ABOVE”, and the Father of lights – controls the heavens)
4. God intends/wills our spiritual birth – he means the trials to produce endurance and faith in us. [this spiritual birth prevents doubt giving birth to ruin]
5. God gives trials as GOOD GIFTS for our ultimate joy.

CONCLUSION

I hope you can see with me that God intends good things for us this year. In the trials of life that will surely come, God means to grow our faith, to stretch us, to cause us to pray more, God wants to set us up so He can intervene and prove Himself faithful for us.

I hope that none of us will be broken by our trials, but rather we will determine to count them all joy. To rejoice in and through trials –

because we are setting our minds and hearts on the TRUE PRIZE that is in Christ Jesus.

Our praises should go to the Great Giver – the Giving God, who gives us every good gift and every act of giving – it all comes from Him. So look forward to some good gifts in 2014. Smile, this is normal. I know it is counter-cultural, and the world will think us crazy. But smile – our God is in control!

PRAY -----

END-----

BENEDICTION

1 Pet. 5:8-10 “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”