

You know I bring these messages on a regular basis and quite often I feel I am 'speaking to myself' (not that you don't hear me that is!) but usually what happens is:

God is dealing with me personally, perhaps some area in my own life, He is putting His finger on, where I may need to change (or acknowledge I need to change at least), or it might be a word of scripture, or some spiritual truth that becomes real for me at a particular moment in my own journey of faith.

And then the whole process of putting a sermon together gives me the opportunity to go deeper, to study, to research so that I can clarify and better understand what God is saying to me and then it is really helpful, to write my thoughts down and then be able to verbalise all this in a message or sermon I bring to you.

And I know that through this process I benefit so much personally – but I do hope you may gain something as well, and it was just the case a few weeks ago, (but also particularly now when we go into another lockdown) that this verse, from the book of James spoke right into my own personal circumstances, my prayer is it will for you as well in your circumstances.

And as we come nearer to the end of 2020 - many I think will be saying 'good riddance' what a dreadful year! So much heartache and pain & frustration we have all experienced, but we have to remember as Christians that God is at work – working out His purposes and it is often in a time of adversity that we really experience His loving kindness.

So I hope this little verse will bless & encourage you and make you think, and it's from:

James 1:2-4 "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything".

I will read the first part of that verse again just in case your left speechless!

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds” it is one of those verses you get in the Bible, when you come across them they are like an impossible command - they seem almost unworkable, unattainable or even ridiculous to the natural human mind.

And here are others throughout the scriptures like: “be anxious for nothing” or “give thanks in all circumstances” “boast in your weakness” that go completely against the grain of ‘logical thinking’! Or Common sense and seem completely alien to our fallen human nature.

And these are statements, which I would add; will only make any sense, for someone who holds a faith in God.

Because If you said them to someone without a faith in God, someone who doesn’t believe In an afterlife, or eternity, or that our universe is in the control of a loving and wise God they would say you are crazy, you have lost the plot, and that you don’t live in the real world!!

So let’s look at this verse: **Firstly** it says “consider it pure Joy” **CONSIDER IT**

Have you noticed to ‘consider something’ is not an emotion – are you aware as well the first thing that kicks in when something goes wrong is the emotions, our feelings - how could this happen? You feel it right there in your gut, the seat of your emotions - but what the apostle is saying here in our verse is not about our feelings:

He’s saying ‘take the long view, don’t react, take a deep breath, step back “consider it” mull it over with faith in mind - it’s a “mind thing” work it out ‘up here’(The head) and see the bigger picture, but a picture with faith & God in the frame.

And what is the bigger picture? What is it that you consider? – You consider that ‘God is in charge’ ‘He is sovereign’ ‘all knowing’ That ‘His ways are above our ways’ that we can trust Him, that ‘He is using these things to ‘change us, to refine us, to sift us.’

That ‘nothing happens to us by chance’ that a ‘loving Father, allows or even sends difficulties, trials, persecutions for our good’, because the thing that is in us, our faith that is “is more precious than pure gold”.

You’re considering that ‘there is something beyond this life that He is preparing us for’ – eternal life where these things that are happening to us now will make sense, that they will benefit us, they will be all worthwhile. These are the things’ we consider’. Ponder over, reflect upon.

Then it goes onto to say Consider it “Pure joy” - **pure Joy!**

Not just bear it, not just put up with it, not even endure it, no, it goes far beyond that it says “think of it as pure joy!” Doesn’t that seem like it’s ‘going a bit too far’! Too extreme, fanatical even?

It’s the same when Paul says elsewhere in the book of Corinthians “I boast in my weakness” **boast** about my weakness! Surely not!! Endure it maybe that sounds more realistic, but boast - this is another level folks! (And I can’t say I am there yet!) No, it’s more than that it’s revolutionary, but Christianity is meant to be revolutionary it turns our thinking upside down.

And the only way you can get there is: by a work of the Holy Spirit and believing the words of Isaiah 55 verses 8-9

“For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts,
nor *are* your ways My ways,” says the LORD.

“For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are My ways higher than your ways,
and My thoughts than your thoughts”

Let’s go on with our verse it says “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds – ‘Whenever you face trials of many kinds’

Or elsewhere it says “In all kinds of trials”. The word used here in the original Greek text is – ‘**manifold trials**’ and the term means – ‘**many coloured**’ like a **spectrum - many coloured**.

These trials we are talking about here come in many diverse and different ways in ‘many colours’ it is a comprehensive term and it means anything in life that tends

to trouble you - in your heart, in your mind, anything that casts you down. It can include all of these: - but it's not exhaustive:-

- World events (including the corona virus)
- Family situations
- Depression/ frustrations
- Anxieties
- A sickness
- Emotional distress
- Rejection
- Financial troubles

The list could go on: - anything that casts you down - Manifold 'many coloured trials '

But what its saying is: you can have joy in the midst of them **because you know**
"Because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance"

"You know" how many of us really 'know' this? – The 'knowing' here is intimate thing it's the same word used here in a marriage relationship between a man and his wife.

This knowing we are talking about here it's not just a head knowledge it far deeper than that and the only way you 'know someone' is by spending time with them, and the only way we know these trials are working for good is by experiencing them! – The more you experience them in frequency, the better you know them, you even become intimate with them.

Like to say a couple of things at this point, this process of what's happening here (how we react to trials that is) doesn't just happen automatically? I think I said before it's not like some thermostat that kicks in when the going gets tough - no we play a part.

Our verse says "the testing of your faith" – and in any test there are those that pass and those that fail so when these trials come along we can react in a right way or wrong way. There is always the potential that 'we just don't not get it' we miss the point!

Heb 12:5 says this

“And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you and later on it says “don't let a bitter root grow up”

There are 3 ways here where we wrongly react to trials; - they are warnings from scripture - be very aware when you're going through difficulties you don't react in this way:

- 1) Make light of it we just cast it off –ignore it just carry on - it has no effect on us.
- 2) We can lose heart and get discouraged by it – give up almost - again it has no effect on us
- 3) Or we can let a bitter root grow up – which can happen often we get bitter or angry with the person or the circumstance that is troubling us.

If we do any of these 3 things we will miss the lesson God is intending we will miss the opportunity to change to be more like Jesus.

So what should happen? How do we come through the ‘testing of our faith?’

It starts when we move into a time of trial a time of testing – God allows it, perhaps He allows the devil to sift us, like Peter, or in other instances He can discipline us as His children for our good (not popular teaching)

What happens to us – firstly, we feel we are being knocked for six! what's happening we say? I thought I was doing ok and this happens, our emotions are all over the place.

But then we start to **‘think**, we start to ‘consider’, our mind, our faith comes into action - it kicks in, We know our Bible's and we know ‘*God works everything for good with those who love him*’ (Rom 8:28) we start to deduce, to reason, to think of these great truths in the scriptures.

We know ‘God is our Father and we are in His loving hands’ – We know Gods character, His nature, that He will never fail us, we know that ‘not a single hair falls from our head without him knowing it’ We know we are ‘more precious to

Him than gold refined in the fire.’ We get our mind working right; we talk to ourselves and admonish ourselves and we use read & meditate on the scriptures to get our thinking in line with God’s word

So we go on, we don’t give up, even though we don’t feel like it, trusting in Him to bring about our salvation, our deliverance.

And what does that produce in us: **perseverance?** ‘The testing of your faith produces perseverance’ it says and next to faith & love, Perseverance is such a precious and valuable thing.

Perseverance says ‘it doesn’t matter what the circumstance, I’m going on, It says “If we endure, we will also reign with Him”; it says like Job *‘Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him.’*

It says “I’m going on, because I know I will see Him face to face one day and He will be pleased with me”.

It also says in our verse “let perseverance finish its work” I find that fascinating it’s like this perseverance within us is driving us on, like some workhorse, it’s almost got a will of its own, a personality of its own, it’s almost as if it’s saying “don’t get in my way”, so Let it go on, for it has a job to do and it must finish it, good old godly perseverance must reach its goal.

And at the end of this work of perseverance when it’s completed, when you’re on your death bed - it enables you to say with the apostle Paul:

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have kept the faith. ⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day” - your now mature and complete not lacking anything”, no more of this troubled life, you have served your purpose, your job is done, and now you are ready to be with Jesus ‘to be changed in an instance, in the twinkling of an eye’.

How do we get there? it’s all Him, it’s all grace, it’s the blood shed on the cross, it’s Him taking our burden – it’s because of that great exchange: our sin/ His

righteousness, His death / our life, This body of decay exchanged to a glorious new one and all made possible by Jesus.

It's all this which enables us to say, in the here and now:-

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything”. AMEN