

A SERIES OF DEVOTIONS BASED UPON THE LETTER OF JAMES

TRIALS PRODUCE TOTAL JOY

James 1:2-4 "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

James presents a paradox in today's meditational thought. A dictionary defines a paradox as "a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that when investigated or explained may prove to be well founded or true." (Thorndike-Barnhardt) The paradox is tribulations produce total joy.

A broken hip does not normally produce rejoicing. Poverty does not normally cause one to be elated. Loss of a job brings grieving, not celebration. There are at least thirteen different Bible passages that speak of joy in the midst of suffering. Here in verses 2-4 is found one of these references, "Count it all joy. ... when you meet trials of various kinds?"

"The foundation of joy in the midst of trials results from a believer's connection to Christ and His suffering. Christ endured the suffering and shame of the cross because of the joy set before Him of winning salvation for all humanity." (Giese, Concordia Commentary on James) This is what the writer to the Hebrews said, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:1-2)

As I have written before, life is not a sprint race. It is a marathon. Every marathon has points to test the runners. Often the worst of these is nick-named "Heart Break Hill" or something similar. James says that these tests produce "steadfastness." The Greek word used here can also mean "patience." I would suggest that the picture here is one of confident faith and trust in God no matter what is happening in your immediate life.

James concludes these three verses with a result clause, “. . . that you lack nothing.” And, indeed you lack nothing when daily you live confident in Jesus promise of His continuous presence in your life (Matthew 28:20) and God’s assurance that no earthly tribulation can separate you from the eternal victory Jesus has earned for you. (Romans 8:31-37)

Prayer: Lord Jesus, send Your Spirit into my heart daily to renew me with a confident faith in the victory you have won for me. In Your holy name. Amen.

Jesus lives! The vict’ry’s won! Death no longer can appall me;
Jesus lives! Death’s reign is done! From the grave will Christ recall me.
Brighter scenes will then commence; This shall be my confidence.

Jesus lives! To Him the throne High above all things is given.
I shall go where He is gone, Live and reign with Him in heaven.
God is faithful; doubtings, hence! This shall be my confidence.

Jesus lives! For me He died, Hence will I, to Jesus living,
Pure in heart and act abide, Praise to Him and glory giving.
All I need God will dispense; This shall be my confidence.

Jesus lives! I know full well Nothing me from Him shall sever.
Neither death nor pow’rs of hell Part me now from Christ forever.
God will be my sure defense; This shall be my confidence.

Jesus lives! And now is death But the gate of life immortal;
This shall calm my trembling breath When I pass its gloomy portal.
Faith shall cry, as fails each sense: Jesus is my confidence.
(LSB 490)