

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ⁶But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

¹²Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. (NIV 84)

Theme: Wisdom to Rejoice in Suffering

What are some occasions in your life that cause you to celebrate—the times where you find joy and happiness? Your birthday probably stands out. Perhaps a graduation party, retirement party, or anniversary. There are all sorts of occasion that lead to joy. There are many times in our lives that we have happiness. But what about suffering? Do you rejoice when you go through some sort of pain or trial? Sadly, we often don't.

So today we ask for wisdom from God—wisdom to rejoice no matter what the situation. Yes, wisdom to rejoice even in suffering.

The Jewish Christians James was writing to knew suffering well. They were persecuted because of their faith. They were spread throughout the Mediterranean world. They were thrown in jail. In less than 20 years many of them would be tortured and killed because of their faith. No one likes to suffer—and yet, we all do. We suffer through physical pain. We get sick. Diagnosed with cancer, get into a car accident, have a stroke, or diagnosed with heart problems. Physical pain is never fun. It often requires surgery and months of rehab.

We also face emotional pain. We often aren't physically harmed because of our faith. Instead we are mocked and ridiculed. The unbelieving world calls us ignorant, or gullible, or intolerant. They try

to get us to convince us to reject the Lord—to follow science. Or to go along with what they as a society has decided what is right or noble. Because of our faith we might lose our jobs, our relatives might disown us, our friends might not want to hang out with us much. Or it's some sort of other emotional pain. We have financial woes, family issues, a loved one get's sick or in an accident. The weight of this world and sin is heavy upon us.

And when this happens, we complain. After all, no one likes to suffer. It leads to much pain and strife. It keeps us up at night. We try to avoid pain at all costs. It is never a pleasant experience. When we suffer God often gets the blame. “Why is he making me go through such pain? Can't he take care of this? Doesn't he love me? Is he out to get me?” So you come to the conclusion that he doesn't love you. Or he doesn't have the power to take care of you. Doubt creeps into your mind. And there is always that worry that you'll have to suffer through this the rest of your life.

Our Old Adam may complain about suffering. But that's not what the New man does. The flesh complains and doubts. But the new spirit rejoices. You heard me right. The Christian rejoices whenever he suffers. It doesn't matter what that suffering is, how painful it may be, or how long it may last. He finds joy in suffering. And it's not as if he is a masochist. He doesn't like pain, he doesn't enjoy pain. But he does find joy in suffering. Because he knows that it's ultimately good for him. **Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete.** Going through trials leads you to persevere in your faith. And it is made stronger. Peter compares going through troubles and trials to refining precious metals in a fire. When you put precious metals, like gold or silver through a fire, it purifies and strengthens it. The impurities are removed and the end result is a more pure and stronger metal. Trials and troubles do the same thing with faith. The end result is a stronger faith. When you suffer you realize that this this isn't all that's important. You lose you grip and obsession with this world. And you cling to what is important. You look toward God and his Word. You

become more mature in your faith. Your faith becomes more complete. And so you see a benefit in suffering. You see it's good for you. Your flesh may doubt and complain. But your spirit rejoices.

But that is easier said than done. It's easy for me to stand up here and tell you to rejoice when you suffer. It's easy to tell others what they should do and how they should feel. But it's completely different when it's you who are suffering. It's hard to rejoice when you are in pain, when troubles come, when death strikes. You can talk all you want. But when the rubber hits the road, how will you react? It takes a lot of wisdom to see past the present. If we suffer now, we want it over—now. We don't like to wait; we want it taken care of instantly. When you suffer it's hard to look past your pain to see the future benefit. It takes patience. It takes faith. It takes a realization of what is truly important.

At times we might have that faith. At times we might trust in God to take care of us and to make everything turn out to our benefit. But at other times we may doubt. We may complain. Our faith often wavers. Like the waves of the sea. At times we are riding high, and at other times we are low. We are easily distracted by the wind of world. This or that happens and our mind is blown all over the place. At times we can be like Peter who doubted when he saw the wave. Or we are like the Israelites who doubted and complained about God when Egyptian army was coming toward them.

So what do we do? We pray to God about it. **If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.** When we suffer we pray to the Lord. For we know that he alone can help us. We know that he can strengthen our faith. That he can remove our doubt and fears and unbelief. So we pray along with the Father whose son was possessed by a demon in Mark 9, **I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!**

And as James said, this wisdom will be given to us. God will answer our prayers when we ask for wisdom—Spiritual wisdom, that is, a strong faith. And how does he do that? Not just by any means. But through the means of grace. The gospel in Word and Sacraments. When you suffer you turn away from the things of this world. And you turn to God. You turn to his Word. You see what he has done for

you. You are reminded of his promises. And the Holy Spirit will work through that gospel. And he will strengthen your faith. So when you suffer you can rejoice. Because as you turn to the Word in your time of need, God is strengthening your faith.

No matter what situation you are in, God is always in control. He always knows what he is doing—he always has a plan. He was in control even when Jesus was hanging on the cross. It was part of his plan. It was so that Jesus could nail our sins to himself. So that he could suffer through the eternal condemnation that we deserve. And three days later, rise from the dead so that we may live with him in heaven forever.

And if did that for us, his enemies, what else wouldn't he do? You see, if you were willing to give a friend a thousand dollars to help him out in a time of need, you would be willing to give him a drink if he were visiting you in your home. The same stands for God. As Paul points out in Romans 8, **He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?** God gave us the ultimate gift in the gift of his one and only Son. The Son gave up his life for us. If God did this for us, what wouldn't he give us? If Christ was willing to give up his life to save us, why wouldn't he strengthen our faith so that we can receive the salvation he won for us—especially when we ask for it!

How foolish we are to doubt. How foolish we are to question God. Or to complain about him. Look at what he has done before us. Look at the salvation he won for us by giving up his life. Look at the way he has always taken care of his children. Remember the promises God gives you again and again.

How foolish we are. Why do we doubt? How pathetic we are when we complain. Why are we pushed around like waves in the wind? Why do we let the waves of the world knock us off of our firm foundation? So we pray to God for a stronger faith—for wisdom in seeing the benefit in everything. And we know that God will answer us.

And through this faith—given and strengthened through the gospel, we will receive the crown of life. **Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.** In the

end we'll be in heaven. In the end—no matter what happens in this life, no matter how much we have to suffer, we'll be with our Savior. Crowned with an eternal glory. A perfect life free from sin and its effects.

That is where our trials and troubles lead us. They lead us away from this life and toward God and his Word. When we suffer we turn to the gospel through which the Holy Spirit makes us **wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus**. Yes, you can rejoice in suffering. Because as you turn to the Word for comfort your faith is strengthened. And faith receives the crown of eternal life.

Birthdays, anniversaries, graduations—you have many reasons to have joy in his life, even when you suffer. How foolish we are to doubt the power, promises, and love of Christ. Pray for a stronger faith. Get into the Word so that Christ may positively answer your prayer. Be wise when you suffer. And rejoice. For your faith is being strengthened to lead you to crown of glory—eternal life forever with Christ. Amen.