

Facing Trials

The Book of James and 1 Peter both contain words of encouragement when facing trials. One reads of the persecution first century Christians faced as they encountered a hostile culture and government. Many who were present on the Day of Pentecost were from foreign countries. They were the “dispersion” referred to in the Gospel as Jesus spoke of a time when Christians would seek Him but not find Him. **“Then the Jews said among themselves, “Where does He intend to go that we shall not find Him? Does He intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?” (John 7:35).** The dispersion were the Jews whose ancestors did not return from the captivity. This created problem between them and their fellow Jewish brethren who grew up in the land of Canaan. They needed encouragement so Peter wrote this letter to them. **“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.” (1 Peter 1:1).**

Peter refers to their salvation which God had foreordained before the world began. **1 Peter 1:2 “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.”** There are some key concepts in this verse. “Elect” refers to those chosen by God. “The foreknowledge of God the Father” refers to God’s predetermine means of salvation for mankind. Before the world began, before the very first sin in the Garden of Eden, God planned for man’s salvation. From Genesis 3 through the rest of the Old Testament we read of man’s salvation coming from the seed of woman, Genesis 3.15. This seed would come through the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He would come from the tribe of Judah and a be a son of the great King David. We know this was speaking of Jesus as He was all of those things. It is through His blood we have redemption, Ephesians 1.7. When one obeys the Gospel of Christ, the blood of Jesus washes away sins, Acts 22.16. Such knowledge should encourage all of us

in times of trouble and trials.

Continuing in 1 Peter 1, we read of our hope in the resurrection of Jesus, the “living hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1.3). Without the resurrection of Jesus from the grave we have no hope, no basis for hope. As Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, some were denying the resurrection of Christ, **“But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.” (1 Corinthians 15:13-14)**. As Christians our hope of salvation is grounded upon the resurrection of Jesus.

Next Peter mentions the reward of the Christian, **“the inheritance that does not fade away reserved in heaven,” (1 Peter 1.4)**. In times of trials we need to remember what it is all about. There is a place called heaven, the abode of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. There will also be the heavenly host, and all those who have obeyed God. A place without trials, or tears, and sorrow. To know it is reserved and does not fade away should help to encourage us to endure the trials of this life for a short while.

Both James and Peter speak of the certainty of trials in this life. Everyone will face trials in one way or another. Hospitals such as St. Jude in Memphis have young children with various cancers and other serious health problems. One will also find older people in hospitals and nursing homes. Those in between the very young and the older also have their trials.

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials” (James 1.2a). **“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,” (1 Peter 1.6)**. Did you notice, James says to count it all joy while Peter says to greatly rejoice. Frankly, I don’t associate joy with trials. It seems to be an oxymoron much like good pain, jumbo shrimp, and having a good cry. But both writers connect joy with enduring trials. We cannot choose our trials but we do choose how we respond to them. To endure is not giving up, not giving in, and not blaming God for our circumstances. How does a young couple deal with their child who has a rare disease and will not make it to his or her 10th birthday? How

do I react when told I have a chronic or degenerative disorder? How does a Christian react when a love one dies in an accident? I will say it again, we do not choose our trials but we choose how we deal with them.

To give credit where credit is due, this morning's sermon is on this topic and some of the points I make comes from a book "A Life Lost and Found" by Wilson Adams and David Lamphear.

Let me end by saying, there is someone who can sympathize with your trials. **"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4.15).** Jesus knows what it means to be betrayed, hated, alone, and to suffer. We can look to Him for help and comfort as we face our trials.
– Dennis Tucker