

FRIDAY 19 August 2022 "Wisdom in Persecution? (James 1:2-8)

Hello, my "Walking with Jesus" friends.

May I ask an important life question for all of us? What are those things which test your faith most? What faith you ask? Well, how about your faith in your family or your faith in your government or your faith in your employer or your faith in the strength of your marriage or your faith in the health care provided when you go to the hospital? But here's the big one... **what tests your faith in GOD? And what has been the result in your life of those faith stretching times?**

Yesterday I left you sitting with James the apostle who is writing a letter to Jewish Christ followers all across the Roman Empire in very difficult times. *For many of them persecution for their faith in Jesus is an all too frequent experience.* It's everything from being mocked and laughed at to being terminated from their job because they won't cheat or having their marriage engagement broken by the parents because they refuse to allow their good Jewish daughter to marry a religious traitor, a Jew who believes Jesus is the Messiah.

Persecution of Jewish Christians in the first century was so widespread James the apostle is led by the Holy Spirit to write a letter starting with encouragement *not if but WHEN these Jesus followers are persecuted.* James wrote: **"Consider it pure JOY my brothers and sisters WHENEVER you face trials [persecution] 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."** (James 1:2-4) Wow that's powerful, isn't it? *What tests your spiritual FAITH my friends?* Do you sometimes wonder if you are lost in the crowd for God? Maybe He's too busy to be concerned about you. After all, there are 8 billion of us humans now, 8 billion! Do problems cause you to wonder if God is REALLY keeping an eye on you? And what does Psalm 139 tell us? **"O God, You know when I sit and when I rise; You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down...Before a word is on my tongue You know it completely oh God!"** (Ps. 139:2-4) So... *how does that challenge you and me to have FAITH that God is FULLY aware of EVERYTHING going on in each of our lives?*

Or maybe you worry about the future, wondering if God knows what your needs will be in your future? Do you remember Jesus said this: **"Your Father knows what you need even before you ask Him...therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life...can anyone by worrying add a single hour to your life?"** (Matt. 6:8,25,27)

James is right. *Our faith in God does not grow in affluence and ease and comfort, our faith in God grows when we need His help, His strength, His provision.* **Everywhere in the world, those with the strongest spiritual faith, the most durable relationship with God, are those who have been persecuted, found their faith stretched almost to the breaking point!**

I wonder if James was thinking about Jeremiah 17:7 when he wrote this part of his letter: ***"Blessed is the person who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in Him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."*** (Jer. 17:7,8)

Jeremiah was writing to his fellow Jews at a terrible time in history! Jerusalem had been destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar only a few years before in 586bc and the great Temple was burned to the ground! Thousands of Jeremiah's fellow Jews had been taken captive and dragged off to Babylon. Jeremiah was allowed to remain behind with the poorest of the poor, living in the shambles of Jerusalem, and yet he wrote God's message of hope to his people. *There is great power available to anyone as they TRUST in the LORD God, especially during very difficult times. Their strong FAITH will both bolster them and those around them.* I love that powerful picture of a strong tree with roots reaching down to a stream nourishing it even in times of drought. Is that a picture of you and me, my friends? That is what James was calling Jewish Christians in the terrible first century to live like... God watered trees in a drought!

James picked up his stylus again ready to write... ***"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."*** (James 1:5) James again put down his stylus and rose from his chair and started to pace, thinking back through the Scriptures that he knew so well. Perhaps he looked out his window toward the great Temple rising high in his city Jerusalem. Perhaps he whispered to himself *'Oh I'd give anything to have seen with my own eyes the great Temple King Solomon built. And oh, to have had the chance to stand in the corner of Solomon's throne room as he listened to very difficult issues from around his kingdom, and then watch King Solomon pronounce the greatest wisdom any human being has ever spoken!'*

Every good Jewish person knew King Solomon, as he was inheriting the throne from his father King David, had requested of God that he receive a great anointing of wisdom from God to effectively govern God's people Israel. (2 Kings 3:5-13) In response, *God did give Solomon more wisdom than any person who has ever lived.* James knew the Scripture well... 1 Kings 4:29 ***"God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon was wiser than anyone else... His fame spread to all the surrounding nations."***

Can you imagine how encouraging James' words were to Jewish Christians all over the Roman empire who were constantly being mocked as idiots for believing in the claim of Jesus' resurrection? Or told they were insane for believing that the death of one man, Jesus, could atone for the sins of people all over the world and even many years after He was crucified!? Or laughed at because they claimed they were certain of eternal life in heaven because of their faith in Jesus as their Savior? *These Jewish Christians, living in very precarious times in the first century, often needed wisdom, like the wisdom of Solomon, in knowing how to live God honoring lives in such persecution.*

James assured them with his words that they had the privilege of requesting wisdom from the very same God Solomon prayed to, expecting God their heavenly Father would respond, giving them the wisdom they needed, just as He gave King Solomon! *But more than that, they had a supernatural gift King Solomon did not have. These Jewish Jesus Christ followers had the Holy Spirit of God living within them and Jesus had called Him the Counselor who would guide them and teach them with God's Wisdom!* Remember, in the upper room Jesus had said: **"I will ask the Father and He will send you another Counselor to help you and be with you forever - the Spirit of Truth... The Counselor, whom My Father will send you in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."** (John 14:16,26) Oh my! The Holy Spirit of God, living within the followers of Jesus, acting as a full time Counselor, giving to us the wisdom of God whenever we need it and request it!

But that's why James added one more statement: **"But when you ask of God, you must believe and not doubt because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do."**

(James 1: 6-8) These Jewish Christians understood that **EVERYTHING in their relationship with Jesus depended on FAITH.** Faith that Jesus was who He said He was, God the Son. Faith that God's willingness to forgive their sin and adopt them as His children because of Jesus' atonement death was really true! Faith that the Holy Spirit really would cleanse them of their sin, regenerate a new spiritual nature in them, and live within them to guide them. Oh, my such great faith was needed for every step as a Jesus Follower! And that's why their faith needed to be strong, immovable, unshakeable, and that required an **'undivided'** heart focused on Jesus and fully trusting God's promises!

I wonder if when James wrote the words **'double-minded and unstable'** the Holy Spirit brought David's Psalm 86 to his mind: **"Teach me Your way O LORD and I will walk in Your truth. Give me an Undivided heart that I may fear Your name!"** (Psalm 86:11) Once again James laid down his stylus...oh my such wonderful, powerful God truths he had written. If we were really in that room with him right now, what do you think he'd say to you and me my friends? I think he'd say, *'So Pastor Doug... how strong is YOUR faith? How often do YOU ask God for wisdom? How powerful is the guiding work of the Holy Spirit in Your life? And what about your heart... undivided, unshakeable?'*

And what are your answers and mine? And here's a song to help us reflect on the power of these great truths, my friends...

Today's Scripture is James 1:2-8.