

Genuine Christian Faith: A Study of the Book of James
Message 1 – Genuine Faith Matures Through Testing, James 1:1-11
Pastor Roger Ridley, Gretna Baptist Church, April 27, 2008

I was watching a program on television recently that surprised me. It was about the paper currency we use and how difficult it has become to stay ahead of counterfeiters. I was surprised to hear that the currency you and I sometimes have in our pockets could be counterfeit. My first thought was, "How would I ever know if my money was genuine or not?"

Have you ever wondered that about your Christian faith? Have you ever questioned whether it was genuine or not?

Because we have become such an experience oriented society, it does not surprise me that Christians do often wonder about this. Of course that's not such a bad thing! The Apostle Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 13:5 to examine ourselves and make sure we are in the faith.

But what do we examine, what do we look for to know if our Christian faith is genuine or not? Through the years I have discovered that adult Christians don't always know. One of the books in the Bible that deals with this subject, in a very practical way, is the book of James.

This book was written by the half-brother of Jesus, a leader in the Jerusalem Church, to Christians who had

been scattered to various parts of the world due to persecution. Facing the challenges they did, their faith was severely tested, causing them to wonder whether their Christian faith was genuine or not. The letter of James was sent out to reach as many of them as possible, in as many circumstances as possible to help them understand the evidences of genuine faith in their lives as Christians.

Because it was written for that purpose, it is intended to accomplish the same thing for us today; provide a list of evidences by which we might affirm the genuineness of our Christian faith.

The first one brought to our attention by James is that Genuine Faith matures through Testing. Please open your Bibles with me to James chapter 1.

In James 1:1-11, we learn that an evidence of genuine faith is seen in our response to difficulty. Genuine Christian faith matures through testing as we rejoice in God, seek His wisdom, and trust in Him.

1. James begins with our ability to rejoice in God despite our circumstances.

Would you agree or disagree with this statement, "Life is 10 percent what happens to you and 90 percent how you respond to what happens to you"? (repeat)

I know, sometimes it seems the other way around!
Sometimes it seems we are hit with one thing after another. **But** it is amazing how one's response to difficulty can change its effect.

Let's look at verse 2 and see what James had to say about this...

Here, we learn three things about trials or difficulties:

- (1) They are certain to come. James says "**when**", not "if."
- (2) They can come suddenly; we seem to "**fall**" into them.
- (3) They can come in **several** ("divers,") forms.

It might be financial, it might be physical, it might be spiritual, it might be emotional, it might be social, or all at the same time! But it is going to happen, it is going to happen to each of us, and it is going to happen in more than one way!

The most challenging thing James tells us though is that we are to face such difficulties with joy.

How is that even possible?

I have always answered that with Romans 8:31...

But James offers a different answer, look at verses 3-4...

Writing to Christians who had fled persecution, James urged them to count it all joy because God would use their difficulties *to further mature* their Christian faith.

I like what the Life Application Bible Commentary says, "We can't really know the depth of our character until we see how we react under pressure."

It is easy to be kind to others when everything is going well, but can we still be kind when others are treating us unfairly? God wants to make us mature and complete, not to keep us from all pain.

James says when our faith is tested, patience is produced. The word *patience* used by him means, to hold up under pressure. When things get tough, when we are under the pressure of difficulties, that's when we most need patience, but, according to James, that's also when it gets developed.

Right there is where the genuineness of our faith begins to shine through. Instead of crushing us, difficulties strengthen us, so that we grow in the Christian faith rather than depart from the Christian faith.

If you've been tested to the core of your being but you continue to trust the Lord, perhaps clinging to Him even

tighter than ever, that's fairly strong evidence that your faith is genuine.

I know personally, every difficulty I have faced as a Christian has brought me closer to, rather than further from the Lord. That's what should happen if our faith is real.

11. Next, James turns our attention to the availability of God's wisdom. Look at verses 5-8...

To respond well to difficulty, what will we most likely need? Wisdom!

By wisdom, James is talking not just about knowledge, but also the ability to make wise decisions in difficult circumstances.

How do we get this wisdom? Simply, we ask God for it!

We find ourselves in a situation bigger than we are, and we don't know what to do. Well, before crumbling beneath its weight, we ask God for wisdom.

We get the worst news of our life and we don't know what to do next, well the next thing to do is to ask God for wisdom.

And I like what I read here. Whenever we do that we can expect two things:

1st, God will give us all the wisdom we need!

2nd, He will never scold us for asking.

Both are what we should expect in a loving, healthy relationship with God.

The thing we must make sure of though is when we ask, we ask in faith without wavering. Asking in faith without wavering; means not only believing in Him, but also believing in His loving care. It includes relying on Him and expecting that God will hear and answer when we pray.

Why is that important?

A person who wavers is not sure about God. Their not sure if He cares, their not sure if He hears, their not sure if He answers, and as a result, even if He does answer, their not sure if He had anything to do with it. And so they fail to give Him the glory, and they fail to allow His work to continue in their life.

Genuine faith seeks out God's wisdom and even in the worst of circumstances is encouraged and strengthened by it. Rather than instability, a person of genuine faith

finds stability in difficult times because of God's wisdom. They make better choices, they find their way through the tragedy, through the heartache, or through the difficulty so they come out stronger in faith, rather than weaker.

III. And then James wants us to understand that genuine faith manifests contentment in difficult times. Look at verses 9-11...

These verses illustrate contentment.

The Apostle Paul says something similar in Philippians 4:11-13...

Contentment, resting in God, despite our circumstances, is evidence of faith in Him.

James says the poor should be glad that riches mean nothing to the Lord; otherwise they would be considered unworthy. And he says the rich should be glad that money means nothing to Him, because money is easily lost. And while others may forsake them in such circumstances, God will not!

We find true wealth by developing our spiritual life, not by developing our financial assets. That may be important, but no where close to our spiritual life. God is

interested in what is lasting (our souls), not in what is temporary (our money and possessions).

When you and I truly believe that then our faith will not fluctuate with the Stock Market. Like James or the Apostle Paul, genuine faith will produce contentment because we know God doesn't change and we can trust Him in good times and bad.

In James 1:1-11, we learn that an evidence of genuine faith is seen in our response to difficulty. Genuine Christian faith matures through testing as we rejoice in God, seek His wisdom, and trust in Him.

How do we get that kind of faith? By simply receiving it!

John 1:11 says as many as receive Jesus Christ, to them He gives the right to become the children of God.

Ephesians 2:8 tells us faith is a gift. To enjoy a gift, we must receive it!

If you have never received Jesus Christ as Savior, do so today. Admit... Believe... Call

If for some reason you've lost the joy of genuine faith then pray like David in Psalm 51:12, "Restore to me the joy of my salvation, and hold me up by your Spirit!"