

THE VALUE OF TRIALS IN SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

James 1:1-4

INTRODUCTION:

There is the liar in every one of us. We may not outright lie to other people very often, but there is one person we are constantly lie to – ourselves! One of the great impediments to the reformation of our character in the likeness of Christ is our propensity towards self deceit. The Scriptures say it this way:

Jeremiah 17:9-10

⁹The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? ¹⁰"I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds."

The Apostle James refers to this same state of affairs in James 3:13-18:

James 3:13-18

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. ¹⁵This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

One of the points made by this passage is that what we attempt to keep hidden in our hearts will inevitably express itself in confusing, contradictory behavior and all kinds of negative actions and reactions.

But for those who desire for Christ to be formed in us, God uses trials to break through the self deceit so that we can see those things that yet need transformation. In this is the great value of trials in our spiritual transformation.

Turn with me to James 1

James 1:1

¹James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.

The author of the book of James is most probably the brother of our Lord Jesus who became a leader in the church of Jerusalem. As we see in his greeting, James was writing to Jewish Christians many if not most of whom had been expelled from their homes in Jerusalem as a result of a wave of persecution called the *Dispersion* or in other translations, the *Diaspora*.

For the recipients of James' letter, the issue of trials was not theoretical, but very practical. With the heart of a loving shepherd, James wrote this letter to encourage his Jewish brethren to continue to trust and obey God in the midst of their trials.

James 1:2-4

²Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

In this context, a trial is an event or experience that tests the quality or character of someone or something.

Do you remember, those of us who were in elementary school in the 1960's and 70's, the **Presidential Physical Fitness Tests** we had to take periodically? What were those for? To show how chubby and out of shape we little kids really were!

A **shakedown cruise** is a nautical term in which the performance of a ship is tested. Shakedown cruises are also used to familiarize the ship's crew with operation of the craft. The term can also refer in a generic sense to the process of testing out any new technology or systems.

A **stress test** is an event designed to expose possible coronary artery blockages among other diseases. Patients with coronary artery blockages may have minimal symptoms and an unremarkable or unchanged EKG while at rest. However, symptoms and signs of heart disease may become unmasked by exposing the heart to the stress of exercise. Let's first define the word "trial".

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Think of each trial we experience as a shakedown cruise for our character. Every trial we experience is a stress test of our heart.

The value of trials are that they have the potential of cutting through our self deceit and exposing ideas, attitudes and actions that are not yet conformed to Christ. Trials have the potential of bringing us face to face with our true condition. And this is of very great value in the process of spiritual transformation.

So my question to you this morning is "what have you learned about yourself through the Witch Creek Fires of 2007?" How have you grown and matured based on how you handled this experience in comparison to a previous crisis? As you think about your reactions and responses throughout this crisis, what attitudes or actions came out that revealed self-centered or body-centered thinking?

If we don't go through this process of self reflection and evaluation, we will lose much of the value of this experience.

God allows trials to occur in our lives in order to build us up and change us from the inside. Every trial is of great value to challenge us to grow in the areas that are not yet full formed in Christ and to encourage us that growth has occurred.

May we glean everything out of this crisis that God has for us!