

" VITAL SIGNS OF A LIVING FAITH"

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Lord's Day Evening

James 1:1-12

INTRODUCTION: What is it that motivates a Christian? What is it that turns a person from darkness to light and from the kingdom of Satan to the Kingdom of God? Is it not when our eyes are opened and we are given ears to hear and we believe on Jesus Christ? What is it that moves a saint of God? Habakkuk said in chapter 2 verse 4 that "the just shall live by his faith."

Paul repeats that battle cry in the clearest dissertation of salvation this world has every seen. He says in Romans 1: 17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

He says in again in Hebrews 10: 38 Now the just shall live by faith: but if *any man* draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

FAITH is the energizing principle of the Christian life.

What makes us as Christians different from other religions? They have a DEAD FAITH! It is a faith that is compartmentalized to some distant part of their person. It might affect them when diversity comes, or even around religious holidays. BUT WE HAVE A FAITH THAT ENERGIZES EVERY PART OF OUR BEING. We have a LIVING FAITH! A living faith cannot be compartmentalized. It screams from the depth of our soul that God is living and Jesus Christ is raised from the dead. It shakes our conscience and demands that we know the God who is alive in our own soul.

It is a faith that literally inhabits us in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ through His Holy Spirit. John states this plainly in his first epistle, chapter 5 and verse 10 "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself." We have the energizing Person of faith within in us!!

An energized faith can overcome all obstacles and literally turns the world upside down! John say that "whosoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, *even* our faith."

My theme for this morning is that FAITH is the energizing principle of the Christian life! This energizing faith holds many, many qualities, but this morning we are going to look at FOUR from the first chapter of the book of James.

Please turn your Bibles to James chapter 1. Our text will come from verses 1 through 12. While you are turning there, I would like to share with you the story of a man who knew the principle of energizing faith.

The most important figure of the Reformation was a monk by the name of Martin Luther. He was born in 1483, and died at the age of 63 in the year 1546. Luther was a man full of self-doubt, guilt, and worry. In his early 20s, Martin Luther was nearly struck by lightning while crossing an open field during a storm, which led to his vow to become a monk. As a young monk, the corruption of the church, the debauchery

of priests, and the power of the Pope disturbed him, disgusted him, and depressed him. He did everything possible to appease his anguished soul: from climbing the 28 stairs of the famous Scala Sancta to going to regular confession, but for all the vigils and fasts and penances, he still felt empty, accursed, and worse.

Why did he not experience the assurance of salvation? Why did he still feel so rotten in spite of all efforts to please God? Why was his soul at war and peace so illusive? The dramatic turning-point of Luther's life occurred when he was sitting alone in his study at Wittenberg. His eyes fell on a passage from the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans. It says: "the just shall live by his faith." He couldn't believe his eyes, he couldn't contain himself, or keep to himself the simplicity of God's ageless path of salvation: faith in God. That discovery changed the course of the church, the course of Western civilization, and the course of history. So on October 31, 1517 Luther nailed his famous Ninety-five Theses onto the door of the castle church at Wittenberg, 60 miles from Berlin that resulted in his excommunication from the church, the start of the Reformation.

What was it that changed the course of history? It was not a new doctrine! It was the preaching of the faith alone in Christ alone. It was the truth that faith is ALIVE! It is energized—it is LIVING!

Let us read James 1:1-12 James mention of "faith" in his opening sentence (vv.2-3) makes it clear that, for James, faith is central to the Christian life and is its true energizing principle. For James, there can be no vital Christianity apart from a living faith. James is concerned that faith is more than mere profession.

The first VITAL SIGN OF AN ENGERGIZED FAITH IS PURITY.

I. A LIVING FAITH IS PURIFIED. Unfortunately as believers, our faith is muddied with the gleaming distractions of the world. God must put our faith through the furnace in order to purge the dross.

PsalM 66:10 For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried.

PsalM 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if *there be any* wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

God throughout the Scriptures has tested the faith of His children. There is no child of God worth his salt that has not been through adversity. In James 1 God demonstrates at least two ways he purifies our faith. The first is through Location.

A. Through LOCATION. GOD WILL PURIFY YOUR FAITH RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE! 1 ¶ James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

CONTEXT: He has you right where you are for a purpose. Here in our text our epistle is addressed to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." God had scattered the believers in the Jewish church from Egypt, throughout the Roman empire, and all the way across to what is now Eastern Turkey for a testimony to the nations. These twelve tribes were not sent out of their own will, but were thrust out

in ancient times by the Babylonians, the Greeks, and even in their day, believing Jews were thrust out by the councils of the Sanhedrin because of their faith in Christ.

EXPLANATION: But let us get into the mind of these believing Jews. Here was the pastor of the church of Jerusalem. Messiah had come, he had born their sorrows and carried their griefs. The Lord laid on Jesus Christ the iniquity of us all. They were awaiting His second coming. Did they want to be scattered throughout the Roman Empire? No! They must have wondered why God had them in their specific locality, and not with the people of God in Jerusalem!

APPLICATION: Maybe your faith is being stretched, and you are struggling with the location you are in. Maybe you are in a job that is difficult. Maybe you have lost your job recently. Maybe you have come from a location where you were content, and God has moved you here, and you wonder what he is doing.

Isaiah 55: 8 – 9 For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Eph. 1:11-12 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

B. Through TRIBULATION. 2 ¶ My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; 3 Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

When James speaks of purification of faith through tribulation, he is not talking about minor little irritations of our faith, but rather larger adverse experiences that cannot be avoided. God would NEVER say "Count it all joy when ye fall into the manifold temptations of sin!" But we will fall into trials and testings of our faith. The Christian life is not insulated from hardship. In fact, Christians suffer adversity as much or more than unbelievers. Look at the wording of our text.

1. Trials are unavoidable. "When" ye fall into divers temptations. In Luke 10:30 Jesus used this word of the man who went from Jerusalem to Jericho and "fell among" thieves. This word pictures the man being surrounded by the thieves on all sides, with no way of escape, and thus unavoidably "falling" victim to their assaults.
2. Trials are unpredictable. When ye "fall into" divers temptations. Trials are sure to come! Not if, but whenever they come. Expect them.
3. Trials are incomparable. The word "divers" is comes from a word that means "many colors." Look, God wants to energize your faith, no matter what color the trial he allows. God allows trials that are tailored just for you. God wants to energize your faith.

How about you, is your heart of faith beating? Is God purifying your faith? Maybe instead of allowing God to purify your faith, you have turned bitter. Whether this is

the case with you or not, you need to look at the second vital sign of ENERGIZING FAITH.

The second VITAL SIGN OF AN ENERGI ZED FAITH IS PURPOSE This vital sign of purpose has to do with being purposed, determined, and unwavering in our calling to do what God has called us to do.

- II. A LIVING FAITH IS PURPOSED. The reality of a living faith is demonstrated by its reaction under adversity.
 - A. Purposed to be CONTENT. "Count it all Joy." James was not asking for a stoic resignation when engulfed by trials, where there is a forced smile that seeks to ignore the pain. James is not asking for his readers to *enjoy* the trial. It does not mean we will be hilarious or laughing when it comes to dealing with trials in our life. What it does mean is that we should have a deep-seated confidence that God knows what He is doing and that results will be for His glory and our good. WE COUNT IT ALL JOY BECAUSE THESE TRIALS WILL ENERGI ZE OUR FAITH!!!
 - B. Purposed to CONTINUE. 3 Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

EXPLANATION: When we read the word "patience" we think of a passive resignation, but this word has great force. It presents the picture of being under a heavy load and resolutely staying there instead of trying to escape. It refers to the state of mind that bravely endures the trial and pressures encountered. It could be called "staying power."

YET THIS PATIENCE IS NOT FOUND AT ALL IN OUR FALLEN VOLITION! We must go to Jesus in utter dependence on Him to understand this energizing principle of faith!

Look at Paul's evaluation of this principle in II Corinthians 12:

- 7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.
- 8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.
- 9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
- 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

ILLUSTRATION: A parable is told of a farmer who owned an old mule. The mule fell into the farmer's well. The farmer heard the mule "braying", or whatever mules do when they fall into wells. After carefully assessing the situation, the farmer sympathized with the mule, but decided that neither the mule nor the well were worth the trouble of saving. Instead he called his neighbors together and told them what had happened...and enlisted them to help haul dirt to bury the old mule in the well and put him out of his misery. Initially, the old mule was hysterical! But as the farmer and his neighbors continued shoveling and the dirt hit his back...a thought struck the mule. It suddenly dawned on him that every time a shovel load of dirt

landed on his back.....HE SHOULD SHAKE IT OFF AND STEP UP! This he did blow after blow. "Shake it off and step up...shake it off and step up...shake it off and step up!" he repeated to encourage himself. No matter how painful the blows, or distressing the situation seemed the old mule fought the "panic" button and just kept right on SHAKING IT OFF AND STEPPING UP! It was not long before the old mule, battered and exhausted, STEPPED TRIUMPHANTLY OVER THE WALL OF THAT WELL. What seemed like it would bury him, actually blessed him.....all because of the manner in which he handled his adversity.

Adversity is a gigantic mountain upon which if we can step upon it, we can see the Almighty all the better. It is only as we endure trials that we are more removed from the vanity of this earth, and though perhaps battered and bruised by trials, we are so much closer to the God of Heaven!

TRANSITION: We are not only purposed to be CONTENT, and purposed to CONTINUE, we are purposed to be COMPLETE.

- C. Purposed to be COMPLETE. 4 But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

EXPLANATION: Don't draw away from the trial before God has worked in you. This seems like a hard saying, but it is really an easy saying. You see, when your faith is energized, your spiritual body will build itself. It is not something that you will see in each trial, but when you look back after time—you will find yourself PERFECT AND ENTIRE, WANTING NOTHING!

The third VITAL SIGN OF AN ENERGI ZED FAITH IS PRAYFULNESS

III. A LIVING FAITH IS PRAYERFUL

God can't resist those who humbly and honestly admit how desperately they need him! Do you realize that one of the major vital signs of faith is PRAYER?

Romans 10: 14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?

Your prayer life is the most VITAL part of energizing faith!!!

- A. Asking for WISDOM. 5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

We know that if we ask according to God's will he hears us, but how can any one of us know God's will? WE MUST ASK!

I think God answers our prayers in spite of what we ask for!! The fact of the matter is, you may not know what to ask for, you may not know God's will—that is when you need to pray the most!! It will energize your faith!!

- B. Asking in CONFIDENCE 6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. 7 For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. 8 A double minded man *is* unstable in all his ways.

EXPLANATION: " Faith" here is not merely a body of doctrinal truth to which we adhere, but rather the wholehearted attitude of a full and unquestioning

committal to and dependence upon God, as He has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. When we pray in faith, we must believe not only in God's ability to grant our requests, but also we must take our stand upon the character and person of God.

Cannot God do any thing?

Genesis 18:14 Is any thing too hard for the LORD?

Jeremiah 32:27 Behold, I *am* the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?

Jeremiah 32:17 Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, *and* there is nothing too hard for thee:

Matthew 7:7 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

C. Asking in HUMILITY 9 Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: 10 But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. 11 For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

EXPLANATION: As the poor brother forgets all his earthly poverty, so the rich brother forgets all his earthly riches. By faith in Christ the two are equals. Both have been given a new status in Christ, and that alone is their reason to glory!

APPLICATION: Whether you are poor, you have everything in the world to come, or whether you are rich, you know that worldly goods mean nothing. We should all call upon the same Father who will answer if we but ask!

A tent or a cottage, why should I care?
They're building a palace for me over there;
Tho' exiled from home, yet, still I may sing:
All glory to God, I'm a child of the King.
--Hattie E. Buell

The fourth and final VITAL SIGN OF AN ENERGIIZED FAITH IS PROSPERITY

IV. A LIVING FAITH IS PROSPEROUS.

A. Because of our CONFIRMATION 12 a Blessed *is* the man that endureth temptation:

Matthew 25:21 His lord said unto him, Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

APPLICATION: There is no greater reward than hearing the confirmation of the Lord! Well done! We shall each hear! We are blessed!

Psalms 1:3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

- B. Because of our CROWN 12 b for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

CONCLUSION: Yes the prosperity of our LIVING FAITH will conclude with a crown, and with this we will also conclude our message this morning. I have often wondered why we shall wear a crown. The scripture says we shall be kings and priests! But there is one who has conquered all.

When Isaiah saw the Lord in the sixth chapter of his book, he said that he saw the Lord, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. The long trains of the robes of the kings in ancient time would grow even longer each time another kingdom was conquered. Each conquered king's train was placed on the end of the conquering king.

Jesus' train FILLED all of heaven, for heaven is God's temple. Why is that? Because HE HAS CONQUERED ALL KINGDOMS AND ALL KINGS.

- Revelation 4: 10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

And so we shall cast our crowns before His throne and proclaim him King of Kings!

Appeal: Are you fretting or resting this evening because of your trials? Give them to the Lord. If you do not know Christ, then you are bearing a trial that no one is able to bear—the load of your trespasses and sins.

Closing Hymn: Let's turn to 448 in our hymnal for our closing hymn "Day by Day."