

January 6, 2008

“Trouble, An Opportunity For Joy”

Part 2: “Confusion: The Route To Faith”

James 1:2-4 (NLT)

Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything.

It was brought to my attention last week that it was not politically correct to use the title “stewardess” in my illustration. It would have been preferred if I used the title “Flight Attendant.” Ok, sorry, I will try to remember that. I also found out that the narrow hall way thing that takes you to the airplane is called a “Jet-way.” So, there you go, we have already learned two new things for 2008. It’s a New Year and a time for New Year Resolutions. (check out this video).

I think it’s good to make resolutions, to resolve or pledge to do some positive things in the 2008.

"Here we are in a month named after the Roman god Janus, an appropriate personification of the start of the new year. This particular Roman god had two faces so he could look ahead toward the future and back at the past at the same time. As we get rid of an old year and look forward to a new one, we all try to be a little like Janus. We know through experience what we did wrong and what we did right, and hope to do better this year. Some people make ambitious new year's resolutions; others just take a deep breath and hope for the best..." (excerpted from "What's in a Name?", *Complete Speaker's Almanac*, p. 22)

I will no longer waste my time reliving the past;
I will spend it worrying about the future!

Last week I made some predictions...In an article in *The Futurist* magazine, writer Laura Lee catalogues some of the worst predictions of all time:

"Inventions have long since reached their limit, and I see no hope for further developments." —Roman engineer Julius Sextus Frontinus, A.D. 100

"The abdomen, the chest, and the brain will forever be shut from the intrusion of the wise and humane surgeon." —John Eric Ericksen, surgeon to Queen Victoria, 1873

"Law will be simplified [over the next century]. Lawyers will have diminished, and their fees will have been vastly curtailed." —journalist Junius Henri Browne, 1893

"It doesn't matter what he does, he will never amount to anything." —Albert Einstein's teacher to Einstein's father, 1895

"It would appear we have reached the limits of what it is possible to achieve with computer technology." —computer scientist John von Neumann, 1949

"The Japanese don't make anything the people in the U.S. would want." —Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, 1954

"Nuclear powered vacuum cleaners will probably be a reality within 10 years." —Alex Lewyt, president of the Lewyt Vacuum Cleaner Company, quoted in the *New York Times*, June 10, 1955

"Before man reaches the moon, your mail will be delivered within hours from New York to Australia by guided missiles. We stand on the threshold of rocket mail." —Arthur Summerfield, U.S. Postmaster General under Eisenhower, 1959

"I predict the internet ... will go spectacularly supernova and in 1996 catastrophically collapse." —Bob Metcalfe, *InfoWorld*, 1995

Aren't you glad your faith does not rest on human words but on the sure Word of God?
—*The Futurist*, (September/October, 2000), p. 20-25

Last week I made some predictions. I predicted that you will experience confusion, disappointment, and conviction in 2008.

An honest look at life will produce confusion about what we see in our world and in ourselves. It will cause disappointment in others when they fail to respond the way we need in sensitive moments, that would mean so much. And it will provoke conviction over the ways we violate God's command to love.

So I predict confusion, disappointment, and conviction for you this year. But I want you to resolve, make a firm decision, or pledge, be firm in your mind that your purpose for 2008 is to be determined to not allow confusion, disappointment, and conviction have a negative effect, but, a positive one.

You see:

Confusion can be the route to a stronger faith.

Disappointment can be the route to steady hope.

Conviction can be the route to deeper, steadfast love

During the month of January Pastor Nick, and I will take each one, one at a time to explain how confusion, disappointment, conviction, can be a path to joy. Yes, joy, because they develop faith, hope, and love. James 1:2 (NLT) "Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy."

Today we will discuss confusion as a route to faith.

The Bible points consistently to the possibility of knowing God. A God who delights in our fellowship, a God who can touch us with His transforming power. Nothing matters more than faith in God. Nothing matters more than seeking a path that leads to knowing God. Knowing God changes us. Knowing God brings a deep inner peace and joy and knowing God gives us power to love others well. My fear is that you may agree with what I'm saying, but secretly wonder why you aren't experiencing what I'm saying.

(Rom 10:17 NKJV) "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Faith comes from hearing, reading, studying the Word of God, but something more is needed, it must be applied to our lives. James 1:21-25 (NIV), "Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you."

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does."

People do not deal honestly with their lives. We hear about the power of God's Word, we read God's Word, but may be seeing little evidence of it's life-changing impact. Yet, to give up the hope of meeting God would require us to deny Scripture. The Bible teaches that there really is a path to knowing God (even in the midst of troubling circumstances). The problem is not with what the Bible says, the problem is that we do not live honestly. We talk about the Bible and it's truth, but don't apply it. We debate the Bible, because we don't want to live it. We quote it and use clichés about it, but it doesn't impact our lives as it should. God is not trying to keep distant from you, but God deals with life as it is, not as you wish it would be. If you want to meet God you have to open your eyes to what is true, as unsettling and confusing as life might be.

There are circumstances in life, there are things about ourselves that completely confuse us. Let's be honest about that. An honest look at life will produce confusion about what we see in our world and in ourselves. Is there something going on in your life right now that confuses you? Why is this happening? Or why isn't that happening? Yet as our text tells us, God wants to use all things to promote a Christ like character in us. "Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything."

The circumstances of life do not have to lead to bitterness and discouragement, they can lead to faith. God is at work in those circumstances. God has a purpose, and He never requires from us something we cannot do. He wants to accomplish His good purposes in our life and His will is best. Our faith is often weak, but the kind of faith that develops to support us through times of overwhelming confusion must be tested to be strong.

The path to knowing God and maturing in that relationship requires a commitment to replace false certainty or denial with a level of confusion (face the reality & confusion – be honest about that), which in turn creates the opportunity to develop faith.

Don't let the confusing parts of life rob you of confidence in the truth of the Bible. Cling to what the Bible says is true: There is a God, He loves you, He sent His Son to die for your sins, He's promised to never leave or forsake you, and He has promised to come back to earth one day to make everything right. Remind yourself of these truths. In moments of soul-wrenching confusion, think of the importance of these unchanging truths. Ponder them until they become realities in your soul. Increase your faith by regularly reading the Scriptures. Confusion is not the time to give up on your faith in God, it is the time to cling to that faith with all you got. In that way confusion becomes the route to a stronger faith.

James says that whenever you face trouble it is your opportunity to choose joy. How can a person consider troubles a reason for joy? This is a remarkable command - we are to choose to be joyful in situations where joy would naturally be our last response. When certain circumstances make us angry and we want to blame the Lord, or give up our faith, James directs us to the healthier alternative - joy. When trials come, "don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends" (Phillips). Those who trust in God ought to exhibit a dramatically different, positive response to the difficult, and confusing events of life.

Our attitude is to be one of joy (genuine rejoicing). This is not joyful for trouble. Instead, it is joy during troubles. The joy is based on confidence in the outcome, God has a plan, God is at work, God loves me, I do not need to be angry, I don't need to be discouraged, I need to trust God. This confusion represents the possibility of growth. Most people are happy when they escape troubles. But James encourages us to use them as an opportunity for joy. James is not encouraging believers to pretend to be happy. Rejoicing goes beyond happiness. Happiness centers on earthly circumstances and how well things are going here. Joy is God-oriented rather than event-oriented because it centers on God and his presence in our experience. Joy is more a decision than a feeling. We are not being told to deny our feelings, rather choosing to live above them. Joy depends on faith in God's sovereignty. Can God be trusted? Well, can He? Are you sure you trust Him? Then don't be bitter or depressed, discouraged or faithless. Choose to trust God, choose joy, a joy that is quiet and grateful, a joy that inwardly delights in the goodness of God. Joy as a deep sense of well-being that may at the same time embrace sorrow, tears, laughter, anger, pain. It is not intense happiness, although choosing joy sometimes produces happiness. But it is choosing to remember that this current trouble is an opportunity for joy because it is going to lead to a maturing faith and deeper walk with God.