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Prayer Meeting Address by Mr.J.Delves at "Ebenezer" chapel, Clapham
on Monday evening 10th. March, 1952

Reading: James 1

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This epistle of James, the first chapter of which I have read, was not actually addressed to any particular church but was addressed to the scattered tribes. They were evidently scattered after the day of Pentecost by reason of persecutions that arose against those who made profession of the Gospel and the Apostle James writes to these, and it will be seen that they were under certain trials, temptations, afflictions, evidently persecutions and they are exhorted to count it all joy when they fall into them. "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations", that is afflictions of certain kinds. We often find the Gospel precepts direct us to a deportment that is quite opposite to our natural mentality and this appears to be a point with James, probably the reason why he connects works so closely with faith, "Faith without works is dead also" (James 2.26) By this we do not understand him to mean works in the sense of merit in relation to the soul's salvation, but works in the sense of practical or corresponding fruits that are uniform with our profession of faith. The whole trend of Gospel preaching is under the same head, namely that there must be a conformity in our life, walk and conversation to bear evidence or testimony to the reality of our faith and profession. If there are not the corresponding fruits then, while we may make profession, we bear no practical evidence that that profession of faith in God is wrought in us by the Holy Ghost. This is the principle test, and one in which we may find ourselves often to come painfully short. Naturally speaking we can count it all joy when things go well with us, when providence smiles and there is nothing very much to try us. Naturally we may count that all joy; but to count it all joy when it is the opposite is a great test of faith which does not consist in making light of trouble or of despising it but in walking before God in it and enduring temptation. It is as though the apostle would put this test before these believers, that those who could walk before God, by His grace, when heavy trials and heavy crosses pressed upon them; bore a witness therein of the reality of their religion as before God and before man.

The precepts of the Gospel come very, very close. They may not reprove you so often as they reprove me. In the light of this the apostle James brings before his readers the need of wisdom. "If any of you lack wisdom,

(that is, in all you are passing through, these trials, these afflictions, these persecutions); if you feel to lack wisdom as to how to walk in them, how to deport yourself under these burdens or afflictions, "let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." And a great point he brings before them is that such asking must be in faith. For "a double minded man is unstable in all his ways". It is true that a poor, tried sinner may feel shaken this way and that way by temptations when he prays and yet may pray in faith, that is to say he may believe in his very soul that God can deal with his case, that He will deal with his case and will bring him through. You may come into some circumstances in your life, perhaps suddenly come into them, where you must of necessity come to some decision one way or the other in the matter and yet can see that which ever way you take in the thing trouble is before you. What can you do in such a case as that? You can but wait on God in faith for Him to help you to follow His direction as to the right course in the sight of God and then walk in it. This is where the apostle James comes in this chapter, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him". That is if he endures in the trial then the Lord will honour that endurance.

Here is another great point; this matter of patience may sometimes put us to a very sharp test. The Apostle Paul says that tribulation worketh patience and here James says that the trying of your faith worketh patience. This is where faith and works blend together, that is faith and the fruit of faith. These works are in obedience to the direction of God, so Abraham is said to be justified by works, not with respect to the salvation of his soul but he was justified by his works in his act of obedience to the command of God even when it seemed to go right across and cut to the very death everything that had had relation to the promise. It was a great act of faith, but his works consisted in his obedience to God's command, notwithstanding the fact that it seemed to go right against the promise God had given him.

God works very wondrously in His people and sometimes puts them to tests; in fact all are more or less tried in their faith and in their obedience too; but he says, "If any of you lack wisdom", that is if any of you come to such a pass in your things as to say 'I do not know what to do', then that is the time for God to show you what to do and for faith and works to blend together in a gracious following of the Lord's word concerning the matter. So he goes on to say, "If any be a hearer

of the word, and not a doer", that is not walking out the truth, not walking in the spirit and precept of the Gospel, but just hearing it and thinking nothing more of it, but a clear walking in it, walking in the rule that is laid down and walking in the path that God has appointed.

So he goes on to speak of practical obedience, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." Many of these precepts may expose our felt impatience and James does not mean that a man's salvation is in the proper sense by practice, but rather that he bears the evidence of possessing a real religion by a practical obedience to the precepts that are laid down in the Word of God. That brings us again to one place, "If any of you lack wisdom".

And who is there that does not feel to lack wisdom at times? "Let him ask of God". What a mercy there is a God to whom we may go in our difficulties. In the ignorance we may feel with respect to handling certain matters or walking in certain thing, here is a gracious direction, "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. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering." That is, let him ask in a gracious confidence that God will fulfil His promise and regard his case and will show him what he may have to do. "For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed", and you can feel that at times in your own heart. When a holy confidence is given, what a relief it brings in your spirit when you can take the matter to God in real prayer, by His grace, commit it to Him and then wait for His voice or wait upon Him to show you the path you have to walk in or what you may have to do. How we need this God and how we need this wisdom in our worship, in our preaching, in our hearing, in our prayers in so many ways in handling matters. How we need this wisdom, each of us more or less; but we cannot need anything that God cannot give. It is our mercy then that we can have contact with Him, hear His voice and walk in the way that He has appointed us.

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