

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As many of you are probably aware, Hurricane Harvey struck the Texas coastline. There is concern about destruction from wind and flood damage. Our Church body, the WELS, had released a statement that 10 congregations were in the path of the hurricane. Our brothers and sisters in faith are facing this challenge. A person weak in faith may wonder, *"Where is the Lord? Why is he allowing this?"* If they lose their home or a loved one they might become angry and refuse to pray.

In the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13, Jesus warn us that the “thorns”, the cares and troubles of this life, can choke out our faith. A hurricane or other natural disaster can bring on cares and troubles that challenge our faith. We have not had a major weather event, at least recently, but it can happen. Are we ready, that is spiritually speaking?

In the Gospel reading Peter thought he was ready to walk on water, but when his faith in Jesus was challenged, he sank like a stone. If it wasn't for Jesus' gracious intervention he would have perished. So, Jesus worked at strengthening Peter's faith. He works on yours and mine.

James in his letter points us to blessings God has promised that will help us endure our trials. By keeping his promises as we go through trials, the Lord builds our faith. In the end, **The Lord Provides Faith that is Confident.** Let's take a closer look at these promises that build faith.

1. Faith is confident because the Lord promises that trials work for our good.

The Lord sometimes teaches us through contradictory statements. **“The foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom.”** St. Paul tells us. It sounds wrong, but it is true that anything God says is better than man’s best wisdom. James begins with a contradictory statement. He wants us to have **“joy in many kinds of trials.”** Joy in trials? Doesn’t seem to make sense. He explains why. The Lord promises that trials work for our good.

A. The trials that the Christians suffered were things they faced in their daily life: temptations, health difficulties, weather difficulties. Things were about to get worse. The persecution of Christians by the Jews in Jerusalem may have led to poverty for some and soon there would be a famine that would

leave many suffering. These troubles moved James and these Christians to go to the Lord for answers.

What is happening is that the Lord is using these trials to exercise our faith. Muscles need to be exercised or they grow weak and useless. Faith must be exercised so it grows. Otherwise, it gets weaker and it can die. Trials are one way that God, who loves us, gets us to exercise our faith.

B. James points to the results. In verses 3 and 4 he writes, “...**you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.**”

The people that James is writing were mostly Jewish Christians and some of them, perhaps many, had been believers in the Lord for a while. They had experienced what he was talking about. Their faith had been tested and it forced them to focus on the object of their faith. That was Jesus.

Jesus had brought them into God’s kingdom. He had taken away their sins through his keeping of God’s law and his sacrificial death at the cross. When they went through trials they looked to Jesus, his cross and empty tomb. This assured them of the standing with God and their salvation. The more they looked to Jesus and his word, the more mature and complete they became.

Has the Lord saddled you with some difficult challenge or trial in your life? Take heart! The Lord allows things to happen for our good. He doesn’t want us to lose our faith and perish forever. He is bringing us close to himself. He is teaching us to pray and to trust him. We have a promise that this is not wasted time or unnecessary, but he is growing our faith in him so we persevere and become more mature and complete.

2. Faith is confident because the Lord promises that he answers our prayers.

One of the promises that strengthens our faith is the promise that the Lord answers our prayers.

A. James writes in verse 5, “**If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.**” This is not the only place in the Bible we an invitation to pray. The Lord says through Asaph the psalm writer, “**Call on me in the day of trouble...**” Jesus teaches his disciples, “**Ask and it will be given to you.**” (Matthew 7:7)

1. James adds an important detail. “**God...gives generously without find fault.**” You may like hearing that the Lord gives generously. That is

important too! But don't miss the second part, "**without finding fault.**" One reason Christians hesitate to pray is because we are sinners. We feel guilty. "How can God even want to hear my prayers?" We may also feel that he is too busy with hurricane victims and shouldn't take time for us. When James says, "**Without finding fault.**", he means that the Lord does not count our sins against us. Though sins that stood between us and God have been removed by Messiah, Jesus. The Lord God does not look at those.

Nor does the Lord find fault with the fact that some of our troubles are less severe than others. We humans prioritize who we can help because we are limited. The Lord God is Almighty and unlimited. He does not have to wait until he is done helping others before he answers us.

2. The Lord promises through James, "**Ask...and it will be given to you.**" We can be confident in our praying because the Lord promises a response. One response we are guaranteed is that he will help us grow in faith. How the Lord responds to our trials and troubles will depend on his good will. Sometimes he lets things go on for a while for our good. Sometimes he will end trials. He also tells us that eventually all our trials will be over when we go to be with him in heaven. That hope focuses our faith on the Lord and we grow stronger and more mature.

B. Many household products that you buy at the store, come with a warning label. I bought bug product not too long ago and it said, "*Use in a well-ventilated area. Don't inhale the fumes.*" James provides a warning label with prayer in verse 6, "**But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt...**"

1. We can't see God and we can't always see what he is doing. The devil will use such situations to tempt us into thinking that God doesn't care and he isn't doing anything. If we doubt, we are going to be in trouble.

2. We are not in trouble because God is mad at us. He has forgiven us our sins in Jesus. The danger is that we don't believe God will help, so we don't pray. Instead we trust our own instincts and we head out on our own. Then we are tossed around like waves on the sea by the winds of trouble.

3. James says that we should not be double minded. We shouldn't be going back and forth between trusting in the Lord and trusting in ourselves. We see Jesus rescuing sinking Peter from the stormy waters. We see Jesus ending the spiritual storm between us and God at the cross. We have every reason to trust him.

3. Faith is confident because of God's promises that he will give us a crown of life.

There is one last promise here that gives us a confident faith. **“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.” (12)** We have joy as we journey through various storms because we know where we are going to end up! When we die and leave this life we receive a crown of life. The crown or wreath that James is mention is olive wreath that was put on the head of the one who was a victor in the games, like the Olympic games. James is clearly stating that the Lord is going to help us and bring us to heaven as victors. This is what St. Paul means when he says in Romans 8 that we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. This promise seals our confident faith.

Conclusion: The troubles for the people in the path of the former Hurricane Harvey are not over. Some will have weeks and months of clean up and repair. We certain want to pray for these people.

God's word through James reminds that we need to pray for the faith of our Christian brothers and sisters. Troubles and trials will challenge their faith. We want the Lord to bless their faith and grow it.

Are you ready for a major storm or challenge in your life? Experts advise that people should be at a certain level of preparedness.

As I speak to you, as a pastor, I am asking if you are spiritually ready for the challenges to your faith? One good thing is that our heavenly Father is thinking ahead. He is even now using your daily trials and troubles to strengthen your faith, so that you are ready for anything. He sent Jesus into the world to deal with our sin and guilt. He who calmed the storm on the sea, calms the storm in our hearts through forgiveness won in his blood. So as your faith is challenged, look to the cross. Look to Jesus. It is a blessed sight for sagging faith. The Lord works in us and strengthens us to stand strong, firm and steadfast. He provides for a confident faith. Amen.