

Body of Christ: Trusting God's Deliverance

2nd Kings 18:28-37; Luke 12:1-12; James 1:2-12



Trusting God for deliverance is not always easy. God does not always deliver in the way we expect or desire. Then again, God is often more intent on teaching us to trust Him than in fulfilling our desire for ease. God calls us to trust that He is faithful, even when we cannot what lies ahead. We need not fear if we can trust God. Can we trust God through an uncertain future? Can we realistically present the world a call to trust God into the unknown? Can we live out that confidence in God?

As the Rabshakeh of Assyria stood before the people of Judah, everything appeared to have been lost. His words contained the flavor of truth. They matched the circumstances of the people and seemed to be an appropriate expression of certain doom and destruction. There was no way out for Judah in the face of the Assyrian army. Israel had fallen to Assyria, as had many nations, and Egypt would have been a meager resort as an ally against the invading army. There was no way out for a besieged Jerusalem. The pride of Judah was now a hopelessly besieged city.

There seemed no way out at all. Trusting *Yahweh* did not seem to have done any good. It seemed that either *Yahweh* cared no more, or *Yahweh* really had abandoned the people to Assyrian domination. Hope was gone, for the people could see no way out of their predicament. Hezekiah put on sackcloth and ashes—symbols of mourning—and went to the Temple to seek direction from *Yahweh*, for *Yahweh* had not yet spoken. *Yahweh* sent word by Isaiah—simple words, but hard to hear. “Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the King of Assyria have reviled Me.”

Do not be afraid. Await God's deliverance. Trust God and wait to see what God will do. It sounded so simple—too simple, in fact! Those words sounded foolish, just as the Rabshakeh had deemed Hezekiah's trust in *Yahweh* to be mere foolishness. How could *Yahweh* do anything about the besieging army? If *Yahweh* were going to intervene, surely it would have come before the city was hopelessly surrounded and cut off from food and water! It was too late to trust God for a way out, wasn't it? Isaiah's words were clear. Trust *Yahweh* to deliver. Trust *Yahweh* to get you through the uncertainty of a future you cannot grasp.

Don't be afraid—trust God. Jesus had the same message to the disciples. Trust God, no matter what the circumstance. Do not fear the authorities, do not fear those who might bring death. Just stand for God and be faithful. Remember that life is about more than what we can see. God is Lord of this life, and the one to come, as well. There is no need to fear.

That sounds nice and comforting in theory. It sounds nice in the comfort of our sanctuary, in our Sunday school classrooms, and maybe even in our homes. Jesus did not couch these words for such comfortable surroundings, however. Even as He spoke to the disciples, He referred to their being brought before synagogue authorities to be questioned. He referred to their being tried before the rulers of their people. He spoke of being confronted by those who had the authority and power to sentence them to punishment, torture, or even death.

In that context, these words just don't sound quite as comforting. They are still every bit as true. Jesus did not want the disciples to fear people. He wanted them to live their lives in open honesty before God. He talked about how the hypocrisy of the Pharisees would one day be unmasked as nothing more than a farce. He warned the disciples that they needed to be true and open in their dealings and service to God. We can't "pull the wool over" God's eyes. We can fool people for a while. We can pretend to be what we are not, but in the end it will only have been pretense. In the end, it is only the truth of our inner lives that counts.

Do not fear the things of this world, but reverence God and await God's deliverance. Await God's justification. Await the day on which God will declare the reality that we have lived. It may be discomfoting for a while. It may be hard to sit back and watch injustice play itself out in our midst. It may be painful to feel the brunt of those who would abuse, ridicule, or take advantage. We are not to live for the short term, but for eternity.

James takes up the call, encouraging us to "Count it all joy!" Could he really be serious? How do we "count it joy" when we have been surrounded by an army of enemies who blaspheme God's name and there is apparently no response from God? How can we "count it all joy" when we become the brunt of ridicule, lies, or derision? How do we "count it joy" when our denominational leaders use lies and pretense to advance their political aims? How do we "count it joy" when what we see is loss, pain, grief, sickness, and despair.

James does not tell us to believe that our trials are pleasurable. He simply calls us to look beyond the problems of the moment, however great they may be. He calls us to look beyond to the eternal issues at hand to the developing of character and endurance. He challenges us to look to what God is doing, rather than seeing the near results of human destructive action.

Why does he call us to "count it joy"? Because there is a side of difficulties that we so often overlook. We focus too often on the pain of the moment and overlook the long term result. James would remind us that our difficulties are tests of our faith, not problems to be obliterated. They are not symptoms to be medicated or obstacles to be erased. They are opportunities for growth in our dependence upon God.

Hezekiah learned to lean on God in a way he would not have done without the Assyrian forces surrounding the city. He learned that God was truly worthy of our trust. He learned that his own analysis of a situation does not rule out God's intervention and deliverance. He learned that our perspective is partial and shortsighted. Jesus stressed the importance of a long-term view of life. He calls us to look beyond the difficulties at hand and live life with an eternal perspective.

From a perspective of eternity, we can "count it all joy," for we learn confidence in God. We can "count it all joy," for we can be sure that God is yet present, active, and directing our steps. We can "count it all joy," for there is joy in God's action of deliverance. We can take matters in our own hand, or trust God for deliverance. Will we trust God to deliver, or will we despair for our lack of perspective? May we have the courage and confidence to seek God's perspective, not our own. It is our choice, whether we count our trials as joy or as despair.

"Fear not, for I AM with you." It is our choice—shall we take courage, or keep despair?

—*Christopher B. Harbin*