

March 18, 2018

## ***"Consider it pure joy..."***

***"Is any one among you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective..."***

***"My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover a multitude of sins."*** James 5:13-20

Belonging to the church, the body of Christ, is so much more than most of us realize. We tend to think that being a part of a church means that we sit in a certain building for a couple of hours a week and maybe participate in a few activities and that's it. From the beginning the concept of being a part of the church was so much more than that.

The picture of the church described in Acts 2:42-47, and throughout the New Testament is a picture of an intimate, interactive group of believers who continually shared everything. Applying much of what the New Testament says about the function of church is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for us to accomplish because our present understanding of church is so very different from what was originally intended.

That difficulty is certainly true when we try to understand what James is saying in the last few verses of his letter. Think about the picture that James paints here. If you are in trouble you should tell someone and pray about it. If you are happy you should sing praises together. If you are sick you should call for the elders to come to you. If you are struggling with sin you should confess to each other and pray for each other.

That level of intimacy is pretty foreign to church as most of us understand it. If we are struggling with sin our brothers and sisters at church will be the last people we tell. If we are sick we will not call to let anyone know and then later we will complain that no one came to visit.

For most of us church is a 'service' that we participate in on a Sunday morning for a couple of hours. We put on our 'church' face and act and talk in our 'church' ways and then we go out into a hostile world and try to survive alone. When Satan attacks us no one knows. When the battle is overwhelming us we tell no one. And as we fall to the powers of evil no one comes to our rescue.

As James might write, ***"Brothers, this ought not to be!"*** The church, the body of Christ, was designed to be our refuge from this world. The best way, I think, to understand God's intent for the church is to look at Luke's description of the church in Acts 2.

There he writes, ***"They devoted themselves to the Apostle's teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the Apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the Temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."***

The intimate connection enjoyed by those early believers is the model of 'church' that James is describing. Those early believers devoted themselves to meeting together, gladly sharing their lives and what they had with each other, actively looking for ways to serve one another, and hungered to be a part of church. To those believers church was always who they were and never just a place to be.

