

Inconvenient Trees: Handling Life's Little Mishaps (James 1:2-4)

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So it's Monday afternoon, and I am sitting in my office with a couple, they just got married, I just did their wedding ceremony and we were talking about some things and we hear this huge thud on the ground. Like somebody dropped a Buick from 100 feet. The guy said "what's that?". I said, "oh their just taking this tree down out there. They have been taking it down all day." She said "well, I hope it doesn't fall on the building." So I said, "yeah, that would be something." So they leave the office at 3 o'clock, I walk over to the school, my daughter goes to school not too far from my office, I walk over like I normally do on Monday's. I pick her up and we go back into the office. I am just cleaning up things, getting my computer, putting things together, that kind of stuff. She is just sitting there, I try to get her to start her homework, she won't do it. Standard stuff. At about 3:45 pm it is time for us to go because I have to be home about the time my son gets home at 4pm. So we go home. At about 5 o'clock I get this frantic knock on the door. I don't know what a frantic knock sounds like, it was just a knock on the door. I go out there and it is Dani, Dani is our Children's Director and she is standing at the door in the rain and she says "I have really bad news for you." This is weird because I said, why didn't you just call me? Well, I had my phone ringer turned off. She says "there is a tree in your office." I said "What? There is a tree in my office?" There is a tree in your office. How did a tree get in my office? Well, it sort of went through the roof.

For those of you that don't know on Monday of last week, strangely enough, a giant tree was being removed and the crane that was holding onto the tree was unbalanced and it fell over and the tree hit the rough and went through the window in my office. So we drove over there right away. It is kind of exciting. There were police tape everywhere. It looked like it was a terrorist attack. There were more police officers and fire engines than I have ever seen, lights everywhere. Yes, there was a huge tree sticking right in the window of my office. They let me go up there eventually, and it looked like a bomb went off. Here is my desk, here is all of my stuff, and there was about 4 feet of giant tree sticking into my office. Amidst all this rumble, and debris and glass, and bricks, I mean it was a huge mess. The next morning I went there to see what was up, and there were still police officers there, all the news trucks were there. All of them with their giant satellite situation things, I am thinking to myself is this really news? If you watched you might have said the same thing. Is this really news? I was a little frustrated that morning. I was frustrated because they wouldn't let us go in there and we had stuff in there, and I am thinking we have a church to run here, we have stuff to do. We have plans, we have events coming up, we have Bible studies. You have to tell me something! They weren't saying anything. I ran into my brother and sister, Rich and Maureen, they were there that morning. God used them in my life in a special way because their attitude should have been my attitude. Their attitude was God's in control. Their attitude was, this is not a big deal. Their attitude was there is a reason for this. It helped me do an about face. When I got to the staff meeting it was my turn in staff meeting to do the devotions, and I opened my Bible to James 1 and I said

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters when you face trials of many kinds." It became an opportunity for us to learn something.

It's funny because that morning someone said "do you think this is like spiritual warfare? Do you think the Devil knocked that tree onto your office to try to kill you?" I said, well, I don't know if he did he has pretty good aim, but really bad timing. Because I was gone!

The funny thing is we ask this question, "why do things like this happen?" Why do weird things happen? Why do bad things happen? Why do dangerous things happen in our lives? Why do they happen? That is sort of the question I want to talk about today. We can't answer all of that question, but we can have some insight into it. That is what I believe. I remember when I was in college, I went to Bible College, we had to go to chapel every single day in Bible College. I didn't enjoy it at all. It was Monday through Friday and I think of all of the chapel I went to I remember one thing more than anything and this came to my mind on Tuesday morning. One of the chapel speakers said this, "Remember that life is 10% what happens to you, and 90% how you react to what happens to you." That has always stuck with me. Let me say it again, "Life is 10% what happens to you, and 90% how you react to what happens to you." What I want to do is take that one step further, I want to develop on that, and what I want to say is this. "You will not be defined in your life by what happens to you, you will be defined in your life by how you react by what happens to you." I mean the definition of your life, when it is all said and done will not be necessarily the things you went through. The challenges you endured. At the end of your life I believe your character will be defined by how you react to the things that happened to you. We all have stuff that happens to us. That is why I have titled this sermon 'Inconvenient Trees: How To Handle Life's Little Mishaps'.

Now your inconvenient tree might be different than ours, speaking figuratively. Your inconvenient tree could be something else. It could be the fact that your car broke down and you really need it to get to your job. Your inconvenient tree could be that you have a relationship that is falling apart, and it causes you struggles and strife. Your inconvenient tree could be the fact that you haven't been able to find a job, or that you lost your job. Your inconvenient tree could be that you were diagnosed with some kind of sickness, some kind of illness, or maybe somebody in your family. For us, our inconvenient tree is an inconvenient tree. How we react to that will define us as a church. In the same way of how you react to your inconvenient trees in your life will define you as a Christian and as a person.

There are three basic kinds of bad things that happen to people. If you were to gather them and categorize them. #1 there are people who do things to you. They say things to you, or they say things about you and it is a frustrating thing and it is a frustrating, hurtful thing and you wonder why are people so angry, why are people so mean. Maybe it's people that do things that affect you. Something that happens at work. Something that happens in your family. It's an action taken by another person, and it has impact on your life. That is one kind of bad thing.

There is another kind of bad thing that could happen to you, another kind of inconvenience, some kind of a natural thing. Maybe it some kind of weather, a hurricane comes in and destroys somebody's house. A fire burns down a house. Something goes wrong in your car, it is a mechanical thing. Some kind of a sickness, some kind of disease. These are natural things, nobody is in charge of these things, they happen because they happen.

Lastly, I think there is a whole other category that I think we tend to forget about and that is we get ourselves into problems because of some of the decisions that we make. Decisions that aren't the best decisions, and the next thing you know we are in a jam and it is all our own fault because we made a decision that was based on what we want or maybe a decision that was based on our priorities and not God's priorities; and the next thing you know we have a big problem.

All three of those categories, interestingly enough, have one thing in common. They are all based on sin. They are all based on living in a fallen world. People have free will so they may do something harmful to you. We live in a fallen world, and so natural disasters happen; things break. Things break down. Diseases happen. We live in a fallen world, we are prideful; and we make bad choices.

So what we are going to do is, we are going to look in the Bible and we are going to look at three different characters in the Old Testament and see how each one of them reacted to their situation. Whether it was a human situation, a natural situation, or an affect of their own bad choice. Interestingly enough all three of them, their names begin with "J". I didn't plan that, it just worked out that way. What we are going to do is we are going to go to the book of Genesis and we will look at the first one. Genesis 50, while you are turning there I want to give you the background story, by the way, don't lose your place in James, we are going to come back there. Joseph, fantastic Bible character, if you want to read his whole story it's starts somewhere back in the 30th chapter. Joseph is a fantastic story. Joseph was one of many brothers, and it was a challenge for him because he was the favorite son, and his other brothers didn't like that. His father loved him more than the other sons. So his brothers in anger decided they were going to do something to him, they wanted to kill him, until one of the brothers said, well let's not kill him let's sell him. Nice brother! So they did, they sold him into slavery to a caravan that was passing through. Then they made it look like he was killed so the father, who loved him most, would think that Joseph was dead. Joseph was taken to Egypt, he was a servant, he was a slave, he worked himself up to be the second in charge of a very wealthy man's house until he was accused by the wealthy man's wife, and then he was thrown in prison. He spent some time in prison, eventually got out, and over the course of time rose to be number two in all of Egypt. Pretty cool considering the current events that our going on now. He was #2, he was that powerful. At that time there was a famine in all of the Middle East, a huge recession. Nobody had any food, and so people from all kinds of different nations would come to Egypt, because Joseph was smart, God was with him, Joseph had planned for this famine. Interestingly enough, the brothers that had sold him into slavery were some of the ones that came to Egypt to buy food. They didn't recognize Joseph, but Joseph recognized them. In an amazing emotional story they have this reunion, and he forgives them, he puts them through a little torture first. Read the story it is awesome. He forgives them and they are reunited as a family. Then Joseph's father dies, Jacob dies, and the brothers are worried that now Joseph, who by the way is a really powerful dude, is going to have them killed. If you look in Genesis 50:20, this is Joseph's response to them; "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

Joseph was harmed by his brothers. This is more than an inconvenient tree in his life, they tried to kill him, they sold him into slavery, they wished him dead. Joseph's response was not to be bitter, it was to see that God had a big picture, and God was in control. So the question I have

for you is, if your lives are defined not by what happens to us, but by how we react to what happens to us. The question is this, when things happen to you, when people harm you will you be bitter or will you be better? Will you be bitter or will you choose to be better? If anybody had the right to be bitter it would be Joseph. If anybody had the right to be angry, it was Joseph. If anybody had the right and the wherewithal to take revenge, it was Joseph. At any moment he could have said two words and they would have been executed. He had command of all of Egypt, which at the time was the most powerful nation in the world. He chose to be better, and he did so because he understood. God had a bigger plan for the whole thing. If it wasn't for Joseph, if Joseph hadn't been sold into slavery, if Joseph hadn't been in Egypt, chances are he wouldn't have planned for that famine and that whole nation could have been ruined, including the whole nation that would eventually become Israel, from whom Jesus was born, the Savior of all of us. Do you see the big picture?

So the question is, when things come our way, when people say bad things about us, when people wish us harm, when their cruel, when their angry, when they do things that harm us we have a choice. To be bitter or better. Which will you choose?

Let's take a look at another Bible character, this time we will turn to the book of Job. The book of Job, I will tell you how to find it, if you open your Bible to just about the middle you will probably be somewhere in Psalms or Proverbs, then turn back because Job is the book right before Psalms. While we are there I will give you some background story on Job. Job is a fantastic Biblical character, we preached a short series on Job, probably a couple of years ago, it is on our website if you are interested in reading more about it. We are just going to scratch the surface of Job here. Job is arguable the oldest book in the Bible, and it is about a guy that had some pretty bad things happen to him. For him it wasn't a result of people being mean so much, although that was a part of it, he had some natural disasters happen to him. Here is what was going on, the Bible says that Satan was roaming to and fro in the land. The Old Testament actually says "the deceiver". God says to Satan, let me paraphrase, He said, are you looking for something to do. Are you looking for someone to mess with? If you are, have you seen my servant Job? There is none like him in all the world. Job was a righteous man. He was an upright guy. He had good character, he had good morals. God is saying, 'hey, if you want to mess with somebody, mess with Job.' Satan says, 'let me tell you something, he only loves you because you are good to him. Look at him, he has everything, he is the richest man.' God says alright, paraphrase again, let's make a bet...you can go ahead and mess with Job, he will not slander me. Satan says let's see.... So you look in this first chapter, here is what happens. "Job's sons and daughters were feasting, drinking wine in their oldest brothers house, a messenger came to them and said the oxen were plowing, the donkeys were grazing nearby the Sabians attacked and made off with them. They put servants to the sword, I am the only one that escaped to tell you." All of his servants were dead. "While he was still speaking another messenger came, the fire of God fell from the sky, burned up the sheep and the servants, I am the only one that escaped to tell you." More servants and his livestock burned by fire. "While he was still speaking another messenger came and said 'the Caldeans formed three raiding parties, swept down on your camels, made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, I am the only one who escaped to tell you. While he was still speaking (this is a bad day, it was probably a Monday), yet another messenger came and said your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brothers house then suddenly a might wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house, the house collapsed on them and they

are dead, I am the only one that has escaped to tell you. Talk about an inconvenient tree. He lost everything in a matter of moments. Some people attacked him, but there were some natural occurrences that happened that were unexplained at the time. Job had a choice! Because he was a Godly man he saw God in everything. He had a choice to react, and what did he say? If you look in verse 20, I will start there, "at this Job got up and tore his robe, shaved his head, then he fell on the ground in worship, (you should underline that in your Bible), and said 'naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I will depart, the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, may the name of the Lord be praised.' In all this Job did not sin by charging God with wrong doing."

If anybody had the right to be upset with God, at that moment, it was Job. He was doing things right. He was the guy people looked up too. He was the model of Christian living, and in an instant everything was taken away from him. His response was different. He didn't choose pity. He didn't say woe is me. He didn't say, why did this happen to me. His focus was not on pity, it was on praise. So the question is, if your life is not defined by the things that happen to you, but if your life is defined by how you react to the things that happened to you; the number one question is when those things happen to you will you react with pity or will you choose praise? Will you choose pity or will you choose praise? This is a challenging thing, because there are a lot of things that happen in this world that have no explanation. If somebody robs you, if somebody steals from you, if somebody hurts you, or says mean things about you, you have a place to focus your frustration and anger. If a might wind blows and knocks your house down it is just a freak occurrence. If a fire burns your house down it is just a weird, strange occurrence. If you go to the doctor and you are diagnosed with a disease there is nowhere to put your frustration, and a lot of people focus their frustration on God, when they have nowhere else to put it.

Not everyone around Job thought that he should be the way he was. Some of the people around him, and the book is 40 chapters long, I would suggest you read it, and it is more complex than just what we are saying here because this dialog goes on and on with his friends about how he should act. It is pretty cool, because at some point his wife says to him, Job 2:9, "are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die." That was his wife, she said "curse God and die." Get it over with! Let him kill you, let Him finish you off. Don't give her a hard time, because I think that is what I would have said. Chances are if you were there too, maybe you would have said the same thing. Here is Job's response. "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God and not trouble? In all of this Job did not sin in what he said." I mean the reality is this...have you ever heard that phrase "God is good, and you say all the time." God is good all the time. God is good all the time. It is easy to say that when things are good. It is EASY to say that when things are good. It is not easy to say that when things are not good. The true test of our character is can we say that all of the time? Being realistic we are just human, but can we say that all of the time? That's the challenge! That is the question. I think at the end of our lives that will define who we are. Especially in the case when we react to things and we don't know why they happen.

Lastly, how about our own bad decisions. How about our own challenges. When we get ourselves in weird situations, weird jams. Let's go to the book of Jonah. Jonah is like one page long, it is really hard to find. It is right after Obadiah, and before Micah. While you are looking for it let me give you some background. Jonah was a profit. His job was to speak the word of

God to people who needed to hear God's word. That is what his job was. That is what he was called to do. We assume he was pretty good at it because one day God went to Jonah and said 'Jonah, I want you to go to the city of Nineveh and tell them about my goodness, and about my grace.' Now at that time the city of Nineveh was well known for being very cruel, for torturing people, for killing people. They were a savage group of people. Jonah essentially said no. He went the exact other direction. You might know the story, it is a great children's story. What is great about the book of Jonah is if you read it and you do some Bible studies on this whole thing you realize this is way complex and deep understanding of how God loves people, of how He shows grace to people. How God works through us despite our weaknesses. If you know that Children's version he goes and he gets on a boat, and they are out on the boat and the next thing you know there is this huge storm. He tells everyone else on the boat the reason for the storm is him. Does he know that he has done the wrong thing? Does he know that he has made a bad decision? He tells them to throw him overboard and as the Bible account goes he was swallowed by a large fish. You want to talk about an inconvenient tree...Okay, he is now in a fish. He is in a tough, tough jam. If you look at this third verse I think it really holds the key for us, it says "but Jonah ran away from the Lord". He ran away from the Lord. How many of us have either run away from God or are running away from God. Now maybe God has not said to you I want you to go to Oviedo and tell the people about my goodness. Maybe He hasn't called you to a far off mission field. Maybe He hasn't called you to give up your job and become a missionary, and travel overseas. Maybe He has. If He has then you should do the opposite of what Jonah did. The reality is God calls us do things every day all the time, all you have to do is open up His word and there are all kinds of things in the Bible about what we are called to do. In terms of how we react to other people, in terms of what we say to other people, in terms of what we do with our finances. In terms of how we live our lives. The Bible is full of instructions from God. A lot of times we say no, I will do it my way. That is the definition of pride. That is like saying God, I know more than you do; so I will handle it from here. When that happens, when we run away from God we almost always get ourselves in some kind of a difficult situation.

So, the question is this...if your lives are not defined by what happens to us, if our lives are instead defined by how we react to what happens to us; the question is this...when God calls you to go, or when God gives you a command will you react in fear or will you react by following God's command. The pathway of fear leads to trouble. The pathway of fear leads to that jam. The pathway of fear leads to that inconvenient situation, the next thing you know you have yourself in. I have seen this many, many times with couples, who have chosen to live together before they get married. God says that you ought not to do that. People say I know better than God I will do that anyway. Many, many times that leads to trouble later. Statistically those marriages are much more prone to fail than a couple that waits. It's true! This happens when God commands to keep themselves pure sexually. They say God that's ancient, that is Old Testament stuff, we live in the 21st Century now. I know better! I will do it my way. A lot of times that leads to challenging decisions later. It's true. How about financially? God says be generous as a people. Bring your tithe to the storehouse and see if I don't throw open the blessings of heaven. No! I know better! I will do it my way! I am afraid that if I give generously that I won't have enough left for me. We know what happens statistically when people are stingy with their money. It never seems like they have enough. There is countless scenarios. Maybe you are thinking of some in your life right now. The question is, when it comes to making that choice will you react in fear or will you follow God? Here is the beautiful thing about this story that I want to point out...Jonah reluctantly went, I mean the fish basically took him there.

So he got out of the fish and he reluctantly told the ninevites about God's love. He did not want to see them saved. He had a bad attitude. I guess being in a fish for three days will do that to you. Every single one of those ninevites repented and came to God. Here is the thing, God doesn't even need you to obey Him to do His work. He will accomplish His purpose with or without you. It doesn't depend on you. You and I have an opportunity to participate, to be a part of the blessing of God. When we follow Him that is what happens.

So, back to James 1:2, let's just go back there for a second. We have seen how our reaction may define us, perhaps that is part of the answer to the question why things happen the way they do; but there is more to it. If you are here this morning and you are in those situations, you know theoretically, proverbially you have a tree in your office. How do you deal with that? I think the first part of making those decisions, to choose praise over pity, to choose being better over being bitter, to choose to follow over being fearful. Has to do with understanding why these situations even existed in the first place. The answer is in the book of James, it says "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 in anything."

The reality is this, God allows these things into our lives. In some cases He may create those situations. He did that in Job. He sort of created a problem for Job. The Bible doesn't say God always does that, but there is one thing for sure, no matter what jam we are in God always knows about it, and it always happens with His approval; nothing happens outside of His scope of approval. If you are in that situation right now, no matter what it is, the Bible says you should be joyful about that because when you are in that situation you know you are being worked on. You know you are being created better. You know that God is strengthening you, and He says listen, stay in that situation, don't give up because that produces perseverance, and when you have perseverance you are not lacking anything. God wants you to be complete. The reality is you may measure how central you are to God's will in your life by how much struggle you are going through.

If anybody tells you that being a Christian is about living a perfect life, where nothing ever goes wrong, they are lying. That is not what the Bible says. The level of trouble you have is sort of inversely proportional to amount of joy you should have; and that is difficult. It is difficult to be joyful when people are saying mean things about you, or people are being wicked towards you. It is difficult to be joyful if you have some kind of a sickness, some kind of disease, some things happen that you have no control over. It is difficult to be joyful when you have messed up and done some stupid things, and made some stupid decisions and got yourself into a huge jam. It is difficult to be joyful, but is precisely what the Bible says. The reason is, so you can be stronger. It is a testing of your faith. There is sort of a mathematical equation here. Faith tested over time equals perseverance, and perseverance is what we all need to survive and to make it, and to make it another day, another week, another month, another year. That perseverance is I think what people see. Your reaction to those things, I think what they see is perseverance.

So what about us as a church? What is going to happen with us? What are we going to do in this situation? This little situation that we are going through with the news cameras and the coverage and all this kind of stuff, it looks like we are going to be out of our building for weeks, personally I think it could be months. They have to repair that facility. They have to rebuild a wall. They are not letting anybody back in there. So now we have to move our band practice,

we have to move the Bible Studies, we have to move where we do our junior high stuff. All of our administrative offices. We have revenue coming in from that place because there is another church that rents that place out for us. Now there is another church with no place to meet. As a church we may be defined by how we react to this. As a church I say we be joyful, because God has us exactly where He wants us to be. The Bible says in Romans 8:28, one of my favorite verses "for we know that all things work together for good, for those that love God, and for those that are called according to His purpose." Are we called as a church? Are we called as a people? Then we know somehow this will work out for good. The question is, how will we react to it. I believe we will react well. Just so that you know we are working to try to keep everybody as updated as possible, they are not telling us much, but like I said I think we will be out of that place for a little while. We are looking for alternative things. Be in prayer for that church, by the way. Right now they are meeting in the park. It is like 42 degrees outside this morning. I don't know what they are going to do, we offered for them to join us here, we might be working on something. Be in prayer for them. Those other businesses as well. Be in prayer for those businesses. We have offered to help as much as we can; there is not really a whole lot we can do. This is one of those things that I believe the community and people will see our faith, and will see our light shine brighter as we react to this in joy. Let's pray.