

Prologue

Recently, in my daily readings in Scripture, I came to a verse in the letter of James that shook me. It was clearly a command from God, and I instinctively knew that I was not fully in obedience to it.

I remembered reading in Frances Ridley Havergal's little book *Royal Commandments* that she had once set herself to read through the Scriptures looking for any command that she was not aware of in order to obey it also. Her yearning was not to break any

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of God's requirements and that she should be wholly obedient to all His desires. 'Keep and seek for all the commandments of the Lord your God,' she wrote, quoting from 1 Chronicles 28:8. She continued, 'We have even a little shrinking from this. We are afraid of seeing something which might be peculiarly hard to keep ... it might be enough to try to keep what commandments we have seen without seeking for still more!' I had thought to myself at the time, phew! I find it hard enough to keep all the commands that I do know – without seeking any others!

But here was the commandment in James that shook me: 'Count it all joy ... when you meet trials of various kinds ...' (James 1:2). Had I really read it correctly? Wasn't that going a bit over the top? I had fairly recently sought to come to terms with Paul's statement in his letter to the Philippians: 'I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content ...' (Phil. 4:11). I had even testified to coming to terms with that standard of acceptance of the Lord's will in my recent book *Enough*. But to 'count it all joy'? No! And the verse in James specifically says that the 'all' includes tough moments – trials. To accept these as part of

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the Lord's will, yes, that is fair enough, but to 'count it joy' – I wasn't there yet.

So I began to think that perhaps the word in the original language that is translated as 'joy' in ours had a different connotation? To us it usually speaks of happiness, at achievement or of acceptance. Yet it is the same word as is used of our Lord Jesus as He faces Gethsemane and Calvary: 'Jesus ... for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God' (Heb. 12:2, *my italics*).

Chara, the Greek word meaning 'joy', is used twenty times in the Gospels – often relating to our Lord Jesus. We find the word in Luke 8:13, when Jesus is explaining the meaning of the Parable of the Sower: '... the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy' (*my italics*). Again, when the woman who had lost a precious silver coin found it, she calls her neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin I had lost' (Luke 15:9). Jesus goes on to add, 'Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents' (Luke 15:10, *my italics*).