

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time***

### **From Trouble to Triumph, Part 1**

Scripture: James 1:2

Code: 59-3

Let's open our Bibles to the first chapter of James and I want to read to you verses 2 through 12...James chapter 1, verses 2 through 12.

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials; knowing this that the testing of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat but it withereth the grass and its flower falleth and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. Blessed is the man that endures trials: for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to them that love Him.

G.K. Chesterton said, "I believe in getting into hot water. I think it keeps you clean." And there is, to be sure, the need in our lives for a testing to see if in fact we are genuine. And sometimes there is no better test than hot water or the water of sorrows and trials. How one handles trouble is an indication of their faith. And trouble coming into your life and my life will speak to the reality of our faith or the lack of it. Therefore in the purpose of James, which is to give us tests of living faith, the first thing he wants to talk about is the test of trials, for trials will reveal whether your faith is living faith or dead faith, whether it's genuine faith or imitation faith, whether it is saving faith or non-saving faith.

It's a very natural starting point for the simple reason that everybody who lives in the world lives through trials. In fact, we are fallen creatures, we are sinful creatures, we live in the midst of a fallen and sinful society. And as a result of that we experience constant trouble. In fact, it just seems like it never goes very far away, if it goes away at all. Job put it this way in chapter 5 verse 7, he said, "Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward." It's as if to say man's fallen nature is a fire that spits up sparks. The natural consequence of the fire of man's fallenness is trouble. In fact, in Job 14:1 he said, "Man that is born of a woman," and that includes all of us, obviously, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble."

In Psalm 22:11 David said, "Be not far from me," crying out to God, "Be not far from me for trouble is near me." In Isaiah 8:22 God speaks through Isaiah of His judgment in the world that left men, quote: "To look unto the earth and find only trouble."

And no doubt you can remember, if you've read that wonderful insight into human wisdom that we know as the book of Ecclesiastes these familiar words in chapter 2, "Therefore I hated life because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me for all is vanity and vexation of spirit." And then verse 23, "For all his days are sorrows and his travailed grief, yea his heart takes not rest in the night." Trouble, trouble, trouble, vanity day and night, life seems but trouble and trouble alone.

Frankly even for Christians, even for those of us who are the children of God, there's a constant kind of facing of trouble, a constant facing of trial in a very troubled world. And even when we sort of get our own little world under control somebody invades it and messes it up inevitably. And you will know that if you've had a group of kids over to your house lately. No matter how you protect your insulated little world, they have a way of doing damage to it. And they are but a small illustration of how life is. We do everything we can to protect ourselves to get the perfect peace and comfort, but inevitably trouble comes either from outside or from inside.

The Psalmist, and I went over some of the writings of the Psalms this week and I was reminded again that the Psalmist repeatedly speaks to the Lord and he asks the Lord to deliver him out of trouble but he never is so presumptuous to ask the Lord to deliver him from trouble. Because he knows that can't happen, he just says don't deliver me from it, just get me out of it when I'm in it.

Even in marriage, marriage--Peter says--is the grace of life. That's like saying it's the whip cream on top. It's the best of things in life. But even in marriage, 1 Corinthians 7:28 says, if you get married, recognize you will have trouble in the flesh. I mean, if you have trouble just being you, then imagine how it will be when you have to be you with somebody else trying to be who they are. There is going to be trouble even in the best of things that God gives to us.

Jesus Himself was not able to avoid trouble. In fact, He said of His disciples, "You have been with Me in My troubles." He said, "It's normal in the world for you to have tribulation." You expect that. It's everywhere. Jesus groaned in His Spirit. In John chapter 11:33 it records that. John 12:27 records that. Even in John 13, I think it's around verse 20, 21, records it again. He knew what it was to have a troubled spirit. He was troubled.

Paul said he was troubled on every side, 2 Corinthians 4:8. We expect it. We expect trouble in our family. We expect trouble from our friends. We expect trouble in our job. We expect trouble at school. We expect it in the economic world. We expect it from criticism. We expect trouble in the form of disease and illness. We even expect trouble to come into our lives in the form of death, as it strikes people very close to us. Trouble comes from persecution. I mean, it's just the way it is in life.

And if you think you're the only one going through it, you haven't been looking around lately. Everybody's in the same situation.

Now James says, in effect, if your Christianity is genuine, it's got to show up in trouble. I mean, frankly, if it's no good for trouble then it's no good. If it's only good for when we don't need it, we don't need it. If my faith in God is only good when I'm doing well, then what good is my faith? It's to sustain me when everything goes wrong. It is a legitimate test of the genuineness of faith to see how it stands in trouble.

Now notice verse 2 for a moment as we just kind of think this concept through a bit. "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials," *poikilos*, many colored, variegated, varied. This is not to emphasize the number but the diversity of trouble. It isn't the idea that we're going to have many troubles, that's true, it's the idea that we're going to have all kinds of them...varied kinds. Multi-colored was the original meaning of the word, coming in all shades and sizes and varieties, all kinds of troubles coming from our family, coming from our relatives, coming from so many areas of disappointment, whatever it is, all kinds of trouble.

Now notice also the various trials. The word is a very familiar word to a student of Scripture, *peirasmos*, it means trials. And it basically has the idea of trouble, something that breaks the idea of tranquility, that breaks the pattern of peace and comfort and joy and happiness. We don't really know specifically the trials that James has in mind as he writes. We don't really know what was going on among the scattered Jews which he would have identified as some specific trial and it's probably well we don't because the general nature of life is so full of trials that a general instruction in this regard is very applicable on a wide range of things, not only to the people to whom James wrote but to us as well. And since he calls them the various trials, the multi-colored trials, the varied trials, he is no doubt assuming that they come in all kinds of forms and it really isn't specifically important which ones these people were enduring at that time.

Now the word "trial" does not necessarily denote some solicitation to evil. It does not necessarily mean temptation. In a sense it's unfortunate that it has been translated in the Authorized as "temptation." It is translated "trials" in some editions. In verse 2 the same word is translated "temptations" in verse 12. And the translators really have little bit led us astray in that. It simply means "trials." It does not necessarily mean a solicitation to evil.

And the context here clearly shows us that the idea is not to emphasize some subjective solicitation to evil, but rather an objective difficulty to prove and strengthen faith. In and of itself, this trial is not a solicitation to evil, it is just an objective difficulty that enters into life that can be a test of the genuineness of our faith.

And by the way, according to Moulton/Milligan, excellent scholars who have given to us a lexicon of the Greek language, they say that the word always conveys the idea of a testing. It always conveys the idea of a testing. It is a very rare word, frankly, in secular Greek, but a very common word in biblical Greek because the testing of faith is such an important part of spiritual life. In fact, the verb form of peirasmos, peirazo, means to put someone to the test, to put someone to the test. So it is the idea then of a testing, whether it results in good things or results in bad things, the issue here is the test.

Every trouble that comes into your life and every trouble, be it a small one or a large one, becomes a test then of your faith. You either pass or fail. To pass the test--mark it-- keeps it a trial. To fail the test turns it into a temptation. If it ends up as sin, it has proven to be a successful temptation. If it ends up in victory, it has proven to be a successful trial. A temptation leads you to sin and makes you fall. A trial leads you to strength and makes you stand.

So trials then are tests that reveal the genuineness and the strength of your faith. They can, on the one hand, reveal the genuineness of your faith and they can, on the second hand, reveal also the strength of your faith. What you do through a trial will reveal whether you really believe God and are genuinely saved. And it will also reveal how strong that saving faith really is.

Now may I suggest to you here what I think a lot of people throughout history have overlooked? Many people have felt that James was heavy on works. I want you to know, in this epistle James is very heavy on faith. He is not out of balance. He is very strong on faith, not just works. And Martin Luther who said "This is a right strawy epistle," s-t-r-a-w-y, showing that it was rather useless because it was so much a works righteousness, really missed the point. James is really strong on faith and works is only a manifestation, it is only one test of true faith.

Now let me say another thing. We should note that James is not distinguishing here between internal and external trials because we can't distinguish between those either. I have found in my life that every external trial soon becomes...what? An internal one. No trial that I've ever seen stays on the outside or it isn't much of a trial. It's when it gets in and festers in my mind that it is a trial. So James is not saying here are the external things and then later we're going to get to temptation which is the internal things. Any trial is external and internal. The Christian life can make no such distinction, these are just trials in general.

And our life is made up of them. They come in the form of disappointments, frustrations, misunderstandings, unfulfilled dreams, unmet expectations, great loss, great loneliness, fear, criticism, persecution, conflict. And they all maybe start on the outside but sooner or later end up on the inside and that's what makes them a trial. That's life.

And all of them come, look at verse 3, for the purpose of testing your faith, to help you to see whether your faith is real and how strong that faith is. They are tests of genuineness for those who claim true faith, and tests of the strength of things. So in a sense they can apply to unbelievers and believers as well.

So remember James purpose now is to test faith. And, beloved, I want to tell you that when you go through a trial, you really ought to look carefully at that trial and examine it in the light of how you react and what that says about your faith. That's what you are to learn from it. And if you persevere through trials as a pattern of life, if you persevere through suffering as a pattern of life and you never abandon your trust in God, then you prove to have genuine faith.

Robert Johnstone, writing in a commentary on James many years ago, said this, "James shows that where there is but an empty profession or a mere dreamy sentiment unbased on firm and intelligent convictions of truth, the fire of trouble will burn them up." Further he said, "But where there is true faith, affliction naturally leads to deeper thought than under other circumstances on sin and its desserts and thus frees the heart from the control of self-righteousness. The source of weakness leads to earnest wrestling with God in prayer and experience of the sustaining grace thus obtained strengthens and exhilarates hope with regard to the time to come," end quote. That is a very rich and loaded statement. But what he's basically saying is, you put a false Christian through a test and inevitably it will blow him away, it will burn him up. You put a true believer in a test and it will drive him to despair about his own weakness and it will drive him in prayer to lean on the weakness...on the strength, rather, of God rather than his own weakness.

Trial then for an imitation of faith burns it up. Trial for true faith causes it pain, the pain of inadequacy and weakness, causes it to turn from self-righteousness and cast itself upon the strength of God. So trouble, or affliction, becomes the first of James' tests for living faith.

Now that's how he begins this section. And I want to show you tonight how he ends it. So let's go down to verse 12. "Blessed is the man that endures trial." This is a beatitude, by the way, very much in the same vein as Matthew 5 where Jesus gave the beatitudes. And I told you last week that it's almost as if the beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount are underlying the thought of James, and we'll see that through the epistle. But he says, "Blessed is the man that endures trials, for when...or literally...after his trial is over he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to them that love Him."

Here is a declaration of the blessedness of one who passes the test. Blessed means happy. Better yet, it means satisfied. Better yet, it means fulfilled with inner joy...fulfilled with inner joy, a state of the soul in ecstasy...a state of the soul in joy. In fact, in chapter 5 of James and verse 11, he says the same thing, "Behold, we count them happy who endure." And then he says you remember the patience of Job, and so forth. We consider people truly happy who endure, who make it through the

trials.

Now this is not happiness due to freedom from trial, this is happiness due to victory over trial. Big difference...big difference. It's not the...it's not the banal happiness of someone who never knew conflict, it's the exhilaration of one who fought and won...who fought and won. It's not the happiness of the spectator, it's the happiness of the participant. Happy, satisfied, fulfilled with an inner state of joy is the man who endures testing. And again, it's not a matter of solicitation to sin. If that was the issue in verse 12, if enduring temptation to sin was the issue it wouldn't have said happy is the man who endures it, it would have had to say happy is the man who resists it. But it says blessed or satisfied is the man who endures it.

And there are three key words in verse 12. The word endure, the word trial and the word tested and the same three words appear in verses 2 and 3. "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing this, that the testing of your faith works patience." And then in verse 4, "Let patience have her perfect work." Count it all joy, the testing of your faith produces endurance. So you have trial, testing, endurance in verses 2 and 3. You have trial, testing, endurance in verse 12, and therefore I conclude that verse 12 is talking about the same thing verse 2 is and these two verses bracket the text in between. And the whole section is about triumph over trials. The same thing in mind in verse 2 and verse 12.

Notice in verse 12 it says, "Blessed is the man that endures." Just as in verse 3, the testing of your faith works endurance, the same idea, same word. Now to endure in verse 12 means to patiently, triumphantly endure. It doesn't mean, "Oh, I endured it, I grit my teeth, I hold my breath, I suck it up and I endure it." It isn't that. It isn't a passive endurance. It isn't a passive survival. It is to be the winner. It's hupomone, present active indicative, to patiently, triumphantly be the winner.

Now the point is simple. The person who claims to be a Christian and who goes through trials and comes out a winner which means he never gives up his faith, he never abandons God, he is shown to be the genuine Christian. And he will receive the crown of life which the Lord will give to those that love Him.

I mean, there are people who come, and you see them and I see them, they come to the church, they profess Christ, they get baptized. Trouble comes into their life and they're gone. I mean, they're gone. And they may never come back. Maybe they got burned in a relationship. They had their eye on some girl and she told him to take a walk, he wasn't her type, or whatever. Or maybe they came and they had to go through some struggle, a dear friend or a member of their family died and it just was overpowering and they walked away and maybe shook a fist at God and that was it.

You see, perseverance through trial is the proof of living faith. Now in verse 12, James calls those who persevere them that love Him. O, that's wonderful because basically that's the...that's the

essence of our attitude toward the Lord in salvation, we love Him. We love Him because He first...what? Loved us. This is all about a love relationship. This is not just some transaction where God saves us no matter what our attitude is and once we're saved we can have any attitude we want. No, those of us who are truly saved have an on-going profound love for Him.

You can just kind of underline that in your Bible as a wonderful definition of a true Christian, them that love Him, the Lord. First John 2 says that we will love Him or we will love the world but not both. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. And that's basic.

And further he says in 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us because they were not of us. If they had been of us, they would have remained with us, but they went out from us that it might be made manifest they never were of us." And what John is saying there, when the test came to whether you loved God or whether you loved the world, they loved the world and they split and it was okay because they never belonged anyway. It's in the trial that true love is made manifest.

In 1 Peter, would you look at chapter 1 for a moment? Peter talks about the same thing. In verse 6 he talks about manifold trials, like various trials that James talks about. And then he says in verse 7, almost as if he borrows the same idea from James, that the trial of your faith. He says all your trials are a test for the validity of your faith. And the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. In other words, he says your faith is being tested to prove its genuineness so that you will having genuine faith stand before the Lord when He comes. And then in verse 8 he defines that true faith, "Whom having not seen, you...what's the next word?...you love." And again, the same thought, the test of faith is passed by those who love God..those who love God.

We hear the echo of the Psalmist in that. I think it's Psalm 97, I'll take a guess and see, verse 10, yes, he says, "Ye who love the Lord, hate evil." That's right. And again, God's people are designated as those who love the Lord. All things work together for good to them that...what? Love God. That's a definition of a Christian.

Listen, a Christian is not someone who simply at one point in time believed the truth. A Christian is someone who has an on-going love for God. And that love holds fast even in trial. I mean, what would we say about a love on a human level that was only good if there wasn't any trouble? Forget it, that's no good. The point is simple then, those who love Him are those who hold on to Him by virtue of love, no matter what the trial. And thus they prove their faith to be genuine.

What does it mean to love there? Well, essentially Jesus said over and over, if you love Me you will...what?...keep My commandments, John 14:15, John 15:9 and 10, 1 John 2 verses 5 and 6, 1 John 4:16, 1 John 5:1,2 and 3, all say the same thing. If you love Me, you keep My commandments. The one who keeps My commandments, he's the one that loves Me.

So the genuineness of faith is built on love. But love to be demonstrated as genuine must be tested. And invariably, if it's true love, it passes the test and maintains obedience...it passes the test and maintains obedience.

Now let's go back to verse 12 and look a little more at that verse. As believers who articulate our faith, we are going to be tested. If we pass the test, holding on to the Lord even though there may be times of struggle and times of doubt, our faith is not destroyed, it is not eliminated, we hold to Him because we love Him. If that's the case, then we will be blessed.

Now to sum this idea up, let me suggest to you that the purpose of the testing is then two-fold. Number one, its purpose is to expose the quality of faith. Testing, as I've been saying, is designed to reveal what kind of faith you have. Look back at verse 12 again. That phrase "for when he is tried." Literally, when he is approved after testing...that's the whole idea. Beloved, can you perceive that in your life? Look, when tests and troubles and trials come, when there is a death or when there is loneliness or a loss or problems, whatever they might be, can you see that through that God is testing the validity of your faith? He is making you approved. He is putting you through the fire, as it were, that you might come out with the dross burned off and the true faith shining bright. Those who hold fast to their trust in God through trial, those whose faith does not fall, though the trial may persist, show themselves to have living faith...living faith.

Now I want to digress for a moment because this is a perfect place to talk about a very important biblical truth, a very important theological thought. Have you heard the phrase, "the perseverance of the saints"? That's a wonderful phrase, a common one in theology. Let me talk about that for a moment.

What does it mean when we hear "the perseverance of the saints"? We would say that it is a part of our theological creed that we believe in the perseverance of the saints. In other words, we believe that the saints will never abandon their faith, they will always persevere, believing God through every trial. That's the perseverance of the saints. In other words, they won't believe for a little while and bail out. They'll persevere. There will be no trial that will come on them to make them give up their faith. Why? Because there is no temptation or trial given you but such as is common to man, and God who is faithful will not allow you to be tempted above that you are able and always will make a way of...what? Escape that you may be able to endure it.

There is always the possibility of the perseverance of the true saints. And the true saints will always persevere. That's a very, very important thought.

Let me tell you why it's important. For years I grew up hearing a phrase called "eternal security." Have you heard that? We believe in eternal security. That's a good phrase. In fact, I used to hear it

this way, once saved...you got it...always saved. That's right. And that's a common phrase...once saved, always saved. And we like to believe that. I mean, who wouldn't? I would not want to be a part of a system that said once saved, but you never know. I don't want that. No, the emphasis on "once saved, always saved," that's all right. But what that is saying in a sense, some people get real nervous and they say, "Wait a minute. Once saved, always saved means you can do anything you want and God is sort of stuck with you." And the emphasis on that is on the holding power of God, and that's all right. The idea of eternal security means that God holds you, you're secure in His unchanging promise. You're secure in His inviolable power.

And Scripture does emphasize that. We are secure. We are secure because of the power of God. There's no question about it. For example, let me just break that down. We are secure in our salvation because of the promise and power of God. John 10, do you remember it? You've probably gone back to it many times in thinking about eternal security. John 10:28, "I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand." Why? "My Father who gave them to Me is greater than all and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand," right? So we're eternally secure because of the promise and power of God. "He that has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." In other words, it's the promise and the power of God.

Secondly, we say we're secure not only because of the promise and power of God but because of the prayers of Christ. He constantly intercedes on our behalf, right? So that no matter what we might do, He intercedes on our behalf and tells the Father that He has already paid for that sin and therefore it's forgiven. In John 6 it says, "All that the Father gives to Me will come to Me and I will lose none of them." He never abandons any of His own. In John 17 He prays for all of His own that they might enter into the fullness of salvation, and that prayer will be answered. In Luke 22 He talks about Peter and He says Satan desires to have you, but I have prayed for you that your faith fail not. And He says when you get through this deal, I want you to strengthen the brethren.

In other words, Peter was secure not only by the promise and power of God but by the prayer of Christ. If any man sins, 1 John says, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous and He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but the sins of the whole world. Christ is our intercessor, our intermediary.

There's a third element in this. We are secure not only because of the prayer and the promise of God and the prayer...the promise and power of God and the prayers of Christ, but also because of the presence of the Spirit...the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is in us the guarantee of future glory, is that not so? Doesn't Ephesians 1 say we have the earnest of the Spirit? We are sealed by the Spirit to the day of redemption.

Now all of that emphasizes eternal security from the standpoint of the power of God, the presence of God through His Spirit and the prayers of Jesus Christ. The whole trinity secures us forever so that no Christian who believes in the Lord will ever be lost. Isn't that wonderful? That's eternal security. And our salvation and our security is based, listen to this, on the covenantal faithfulness of God. It is based on the covenantal faithfulness of God. And the very God of peace, says Paul to the Thessalonians, chapter 5 verse 23, sanctify you holy. And I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved, blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. I'm praying for you that you'll be preserved, blameless till Jesus gets here. Verse 24 says, and faithful is He that calls you who also will...what?...do it. We are secure based on the covenantal faithfulness of God.

That's wonderful. God preserves His people from apostasy. He preserves His people from defection. And He brings all of them to heaven. That's clearly the teaching of Scripture. Listen to what Scripture says. Psalm 31, "Be of good courage and He will strengthen your heart all ye that hope in the Lord." Psalm 37, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord." Psalm 37 again, verse 28, "For the Lord loves judgment and forsakes not His saints...listen to this...they are preserved forever." Wonderful. Psalm 41:2 says the Lord will preserve him and keep him alive. And he shall be blessed on the earth. Psalm 97:10, "You that love the Lord hate evil. He preserves the souls of His saints. He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked."

Psalm 116:6, "The Lord preserves the simple." Aren't you glad for that? "I was brought low and He helped me. He will not allow my foot to be moved and He that keeps thee will not slumber. Behold, He that keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper. The Lord is thy shade on thy right hand, the sun shall not smite thee by day nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil." Wonderful.

Romans 16:25, "Now to him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel." Second Timothy 1:12, "For the which cause I also suffer these things, nevertheless I'm not ashamed. For I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I've committed to Him against that day." You remember that one? He's able to keep what I've committed to Him. And what have I committed to Him? My soul.

Second Timothy 4:18, "And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work," listen to this, "and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom, to whom be glory forever and ever amen." First Peter 1:5 says we are kept by the power of God. Jude 1, we are preserved in Jesus Christ. And Jude 24, "Now to Him that is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy."

Aren't those wonderful scriptures? Strong language, folks, about eternal security. But may I hasten to say there's another side to this? There's another side to this. You say, "What's the other side?" The other side is that we are not only kept by God but from the human viewpoint, we also persevere.

In other words, you aren't kept by God if you chuck your faith in the midst of a trial. And again you're back to that apparent paradox of the work of God and the way of man. You're saved because you were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world and yet you're not saved without exercising faith, right? You're secure because of the covenant faithfulness of God, but you're not secure without exercising perseverance. The means then of eternal security is wrought through the power of the Spirit energizing the true believer to endure in faith through all trials.

Burkhoff(?), Louis Burkhoff, an excellent theologian, calls perseverance..."That continuous operation of the Holy Spirit in the believer by which the work of divine grace that is begun in the heart is continued and brought to completion." So our part is to endure.

Listen to what it says in the Scripture also. Matthew 24:13, "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." Now we just said that God's going to keep us, we've turned the table around and it appears to be contradictory, but it isn't. It's the way He keeps us by energizing us by His Spirit to endure. Then Jesus said to the Jews in John 8:31, "If you continue in My Word, then are you My disciples for real." First Corinthians 15, "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached unto you which you also received and wherein you stand...listen to this...by which you also are saved if you keep in memory what I preach to you, unless you've believed for nothing." If you don't hold on to it, you show your faith wasn't real.

Colossians 1, listen to this text, "And you that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now has He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death to present you holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in His sight." Isn't that wonderful? Salvation. We're presented to God holy, unreprouvable, unblamable in His sight...then it says, "If you continue in the faith grounded and settled and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel." You're only secure if you endure. You're only secure if you endure. Endurance is the means by which security is worked out.

Therefore Hebrews 2 says, "We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard lest that any time we let them slip." Don't let them slip. We are made partakers of Christ, Hebrews 3:14 says, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end. Hebrews 4:14 says, "Let us hold fast our profession." Hebrews 6:12, "We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end and be not slothful but followers of them...listen...who through faith and endurance inherit the promises." That's the perseverance of the saints. We endure. Hebrews 10:39 says, "We are not of them who draw back unto perdition but them who believe to the saving of the soul." Peter even said in 2 Peter 1:10, "If you do these things, you shall never fall." So the point is, no one is secure who doesn't endure.

You say, "Well, what happens when someone doesn't...doesn't endure?" Very simple, 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us because they never were...what?...of us." They failed the test of genuine

faith. No trial then, beloved, get it...no trial is so great that it could sever you from your Lord if you're faith is genuine. It's only a test to manifest the genuineness of that faith. So eternal security is not enough alone. It is not a question of once saved-always saved, no matter what you believe and no matter what you do. No. If there's not endurance, if you don't pass the test and hold on to the Lord, if you're not continuing to love and obey Him through every trial of life, then you give evidence of having an illegitimate faith.

How many people do you know who came to church for a while, had a little trouble in their life and left? Who made a profession of faith in Christ, but they no longer endure, they cannot be identified as those who love Him, their life is not characterized by obedience.

I love what it says in the Westminster Confession of Faith, "They whom God hath accepted in His beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace but shall certainly persevere therein to the end and be eternally saved. This perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will but on the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father, upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ, the abiding of the Spirit and of the seed of God within them and the nature of the covenant of grace from all which ariseth also to certainty and infallibility thereof. Nevertheless, they may through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins. And for a time continue therein, whereby they incur God's displeasure and grieve His Holy Spirit, come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts, have their hearts hardened, their conscience wounded, hurt and scandalize other...others and bring temporal judgments upon themselves."

Now what the Westminster Confession is saying is a Christian can get in a whole lot of trouble but never ultimately jettison his faith because he will persevere. Trials, then, prove genuine faith.

Meditate on the following hymns. More secure is no one ever than the loved ones of the Savior. Not yon star on high abiding, nor the bird in home nest hiding. God His own doth tend and nourish, in His holy courts they flourish, like a Father kind He spares them in His loving arms He bears them. Neither life nor death can ever from the Lord His children sever, for His love and deep compassion comforts them in tribulation. Little flock to joy then yield thee, Jacob's God will ever shield thee, rest secure with this defender, at His will all foes surrender. What He takes or what He gives us shows the Father's love so precious, we may trust His purpose wholly, tis His children's welfare souly.

Yes, we are kept and we are kept to persevere. Someone has written,

"Jesus lives and so shall I. Death thy sting is gone forever. He who deigned for me to die, lives the bands of death to sever. He shall raise me from the dust, Jesus is my hope and trust.

"Jesus lives and reigns supreme, and His kingdom still remaining, I shall also be with Him ever living, ever reigning. God has promised be it must, Jesus is my hope and trust.

"Jesus lives and by His grace, victory o'er my passions giving, I will cleanse my heart and ways, ever to His glory living. Me He raises from the dust, Jesus is my hope and trust.

"Jesus lives I know full well, not from Him my heart can sever, life nor death nor powers of hell, joy nor grief henceforth forever. None of all His saints is lost, Jesus is my hope and trust.

"Jesus lives and death is now but my entrance into glory. Courage then my soul for thou hast a crown of life before thee. Thou shalt find thy hopes were just. Jesus is the Christian's trust."

Whenever trials come into your life or mine, they prove the genuineness of our faith by giving us opportunity to persevere. And having persevered, look back and say, "Yes, I know I belong to the Lord."

There is a second purpose that I want briefly to mention to you. These trials are not only to expose the quality of faith but to strengthen that faith...to strengthen that faith. And we're going to look at that purpose later, not right now. But just file that in your mind. They also strengthen our faith and thus do they serve a very good purpose.

But for those who do not fall into the trial, would you notice back at verse 12? For those who do not collapse, he says, "After they have been approved, he shall receive the crown of life." Now for you Greek students, that's what I would like to call an appositional genitive. And literally it would be translated this way, "To receive a crown which is life." The crown equals life.

The point here is this, the crown is eternal life. The promise of eternal life is what God has promised them that love Him. Eternal life...mark it...is our ultimate reward. You say, "I already had that, I thought." Well, you do have it, you have it on promise, some day you're going to get it in reality in its fullness. We are still waiting for the full salvation. We are still waiting to enter in to our future reward, that's why it's a future tense. He shall receive the crown...what is the crown?...it is eternal life. At the Lord's coming, He will grant to us the fullness of eternal life. This is reminiscent of 2 Timothy 4:8, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown which is righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge will give me at that day, not to me only but also all them that love His appearing again." At the time when the Lord comes and takes us to Himself there will be a crown, that crown is eternal life. There will be a crown, that crown is righteousness. We will at that moment have eternal righteousness and eternal life. And I believe it refers to the eternal life that we receive at the coming of Jesus Christ.

In fact, all of the rewards that the Lord grants to us are bound up in our eternal life ultimately. First Timothy 6:12, "Fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life." The fullness of the promise of eternal life. In fact, in 1 Peter 5:4, "When the chief shepherd shall appear, you will receive a crown which is glory." So it's eternal life, it's righteousness, it's glory, those are not crowns that belong to different Christians, those are crowns that belong to all Christians...all Christians will receive eternal life, eternal righteousness and eternal glory.

By the way, Revelation 2:10 also mentions the crown of life again. And there it is promised to those who were faithful unto death, who went through trials, it's the same context. He's writing to the church at Smyrna, you have tribulation for a short period of time, if you prove yourself faithful through that even if it means death, then I'll reward you with eternal life.

Now let me say this. Eternal life is not earned by endurance. It is not earned by endurance but endurance is the proof of true faith and true love which is rewarded by eternal life. Did you get that distinction? It is not earned by endurance, it is the reward for endurance which proves the genuineness of saving faith.

The word "crown," by the way, is the word *stephanos*. It is used in several different ways but generally in the culture of the New Testament, it had to do with a wreath that was put around the head of a victor in an athletic event. Some commentators feel that because the Jews rather rejected that whole idea of competition, they didn't like the fact that many of those games were held with men completely naked, participating or with very minimal garments which offended the Jews. And so they had a rather severe distaste for that. And so some feel James would never refer to a *stephanos* in regard to that kind of competition. But I think that's begging the issue somewhat. We know for sure from the antiquities of Josephus that there were such games, competition games, held in the city of Jerusalem under the reign of Herod the Great and so it's very likely that they were familiar with the *stephanos* as a victor's crown.

And obviously when you're talking about enduring a trial to the end, that fits the context here. Some would like us to believe *stephanos* has to do with the crown for a king or the garland that was put on the head of someone at a wedding or a feast or a celebration so that it becomes a crown of celebration, a crown of joy, a crown of happiness. But it seems to me it includes prosperity and happiness and honor and royalty, but the context must be that of a victor's crown. And since that would have been familiar things to them, it's very simple to assume that that's exactly what James had in mind.

So what he is saying is that the Lord is going to reward with eternal life those who demonstrate that they had true salvation in that they persevered. So, beloved, as we open this section then we understand that life is full of trials. I mean, that's just the way it's going to be. And how we deal with those trials manifests the genuineness or the lack of it of our faith. If we endure, if we persevere, if

we are victorious, we demonstrate true saving faith and we will in the end receive the reward of that saving faith, the reward of that continual love which is the fullness of eternal life, eternal righteousness, eternal glory. That's for those who prove to be genuine.

Now the question immediately comes up at this point, having looked at verse 2 and verse 12, how can a Christian practically endure trials? How can we do that? What is the practicality of endurance? And that's what James wants to hit, he's very pragmatic.

It's not enough to say, "I must persevere, tell me how. How do I persevere?" Look at your outline for a moment and follow those five points that I gave. These are the pragmatic aspects to a persevering faith. Several things are required: a joyous attitude, a joyous attitude, verse 2, "Count it all joy;" an understanding mind, verse 3, "Knowing this;" a submissive will, verse 4, "Let patience have her perfect work, let it do what it's going to do." And then a believing heart, don't have wavering faith, verse 6, but ask in true faith. Verse 8, don't be double- minded. And then in verses 9 to 11, a humble spirit. The way to go through trials victoriously is with a joyous attitude, an understanding mind, that is perceiving the reality of the trial and the purpose in it; a submissive will, accepting it from the Lord, getting under it, and learning what He wants you to learn; a believing heart that never wavers in faith; and a humble spirit that is willing to accept anything. Now that's how you handle your trials.

Now specifically, we're going to look at all of those next week. And they are going to be so rich and so practical. And I want to give you an assignment, don't come alone next week. We graduated all the students at the college yesterday, they're gone. So we miss them but we want you to bring some folks to take their place as we get into the practical ways that you can be victorious in every test and every trial. And that's for next week. Let's bow in prayer together.

Father, our hearts are so filled with thanksgiving and hope as we have shared in the truth of Your Word. We thank You that You have brought us into various trials to test our faith so that having demonstrated that our faith is genuine, having passed the test, and demonstrated that we are the ones that love you by maintaining obedience, we shall receive blessing, yes the crown of life that You give as You have promised to those who belong to You. Thank You for that great hope. Thank You that not only do You secure us by Your covenant faithfulness, but You energize us by Your Spirit to persevere and to enjoy the victory that comes to those who walk with You. Bless our week. May the trials of this week prove to be the source of our greatest joy, for the Savior's sake, Amen.

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