

James II - Study Notes

Introduction

The truth is that the faith that saved us will continue to be put to test by trials and temptations. We will face trials of life and be tempted to sin. But we can face the future with confidence, responding to the truths of scripture with faith and obedience and overcome temptations.

James's overriding theme is that *real faith produces genuine works*. Chapter 1 teaches us that when faith is put to the test it perseveres. It results in stability. James taught that, normal trials that accompany our journey in life don't crush genuine faith; they produce endurance or perseverance. The key to overcoming temptation is drawing on His strength. Genuine faith results in submission to God's Word, conforming the life of the believer to the image of Christ. So today we are studying James 1:1-12 the **Trials of Life**.

The reality is that on our journey in life there is hurt, heartache, pain, problems, disappointments, discouragement, sickness, suffering, disease and death. The reality of suffering creates within us questions regarding God's justice and the purpose of life.

James commenced his letter by launching his overriding theme that real faith, produces genuine works. James' readers were enduring terrible hardships as they tried to come to terms with their new identities as Jewish Christians in a culture that despised both Jews and Christians. Some of them under these extreme trials were thinking of returning to Judaism or stop living their faith in Christ.

These trials have touched every generation of Christians throughout history and they will touch you and I. James 1:1-4 *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.* ² *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,* ³ *because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.* ⁴ *Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.* The recipients of this letter endured adversity. They became the brunt of criticism, brutality, unjust treatment.

James addressed these believers with a single word: **Greetings**. This is a common form of official greeting at that time. The Greek word *chairen* literally means to rejoice. This sets the very tone for his letter.

The Greek word for trial is *peirasmos* which appears again in verse 12. James specifically addressed the tests that directly challenge the integrity of a believer's faith.

Firstly James said that trials are inevitable, not **if** but **whenever**, when we do. Trials are inescapable and unavoidable. These will certainly come. James talked about, *many kinds*, various types and we do not know in what form they will take. Trials occur in all shapes and sizes. They burst into our lives and they can stay too long! They may be frequent and unpredictable.

James explained the reason for such trials. They produce immediate and ultimate results. James 1:3 says *because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance (endurance)*. This is the immediate result. The Greek word for *testing* is *dokimion*. It refers to a way of authenticating something, for example, a gold prospector bites into golden nuggets to test its quality. God applies specific tests to each of His children, assessing their faith to reveal its true character. The object of the God's testing is our faith. Illustration of a runner: who has a trainer who knows which muscles to develop in order to bring about the best results. His goal is to stretch and strength our faith muscles, which produces endurance.

Endurance is the immediate result. Endurance has a greater purpose, a perfect result. In effect, in God's sovereign plan He lines up a chain of events that will take place for a specific purpose, endurance being the first one, when endurance takes place, it then leads us to maturity, which leads to a fully developed character. Such trials are an opportunity for us individually to trust Him. These are times to hang in there.

James 1:4 *Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

James answered the question - how can Christians in trouble, rise above their situations without dropping out, giving in, or falling short?

In verse 2 James uses the word *consider* which has an interesting background. It comes from the root meaning to lead or to guide. James is saying our lead or guiding thought should be joy, behind which all other actions should follow.

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In verse 3 James used the term *you know*. By knowing that God has a greater purpose in the testing, the believer is able to *consider it pure joy*.

In verse 4 James says *Let perseverance finish its work*. James encouraged co-operation with God's work. We find the same passive co-operation in 1 Peter 5:6. Please read this for your self.

James says we are to face trials with a deliberate attitude of joy, knowing that God is working out His plan in our lives and co-operating with Him through the entire process. James 1:5-8 *If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. ⁶ But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸ Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.*

James continued the theme by answering another question why do trials overwhelm us? Why do we sometimes cave in? The answer is **our wisdom**. Whenever we feel ill-equipped to handle a trial, we have one option: ask God for wisdom. Wisdom can be defined as the ability to view life from God's perspective. James said this kind of wisdom comes by prayer. We might say for example *in the midst of this trial, I ask for your wisdom, Help me to see what I'm going through from your viewpoint, and I ask for faith not to give up*. This prayer is one of sustaining faith that allows us to endure trials, to align our will and attitude to His divine perspective, submitting ourselves to God and His mighty hand.

The opposite of faith is doubt. James compared a person who doubts to the surf of the sea, driven by wind. It is the same word used in the gospel of Luke when the disciples thought they would perish in the storm of the Sea of Galilee. They woke Jesus, who immediately rebuked the wind and the waves (Luke 8:24). Interestingly, the first words out of Jesus's mouth after coming storm were, *where is your faith? (Luke 8:25)*. James described this as *double-minded*. The Greek word *dipsychos* literally means double souled. James used this term again in chapter James 4:8 which we will revisit later. Where there should be one thought, goal, attitude, or devotion, we find two competing thoughts. Consequently a double minded person is one who wants his or her will at the same time as God's will. That kind of person is *unstable in all they do*. Part of us wants to live in God's will; but the other part on our terms. When the trial comes I refuse to lose my grip and trust that the purpose and plan of God will bring me freedom.

James 1:9-12 *Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. ¹⁰ But the rich should take pride in their humiliation -since they will pass away like a wild flower. ¹¹ For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business. ¹² Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.*

Trials affect everybody; rich and poor and both wisdom and faith are required. Wisdom reminds those that are poor of their high position in Christ. The Apostle Paul says this in Ephesians 2:6 says *And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus*. For the rich in verse 10 they are reminded of the fragility of life, trials come and earthly riches are lost. If we run after their own pursuits they will fade away. Verse 12 tells us that *one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life*. The word blessed means *makarios* means genuinely happy. James describes the rewards on heaven as *the crown of life*. The rewards on this earth are maturity, wisdom, and insight into God's plan. That is real life at its best! James called believers to respond to life's inevitable trials with joy, wisdom, and firm confidence in Him.

When trouble comes it is essential that we respond with wisdom. Wisdom for handling trials can only come from God. He gives us wisdom primarily through His Word.

Romans 8:28 *says And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

Hebrew 12:1-3 directs our attention on Jesus and other fellow sufferers who have gone before us as models of endurance.

1 Peter 1:6-7 reminds us that endurance will ultimately result in praise, glory, and honour.

When troubles come we should respond in faith. In the context of trials, faith means having absolute confidence in God's promises in the midst of circumstances that appear to contradict those promises. Single-minded faith, means making a decision, with God's help, to choose our attitude. It means surrendering fully to God, because we trust Him, resisting the natural tendency to abandon hope. We can strengthen and encourage each other's faith.