

James 1:9-12

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Open up your Bibles to the book of James. James chapter 1. I've got a lot of ground to cover in 30 minutes, so we better get ruling.

But as an early believer, my first study of the book of James was actually with one of my really good friends from high school named Mitchell.

And Mitchell, he had a pretty serious drinking problem and a little bit of drugs, but mainly drinking in high school. And a few years into college, a friend of mine said, hey, did you hear about Mitchell? Mitchell got saved while he was in prison. He's in prison right now, and like he's come to know the Lord, and I couldn't believe it. It was awesome. So he says, when he gets out of jail, he's going to need some really good friends to come alongside him.

And I was like, let's do it. But as is the fashion, like when you're saved in jail, you're pretty blunt to the point a lot of the time. And Mitchell was very much like that.

[1 : 05] So he was like, hey, have you read the book of James? I'm like, yeah, let's read it together, man. And it kind of characterizes the book of James. Like Mitchell was very straightforward, didn't beat around the bush, just kind of told you how it was.

Didn't really care about truth first and your feelings later. And we had a mutual friend that we were both trying to help. And he said, hey, how's this guy doing?

And I said, well, he's doing a little better. Like he's not partying as much. He's gotten out of the way from the crowd. And he's doing a little better. And Mitchell said, is he following the Lord?

And I just said, I don't think so. But he's not doing good then. It's kind of like what he, kind of that. But I see why he loved the book of James, because it is just sort of really straightforward.

James' primary theme is not really how someone becomes a believer or how someone becomes saved, but rather like what does real faith look like? What does a, what does genuine saving faith look like?

[2 : 08] And he focuses on being more of a doer of the word than just a hearer of the word. His audience is primarily Jewish Christians. Because he mentions in verse one, the 12 tribes and the dispersion.

So Jewish Christians who are probably being persecuted and driven away from a lot of their, their context that they were living in. This is James, more than likely the brother of Jesus.

It's mentioned in Matthew 13, a leader in the Jerusalem church. And so he gets right into it. But Zach and Caleb did a really good job of going through the last parts of this.

We're going to be picking up in verse nine today of chapter one. But the context of this whole section is basically how God uses trials to refine the faith of the believer in God's design in those trials.

So James chapter one, verse nine. It says, Under trial for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

[3 : 43] Let's pray with me real quick. Father, we are grateful to be gathered today as your people. People that have all been saved by Jesus Christ.

And now that we are one in Jesus Christ, that we belong to one another. And I pray that today he would use your word to strengthen, challenge, convict, build up.

That you would have the desire that you wish for each of the person here, Lord. That your spirit would apply the word appropriately. And thank you for this time, Lord, in Jesus name. Amen.

Amen. All right. So again, in the context, James had been talking about trials and affliction. If you go back up to verse two, he says, Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.

For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect. That you may be perfect and complete, lacking and nothing.

[4 : 49] And again, since Zach and Caleb did a good job of kind of wringing every drop out of this text about trials, I thought we would turn over to another familiar text just to get a little more of the context of just what God means by trials.

But this word, trials, is used here in James, is *parizamos*. And it means not an inner wrestling with sinful inclinations, but rather outward undeserved sufferings from outside a person.

So persecution, things that are coming from out here and coming on you, that weigh on you, that press at you. So it's not like, you know, again, it's not a struggle with sin or temptation, but it's the stuff that comes from outside that distresses us.

That's what trials kind of mean here. And God can work in the little things in our lives, but he really works in the tragedies and the hard-pressed moments of trials, the *parizamos*, the darkest hours of our souls.

And so Peter, the Apostle Peter, just like James, kind of writes about this. But just to get some more context of trials, flip over to 1 Peter 1 real quick, but keep your hand in James.

[6 : 00] But 1 Peter 1, verse 6. And likewise, Peter is preparing the churches to get ready for official Roman persecution that was coming, which up to that point had mainly been from the Jews, but it was getting to be official from Rome itself.

So Peter's preparing the churches to prepare to suffer and to endure trials. So 1 Peter 1, and look at verse 6. And to pick up on the language that James uses, he says, In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold, that perishes though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in the praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

And though you have not seen him, I love this verse, though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with the joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

And so in this one text, tying it into James, right, is this idea of how precious metals and a refiner's fire, so it's an image used a lot in the Bible for a powerful metaphor for trials.

So our suffering and all that we go through is testing that is sent from God. Trials are a crucible, so to speak.

[7 : 42] So just as gold and other precious metals go through extreme heat and a refiner's fire, a crucible to burn out any impurities that are there, to refine it.

So it's used as a metaphor of how God uses trials to take the object of our faith and push it through it so that it'll burn a lot of the junk out of our lives. It should not be there.

It brings us closer to what God desires. The psalmist said in Psalm 66, For you, O God, have tested us. You have tried us as silver is tried.

You brought us into the net. You laid crushing burdens on our backs. You let men ride over our heads when we went through fire and through water.

Yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance. So the imagery as God is the skilled refiner, taking our faith and putting it through fire of trials and suffering.

[8 : 41] So just as gold has a lot of impurities, yeah, the believer's life, my life, your life, has a lot of stuff in it that should not be. We are not yet perfect. But when God puts us through fires, it hurts.

It hurts. It burns. But when we come out of the furnace, more pure, closer to Christ, and more like Him. So a few observations, just really quick, just an intro here, from Peter's passage about trials, because again, they went well on James the last two weeks.

A few observations from this passage in 1 Peter. Notice, he says, Though now for a little while. Here's four observations. Trials are temporary. Though now for a little while.

So when you're going through trials, it can seem like they won't stop. They never will end. And it just makes us feel like, is there ever going to be a stop to this?

Is it unending? But he's saying for a little while. It's temporary, because one day we will inherit eternal salvation. So life is not easy. The second observation, our trials bring grief.

[9 : 51] It says you have been grieved. Meaning trials are not fun. They're not pleasant or easy to go through. Suffering, affliction, and hardship brings great distress, discomfort, pain, and grief into our lives.

So it's hard. I like that recognition. Trials bring grief. Thirdly, trials vary in form. And this is important. It connects to what James says.

By various trials. Trials of many kinds. They vary in form. So they don't always look the same for my life, or your life, or someone else's. God providentially can design a certain trial to hit you where he needs to hit you.

That might not really be necessarily as big of a test for somebody else. But for you it is. He knows exactly what to pressure you with. He knows exactly what to do.

And so design for each believer. Some it's physical persecution, sickness, illness, relational loss, whatever it is. He just knows. So trials vary in form. And then lastly, trials have design.

[10:58] This is difficult in the moment to see. But he says if necessary. So meaning trials just don't happen randomly or meaninglessly. They always have a providential design behind them.

So that's why James says ask God for wisdom. He'll show you. Ask him. So he designs for us to learn something about ourselves and him in those trials.

So trials are temporary. Trials bring grief. They vary in form. And trials have design. So if you're going to go back to James now. James chapter 1.

Faith that doesn't flourish. Faith does not flourish when it lies untested. It's kind of like going to the gym. If you don't exercise your muscles, you atrophy.

And so when God loves us and he saves us, he imparts to us saving faith when we are born again. But because he cares for us, he also injects various trials to train, grow, and sweeten, and strengthen, and mature us in the process.

[12:07] So trials are not given to us unnecessarily to produce enduring faith. But trials are one of the most essential things that God uses to keep our faith alive, to sustain it, and to help us persevere.

He keeps alive the faith that he has given us to the very end. Trials are a huge way he does that.

So, walking through our text here, there's just four points. All right?

Doing it a little different maybe, but point number one, our trials are meant to humble us. Trials are meant to humble us. You see this in verses 9 and 10, the second part.

He says, Because like a flower of the grass, he will pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass. Its flower falls, and its beauty perishes.

So, he's giving you a metaphor, one familiar in Scripture. Mortal mankind is often compared to the flower of the grass. There's three common flowers in Israel, and they have beautiful colors when they come out in February.

[13:21] But despite their beauty, their youth, eventually they are scorched and burned to ashes by May. And so, the scorching heat refers to this strong blast, scorching wind, that just kind of devastates every flower in its path.

And he's saying, so it is with mortal man. He's like that. Because one day, because of sin, he will decay, and eventually all of us will not be here.

All of us will not be here. One day, we will all pass away. Job wrote, man, who is born of woman, is few of days and full of trouble.

He comes out like a flower and withers. He is like a shadow that continues not. And later on, in the book of James, James chapter 4, he says, what is your life?

For you are but a mist. You are but a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes. So like short-lived flowers of the field, so too we also will perish one day.

[14:26] Is that a humbling thought? If you sit and chew on it for a little while, it'll be a humbling thought. Do you feel the weight of that, that we're here and we're gone? And a lot of the younger crew here, it's just not on your radar because you feel strong, healthy, kind of at the peak of your physical vitality, but I promise one day it'll hit you in a very real way that we are fading.

The blasting heat and wind and fury of trials will come and will humble us. We are not immortal. So, trials are meant to humble us.

Trials and suffering touch everyone. That's one of the common themes here. So, the broader theme is it touches everyone. James wants the readers to have this sink in their heads and no matter how powerful and rich they are or how weak and poor they are, trials and suffering will come upon everyone.

It kind of levels the playing field. It's the great equalizer. There's no one who can escape it. No one's exempt. And so, in this context, James particularly has in mind people who are rich and people who are poor in the context of the church.

It says the brothers. So, in the Psalms it says, those of low estate are but a breath. Those of high estate are a delusion.

[15:52] In the balances they go up and they are together lighter than a breath. Psalm 62 verse 9 meaning like none of them are permanent.

Whether you're high, you're low, rich or poor, we're all like a breath. Trials and afflictions we face in this present life are the great equalizer. Bring all of God's people to complete dependence on Him and then also in connection to each other.

We're all knocked down to the same level. Trials force us to despair of our own resources and then to look to God's resources. So, it is imperative though it's imperative that God helps us see our need for Him.

And trials are how He does that. Whatever it costs it's so important that we become aware of our need for Him. Hold your hand there. I don't want to replace for you to turn but hold your hand in James but my favorite passage to display what I'm talking about is here is 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians chapter 1. If you haven't read this lately it's going to blow your mind. 2 Corinthians chapter 1 go to verse 8. So, Apostle Paul writing his second letter to the church at Corinth.

[17:13] Check this out. 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 8. Paul says, For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia.

For we were so utterly burned beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. You hear that? Paul's like, it got so bad we wanted to die.

That's like how bad it got. Can you imagine Paul saying that? I think we have kind of a false view of him sometimes. He just, it's okay, you know, just sort of brushes it off. It got so bad in Asia, he said, that we despaired of life.

Verse 9. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death, but this was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead.

He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him, we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. So, hopefully we can fix this problem.

[18:23] There's a lot of people, it's kind of become a cliché in the church, but it's not true, but it says God will not allow you to go through more than you can bear. Not true.

He says it right there. We were burned beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. It does say in James, coming up soon, that he won't allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear. It's not the same idea. Not an enticement to sin. This is, God isn't just up there kind of being your cheerleader. He wants to break you to where you are very aware of your need for him.

And how will you ever get there if you don't despair of your own strength? If you get to that point where you realize, I don't have anything left. It's got to be him. So he will put us through more than we can bear so that we will not rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead.

And it's not a fun lesson to learn in the middle of it. But when you come out of it, it's so great. So go over back to James again. Trials bring us to the same level of dependency on God and humbly the same level with each other no matter who we are.

[19:38] It says in Acts, there are many tribulations. All of us must enter the kingdom of God. So the point here is whether poor or rich, trials will come into our lives to humble us and remind us that we are not God, that we must humbly admit that our resources are not enough and that we must go to him alone.

So that's just imperative that we see that. So as a poor brother forgets his earthly poverty, so the rich brother will forget his earthly riches in the middle of trials.

They are equal in faith in Christ. And so God, again, in his providence uses trials a certain design both for the rich and for the poor.

That's kind of where we're going to go the next few points here. But if you're under the delusion that just because you're a follower of Christ that you're going to be exempt from trials, like, it's not going to happen.

We all have to, like, be aware that it's going to come in this life. And that we must learn how to suffer well. It's just going to get worse.

[20:48] So, number two. Trials lift up the poor. This is in verse 9. He said, let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation.

So, here, James is addressing, in other words, the brother of humble circumstances, of low degree. Someone who actually is financially, economically, poor, didn't have much.

That would represent most of the people in the ancient world. Most of the believers. There wasn't a majority middle class back then. It was either, like, the really, really powerful, rich, and usually extreme poor.

But it also could refer to believers who maybe were rich, but because of trials and persecution, they've been dispossessed of their homes, their possessions. So, they've been brought low. And so, very important to kind of see that here. But, how does God use trials and suffering in the life of the poor person, the lowly person? It says that he exalts him.

[21 : 55] Despite his earthly condition, when a poor saint has an eternal perspective, he can boast or glory and rejoice in his exaltation.

So, it's a legitimate form of pride. It doesn't mean like an arrogant boasting. It means like you're boasting in your God and how great he is. And so, in the fallen world's eyes, I look at people who don't have a lot, people who appear poor, and as Paul said, we have become and still are like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.

It's like how the world views people in that condition. Yet, because of Christ's transforming power, because of his love for us, a poor saint, in God's eyes, is beautiful.

A true believer in this life, regardless of how low he is, in the world's eyes, can take pride in his God. And James exhorts the poor person to boast of glory in his status in Christ, that one day he will be exalted and vindicated by God, even though he doesn't have much in this life.

And so, he can look at true riches that are above, and not what is here below. That gives him hope and expectation to go into the next life.

[23 : 16] So he can gladly accept temporary deprivation, right, of suffering, trials, because he has a future hope set on the eternal realm of God.

God. And he can hope in the truth that one day he will be exalted. All right, so here's a commentator, I love this, he says about the poor saint, he may be hungry, but he has the bread of life.

He may be thirsty, but he has the water of life. He may be poor, but he has eternal riches. He may be cast aside by men, but he has been received by God.

He may have no home here, but he has a glorious home in the life to come. So that is how we ought to look at those of us who are poor, those of us who are lowly.

Poor is kind of a hard context to apply to a lot of us because comparatively we are pretty well off, but it can also mean someone who is lowly, of lowly spirit, someone who is broken, right?

[24 : 22] So be aware of that. God will exalt the poor. He will lift up the poor. Point number three, trials bring down the rich.

Trials bring down the rich. You see in verse 9, it said, let the rich boast in his humiliation. And rich here is referring to someone who is well off, someone who has a lot, someone who is financially, economically, stable, everything going for him.

Such people did exist back then, but again, it was a very slim majority. But put yourself in James' shoes. He's writing to a Jewish audience, and to a lot of the Jews, the Pharisees and others, like wealth was a sign of God's favor and acceptance of that person.

And the poor person was looked at as cursed by God. And so he's reminding them, not really, not really, not true. In contrast, James exhorts the rich brother to boast in his humiliation because he's being shown by God that he is weak, that he is vulnerable, that he is fragile because of trials.

So I think at least there's two things that James is trying to get the rich man to see. First, he wants to use trials to help the rich man realize that his wealth is temporary and it brings him no advantage before God.

[25 : 51] money can solve some problems, some, but there's a lot that they cannot solve at all or help you with. It can't buy people out of their problems.

When you lose a loved one to death, when you have a child who's diagnosed with a chronic illness, when you suffer physically or you have deep emotional pain, like no money can buy you out of that. And God uses that to show you that you are vulnerable, that you need him, that you don't have this invisible attitude towards God.

So James says, the rich, those who are well off, should boast not on their riches, but being made low before God. So the rich man should thank God. Thank you for making me aware of my great need for you.

Because of all my stuff, I sometimes will lose sight of that. I think that I am independent, self-sufficient, and God uses that to bankrupt them of their worldly riches, to show them their need for his grace.

[27 : 01] So God used the trials to humble the rich, bring them low, to make them aware of their need for him, to have their hope set on the living God. Secondly, though, underneath this, I think that God uses trials to help the rich identify with the poor brother.

God both have that in common. We're both fleeting. We both are temporary. Trials bring us down to the same level and make us both aware, poor or rich, of how much we need God.

So it's the great equalizer, like I said. Just as the trials that come upon the rich, all their stuff will be gone one day and they'll have just the same amount as the poor guy, right?

So it brings them together, helps them relate. So, you know, again, in our affluent Western culture as believers, we tend to think that we're insulated and we have some sort of false sense of security, nothing bad or dangerous is going to happen.

But, we all know that's not true. We know that God is going to use whatever it takes to make us aware of our need for him. So God ordains hard times to make sure that we don't make idols out of the good times.

[28 : 21] Does that make sense? And he wants to show us what's in our hearts. Like, where does your true treasure lie? Is it in him or the stuff that he just gives us?

And when he takes it away, are we angry and resentful? Or are we recognized it was grace in the first place and that because of him we still can glory in him?

And then lastly, I could spend the whole time on just this last point, but I'm trying to land the plane for everyone. Point four, trials lead to glory.

Trials lead to glory. First 12, blessed, happy, intensely joyful is the man who remains steadfast under trial.

For when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. So, a promise to persevere.

[29 : 24] So, being straightforward, if you knew that a really great trial was about to come, one that was going to hit you or hurt, to endure a great tribulation, our souls need something to hold on to, if we're going to make it.

It's not that easy to do it just with a mere command to survive. Our minds and our hearts need to latch on to a reason for us to go forward.

We need a rock-solid truth, a promise to grasp hold of so that we don't get blown away, an anchor for our souls. And there's so many in the scripture for believers in Jesus Christ, while we can count trials as great joy, count all joy.

How about this one? 2 Corinthians again, chapter 4, says, this light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comprehension.

You can't wrap your head around it. We can embrace the promise that no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor heart of man imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.

[30 : 42] It's greater than anything you can concoct up. It's greater than anything you can conceive or imagine. We can agree with the Apostle Paul in Romans 8, I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us.

No matter how bad this is, something greater is far, far much more than we could even comprehend now. And then what Jesus said, rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven.

We need to fill our mind with those promises. Favorite Piper quote, wimpy views, wimpy worldviews make wimpy Christians.

So, because when trials come, you've got to have something to latch onto. You've got to have something for the Holy Spirit to remind you of. to make it, or you're going to be blown away.

So now is the time to fortify. But in James, he gives us a great one. Blessed, happy, deep joy are those who persevere under trial, right?

[31 : 48] Who remain steadfast. Love the word, that word. It means those who bear bravely and calmly all the ills that befall them. You only can do that if you have Christ.

Under trial, parisimos, there's that word again. Why? For because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life. Crown alludes not to a royal crown, more of an athletic crown, a, back then, a laurel wreath, the athletics victor crown, or the general's victorious victor crown that he would wear.

It's this idea. Paul wrote about it. In 1 Corinthians, he talks about believers who are on a spiritual race to receive a wreath that is imperishable, right?

So, the literal here, I love this, it just means the crown which is life. So, the reward for faithful perseverance is eternal life. The resurrection that we will all have if we are in Christ Jesus, that's our, that's the reward.

One that we don't deserve, but one that we've been given by faith in Jesus Christ. The guarantor, however you want to say that, of such a promise if you look, is God himself.

[33 : 07] He has promised. God is not a liar. God does not change his mind as if he was a mere man. So, if God says, one day, if you persevere, if you make it, you'll receive the crown of life.

I promise you. And then, to tie it in, to make sure that our affections are on him, it is a promise of God he makes only to those who love him.

Alright? So, there will be no boasting in heaven. Those who remain steadfast under trial are those who love God. Eternal life is heaven with all its blessings, but we are in the presence of God forever.

Alright, in closing, and then we're done, Revelation, chapter 2. Revelation, chapter 2. Revelation, not revelations.

Chapter 2. So, Jesus is speaking as the powerful, majestic, radiant Son of God to the Apostle James on the island of Patmos, and he gives these, he speaks to these different churches, these seven churches.

[34 : 24] This is the church of Smyrna, not Smyrna, Georgia, but in Asia. So, check this out. This is Revelation, chapter 2.

Look at verse 9. This is Jesus talking to the church. He goes, I know your tribulation and your poverty, but you are rich. The physically poor believers in that church were spiritually rich.

He says, and the slander of those who say that they are Jews, but really are not. They are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer.

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. hear that? Just get yourself ready. Like, just imagine that a trial is coming. They will come. Let's hear Jesus say these kind of words to you.

It's meant for this context, but it's also true for all believers in Christ. Jesus, do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison that you may be tested.

[35 : 28] And for 10 days you will have tribulation. be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death. So good. So good. So, I know many in this church today are going through much tribulation.

tribulation. I hope that we can bear that together. Trials have brought us a lot closer together as a body, particularly this last year and a half. Something just to rejoice over.

But it will be over soon. Like we all will be here and then we're gone. And then hopefully we'll all meet each other on the other side. And we will receive the crown which is life because of the work of the Lord Jesus alone.

Right? We'll be there forever. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death. Join me in prayer. Amen.