

~Other Speakers S-Z: Classic Christian Writings:

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (James 1:12).

The purpose of the epistle of James was, and still is, to give directions concerning the living of the Christian life. It would appear that under the pressures of poverty and persecution some of the readers had become depressed, bitter, and impatient and were accommodating their lives to the life of the world. Specifically the book of James is intended to give comfort, rebuke, and counsel to Christians passing through a period of severe trial—comfort for their sorrows, rebuke for their worldliness, and counsel for redirecting their lives.

"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James: 1:2-4). Here James says that the Christian is to consider all of his trials as occasions for joy. This is possible because he knows confidently that trials serve a disciplinary purpose in the Christian life. By them faith is tested, and this testing of faith produces steadfastness and perseverance. Patience, therefore, must be permitted to attain its full effect to the end that the Christian may reach maturity and completeness in Christian character.

Spiritual Resources for Meeting Trials

In verses 1:5-8 James gives us the spiritual resources for meeting trials: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering: for he that wavereth 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." At least three things James mentions as necessary. These are wisdom, prayer, and faith. The emphasis, however, is not simply upon the need of these things; there is stress upon the fact that what is needed is also available through the gracious provision of God.

"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 the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways." James tells us in these verses (1:9-11), that the poor man may find his lowly circumstances a sore trial, but let him not be depressed by this. On the contrary, let him think upon his lofty spiritual privileges and glory in the fact that he is rich in the things that really matter. The rich man, on the other hand, must recognize that his wealth can be a trial. He therefore, recognizing the vanity of wealth and the uncertainty of all things earthly, must glory in the spiritual realities that have opened up to him in the Lord.

Verse 12 is a fitting conclusion to the discussion begun in verse 2: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." You could read this verse as follows: "Happy is the man who doesn't give in and do wrong when he is tempted, for afterwards he will get as his reward the crown of life that God has promised those who love Him."

This verse has been called a beatitude—and is the only one found in the entire letter. This sounds very much like the words of Jesus when He said, "He who endures to the end will be saved" (Matt. 10:22; 24:13; Mark 13:13).

Many scholars interpret the word "tempted" or "temptation" in verse 12 to mean "trial," and feel it is the same as found in verse 2. In verse 13 the word for sure means "temptation." Some scholars think the idea of "temptation" is also found in verse 12.

Lead Us Not into Temptation

We must never forget that Jesus warned us against rushing into temptation, not merely in the Lord's prayer (Matt. 6:13; Luke 11:4) but also in the agony of Gethsemane, when Satan had come upon Him with renewed energy in spite of repeated defeats by Jesus since the wilderness temptations (Matt. 26:41; Luke 22:40). Jesus urged the disciples to pray to be spared temptation. No one knew so well as He the power of the evil one. Temptation is not to be courted, not even for the sake of the experience and the possible victory.

But if temptation is thrust upon one, then he must fight and win as Jesus did. There is always a way of escape as we are told in 1 Corinthians 10:13: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." I repeat, there is a way out when Satan tempts the children of God.

Fortunate Is the Man Who Endureth Temptation

James says, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation." The word "Blessed" means "fortunate," and speaks of an inner quality of happiness in God, a happiness not affected by outward circumstances. In fact, the New Testament often uses this word to describe those who as far as outward circumstances are concerned appear not to be fortunate at all—the poor, the hungry, the persecuted, the martyrs, and so on. James, in keeping with this emphasis, pronounces that man blessed who endureth temptation (or trial).

Dr. Curtis Vaughn says, "What is in mind here is not the mere experience of trial; that does not necessarily bring blessedness to an individual. Indeed, some men come out of their difficulties not softened but hardened; and their testing proves to be no boon to them. The blessing is in the courageous endurance of trial." One translation of this phrase reads, "Blessed is the man who remains firm under temptation."

The phrase, "For when he is tried," perhaps is better translated, "for when he hath been approved." The word translated "approved" ("tried" is the King James rendering of it) was used of metals and coins which had been tested and found true. Here it is simply another way of expressing the idea of endurance. One rendering of this phrase could read, "for when he succeeds in passing the test."

I repeat, the trial referred to here is the same type spoken of earlier. It is one which comes from without, not from within. The trial reveals that which is pure and unadulterated. The one who is tested and emerges victorious is one whose faith is strong and secure. Such a person deserves to be congratulated. Some scholars see James congratulating those faithful ones because of the reward which is promised the man who successfully endures trial.

A Crown of Life Is Promised to the Victor

The reason for this blessedness, this congratulation, is stated more fully in the latter part of verse 12. James says, "for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." What is "the crown of life" James speaks of? Scholars differ on this interpretation. Some believe it refers to the life of the present time, the here and now, life in its fullness, life in its completeness.

In the Greek world crowns were given to athletes victorious in the games (1 Cor. 9:25) and to citizens who distinguished themselves in service. Thus the crown, in Greek thought, was either a prize of victory or a badge of honor. So James could mean the crown is a gift symbolizing divine approval of a life tested by trial.

But we find other scholars who interpret this phrase in a fuller sense as referring to eternal, spiritual life. Jesus promised true life, eternal life, to the one who really loves Him. To these He gives "the crown, which is life." The crown or wreath placed upon the head of the victor in the race, does not last long. The one who loves Jesus receives an imperishable crown. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:25: "Everyone who contends for a prize exercises self-control in all things. They, then, do it in order that they may receive a perishable crown, but we to receive an imperishable crown—a heavenly reward that never disappears."

The burden of this entire passage is encouragement in face of the afflictions and trials of life—encouragement to patient endurance, encouragement to believe that trials can be turned to our good, encouragement to prayer, encouragement to joyful acceptance of one's lot in life, encouragement to look hopefully to the future. It is encouragement both to those who are in depressed circumstances, and to those who will be reduced to that condition by the persecutions of the enemies of the gospel.

James Emphasizes Endureth

There is no emphasis upon "the man," as if the person in view were distinguished from soft and effeminate professors, who easily give way in trial. The emphasis rather falls upon "endureth." It is one thing to bear the cross, another to endure the burden, in the way the Spirit indicated in verses 3,4,9-11. Temptation refers to those various troubles and calamities permitted by God for the purpose of testing the faith, piety and virtue of His people. When temptations produce the intended effect, then they bring approval and reward.

Enduring Through Life's Trials By Jimmy Morgan

When James uses the word "for" in "For when he is tried (approved) he shall receive the crown of life"—the word "for" indicates the reason of the blessing. The believer who has patiently borne the ordeal of affliction, and who is "approved" after due examination and trial of his case, will receive a glorious recompense of grace. The figure of reward is striking. "The crown of life" is the same as "the crown-life." Life is the crown with which God's steadfast confessor will be adorned (Rev. 2:10; 1 Pet. 5:4; 2 Tim. 4:8). That life which alone deserves the name, life spiritual from its beginning, and hereafter perfect, blissful, and eternal, and thus beyond the reach of human malice and temporal calamity. This is a blessing which the persecuted Christian, to obtain it, may joyfully consent to suffer and to die, if need be.

In the last phrase of this verse that reads, "which the Lord hath promised to them that love him," we need to understand the expression "The Lord" is not in the original text. The expression is "He" and this refers not to Christ, but to God. The certainty of the reward is indicated by the fact that it is promised by the Sovereign of heaven.

Rewards are assured to those who endure trial from love to God, in contrast with the "double minded" spoken of in verse 8. Love produces endurance, for those who love God appreciate the kindly wisdom that measures and controls the trials of life, and the blessed end to which these trials lead. Hence, those who love the Lord, and those who endure temptation are the same. In the theology of James, love is the essence of true faith. Amen and amen.