

A Study in James
Part 3 – “The Rewards of Enduring Trials”
James 1:12

TAKE YOUR BIBLES PLEASE...

Blessed 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. (James 1:12 ESV).

Today we come to a fitting conclusion to the discussion begun in verse 2 of James' letter. In it he offers consolation to the suffering saint; tired from the constant difficulty of the present life of trial and trouble, he says there is a good result! He accomplishes this by holding before his readers the fact that God rewards those who remain steadfast under trial and trouble. We should not forget this is just one of many times in Scripture this principle is plainly revealed. Throughout the book of Job we see the faithful will be vindicated. The central thrust of the Beatitudes is found in the fact that those who are faithful will find their reward. This is our central truth today.

The trials of life are as common to man as are the temptations of life. Here James merely looks at the trials. He'll deal with the temptation to sin a bit later. However, in the conclusion to the discussion I believe he has both in mind. The result of perseverance through either trial or temptation is a reward.

In 1981 I clipped a comic strip from the *Mt. Pleasant Daily Tribune*. I suppose that *Peanuts* is one of the all time favorite cartoon characters for many people. It certainly is one of mine. This particular cartoon strip really caught my eye though. Woodstock, the little yellow bird in the cast of characters, is flying in his wavering style and runs headlong into the window of the house with a loud “bonk.” Snoopy looks down at the fallen and dazed Woodstock as he is lying in a heap on the snow and says, “That was a window you just flew into.” Lifting him up to see the window, he continues, “See? It looks like the sky, but it isn't... it's a piece of glass.” In the next frame of the cartoon Snoopy continues his explanation, “Birds are always flying into windows. You have to be very careful, I guess... I don't know what else you can do about it.” Snoopy lifts his eyes in amazement as Woodstock is kicking the house and says, “Kicking the house won't help.”

Isn't really what James is saying to us? Kicking the house won't help. The only help in our trials is to be found in the promise of God to give us a great victory as we persevere through the “windows of life” that we fly into. These trials should be endured with steadfast, courageous faith.

It should be noted that the word “endure” is actually translated “remains steadfast” in our reading. It comes from the same root word as does the word “patience.” It means one who faces these experiences of life with unwavering steadfast faith in the Lord. The spirit of this endurance is seen in the word “love.” The reward is promised to those who love the Lord. They will not yield to the pressures of difficulties because they love the Lord. This is the key to victory. **There are a few observations about the way we receive our reward for endurance that are very important.**

First, We Receive Our Reward By Not Being Ashamed of Who We Are.

James begins with the word “blessed.” This was one of Jesus’ favorite words. The word means to be spiritually fortunate. It spoke of an inner quality of happiness in God. It is the happiness that is independent of outward circumstances. LISTEN, you know it’s coming don’t you... *Inward happiness must not be determined by outward circumstance.* I know you have heard me say that many times, but it bears repeating since it is such a vital truth for the living of a joyful, victorious life. I am convinced that the reason many people yield to temptation to sin or fall in difficulty is due in large part to this problem. People believe they will find happiness in their sin. They run from their trials because they think they will find happiness by avoiding the difficulty. *True happiness can never be found in rebellion, but in realizing. The first step in realizing is to come to a point of not being ashamed of yourself.*

Don’t misunderstand. I am not advocating that we have a highly exalted view, a pompous attitude about ourselves, but a real concept of who we are. Let me show you three Scriptural truths about who you are... basic facts about you:

1. *First, you are.* There are nearly seven billion people in the world today; even so, you are one of them. And, you are completely unique. You may not think this is such earth-shattering news, but it is the basis for true blessedness in Christ. Jesus came to minister to mankind the redemptive plan of his Father. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. Well, you and I are one of those!
2. *Second, you are becoming.* You are either becoming more, or you are becoming less. You are becoming better, or you are becoming worse. You are moving toward strength, or you are moving toward weakness. You are growing in fellowship with others, or you are becoming more and more wrapped in yourself. You are moving toward life, or you are moving toward death. No one of us is standing still. No one merely marks time.
3. *Third, you must begin where you are.* No one is allowed to jump ahead of their chosen path. The only starting point is who you are right now. You may not go back a day, or a year, or ten years. Life moves in only one direction. It does not go backward. That knowledge sets you free from regret; it conquers the “what-if’s” of life.

I read a story about a sixth grade teacher who asked her class the question: “What was not here fifteen years ago?” Expecting answers of new technology or discoveries, she was surprised when one little boy raised his hand and said, “Me.” He was wonderfully correct! Something new and wonderful came into the world when each of us was born. One of the most thrilling declarations of Scripture is in the fact that each of us existed in the mind of God before we were born and our birth is the deliberate, intentional act of God to wonderfully make us.

The Psalmist declares:

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. (Psalm 139:13-16 ESV).

As we realize that God created each of us with a purpose, a design, we can understand that we are good for something. How sad it is to hear someone say, "I'm just good for nothing," or, to hear that accusation hurled at another. The truth is we are all good for something unique and beautiful in God's plan. This brings us to James' next statement.

Second, We Receive Our Reward by Receiving the Crown of Life.

Look at verse 12 again... *Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life.*

In the New Testament crowns were given in several circumstances. A crown of flowers was worn at times of joy. Crowns were given to those who were honored. Of course they were worn by kings and royalty. The crown James mentions here is more along the lines of that worn by the victor, the winner, though it would include joy and honor. The principle of truth here is that the Lord will reward those who endure with joy and honor.

So, what is this "crown of life"? Let me paraphrase this statement by James for you: ***the crown of life is the crown which IS life.*** That's the idea James conveys. It is real life. It is not what masquerades as life in this world. It is true blessedness, genuine happiness. When we endure, God gives to us real happiness. Now, that's something I'll wait for. Won't you? The great truth is that it is available now through enduring these trials of life.

- **When we yield to temptation, it is due to our core belief that doing that which we are tempted to do will bring happiness.** I've never met anyone who has fallen to sin who said, "I did it because I wanted to be miserable." We do those things because Satan whispers in our ear that it is good and God really didn't mean it when he said if we ate it we would surely die!
- **When we run from our trials, don't we run because we believe escape is the only way to be happy?** God says standing in the midst of trouble is the way to victory. Life is found in enduring the trouble; and, it is a life given by God himself. It is a life that is true and good in every way.

Do you understand? God is the one great essential of life. Your life can have meaning and fulfillment only as it is focused in Him.

For many summers a composer named Gioacchino Rossini would go out to some small village surrounding his home in Italy, one which could not afford an opera, and he would write an opera which the people of that village could perform. One summer, he auditioned all the talent in this small village nearby and the only woman who could possibly be the leading lady was limited to only one good note! It was middle B-flat. Rossini would not be discouraged; he went ahead and wrote the opera in which the leading lady had only one note to sing. *But*, he surrounded that middle B-flat with such beautiful harmony that when she sang her one note, it was like an angel from heaven.

This is what God calls each of us to do. We merely need sing the notes we are capable of singing. Then He will surround us in such a way that the effort we make is beautiful, useful, and satisfying. This is why Jesus came to earth, died, was resurrected, ascended into heaven, and has promised to come again!

These two things are certain if we are to live in blessedness: ***We must not be ashamed of who we are;*** and, ***We must receive the crown of life.*** To do these two things we must focus on the person and work of Jesus Christ. After all it is that work of grace that empowers us to truly see him!

Just how many more times are you going to kick the house after you've flown into the window?