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Sermon Notes

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Joyful Perseverance in Trials Produces Spiritual Maturity

James 1:1-12

The Kingdom of Heaven likened to a lavish treasure hidden in a field

There is no more precious commodity in this world than salvation through faith in Christ. And it is REAL... the truest treasure in this universe

But what if OUR CLAIM TO the treasure is counterfeit? In the parable, the man went out and sold everything he had and bought the field... but suppose the purchase was made from a fraudulent salesman? What if our TITLE DEED is fake?

Speaking more directly, how can we be sure that our faith in Christ is the genuine article... that we are not deceiving ourselves that we have ownership of the treasure?

There are frauds and counterfeits everywhere... fake diamonds, counterfeit Rolexes, forged \$100 bills... perhaps the most lucrative is counterfeit artwork

Paintings worth millions of dollars have been skillfully faked by cunning deceivers... one painting of Saint Jerome supposedly painted in the 16th century by the Italian artist Parmigiano was sold at a 2012 auction for \$842,500, but it turned out to be a cunning fake—even with fake cracks in the paint that made it look very old.

The art collector had lost almost a million dollars on a FAKE... but the stakes when it comes to our faith is infinitely higher... ETERNITY hangs in the balance!

The New Testament strongly encourages all people who claim to be Christians to test the genuineness of their faith to be sure that it is the real article...

2 Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you-- unless, of course, you fail the test?

The consistent answer given in the New Testament of “How can I KNOW that my faith is genuine?” is FRUIT! If there is fruit, there is life... if there is no fruit, there is no life

You may wonder, “What fruit does God want to see in my life?” Again... he has not left us as orphans on that question... much of the New Testament defines the healthy Christian life. But one book in particular zeroes in on GOOD WORKS as the true evidence of a genuine faith in Christ... the book we are beginning to study today—James.

James is a book that is hard to synthesize into one overarching theme... it reads more like the Book of Proverbs, giving practical wisdom on various aspects of the Christian life. But one could argue that the theological center of the book is chapter 2 in which James seeks to show the difference between TRUE and FALSE FAITH...

James 2:14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?

“Such faith...” What kind of faith SAVES A SINNER’S SOUL?? James says, a faith that produces GOOD WORKS... and if there are no good works, there is no real faith. This is how we can test the difference between genuine faith and an ingenious counterfeit. Satan is a great deceiver... but it is even more diabolical when he lures a person’s soul into joining in the deceit... to become SELF-DECEIVED about your true spiritual state. To be the fraudulent counterfeiter yourself. To join Satan in LYING TO YOURSELF...

The whole book of James therefore I think can be organized under this main theme: what does genuine faith look like in a person’s life? What are accurate tests of faith to be sure it is the real thing?

This first sermon, on joyful perseverance in trials, will begin to expose true faith from the counterfeit.

I. An Introduction to James: The Man and His Letter (vs. 1)

James 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

A. Who is this James?

1. Not James the brother of John ... the first of the twelve to be martyred; (Acts 12)... he died too early to write this epistle
2. James, the brother of Jesus
 - a. Mary, the mother of Jesus was a virgin when Jesus was born; but she was not a perpetual virgin—she and Joseph had a family

Matthew 13:55-56 "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? ⁵⁶ Aren't all his sisters with us?"

B. James's Journey of Faith

1. James did not believe in Jesus as the Son of God initially...

John 7:5 For even his own brothers did not believe in him.

2. BUT after the resurrection of Jesus, James was with Mary in the Upper Room along with all the other believers in Jesus (Acts 1:14)
3. What happened? 1 Corinthians 15:7 says that Jesus specifically appeared to James after his resurrection from the dead!!
4. This post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to his brother James changed James forever... from then on he knew who Jesus was
5. James went on to be the central leader of the church in Jerusalem... Paul calls him a "pillar" (Galatians 2:9) of the church; he led the Jerusalem council on circumcision in Acts 15
6. This converted half-brother of Jesus was the author of this epistle

C. Who Is He Writing To?

1. James was the leader of the Jewish church in Jerusalem

2. He is writing to *“the twelve tribes scattered among the nations”*... that is to Jews scattered among the Gentiles of the Roman world
3. They are Jewish believers in Christ... he calls them “brothers” and “believers in Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory” (2:1)
4. Why are they scattered? Maybe they were already scattered centuries ago as Jews were after the Exiles from the Promised Land; but it is also possible that they were scattered by the persecution initiated after the martyrdom of Stephen, and by the economic hardships that unbelieving Jewish authorities put on Jews who believed in Jesus... they were EVICTED from the synagogue and probably could not carry on their trade, or buy and sell... so they were consigned to severe poverty

II. Joyful Perseverance in All Trials (vss. 2-4)

James 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

A. The Suffering of Trials

1. The key first test is how a Christian reacts to trials of various kinds
2. James does not specify what these VARIOUS trials are...
 - a. Trials common to all people: sickness, injury, pain, the death of loved ones, poverty, natural disasters, troubles in the family, conflicts with sinners in the community and the workplace
 - b. It could also be trials directly connected to their Christian faith... persecution by unbelievers—economic isolation and boycotting, confiscation of property, even to the extreme of imprisonment and death
3. These trials MUST COME... they are inevitable

John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

4. They are especially intense the more boldly people stand for Christ

2 Timothy 3:12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted

5. Some of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world are going through intense suffering as Christians... hounded by the godless government of North Korea or the controlling regime of China or the fundamentalist Islamic powers of Iran or Saudi Arabia or the fiercely nationalistic forces of India

6. James is not specific about the trials... VARIOUS KINDS... expect them, they will come

7. James says “whenever you FALL INTO” trials... it’s like you were walking along in life, minding your own business, then suddenly you fell into a deep pit, you land at the bottom, jolted, hurt, confused, and now you look up wondering what happened and what to do next!

B. Our Response to the Trial is Everything!

1. James says “Consider it PURE JOY”

a. Literally “all joy”... Joy through and through... like “joy and nothing but joy”

b. This does not MINIMIZE the suffering of the trial, but it means taking the ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE... what will this agony produce in the end?

Hebrews 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus... who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Knowing that God is working on your soul, fitting you for heaven!

C. What Joyful, Faith-filled Submission to the Trial Produces

1. Everything starts with knowledge... vs. 3 “knowing”... “because you know...”

James 1:3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance

- a. The “testing of your faith” ... testing = trying, assaying, like in a refiner’s fire
- b. The trial reveals our faith to be the true thing IF YOU STAND FIRM!!
- c. More than that, however, the actual process of the suffering, of the trial, produces a stronger faith... a greater reliance on Christ, a greater awareness of the transitory nature of this world, a greater focus on the glory of God, a stronger eternal perspective, more obedience... it drives away sin
- d. Just like working in the weight room causes muscles to grow... OPPOSITION of the muscle by the weight makes it stronger
- e. Endurance = NOT GIVING UP... stronger in determination to follow Christ

D. The Ultimate End of Christian Endurance: Christian Maturity

James 1:4 And let endurance have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- 1. As we stay steady under God’s mighty hand, he will work on our souls day by day
- 2. There is a clear grammatical insight here that some translations omit... **“LET endurance have its full effect”**
 - a. Let God do his work in you
 - b. Be calm and steady like a patient who needs a surgical procedure done without general anesthesia

Imagine someone who has a nasty cut on his hand with some dirt in the cut... the cut needs to be cleaned out, then stitched up; if the patient is skittish, yelling, twitching, jumpy, crying, wincing, pulling his wounded hand back every time the doctor touches it, he cannot clean the wound and stitch it up

The patient needs to LET the doctor do his work; so also we need to LET the trial do its work in us; LET God work in us; don’t be bitter, don’t murmur, don’t stop praying and going to church, don’t say hard things

against God. Stay quiet and steady and trusting under God's mighty and skillful hand

3. What does perseverance produce? Christian maturity
 - a. We will be **“mature and complete, not lacking anything”**
 - b. Conformed to Christ... not lacking any virtue... love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness... also courage, meekness, tenderness toward others...
 - c. These Christian virtues don't automatically spring up in the soul, but they have to be **WORKED IN US** by God
 - d. That is the ground of our JOY... we are **PROVEN** to be genuine Christians as we see our own growth in Christlike character

Without trials, we are **“immature, incomplete, and lack things”** spiritually.

Next James goes to wisdom... We may not see the connection, but it is there!!

III. Seeking Wisdom from a Generously Wise God (vss. 5-8)

James 1:5-8 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

A. This is a Timeless Universal Promise... But Set in a Context

1. Timeless and universal quest for WISDOM:
 - i) “Should I marry this person?”
 - ii) “Should I go on this mission trip?”
 - iii) “What is my spiritual gift?”
 - iv) “What Christian ministry should I invest my money in? And how much should I give?”
 - v) “Should I accept this job offer?”

vi) “How can I make my child obey me cheerfully?”

b. ANY OF THESE and OTHER ISSUES can be brought to God in prayer, quoting James 1:5-8

2. But we must also see the **context**!! Suffering in trials!!
3. See the connection between verse 4 and verse 5... “not lacking anything”... and “if anyone lacks wisdom...”
4. So... why is wisdom needed in a trial?

B. The Purpose of Wisdom in a Trial

1. The most common question in any trial is “WHY IS THIS HAPPENING TO ME?”
2. The more painful it is, the more poignant the question...
 - a. “Why, O Lord, did you take our little girl from us?”
 - b. “Why, O Lord, will you not heal me?”
 - c. [In persecuted countries] “Why, O Lord, do you allow the wicked to prosper and our pastor to be arrested and beaten?”
 - d. “Why, O Lord, did you allow our home to be destroyed in that hurricane, when others’ homes were barely touched?”
3. In context here in James, perhaps the FIRST thing a suffering Christian needs is wisdom concerning the trial... and that is the very thing James is doing here... showing you the direct connection between the trials and God’s saving work in our souls
4. Wisdom IN THE TRIAL helps us to connect the dots
5. Look at Paul’s “thorn in the flesh”... he had learned exactly WHY God was doing this, what it was teaching him

2 Corinthians 12:7-9 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me,

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

This is the WISDOM IN THE TRIAL that we should seek

Beyond that, however, this passage directly promises guidance from the Lord

C. Seeking Guidance for your Lives

1. "If any of you lacks wisdom..." We should know how true this is of us
2. Many times we have no idea what to do when an important decision comes to us

Yankee catcher Yogi Berra said, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it!" But obviously, that doesn't help much

3. God wants us to live in direct dependence on him... to ask him what he wants us to do; to realize **"You are not your own, you are bought at a price."** We are his servants... we should seek his wisdom continually on WHAT TO DO

Isaiah 30:21 Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."

D. Seeking Wisdom BY FAITH

1. When you ask, you must **BELIEVE AND NOT DOUBT**
2. Believe what? That God hears your prayer for wisdom, and that he will lead you and guide you well
3. Doubting people are like the wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind... tossed back and forth by this or that impression or idea
4. James calls such a person a DOUBLE-MINDED MAN
 - a. This is tied to worldliness later in James... seeking the world's goals, the world's direction, the world's agenda and approval
 - b. Single-minded = all I want to do is PLEASE THE LORD!

- c. Double-minded people are not obedient people; God will not give them his supernatural wisdom

James 1:7-8 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

5. How does God give wisdom?
 - a. Directly through the leadership of the Holy Spirit
 - b. The Spirit speaks primarily through the word of God
 - c. He also speaks through godly counselors... mature Christians who have wisdom and can speak to the situation
 - d. So as you bring the question to him “What should I do?” he will lead you if you seek wisdom from him
 - e. Be careful about INNER IMPRESSIONS that are not connected strongly to God’s Word

T-Shirt I saw a few years ago: “I do everything the voices in my head tell me to do!”

NO! Seek guidance based on God’s Word and counsel from godly Christians, as well as the inner guidance of the Holy Spirit

IV. Temporary vs. Eternal Wealth (vss. 9-11)

James 1:9-11 The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. ¹⁰ But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he 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 man will fade away even while he goes about his business.

A. How Does This Section Connect to the Chapter?

1. Not very clear... BUT I think there is a connection
 - a. The trial that these Jewish believers were going through almost certainly involved POVERTY... they were kicked out of the synagogues and unable to earn a living as normally

- b. So James addresses the issues of true wealth and true poverty
- 2. As with all the wisdom he's giving to suffering Christians, he wants to give ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE
- 3. So he speaks to both poor and rich Christians

B. Eternal vs. Temporal Wealth

- 1. Both poor and rich Christians need to be very clear on the limitations of earthly wealth
- 2. Poor Christians need to realize that the money and possessions they are deprived of now in this life are of very limited value
- 3. The poor can be led by their circumstances into fixating on money and being extremely discontent in their poverty; they can covet and be greedy and materialistic even while they have nothing
- 4. This will only make their trial MUCH WORSE
- 5. So James says that poor Christians should focus on their true wealth as heirs of the New Heaven and New Earth
- 6. They should BOAST in the Lord and in his lavish gifts of grace waiting for them in heaven

C. Conversely, the Rich Christians Should Focus on Their Humiliation AS CHRISTIANS and not be arrogant about money

- 1. Rich Christians should accept the humbling status of openly professing their faith in Christ
- 2. They should not keep their Christianity secret in order to make business connections
- 3. They should boast in their HUMBLE position as Christians, following a Savior who was despised and rejected and crucified in disgrace outside the city walls.

D. Rich Unbelievers Fade Away in the Midst of Business

- 1. Wealth will not help anyone when their time comes

2. How many successful business people suddenly grab their chests and fall down dead from a heart attack? Or are stricken by another shocking and unseen malady... he passes like a wildflower, as Isaiah 40 says... “All flesh is grass and all their glory is as the flower of the field.”
3. And their money will offer even less help on the Day of Judgment, for Christ the Judge of all the Earth cannot be bribed

Proverbs 11:4 Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.

V. God’s Promise of Life to Those Who Persevere (vs. 12)

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

A. This Wraps Up This Whole First Section

B. Keep Your Eyes on the Prize... the Crown of LIFE in Heaven!

VI. Applications

A. Come to Christ!

1. All of this wise counsel is given to Christians... the people James calls “brothers”
2. Have you found salvation in Christ? Do you know for certain that your sins are forgiven?
3. God sent his Son into the world to live a sinless life and die in our place on the cross... God raised Jesus Christ from the dead
4. James saw him after he rose from the dead; saw him with his own two eyes, and it changed him forever
5. You cannot see the risen Christ with your eyes, but you can hear this word and believe the gospel...

Romans 10:9 if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Now... Christians...

B. Test Your Faith to See if It's Genuine

1. Do you see the evidence of a changed life? Are you walking in obedience to God's commands? Do you love God? Do you yearn to please him?
2. DON'T JUST ASSUME! Test yourself to see if you are in Christ!

C. How Do You Respond to Trials of Various Kinds?

1. Many of us grumble and complain
2. Can you ask God to enable you to "Consider it pure joy" whenever you go through various trials?
3. Ask God to build a stable, trusting maturity in you. Realize that God will use trials to do it

D. Seek Wisdom from God!

1. Seek his guidance more than ever before!
2. Pray more about decisions than ever before... Don't assume that you should just go ahead and do whatever you feel like doing
3. Ask filled with faith, believing he will guide you clearly
4. Don't trust to inner impressions, but seek wisdom from God's Word and from mature Christians who know you well

E. Wealthy Christians

1. Meditate much on how meaningless earthly wealth is compared to eternity
2. Understand your LOW POSITION as a Christian
3. Do not trust your wealth

4. Give more away than ever before! Store up treasure in heaven!