

# Tempted or Tested

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## **Text:**

James 1:1-18

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.

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 in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, 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 also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

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. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

## **Introduction:**

In our consideration of this text we have been examining James' understanding of the place of trials in the Christian life. We have summarized what he says in verses 3 and four in three points:

- As believers we should rejoice in trials
- Because trials teach us endurance
- And only endurance can perfects us and prepare us for our ultimate destiny

Furthermore, we have seen that this summary is not unique to James, but appears to be the universal teaching of the New Testament. Finally, we have seen that to properly grasp this idea we must give careful attention to four key terms: “joy”, “trials”, “endurance”, and “perfection”. To misunderstand any one of these terms could cause us to misunderstand this teaching which is essential to how we interpret the events of our lives as Christians. What we are really doing is trying to make sense of what happens to us as Christians. This is not always easy. James has done us a great service in this passage by giving us invaluable teaching that, if properly understood, will help us navigate through the rough seas and dark nights of our lives.

Last week we looked at the first key word, “joy”. We saw first that joy is not to be confused with pleasure; that, indeed, sometimes to find joy we must forfeit pleasure. We saw secondly that joy is a gift of God that accompanies God’s gift of salvation. To know God through Jesus Christ; To know the forgiveness of sins, and to be indwelled by the Holy Spirit is to know joy, the joy of the Lord which is deeper than life’s experience, good and bad, because it does not come from them, but from God. This is the way we must understand joy, if we are to make sense of rejoicing in our trials.

Today we come to the second key word which I have chosen to translate as “trials”. This word in its noun or verbal form occurs nine times in the longer passage we have read today. Depending on the translation you read from it may be translated in various ways. I have read from the ESV which uses three different English words: “trial/to try”, “test/to test”, and “temptation/to temp”. If one of these words comes the closer to the meaning of the Greek word that it translates than the others, it would be the word “test”. In Greek as in English the word can have a fairly wide range of meaning. Think of all the different ways in which we use the word “test”. If you need help take a look at the word in an unabridged dictionary. What makes the difference between a trial and a temptation is:

- Who is giving the test
- Why the test is being given.

Now there is more in this text about trials and temptations than we can cover in one sermon. It will be necessary to look at this word again next time, but what I want us to try to understand today is the difference between a trial and a temptation, and how we should react to each. This is essential if we are to make any sense out of our lives at all. Let me first summarize, and then develop this necessary distinction between two kinds of tests that all of us necessarily face.

- Trials test our faith. They are given, or at least allowed, by God for the development of our endurance and the perfection of our character. As such they are to be endured patiently with joy.
- Temptations test are moral character. They originate with the enemy, the devil, and they appeal to our sinful desires. Their purpose is our destruction. They are thus, to be immediately resisted.

## **I. Trials**

James says we can rejoice in trials because they have a good source and they seek a positive outcome. As we have seen the actual experience of the trial may be difficult, even grievous, but it works for our good. This is the reason that we are exhorted to endure them. They are a test, but the purpose of the test is the strengthen us and to produce in us Christ-like character.

## **II. Temptations**

Temptations, on the other hand, do not come from God, and they are not meant for our good, but for our destruction. Satan did not tempt Jesus in the wilderness to strengthen him and to prepare him for the work that lay ahead of him; he tempted him to turn him away from that work and to thwart the work of God. Therefore Jesus did not patiently endure Satan’s temptations, but immediately resisted them.

James assures us that God never has anything to do with any solicitation to evil. He himself cannot be tempted with evil and he tempts no one. We are tempted, he says, when we allow the enticement of the world and the devil to appeal to our own sinful desires. Therefore, temptations are not to be patiently endured, but they are to be impatiently resisted. Later in this Epistle, James will write: “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:7-8). Jesus told his disciples “watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation”, and he taught us to pray to be delivered from temptation. Paul’s favorite verb to describe our reaction to temptation is “flee”. To the Corinthians he says: “flee sexual immorality” (I Corinthians 6:18), and “flee idolatry” (I Corinthians 10:14). To Timothy he writes of the dangers of greed that have destroyed some Christian leaders in these words: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness,

godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness” (I Timothy 2:6-11). In his second letter to Timothy he has this advice for him: “Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (II Timothy 2:21-22).

We must always keep this distinction in mind. Trials are tests that are designed to strengthen us. They are for our good and can be joyfully endured, but temptations are tests meant to destroy us and must be immediately and decisively resisted. Jesus sets the example for us in each case. He resisted the devil, but he endured the cross.

When my two youngest children were in middle school, they were members of an organization that our church sponsored called “les flammebeaux”. I was the leader of the group, and was aptly assisted by one of the students from the Bible Institute who was a former military man, Eric Fau. The organization was biblically based. Our goal was to build strong Christian character into our young people. In addition to our Bible teaching we did a lot of outdoor activities. One of the things we did was to organize a survival camp each winter.

Nathan and Meredith were 12, I think, the winter of the camp I am about to describe. We had the perfect place, an old mill with only one wood stove to heat the kitchen, and then not very much, and the perfect weather—a foot of snow, and temperatures well below freezing. The entire time was to be filled with tests to see if the lessons Eric and I had been teaching them had been learned. In fact, the kids were to be severely tested even before arriving at the mill.

The campsite was a couple of hours from home, and none of the kids had ever been there. We intentionally arrived about 11 P.M., but we didn’t go to the mill. We stopped in the forest about a mile away. We then gave them a coded map which they were to decode, and then use their compasses to find their way, in the dark, and in the snow and cold to the campsite that none of them had ever seen before or even knew what looked like. They jumped out of the van, and Eric and I drove off. What the kids didn’t know was that as soon as they were out of sight, I stopped and let Eric out so he could follow them and make sure they got there, and rescue them if they didn’t. I then made my way to the mill where I lit a fire in the wood stove, put on the coffee and waited for them to arrive. They did without ever knowing that Eric was just behind them. They passed the test, and to this day they will all tell you that that test and the many others that they passed in that camp and similar activities had a very positive influence on their lives. To this day when any of them get together they will inevitably talk about those experiences.

Was it easy for six 12 year olds to find their way in the cold and the dark to a place they had never been. Probably not, but as I reflect back on that event 20 some years later it occurs to me that when it came time to get out of the van and begin the trek, none of them complained or resisted. They were, in fact, a joyful lot as they embarked on their test. Why? First, I think, because they trusted Eric and me. They had been with us long enough to know that no matter what kind of outrageous things we came up with for them to do, we would not let them down. They knew that we desired their success, that the farthest thing from our minds was doing anything with the intention of doing them harm. We were for them. We were their best friends, and they knew it.

Secondly, they relished the test, because they had been prepared for it, and they desired the growth and progress that they knew would come from facing the challenges we were putting before them. To this day they are reaping the benefits of joyfully accepting the tests.

Both of these things are essential for us if we are to joyfully accept our trials as for our good. We must have a profound conviction that we need not fear anything that God has given or allowed for our good. God is for us. He does nothing to harm us. He always acts for our good. Once we have that conviction we can joyfully embrace our trials. But we must also have a deep desire to be more than mediocre. We must want to become all that God intended us to be. If we do, then we will see the tests of life as means of growth, not as threats to our security. We will accept them because we desire the outcome that only such tests can give. So let us always resist temptation knowing that it comes from the evil one and aims at our destruction, but endure our trials with joyful patience, because we know that they are intended for our good, to help us reach the goal that our Father has set for us.