

JAMES 1:12

WIMPS NEED NOT APPLY

“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.”¹

If you have followed the message of James to this point in our studies, you will have undoubtedly drawn the conclusion that unlike much of modern religious activity, Christianity as practised by the earliest disciples was a vigorous Faith. The Faith of the first believers was virile in its conduct and they were valiant in pursuit of truth. There was no place for wimps in the first blush of the Faith; rather, the Faith called for stamina and courage. Surely these first believers were bold for the cause of Christ.

Contemporary Christianity differs significantly from biblical Christianity. Modern Christendom suffers from an unbiblical feminisation of the Faith once delivered to the saints. To a disquieting degree, males appear to have concluded that church is no place for a man. Contemporary Christian music is composed essentially of love songs that compel a man to sing of his love for another man. Theology is sacrificed for repetition in the music, and contemporary preaching is judged by how it makes us feel rather than whether it equips us for a righteous life. Churches appear to have concluded that since men will not fulfil their God-appointed role as leaders, women will assume oversight of the churches, with disastrous consequences. Few people are actually happy with the state of contemporary Christendom, but fewer people still are willing to return to the teaching of the Word in order to become all that God intended His people to be.

The first disciples were men—men of action and courage. Though there were occasional failures when they faced the foe, following the Resurrection of the Master, there were no further major retreats. Any fair assessment of the account provided in Acts leads to the conclusion that Christianity is a dynamic Faith, calling for noble ideals of courage, consistency and compassion—all manly qualities.

James, in this earliest of Christian literature, addresses the need for manly Faith. In the churches James addressed, wimps would not need to apply as the Faith required stamina and steadfastness, qualities that are increasingly rare among the faithful today.

THE CALL TO STAND FIRM IN TRIALS — “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial.” James began his letter by encouraging believers who were even then undergoing severe trials. Now, in the portion of the Word under consideration today, James pronounces a benediction on those who withstood those same trials. We do not often use the term “benediction” in our everyday language; it is literally a “good word,” the pronunciation of happiness for those who are recipients of the statement of approval. James says that those who remain steadfast despite trials are happy.

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In previous studies, we have reviewed the types of trials the first Christians endured. Certainly, their trials were physical—they paid an awful price to be followers of the Master. However, we saw that an even greater trial for these suffering saints were the challenges to their faith. Today, we could summarise such challenges by listing the complaints that are commonly voiced when believers face reversals or disappointments.

“Why is this happening to me?” is one complaint frequently heard. Focused on himself or herself, the weeping saint complains about the unfairness of his or her situation. Another complaint leads down the dead end of supposed intellectual philosophical musings as the disappointed individual questions whether God is omnipotent or whether He is good. “God cannot be good, or He would not let me experience disappointment,” is one aspect of this sanctified grouching. Another aspect is the cry that God must not be all-powerful or the one experiencing setbacks would not be rocked by frustration. Other saints turn to introspection as they wonder what sin they must have committed to experience disappointment.

What is important for those who would honour God is to realise that trials are common to the life of a follower of the Son of God. Peter wrote in a similar vein to encourage believers who were called to endure trials. Listen to the opening words of his first letter. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 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 praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” [1 PETER 1:3-9].

The saint enduring trials rejoices in the knowledge that he possesses salvation, and possessing salvation, the child of God has an inheritance reserved in Heaven itself. The follower of Christ, immersed in trials, should be consoled in the knowledge that his faith is being proved to be genuine. God is permitting the testing for purposes that His child cannot even imagine at the moment. However, when the testing is finished, He will be glorified and the child of God will be honoured because he has stood firm.

Peter also wrote, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And

“If the righteous is scarcely saved,
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”

“Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good” [1 PETER 4:12-19].

Sharing in the suffering of Christ is a common theme throughout the New Testament, though it is virtually foreign to modern theology. Listen, as one example, to the Apostle Paul as he writes from a cell in the Tullianum—the Mamertine Prison in Rome. “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead” [PHILIPPIANS 3:8-11]. Notice in particular Paul’s willingness—nay, eagerness—to share in Christ’s sufferings. Paul testified that Christians “share abundantly in Christ’s suffering” [2 CORINTHIANS 1:5].

One must be struck by the “encouragement” Paul and Barnabas delivered to the new Christians of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. They taught these tyro Christians that “through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God” [ACTS 14:22]. These were not mere words delivered as dry sermonising, but rather Paul punctuated his teaching through suffering because of his faith. Paul was stoned and assumed to be dead in Lystra [ACTS 14:19]. Paul and Barnabas were threatened and run out of Iconium [ACTS 14:5, 6]. The apostles were persecuted in Antioch of Pisidia [ACTS 13:50].

Writing the Corinthian Christians, Paul concluded the first letter with a series of admonitions that sound positively courageous in the face of what was faced as a saint. “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong” [1 CORINTHIANS 16:13]. Paul urged the Philippian saints to stand united in the Faith. He wrote, “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel” [PHILIPPIANS 1:27].

Such sentiments sound foreign to the ears of modern Christians living in western comfort. We seem to have convinced ourselves that if we are followers of Christ, all our problems will be in the past. We have bought into the lie that only those who are awful sinners ever experience difficulties. There is an entire movement built around the concept that one need but have sufficient faith to get all that is required for an easy life. However, such teaching is an utter distortion of reality.

So determined are modern Christians to enjoy ease of life that they are prepared to destroy anyone who dares call them to account before the Lord, or even to remind them of the teaching of the Word. Paul spoke of the days that would be coming when he wrote the young theologian, Timothy. “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” [1 TIMOTHY 4:1-5].

By no means have I exhausted the biblical call to steadfastness in the face of difficulties, and especially have I not exhausted the encouragement to remain steadfast during trials of the soul. God has given to His people His salvation to set them free from the fear of death, His Holy Spirit to provide strength in the day of testing, and His promise that we shall overcome by the blood of the lamb and the word of our testimony. Just as we are forewarned that trials will come, so we are encouraged to stand firm, not permitting ourselves to be stampeded by fear.

Permit me to be practical for a moment. Some of us have witnessed professing Christians who are easily stampeded by the mere threat of trials. Not only do such individuals timidly imagine that those who are exploring the Faith may be turned away by hearing the truth, but they are personally offended by the preaching of the Word. Sound words intimidate them; they can tolerate neither reproof, rebuke nor exhortation. Rather than examining their own soul and bringing themselves into line with the Word of God, they resist the instruction of the Word and thus destroy whatever advantage they may have otherwise enjoyed through obedience.

The consequence when such individuals gain ascendancy among the churches is that the Faith is enervated, and that the flock of God becomes spiritually anaemic. Recognising that they are not living vibrant lives consistent with the Word of God, these impoverished souls attempt to drum up excitement through lively songs and physical activity, much as did the prophets of Baal in the days of Elijah [1 KINGS 18:26-29]. Do not permit that to happen in your life as a Body. Instead, determine that we will entrust our souls to the care of the Father, depending on the power of His indwelling Spirit to advance the cause of the Saviour throughout our world.

THE CONSOLATION DURING TRIALS — “When he has stood the test ...” Trials are not a blessing. Never let yourself fall into the delusion that it is a blessing to be tested. However, there is a blessing that will result when you stand firm during trials; and there is blessedness during the trial because we discover the power of Christ enabling us to be godly at precisely that time when we surrender our lives to His care.

There is a strange creature that parades misery as a badge of honour. They have perhaps read Paul’s words to the Thessalonian Christians to “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” [1 THESSALONIANS 5:18], and they become ridiculous in professing joy because they are suffering. Dear people, there is a world of difference between rejoicing while suffering and rejoicing because you are suffering. One is the outgrowth of confidence that your Father is actually in control of all things; the other is a vain attempt to manipulate God into doing your will. There is a world of difference between giving thanks during suffering, and giving thanks because of suffering. The former is evidence that the one suffering remains focused on the Lord who leads His people through the vicissitudes of life; the latter is evidence that the person is unable to think biblically.

The consolation God provides when we are called to endure trials is several-fold. First, God’s people are *consolated by the knowledge that the testing will not continue forever*. I am reminded of a dear saint down in East Texas who was asked to give her testimony, citing her favourite verse of the Word of God. The old woman was not well educated, though she did love to read the Bible and she did spend considerable time in the presence of the Saviour.

“I loves that verse that says, ‘An’ it came to pass,’” she testified.

As you might expect, the Pastor was nonplussed and asked her to explain what she meant by stating that particular verse was her favourite verse in the Bible.

“Well,” said that dear saint of God, “Life is hard and I face many trials. I’s learned that my troubles just ‘came to pass.’ They ain’t never came to stay.”

Well, that is right. No trial, no testing, is permanent. The child of God may be confident that:

“Weeping may tarry for the night,
but joy comes with the morning.”

[PSALM 30:5]

We are able to assert with confidence that whatever trial we may face, it is but a “slight, momentary affliction” which “is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” [2 CORINTHIANS 4:17].

So many Christians have memorised **ROMANS 8:28**, but we would do well to learn **ROMANS 8:18** as a backdrop for the consolation offered. Paul weighed the momentary, transient trials he faced against eternity, and concluded, “I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed to us.” In other words, he realised that testing would not continue forever.

When he wrote Timothy the final letter, Paul focused on what was coming. Listen to the old man of God as he faced his imminent death. “I am already being poured out as an offering, and the time for me to depart is at hand. I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith! Finally the crown of righteousness is reserved for me. The Lord, the righteous Judge, will award it to me in that day—and not to me only, but also to all who have set their affection on his appearing” [2 TIMOTHY 4:6-8, NET BIBLE].

That one word, “Finally!” rings out as a shout of victory. The race is run. The last battle has been fought. An executioner will shortly sever my head from my body. When that happens, it should not be a time for sorrow. “Finally! Finally! Finally!” This life will be passed and I will be face-to-face with “the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.” The Roman tyrant and Jewish persecutors no doubt thought that they were ridding themselves of a source of grave aggravation, but the man of God was not dead. In fact, at the moment that they removed his head, the soul returned to God who gave it and that Apostle began to really live. Just so, you and I will truly begin to live when the last battle has been fought and we, also, will be enabled to exult, “Finally!”

Again, the Lord’s people are *consoled by the knowledge that they are not alone*. James encourages the people of God with the knowledge that the Master is overseeing their testing. God is reviewing the steadfast resolve of His child, and He is determined to award “the crown of life” at the conclusion of the days of trial. We never enter into any trial that the Master does not share with us.

Three young Hebrew men, taken as captives following the fall of Jerusalem, were brutalised by their captors. However, they did not cease to worship the Lord God. The king of Babylon created his own rock band to get people in the mood to “worship,” and he issued a command that whenever anyone heard the band—“the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music,” they must immediately fall down and worship a great image he had made.

Committed to God, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to worship his idol. Outed by angry courtesans of the king, they were threatened with death. When they stood firm in their faith, they were bound and thrown into an overheated furnace. That would teach them! Or, at least we would expect such extreme measures to teach them.

Peering into the furnace, no doubt in expectation of being satisfied that he had extracted his vengeance on these unrepentant worshippers of the Hebrew God, the king was astonished to see “four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire.” The king identified three of the men as those whom he had thrown into the furnace, but the fourth was “like a son of the gods” [see **DANIEL 3:1-30**]. It was none other than the preincarnate Christ, walking with those who courageously stood for truth and sought His glory. This is the same presence we may anticipate to this day when passing through trials.

Jesus promised His people, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” [**MATTHEW 28:20**]. This promise is but an iteration of an earlier affirmation of the Master that “where I am, there will My servant be also” [**JOHN 12:26**]. On one occasion Paul was feeling somewhat timid, knowing that he faced incredible opposition from people that hated him because they hated his message. We are left with the impression that the Apostle was about to make a hasty exit from Corinth, but Jesus Himself intervened. As Paul attempted to sleep, the Lord appeared in a vision and commanded the Apostle, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people” [**ACTS 18:9, 10**].

I have often drawn comfort from the account of Moses enduring despite many hardships. The author of the Letter to the Hebrew Christians wrote of the man of God, “By faith [Moses] left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible” [**HEBREWS 11:27**]. It is as though God is saying that from time-to-time He pulls back the curtain that separates time from eternity, permitting his beleaguered child to see what lies beyond the pale. It is as though God is saying, “Don’t give up! I’m on the throne, and you are not finished with your work yet.”

God has promised, “‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we can confidently say,

“‘The Lord is my helper;
I will not fear;
What can man do to me?’”

[**HEBREWS 13:5**]

Many years ago I heard the account of a missionary who served the Lord in China during the days preceding and following the Communist revolution. That missionary was imprisoned and treated meanly. On one occasion his interrogator taunted him because of his faith. “Where is your God now, Christian?” that Communist tormentor mocked.

Wracked with pain, that godly missionary responded by quoting from the Psalms,

“I trust in you, O Lord;
I say, ‘You are my God.’
My times are in your hand;
rescue me from the hand of my enemies and
from my persecutors!”

[PSALM 31:14, 15]

“What is that?” demanded the Communist, to which the missionary responded that it was a quotation from the Psalms.

The interrogator was enraged, and he rushed from the room only to return shortly with a Bible which he threw in front of the weakened missionary. “Find that passage now, or I shall shoot you on the spot!” he threatened.

Letting the Bible fall open, the man of God placed his finger on the verse which he had just quoted and read,

“I trust in you, O Lord;
I say, ‘You are my God.’
My times are in your hand;
rescue me from the hand of my enemies and
from my persecutors!”

[PSALM 31:14, 15]

It is reported that the Communist interrogator was unnerved and fled from the room never to return to continue the torture. Eventually, that missionary was released and returned to his homeland where he continued serving the Lord. Though the account is dramatic, it is nevertheless true that my times are in the hands of my God. He is ever with me, guiding me and directing my steps for my good and for His glory.

Lastly, Christians who know the Lord God are *comforted in the knowledge that their trials have purpose*. Listen, I have a secret for you. I read the end of the book. We win. All that we have done for the cause of Christ has purpose. His glory is ever in focus for the child of God, and as we seek His glory we are equipping ourselves for eternity. We are being changed into His image, and the process the Father uses to refine us involves permitting us to pass through the various trials we encounter.

James will soon write, “We consider those blessed who remained steadfast” [JAMES 5:11]. Here, the focus is on those who have passed through their own particular trial and who now enjoy the results that accompany completion of the maturation process. In our text, the focus is on those who are in the midst of testing. In the latter instance, the process is complete. Together with the one tested, God has worked through the process of trial, and now steadfastness has its full effect, and the one tested is mature—his life is whole. This is the focus of the remainder of the message.

THE CONCLUSION OF TRIALS — “He will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.” Beyond the immediate testing lies God’s reward. Previously, we saw that the reward is, in part, steadfastness resulting from withstanding the trial. However, God is just; He will not forget your faithfulness. Continuing throughout the heat of the day ensures a reward, just as He has promised.

I have often thought of the rewards that God has promised. God gives tantalising glimpses of what lies in store for His people. Earthly religions seek physical rewards, since they are of the earth—they cannot rise above the constraints of this life. The Word of God, however, promises us that we shall be like Christ. That resurrection body which now identifies Him as having conquered death is a harbinger of what we shall be like.

Paul writes, “When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’
‘O death, where is your victory?’
O death, where is your sting?’

“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Then, because this is true, the Apostle urges us to focus on eternity, knowing that we are already more than conquerors through Christ Jesus our Lord. “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain” [1 CORINTHIANS 15:54-58].

When he wrote the Roman Christians, Paul encouraged them by asking them to look forward to what was coming based on what has already taken place. “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified” [ROMANS 8:28-30].

Already, we Christians are being transformed into the image of God’s own Son. Already, having been justified we who are Christians are being glorified. We are being fitted for Heaven, and God Himself has promised that He will be our God and we will be His people. We cannot know all that is entailed in worshipping God perfectly and eternally, but we are certain that it will not be boring or repetitious. Because God is infinite, I anticipate that we will invest the remainder of eternity in seeking out infinite ways to glorify His Name and to be refreshed through serving Him.

Though I do not know with precision what the crown of life may be, I know God; and knowing God, I am confident that what He gives is good. I do not mean to demean the concept of His goodness by using that term; the word has acquired a decided insipid flavour in our day, but it was not always so. The word “good” is derived from the word “God.” Thus, by employing the term, I imply that as God is infinite in goodness and glory, so His gift—the crown of life—will endlessly and infinitely delight His people. Whatever the crown of life proves to be, it cannot be better than the knowledge that God has given us His very self. We are destined to share His glory throughout eternity.

That brings me to the question that is of uttermost importance for each individual. Are you a Christian? Do you have the hope that you shall share in this life God promises? Have you received the forgiveness of sin? Have you been born from above? The gift of life is offered to all who will receive it.

God’s Word declares that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” [ROMANS 3:23]. Moreover, we are told that “the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” [ROMANS 6:23].

All your labour only results in death, but God offers the free gift of real life—life such as you could never imagine, and that life is offered only through Jesus Christ the Lord. It is necessary to submit to His rightful reign over your life to enjoy that life.

You see, the Word of God affirms, “While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.” In this act we see that “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” [**ROMANS 5:6, 8**].

In order to appropriate God’s gracious provision of life, the Bible urges faith in the Living Son of God. Thus, it is written, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” That offer of freedom from sin and freedom from guilt concludes by testifying, “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**].

We extend the offer of to join Christ’s people in a vigorous life. Those who will follow the Master, willingly accepting the exciting life of godliness are called now to receive His commission and enter into His service, knowing that He will give them both strength for the challenge and a reward for faithful service. The life to which He calls demands courage and strength, both of which He will supply. Wimps need not apply.

And this is our call to each one sharing our service this day. To receive the life that is offered in Jesus Christ, come, confessing His Name. To openly identify with Him, come, standing openly with Him in baptism as He commands. To place your life in the fellowship of this congregation, come, and angels attend you in the way. Amen.