

James 1

by Peter Maiden

James 1 teaches that trials are a blessing in disguise, testing our faith and producing steadfastness, which leads to spiritual maturity and completeness.

Duration: 52:11

Scripture: James 1:2-11, James 1:19-20, James 1:22-27

Topics: "James"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the book of James and discusses the importance of understanding God's design in times of trial. He emphasizes that wealth is transient and can easily fade away, just like the grass or flowers. The preacher encourages Christians to seek wisdom and rejoice in the midst of trials, whether it be poverty, riches, or any other difficulty. He also highlights the promises of God, particularly the promise that those who persevere will receive the crown of life. Additionally, the preacher emphasizes the need for Christians to have a true understanding of God's perfect love and goodness in times of crisis.

Transcript

James chapter 1. My readings will be from the New International Version of the Bible. James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the 12 tribes scattered among the nations, greetings. Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. 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. 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.

That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord. He is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does. The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position, that the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower.

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.

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. When tempted, no one should say, God is tempting me, for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death. Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created. My dear brothers, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

For man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.

Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word, but does not do what it says, is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror, and after looking at himself goes away, and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it, he will be blessed in what he does.

If anyone considers himself religious, and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself, and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts, as pure and faultless, is this, to look after orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. Let's pray that God will help us to understand those verses.

The majority of the epistles in our New Testament were written either to churches, or to individual Christians. But one or two of the epistles were written not just for one person, or for one church, but they are known as general, or catholic letters, and they were a kind of circular letter. The apostle would send it to one church, that church might take a handwritten copy of the epistle, and then he would send it on to the next church to be read there also.

This epistle that we're going to look at together in these next four evenings, falls into the second of those two categories. It was a circular, a general letter, written to the whole of Christendom. It was intended to be read by as many Christians as possible, and of course it was written by James, who at this time was the acknowledged leader of the main congregation in the early days of the church at Jerusalem.

Now as usual there's been much theological discussion over the years as to who actually wrote this letter, because of course we come across a number of James in the New Testament. And if you read the theological discussions you will find that the majority of evangelical scholars, in fact almost all evangelical scholars, believe that it was James the natural brother of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was the author of this little epistle. And I think it might be very useful just to set the scene for this letter, to quickly look at what we know of the life of the author, James the natural brother of Jesus.

I would certainly say that James had not always been an ardent believer in his brother as the Messiah. In Mark chapter 3 and verse 21, we read that when the friends of Jesus heard of his early ministry, they went out to lay hold of him because they said he is beside himself. In other words, he is insane.

According to Dr. R. G. Tasker, the Greek word there translated friend would almost certainly include the close family members of Jesus. It's an interesting fact isn't it, that when Jesus began his public ministry, his close family, of course not Mary and Joseph, but most probably his brothers, including James, came to the conclusion that he was probably insane. And it would appear that it wasn't until the resurrection appearances of Christ that James was finally convinced that Jesus was the Messiah.

Remember how Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 that the risen Christ was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve, and after that he was seen of James and then all the apostles. It's very interesting how Paul distinguishes there between James and all the other apostles. One commentator puts it like this, the inference can reasonably be drawn from this, that James became an apostle in virtue of his vision of the risen Lord.

So James was a late convert, if you like. He only, after the resurrection, was convinced about the reality of his brother. But if he was a late convert, then he rose very, very quickly and very, very dramatically in prominence in the early church.

Not many years passed before James was the established leader of the major congregation in the early church, the church at Jerusalem. You might remember that when Peter was miraculously released from prison, the first thing he did on returning to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, was to tell his friends there to go and give a report of all that he had told them to James and to all the brethren. But probably the clearest place in which you see the position of authority to which James rose is in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

It's there that you have the first great committee meeting or council of the Christian church. You remember how Gentiles started getting converted and the church has always found it difficult to handle new things, hasn't it? And this hadn't happened before, Gentiles getting converted. And so they found this rather difficult to handle.

What were they to do about these Gentiles? And they weren't really sure, so of course the old established answer, form a committee. So in Acts chapter 15, you have the great council of the early church. Some people would argue that the church has never really recovered from Acts chapter 15.

It's been ever since. Well, I don't know whether that's true or not. But here you have this great council of Jerusalem, Acts chapter 15.

What are we going to do about these Gentiles getting converted? There's a great discussion. And then in verse 19, James speaks. And listen to what he says.

And then the decision of the council is related. So you can see that James became a very influential figure in the early years of the Christian church. That's the author, a late convert through the resurrection, but a man who rose to a position of prominence and authority in the early days of the church.

Well then, if that's the author, who were the people to whom he was writing? As I said earlier, he was writing to all Christians. But what was the situation for Christians when James wrote this letter? Well, again, there's been much discussion as to exactly when it was written. And the major consensus of opinion is that it was written somewhere around AD 60.

And those years, around the year AD 60, were extremely difficult days for the Christian church. Paul was by now a prisoner at Rome. He was awaiting his trial.

The early enthusiasm which had been engendered by those Gentile missions was now beginning to wane. And heretical teaching of all kinds was assailing the church. So that at one occasion, Paul even had to write and say, all of Asia, all the believers in Asia, had turned away from the faith.

And Christianity was now being seen as a deadly enemy, both by the Jews and by the Romans. And persecution was rampant. Now I think once you realize the situation of the Christians when James wrote, you immediately see how relevant this epistle was.

So with those few background details in our minds, let's move to the text itself and to this first chapter. As with all the other epistles, it of course begins with a personal greeting. It's a very brief greeting contained in just one verse.

It tells us from whom the letter came. And we've already looked at that. But it's very interesting how James introduces himself.

Remember, he was the natural brother of the Lord Jesus. He was also a prominent leader in the church in Jerusalem. But how does he introduce himself? James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I think you see one of two things. Either you see that James was an extremely humble man. He wasn't a man who boasted about his family background.

He wasn't a man who boasted about his prominent position in the church. He just introduces himself a humble servant of God. But maybe he wasn't just humble.

Maybe he was a man who had some concept of the honor and the privilege of being a servant, a *doulos* of God. I wonder if you appreciate just what a privilege it is. I think James is really saying to us here, yes, I might be the natural brother of our Lord.

I may have arisen to a great position of leadership in the church. But I tell you, it's an immense privilege just to be a humble servant of the living God and of his son Jesus Christ. And you recall how time and time again, the apostle Paul would boast of being a *doulos*, a bond slave, a willing servant of Jesus Christ.

There's surely no higher privilege on earth. So that's who the letter is from, a humble servant of God. And then we're told to whom the letter was written.

James says, I'm writing to the 12 tribes who are dispersed abroad. Now I think here we must understand the 12 tribes as speaking not only of the old nation of Israel, but also of the new Israel, the seed of Abraham. I remember being told as a young person that really the epistle of James had no relevance for me.

It wasn't written for people in my dispensation. It was just written for Israel. Well, I'm glad that I was delivered from such error in my teenage years.

And I began to see the relevance of the epistle of James for people today. All of scripture is given by inspiration of God and all of it is profitable. So James is writing to all Christians, believing Jews and believing Gentiles alike.

He is writing to the seed of Abraham scattered abroad across the world. And of course, in the early days of the church, Christians were being scattered around the world at a tremendous rate. It happened through a number of different means.

Many were being scattered on missions. They were going on missionary trips. But the major scattering took place because of persecution.

These persecutions began as early as the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, following on hard after the persecution of Stephen. Believers were scattered everywhere around the known world, running away from the persecution of their enemies. So that's the greeting written by James, the servant of God to Christians throughout the world who were being scattered by persecution.

And I think once you realize the background, you see what the epistle is all about. James is really giving very practical advice, very practical direction as to how Christians should respond in days of difficulty. It's pretty obvious that James knew difficulties were ahead.

We don't know how he knew. Maybe he received some special revelation from God. Or maybe he'd just seen the signs of the times.

He'd seen the black clouds of difficulty beginning to descend. So he took his pen and he wrote this letter to prepare Christians for what he perceived was to follow. And so from verse 2 to verse 5, you have the main section, the first main section of the epistle, where Paul tells us of God's design in difficulty.

James, sorry. He tells us how God intends to use difficulty in our lives. Now let me just point out two things before we try and get an overall view of these first few verses.

First of all, note the word count or consider at the beginning of verse 2. Consider it all joy when you face trials of many kinds. It's a very important word. It's a word which means to reckon or to esteem something.

So James is pleading with believers to look at trials, to look at problems and difficulties from a different viewpoint than the natural man might look at them from. Trials, problems might cause the natural man to be angry or to be depressed or just to resign himself to the problems. But says James, you Christians should be different.

You should look at problems through different eyes. I want you to reckon, to count, to consider these problems in an entirely different way. Then secondly, note how James speaks of trials that believers fall into.

We can sometimes bring difficulties upon ourselves, can't we, by disobedience. Or by sheer stupidity. Now James does not say rejoice when you bring trials upon yourself through disobedience.

His message there would be to repent rather than to rejoice. But when Christians fall into these difficulties, when they take us by surprise, due to no fault of our own, then says James, we can rejoice. And you might sensibly ask, why should I rejoice? How can I rejoice? Maybe you've come through a very difficult week and you read these verses and they don't mean very much to you.

How can I rejoice after the kind of week I've just been through? Well, James explains why Christians can rejoice. He says, look, in the problems, in the difficulties, there's a divine hand at work. God wants to test your faith and my faith through trials.

And the reason he wants to test our faith is that faith grows only when it's tested. Do you know why some of us aren't growing as Christians tonight? It's because our faith is never tested. Therefore it's merely academic.

We believe that God will supply all our needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. It's in our heads. But when did we at last step out and prove that in the crucible of experience? It's then when faith grows, when it's tested.

So says James. God sometimes allows, he sometimes designs these difficulties, so that faith might move from the academic plane to the experiential and the experimental plane in our lives. In fact, when faith is tested, other characteristics are produced.

And the first, James, is steadfastness. It's a word which means staying power. Or that lovely word, I don't think you'll find it in the Oxford dictionary, stickability.

How the Christian needs that in our generation and in every generation, particularly when opposition and difficulty comes our way. We need stickability, staying power. Last year I was in East Germany.

And I met Christians who'd been through the crucible of suffering. I met Christians who'd been through violent physical persecution. And they told me of large congregations, much larger than we have here tonight.

When the wave of persecution came, the congregations were decimated. People who seemed to be walking well were seen no longer when the first word of persecution was spoken. I wonder how many of us would really stand if the devil turned the screw a few more turns.

We have it often so easy. I have it often so easy. We need our faith to be tested, that staying power might be produced, so that when the day of trial comes, faith will prove to be genuine and we will stand.

And then steadfastness, says James, in turn will lead to other things. If you appropriate the trials are right and you continue on, James says, you'll become perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Now over the years, the possibility of sinless perfection has been argued from this verse.

But if you just quickly turn the page to James chapter 3 and verse 2, you'll see that James certainly didn't teach sinless perfection. He writes there, we all stumble in many ways. Now this word perfect really should be translated something like sincere or mature.

That's probably the best word, mature. Whatever the exact meaning, the argument is quite plain. James says, look out, trials are coming your way and Satan intends that they will ruin your faith.

But if you see them in the right way, if you reckon them in the right way, then in fact they'll be a blessing in your life. They'll test your faith, your faith will be strengthened, stickability will be produced and it will bring you to maturity. You know, in some of the Arab lands where I've had the privilege of visiting, there's a little proverb, it's just a very brief one and it goes like this, all sunshine makes a desert.

Just five words. And it's true of the ground but how true it is of the Christian life as well. All sunshine makes a desert.

All our lives are ease and plenty and we have everything that we require and there's no real difficulties in our lives. Then we'll become a desert. We'll become barren and superficial.

But trials, says James, problems, difficulties will drive us to the deep things of life and spiritual maturity will result. So that's James's first point. Trials are coming your way brothers and sisters.

When they come, recognise God's design in those difficulties. Then secondly, James speaks to us in the next couple of verses of the need for wisdom. The need for wisdom.

Now in certain translations, including the English authorised version, the word but is missed out at the beginning of verse five. It's certainly there in the Greek and it's a very important word because it links the need for wisdom with what has gone before. If you and I are going to appropriate trials in the right way in our lives, we are going to need spiritual wisdom.

If we're going to get to that place of spiritual sincerity or maturity, we're going to need wisdom. And God's promise with regard to wisdom is truly marvellous, isn't it? Alec Mortier, I think, breaks down this fifth verse in a beautiful way. He says it can be summed up in three words.

Simplicity, availability and liberality. You see what he means? The simplicity is that of prayer. If you lack wisdom, brother or sister, there's a very simple remedy.

You don't need to wait for some great Christian counsellor to come your way. The simplicity is prayer. You can turn to God whoever you are.

Whatever your academic level, whatever your spiritual experience, a man who lacks wisdom simply turns to God. Simplicity. But then availability.

And the availability is that of God. God is always there. Always there to pour his wisdom into your life.

And then liberality. The liberality can be seen in three ways. Number one, God excludes no one.

He gives to all, says James. If you lack wisdom and turn to God, he gives to all. But then secondly, he gives beyond what is required.

That's what the word liberally means. You turn to God and you feel a need for wisdom, he will give you more wisdom than you require. And then beautifully, thirdly, he invites us to come and come and come again.

Because he gives without reproach. That means without a grudge, without rebuking us. Isn't that a marvellous thing about prayer? Don't you find it in your own life? You're making the same mistakes this year as you made last year.

And if you're honest, you were making them 10 years ago. And you don't really seem to be growing up spiritually. I often feel that way.

And I have to go back to God again. But there's no sense of grudge. There's no sense of reproach.

You don't get the sense that God says, look, Peter, you were here asking me about this last year. And you were here a decade ago. Are you never going to grow up? There's never that sense, is there? God is always there.

He's always giving liberally the wisdom for which we ask. And then thirdly, James shows us the need for undivided loyalty in verses 6 to 8. How essential such a characteristic is in the time of trial. If we are in any sense double-minded at the moment of trial, the trial will break us.

We'll be unable to reckon it in the right way. We'll be unable to be joyful in the midst of trial. Now look at the very graphic picture which James gives us of a double-minded Christian.

He says such a person is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. That's a powerful illustration, isn't it? Imagine in your mind for a moment the sea. First, it's beating against the rock, as though it had no other purpose in mind than to shatter its way through.

But then the tide turns and it goes back. That's the sea, isn't it? First one way, then the other. What a tragic picture of so many Christians.

They don't have that steadfastness. They don't have that perseverance of verse 3, particularly in the place of prayer, which is the context here in verses 6 to 8. And says James, if such people, these double-minded people, ask for wisdom, then they might as well realize that they won't receive from God. God honors the prayer of faith.

So that's the opening part of chapter 1. What marvelous instruction. James says trials are coming your way. When they come, recognize God's design in them.

Rush into his presence for wisdom to appropriate them in the right way. And it doesn't matter how much and how often you go. The wisdom will always come.

And remember, stand firm. Don't be double-minded. Don't be this way and that way.

Stand firm and you will triumph. Now in verses 9 to 11, James illustrates what he's been speaking about. And he gives us two possible trials that Christians might fall into.

They're very interesting trials. One is the trial of poverty, verse 9. The other is the trial of riches, verse 10. Alec Motyer says, poverty can move a person from inflexible loyalty to God simply through the sheer difficulty of living.

How true that is. We don't know what poverty is in the western world. If you come across the Indian Christian in the villages of northern India, who in a time of bad famine might spend his days just walking along the road, picking up seed to eat.

You ask him, have you had your quiet time this morning, brother? No, he hasn't had his quiet time. He's spending his whole day just surviving, just getting enough for himself, getting enough for his family. Motyer is right.

Poverty can drive a person from God through the sheer difficulty of living. Wealth's much the same, isn't it? Wealth can seduce a man's mind from that undeviating loyalty to God by putting up the counter-attractions of the things of the world. But, says James, poverty doesn't have to break you, neither does riches.

It all depends how you reckon those things, how you consider them. So, what is the man going through the trial of poverty to do? Well, look at verse 9. The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. There's James' advice.

If you're going through the trial of poverty, if you haven't got two pennies to rub together, look away from your material circumstances and rejoice. You're a son, you're an heir of the living God. What about the rich man? Well, he's got a problem, hasn't he? It's very, very important that the rich man realizes that his

wealth is transient.

Just as the grass or the flower easily withers away, the rich man can fade away, surrounded by all the trappings of his success. That's what verse 10 really says. So, James says, there's what I mean, you see.

When the trial comes, be it a trial of poverty, look for God's design in it. Look for wisdom in it, to appropriate it in the right way, and you will rejoice in the midst of trial, whether it's the trial of poverty or riches or any other of the myriads of trials which can come our way. Well, after that little break for an illustration, James takes up the subject again in verse 12.

And he says the fourth thing which it's important to think about in times of trial is the promises of God. And in verse 12, he gives us one promise that every Christian can hold on to in any time of trial. It's the promise that the man who perseveres will be given the crown of life.

Do you remember the words of the Apostle Paul? The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. I know you're not supposed to have spiritual heroes, but Paul is one of my spiritual heroes. You know, tradition tells us that he was bald.

That's one of the reasons he's probably a hero of mine. It also tells us that he was hunchbacked and probably short-sighted. He wasn't a very pleasant physical sight, to be honest.

Hunchbacked, bald, short-sighted. Going through all the trials and the struggles that that man went through. And I just have this mental picture of this bent man crying out, the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Paul had learnt the secret in the day of trial, holding on to the promises of God. You know that blessed experience? That blessed experience when the pressure is on of looking away from your circumstances and forward to the future. When you will be delivered not only from the power of sin and the guilt of sin, but you'll be delivered from the very presence of sin.

What a tremendous motivation in times of difficulty. And then fifthly, says James, in the crisis you need a true understanding of God. And he argues this in verses 13 to 18.

And there's two things about God that it's particularly important for a man to understand. First, you must understand God's perfect love. Verse 17, every good and perfect gift comes down from above, and so on.

A verse you know well. Again, I think Alec Motyer divides the verse beautifully. He says God's goodness is unmixed goodness.

It's nothing but good, every good, and every perfect gift. Isn't that a marvelous thing about God? He's so consistent. Everything, every day, is good.

Secondly, it's unquestionable goodness. These gifts come to us from the father of lights, says James. There's no darkness in God.

There's no place for an ulterior motive to lurk. Have you ever been given a gift? It happened to me recently. And later on you realized there was an ulterior motive in being given that gift.

God is not like that. Every gift he gives to us, he gives to us because he loves us, because he wants us to enjoy this world, and to enjoy him. His goodness is unmixed and unquestionable.

And thirdly, it's unvarying. Says James, there's no variation. There's no shadow cast by his turning.

God is not one thing today, and another thing tomorrow. His love is unvarying. It's utterly consistent.

And then you have the great crowning act of his love and goodness in verse 18. What's the greatest goodness of all? In the exercise of his will, he brought us forth by the word of truth. That's a glorious statement concerning the doctrine of salvation, which we could take the whole evening to look at.

We're just going to move on and come back to it a little later for a couple of minutes. So that's the first thing you must realize about God when you're going through the trial. Realize his goodness.

The devil will suggest other things, but recognize his unmixed, unquestionable, unvarying goodness. Equally, you must realize, says James, the holiness and righteousness of God. You see, there's always the danger when we fall in the day of difficulty of turning around and pointing the finger at God.

I've seen myself do that. I've been going through some particular difficulty, and because of the difficulty, I have sinned. I turn around and blame God.

Why did you allow it? Why did I have to be under such pressure? James goes on to say that God is neither tempted by evil, nor can he tempt anyone. He is an absolutely righteous and an utterly holy God. That's the thing which kept Job going.

If you read through the book of Job, he couldn't understand all that was happening to him, but he understood one thing. God is righteous, God is just, and nothing is happening to me which isn't within the permissive will of a righteous, holy, loving Father. So that's the fifth thing to realize when you're going through difficulty.

You must have a true conception of the character of God. Now look at the final thing, verses 19 to 27. James says, in these days of difficulty, you must be ready to hear, to receive, and to obey the Word of God.

And in these verses, we have some immensely practical advice. So important, so important for those of us who are regularly privileged to listen to God's Word. What a privilege it is, but what a responsibility it is to regularly sit under the ministry of God's living Word.

Look at James' advice. It's threefold. Number one, verse 19, be quick to listen to God's Word.

Take every opportunity to come under the sound of God's holy Word. I have to say that one of the distressing things about the church in Britain today, in my opinion, is that Christians are slow, slow to come under the ministry of the Word of God. It's a sad thing.

They're willing to attend other events, but they're slow to sit under the ministry of God's Word. James says, be quick, take every opportunity to listen to God's Word. Now closely connected with that advice are the two phrases that follow, be slow to speak and be slow to become angry.

What does James mean? He says, beware of being so self-opinionated, so dogmatic that your mind is closed to the Word of God. You ever met that kind of person? Maybe you're that kind of person yourself. You read the Word of God and God speaks to you, but immediately you respond.

You have all your answers. You think you know it all. You've worked out all your doctrines.

You know what the Word of God says. You will never be moved. Beware, says James, of being so quick to speak.

When you open the Word of God, be slow to speak. Let God speak to you. We must beware of coming to the Word of God with our doctrines and looking at the Word of God to have our doctrinal views confirmed.

We must come to the Word of God with open hearts, with an open mind, and allow God to feed us and to lead us through the Scriptures. But we also, says James, must be slow to anger when we hear God's Word. And that's because God's Word is a two-edged sword.

And sometimes when we read the Word of God or when God's Word is ministered to us, it pierces right deep down into our lives. It touches the very personal parts of our life. And sometimes the response can be anger.

I so loved King David, not because he was perfect. He was far from it. But King David was a man who always seemed to respond beautifully to the Word of God.

You remember when the prophet Nathan visited him after his sin with Uriah the Hittite and with Bathsheba? And Nathan brought solemn words to King David. His family would suffer for the rest of his days because of his sin. And this is what David said, I, Nathan, have sinned against the Lord.

He didn't start bringing up all his arguments. He didn't respond angrily. But he realized that God had spoken.

And he listened quietly to what God had to say. It's a great responsibility, isn't it, to come under the ministry of God's Word. Let's be quick to come.

And when we hear, let's be slow to speak. Let's be slow to come with all our opinions and all our ideas. Let's go away and quietly think over what God says through his Word.

Maybe some of us have been wrong on some issues. Maybe for many, many years. Maybe what God wants to change us in some areas.

Maybe he wants to do a new thing amongst us. It wouldn't be the first time in church history, would it? That God had done something entirely new with his people. Let's be quick to hear and slow to speak.

But hearing isn't sufficient, says James. The next step is to humbly receive the Word of God, verse 21. And if you're going to receive the Word of God, you have to get rid of certain things.

You have to get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent. So easy, isn't it? In our filthy society, for that is certainly what it is, to become contaminated by the filth that surrounds us. And our minds become congested with this filth amongst which we live.

And if we don't get rid of it from our lives, if we don't forsake it, then the Word of God can't shine clearly into our minds. So we must listen and we must receive God's Word. But thirdly, we must go on to do it.

Having heard it, having received it, we must do it. Now if you look at verse 22, the picture is of a man who on hearing God's Word, immediately sets out to work out his excuses for not doing what he hears. That's the picture which is in James' mind.

And if we're not careful, we'll find ourselves even subconsciously doing the same thing. On hearing God's Word, we have a kind of defense mechanism which is immediately triggered off. We find ourselves rationalizing everything we hear, or thinking how relevant it is for someone else.

You ever been in that situation? You hear a powerful word from some great preacher, and you go out of the door thinking, my, if only so-and-so had been in tonight. Wouldn't that have been good for them? You see, you've rationalized. God is speaking to you.

And you must not only listen, you must not only receive, but you personally must do what God says when he speaks. Otherwise, says James, with a touch of humor, it's rather like a man with a dirty face. He goes in front of the mirror and he says, look, I've got a dirty face.

But he goes on his way without washing. The man is a fool. He has no excuse.

He has seen himself, but he's done about it. I wonder if it's like that for many Christians. We see ourselves as the Word of God is ministered.

We see where we fail. We see where we fall. But are we doing anything about it? Are we doing what God says? So there are six things which are absolutely vital in the day of trial.

I wonder what's ahead for us as Christians in the United Kingdom. I wonder what's ahead for us personally. I sometimes wonder what's ahead for me.

Three children. I've never really had a tremendous crisis in my personal life yet. No close bereavement.

There's a sense in which I don't know what difficulty is. I wonder what's ahead for me and my family. I wonder what's ahead for God's people in this place and in this nation.

Certainly for many of us, a variety of trials. Here are six very important things. Number one, God is in it.

He has a design in the difficulty. Number two, cry out for wisdom. Number three, be loyal, tenaciously loyal.

Don't be double-minded. Number four, remember the promises of God. Number five, remember the goodness of God and beware of wrong thinking about God.

He is righteous and the word of God should have a special place in the time of trial. Let's be quick to hear it. Let's receive it into our lives and let's practice what we hear.

So important, isn't it? How we respond to trials. We have five minutes left, if you'll just permit me. There's one thing more important than how you respond to a trial.

One thing more important and that is that at that moment of trial, your faith is found to be genuine faith. That's the vital thing, isn't it? If your faith is genuine, if it's the real article, then it doesn't matter what hits it, it's going to stand. Remember the story of the sower? Jesus says the sower scatters the seed and some of the seed falls on very thin soil.

It seems to sprout to life. The storm comes and the sun burns down and apparent life is consumed. Jesus said it's like that with many Christians.

They join the club, the Christian club. They join the periphery of the church. When the trial comes, the sheep and the goats are sorted.

It's only then that we know and recognize genuine faith. And so we see in this chapter, James beginning what he's going to follow for the next three chapters and what we're going to follow with him on the next three evenings. He shows us in chapter one, the source of genuine faith.

And then he shows us three signs, three proofs of genuine faith. Let's just look at them briefly. We'll look at it in much greater detail on the next three evenings.

But look first of all at the source of genuine faith. Why are you a Christian? Why is my next-door neighbor not a Christian? Am I a Christian because somehow I am better than my next-door neighbor? Am I a Christian because somehow I am more intelligent than my next-door neighbor? Why am I a Christian? Why are you a Christian? The verse which gives us the answer is verse 18. We are Christians because God chose to give us birth.

That's where genuine faith begins. It begins in the mind and in the eternal counsels of God. That's why we're Christians.

How did God give us birth? Well, James continues, through the word of truth. That's how we became Christians. God spoke his living word into our dead hearts and we burst forth into spiritual life.

That tremendous experience which we call regeneration. That's how Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 4, isn't it? The God who said, let light shine out of darkness has done what? He's shone into our hearts so that we can see the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. That would be my testimony if I was to give it tonight.

I'm a Christian because God has broken into my life. I haven't gone searching for him. Many times I've gone running from him.

But God has come searching for me and he has burst into my life by his powerful spirit and he has brought about the miracle of regeneration. Why did he do it? Well, look at the rest of the verse. God gave us birth through the word of truth.

Why? That we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created. That's why you were saved, to be the first fruits. Now, you've got to know your Old Testament to understand that.

You know how in the Old Testament the first fruits were brought and they were given to the Levites. They were given to God, the first fruits of the harvest. It was given to God.

Now, it didn't matter how meager the harvest was. It didn't matter whether the people were to go poor. The first fruits were God's.

And that's why you've been saved. That's why you've become a Christian. That you might be given to God.

You are God's special possession. You have been separated out of this world and given to God, to be holy unto him. That's your first privilege and it's your first responsibility, to be holy to God and to give him your life and your worship.

So, there's the source of genuine faith. It begins in the eternal counsels of God. It's brought to pass by the living word of God.

And the purpose is that we might be separated for God. But what are the proofs of genuine faith? How do we know the real Christian? Well, it's interesting that in the last three verses, James gives us three proofs. Very, very interesting.

I wonder if before looking at verses 26 and 27, you'd been asked, what three proofs would you give for a genuine Christian? I Someone might say fervency in evangelism. Someone might say fervency in prayer. Someone might say the fact that a person's happy.

I've heard them all. What three proofs does James give? Number one, a controlled tongue. Number two, a love for those who are in need.

Verse 27, religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless, the genuine article in other words, is this, looking after orphans and widows in their distress. A Christian who is not concerned for the needy in society. What kind of a Christian is he? James says there's no sign of genuine faith there.

A real proof of genuine faith is concern. Concern for those in need. And then thirdly, holiness.

The end of verse 27, keeping oneself from being polluted by the world. Now James could have used more than these three proofs. There are many other fruits by which the Christian is known, but here are three very, very interesting ones.

We're going to look at them in the next three chapters because what James does is he takes one of these points in each of the next three chapters and he elaborates it. So in chapter two, he elaborates the point that a genuine Christian will be concerned for those in need. And you have that dramatic, dramatic 24th verse of chapter two, which reads even more dramatically in the NIV, especially for evangelicals.

You see, says James, that a person is justified by works, oh dear, and not by faith alone. That's why Martin Luther called this an epistle of straw and tried to burn it. So we'll have a look at that tomorrow.

But chapter two elaborates this point that if you're a Christian, you'll have genuine concern for those around you who are in need. We've been afraid for years, haven't we, of the social gospel. These poor people who have a social gospel, and we've reasoned for concern, but we've equally reasoned for concern for Christians who are not concerned socially.

We should be concerned about the needs in our community, about the needs of individuals around us. Jesus was concerned. He was concerned about the blind and the poor and so on.

I mustn't go any further or we'll do the second talk on the first night. But that's chapter two. If you're a real Christian, concern for those in need.

Chapter three, you know well, it's a classic passage on taming the tongue. A true Christian, increasingly, it's not going to happen in a moment, especially for some of us, but increasingly you're going to be taming the tongue. And chapter four, you're going to be increasingly having a desire for holiness.

So we'll look at those three points on the next three evenings.

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