

Talk – James 1:1-18 – Crown of Suffering

Central Truth

Blessed is the one who perseveres in faith.

Purpose

In this sermon, I want my hearers to think of the benefit of the spiritual trials that they face and live as if they are wearing the crown of life.

Outline

1:1 Salutation

1:2-8 Purpose of Perseverance

1:5-8 Pray for wisdom and pray with faith

1:9-11 Paradox of Perseverance

1:9 The POOR Rich

1:10-11 The RICH Poor

1:12-15 Outcome of Perseverance

1:12 Crown of Life

1:13-15 Temptation > Sin > Death

1:16-18 Fruit of Perseverance

Reading

James 1:1-18

Talk – James 1:1-18 – Crown of Suffering

CHECK TIME

Talk

Prayer

Dear Lord and Father,

We pray for wisdom where we lack it, faith where we doubt it, and humility where we need it – and all because you are willing to give to us through your word of truth.

AMEN

Opening

[Delivered increasingly cynically]

- Blessed is the person who is happy, comfortable, who takes what is given, and receives what is offered.
- Blessed is the person who doesn't have to work hard but achieves, who is rich in the eyes of others, and is given respect even when it is just for show.
- Blessed is the sports star or the movie star or the TV star.
- Blessed is the one who drives *that* car or owns *that* house, or goes on *that* holiday or receives *that* inheritance.
- Blessed are those the rest of the world envies.

I was walking through a shop on Friday when I overheard in a conversation between two shoppers - that modern day mantra – 'well all that counts is that I am happy'. (I am sure you have heard that before?)

1:1 Salutation

- Tonight we start a new sermon series from the letter of James – and I suspect that if James was to overhear a conversation between two *believers* which started with 'well all that counts is that I am happy' – that he would interrupt and hand them a copy of this letter which in verse 3 starts with '*Consider it pure joy my brethren whenever you face trials of many kinds*'
– and then look at the faces of those believers who looked back aghast as they digest the whole idea that being blessed is not about being happy or comfortable.
- Friends if you are the kind of person who loves to hear a sermon which just says it like it is – then you are going to enjoy this series.
- If you are the person who is just wants to hear where the rubber hits the road – then this letter will be great – because of all the letters of the New Testament, this letter has the most number of direct commands.

Talk – James 1:1-18 – Crown of Suffering

- It is most likely that this letter is written by the James the younger brother of Jesus – so he knows Jesus well.
- He is well placed to write this letter as he also rose to a prominent position in the early Christian church being the first bishop of Jerusalem.
- Where the 12 apostles were often clear about *why* they taught what they taught, James just wants to cut to the case and tell believers who were scattered around the early church world *what* they should do to live as believers.
- And it helps us because sometimes we also need a bit of a kick up the pants.

- Verses 3-18 are all about godly perseverance.
- And so we are going to look at
 - the *Purpose* of perseverance,
 - the *Paradox* of perseverance,
 - the *Outcome* of perseverance,
 - and the *Fruit* of perseverance.

1:2-8 Purpose of Perseverance

- So the *Purpose of perseverance*.
- Verse 3 – ‘*consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance*’.
- James is not saying here that if you are a believer – you should run out there and find further ways to suffer, and embrace them.
- This is not as much about suffering as it is about the perseverance *that is learned* through the tough stuff that we might experience.
- You can see in the next verse, that one of the benefits of perseverance is maturity.

Explanation

- We know that, the best lessons that each of us have learned have come as we have worked our way through tough stuff and once through, we look back and realise how much we have grown in the process.
- Children learn some of the basic skills of life through the trials and tribulations of the school yard – and it strengthens them for what will come later in life. It doesn’t help them to always wrap them in cotton wool to protect them - because it takes away their opportunity to grow and learn.
- And I see that as the pastor of this gathering. Every week new trials surface for different people. Trials that no one would want to wish upon another, but trials that grow us individually and at times corporately.
- And you know, often when those trials come, I notice that we ask for usually two things – that the trial be removed (understandably) or second that we have wisdom to make it through the trial.

Talk – James 1:1-18 – Crown of Suffering

1:5-8 Pray for wisdom and pray with faith

- Look at what James suggests in verse 5 – *‘If anyone lacks wisdom, they should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given generously’*
- What a great Father, he is someone who when faced with a trial, we can approach and ask advise, ask wisdom and he will give it.
- Do you notice, that James doesn’t suggest that we ask for the trial to be removed, but that when we need help, we can ask God for wisdom in how to proceed and he will offer it – not finding fault with us but guiding us.

Illustration

- I have four children. In the school of hard knocks, instead of me stepping in and fixing the situation (which parents love to do), often what is best is to help my child to be wise as they work their way through whatever issue that are facing. To advise them.

Explanation

- But there is another side to that equation, is there not? Will my child accept that advice?
- What James does here is *not* simply say: pray for wisdom, he says *listen* to what God says and accept.
- Look at verse 6 – *‘when he asks he must believe and not doubt because he who doubts is like the wave of the sea blown and tossed by the wind’*.
- When in the midst of a trial, if you ask God for help – then what should go with that is the acceptance of what God may say or do.
- James is eager that the person of faith, lives by faith and he knows that the time this is most tested is when the person is under trial.
- His prime concern is that the person is not double-minded (which you can see in also mentioned in verse 8) – in other words he doesn’t want the person to operate with a foot in opposing camps. If you are a person of God, then trust him to do what he will (which may appear to be nothing) but whatever he does/doesn’t do to know that it is for our benefit.
- What won’t help is to turn to the world just because life is a trial and see what answer you can get from the world. Choose the path of least resistance, taking the easiest path – because when you do, you stand for nothing - you are blown and tossed by the wind or the waves – and in the end that will not build you to persevere.

Application

Talk – James 1:1-18 – Crown of Suffering

- Friends, there are several in this church family, who I know are finding some things about life really tough. It might be due to circumstances totally out of your control or it could be as a result of a decision or decisions that you have made.
- Those trials are there to test your faith.
- The question, is whether you are going to ask God for wisdom and accept his promise that he will work through what is best for you.
 - Or whether you will be double minded in the way you face the trial before you – taking some of what the world says, doing some of what God says - and in the end hoping for the best.

PAUSE

1:9-11 Paradox of Perseverance

- The next section verse 9-11 show us the *paradox of perseverance*.
[READ 1:9-11]
- What James is doing here is showing us the folly of trusting the answers of the world when we suffer.
- And the reason is because what the world values is the wrong way around.
- In verse 9 we have the POOR Rich – the one who finds himself in humble circumstances according to the world.
 - I take that to mean that the person would be looked upon poorly according to the values of the world – maybe status, or position, or demographic or bank balance – or maybe in the context of some suffering.
- But this person, James says, is one God looks upon with favour – and as such they should see themselves to be in a high position. It is a paradox.
- In verse 10, we have the RICH Poor – the one who is rich and privileged in circumstance in the eyes of the world. Maybe status, or position, or demographic, or bank balance, or maybe they are fit and well and have no concerns to bother them.
- But this person, James says, is one God looks upon with no regard – and as such they should see themselves in a low position. It is a paradox.
- But that person cannot see the peril that sits over their heads – for as good as they think they have it, the heat will come, their flower will fall, they will wither, they will shrivel and they will fade away while going about their business.
- The path of the Christian in the non-Christian world – is the POOR Rich.
- So POOR in the eyes of those who don't value what God values – yet so RICH in the blessings of what God promises.
- Friends, we are called to persevere because as we do, we grow in maturity, in wisdom in faith.

PAUSE

Talk – James 1:1-18 – Crown of Suffering

1:12-15 Outcome of Perseverance

1:12 Crown of Life

- And the *outcome of that perseverance* is what James describes from verse 12.
- Blessed is the person who perseveres because in coming through that test, they receive the promised crown of life.
- To be ‘Blessed’ is so much better that the idea of being ‘happy’
- You can’t really say here ‘happy is the one who perseveres under trial’, because who is happy when they are tested? It is such an inward looking emotion.
- Yet to be ‘blessed’ captured the idea of being thankful, of being safe, of being privileged despite the circumstances.
- And here those circumstances include a ‘crown of life’. A high position.

- It strikes me that the perfect example of a person who lived out what James has described here is Jesus himself.
- He faced trials – in fact they led to a cross
- He persevered – to the point of death and under great suffering
- He cried out to God – and trusted even as it appeared that God was to do nothing to take away his suffering.
- He humbled himself – faced the world undeterred as he lived for God – yet was mocked and ridiculed as if he was a fool.
- He was given the crown as God’s king and was exalted into his high position now at the right hand of God.
- He did that because he loved God before he loved the World.
- Yes, friends, it strikes me that the perfect example of a blessed person – is in fact Jesus.

1:13-15 Temptation > Sin > Death

- The crown that the Christian wears is the crown that was first worn for us by Jesus.

- But you say – Jesus was the Son of God. He was equipped to suffer! It was in his DNA! He could stand strong where we cannot!

- Well, my brethren, that argument does not seem to fly for James.
- He knows that a key trial we face is the temptation to follow what the world values.
- In fact, often much of the suffering that we experience is a direct result of us giving in to temptations in areas which go against what God asks of us – we all know that battle.
- Look at what he says from verse 13.
- When tempted, it’s not God’s fault.

Talk – James 1:1-18 – Crown of Suffering

- The temptations that come at us come at us come from the world, the flesh, the devil – don't blame God for those.
- That is a battle that happens because we allow our own evil desires to drag us away and entice – and once that desire is sparked, when we give into it, that is when it becomes sin and in turn it is because of that sin – that death results.
- We know this – and we know this about every temptation that stands before us.
- Something that is valued more by the world – money, sex, pornography, job status, , sport, possessions, relationships, education, career – something that is valued by the world, calls out to us, seduces us, makes promises to us, calls upon us to give to it what we know should be given to God – they are the temptations that stand before us.
- And the answer should not be to take it – to give into it.
- That is the non- persevering way, that is the unwise way - that is the easy way.
- You don't grow in wisdom, and faith, by giving in to temptation.
 - You grow in sin. and when fully grown it gives birth to death.

PAUSE

1:16-18 Fruit of Perseverance

- But friends, there is a hope – it is the *fruit of perseverance* – and that is where our passage finishes in verse 16-18.
- James says, don't be deceived. That which is worldly will not give life.
- In fact, even in the face of temptation and temptation that has given way to sin, leading to death – there is hope
- Verse 17 - Every good and perfect gift is from above, from the Father – the he, unlike the world, does not change like shifting shadows – it is he who gives birth, not to death (as in verse 15), but to life.
- James gives us the reassurance that it is God, it is by his hand, it is by his intention that we live through the trials.
 - When the New Testament speaks of *new birth* that is given to believers – it speaks of two births.
 - There is the birth that comes when we become believers – the *born-again* kind of birth (like we hear about in John 3:7 when Jesus tells Nicodemus what it means to come into the Kingdom of heaven)
 - But there is also another kind of new birth – it is a *new creation birth* – the promise of being made new again and restored and freed from the curse of sin (like we hear about in 2 Cor 5:17 and 1 Peter 1:3 and 2 Peter 3:13) – and it is this new birth, this new inheritance, that we enjoy into eternity.
 - It is this kind of *new birth* that I think is on display in our passage.
 - That God, has chosen to give us birth that will replace the trials and the sufferings that we experience as part of being held in this world.

Talk – James 1:1-18 – Crown of Suffering

- And notice that the tool, the help that he offers us, is the *word of truth*
- *[Hold up the Bible]* this is what we have in his world. It shapes us, it directs us, it guides us such that we are able to be wise for his salvation while we wait for that time when we enter into his eternal new birth.
- When we persevere with the word of truth we are equipped to stand firm through the tests and trials that we experience and even if those tests and trials lead us to the point of death's door (as it inevitably will), then we have the promise that the Father gives us a new birth.

Purpose

I think that James wants his readers to think of the benefits of the spiritual trials that they face and to challenge them live according to God's word of truth as if they were already wearing the crown of life.

Let me make that more personal to us.

I think that James wants us to think of the benefits of the spiritual trials that we face and to challenge us live according to God's word of truth as if we were already wearing the crown of life.

PAUSE

Application

- So, let's think of the sufferings that we experience with an attitude that is not despairing, but with faith in our Lord who gives what is best.
- And, let's help one another persevere but persevere with hope that grows as we become more mature in faith.
- And let's face temptations more boldly, resisting the urge to give into the easier lure of the world but to stand firm in the knowledge of what God has done for us in Jesus.
- And let's live as one's who wear the crown of life knowing that our new birth into eternity will be good and perfect.

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord and Father,

We pray for wisdom where we lack it, faith where we doubt it, and humility where we need it – and all because you are willing to give to us what we need to persevere through your word of truth.

AMEN