

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

Date: 15 October 2023
Services: *Across the Diocese*
Series: Jesus' brother, challenges our hearts
Title: Facing trials
Passage: James 1:1-15

Four keys to facing trials:

1. **By seeing the big picture**
2. **By asking for wisdom**
3. **By seeing reality as God sees it**
4. **By seeing temptation for what it is**

Series introduction

- Let's begin by cheating... so we might see what the book is about...turn with me to the last verses of the book – 5:19-20 *My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back,* ²⁰ *remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*
- This is exactly the work James is doing right throughout this wonderful, searching, inspiring letter... bringing back people who have wandered from the truth... back to the truth.
- people who want to have a bet each way – a bit with God and a bit with world...
- people who are playing up to the rich to earn their favour...
- people who have lost control of their tongue...
- people who claim to be people of faith but there's just no evidence in their lives...
- now.... what we long for in our church, surely; is people with a real and vital and energetic faith... where faith changes you... where God changes you... where your relationship with God cannot help but change you... and that is my prayer for the impact of this James' series. ///
- When you get a letter in the mail... you normally want to know who's it **from**...
- This letter is from. James. One of four brothers of the Lord Jesus.
- He went from being opposed to Jesus – to a central leader of the Jerusalem church.
- he describes himself here as – 'a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.'
- We see in that description in v1, both his humility and the position of honour in which he now holds his brother... who he calls 'the Lord'.
- so these words are from the brother of our Lord... but as with **all Scripture**... they are also... the Words of **God himself** who has breathed out all **Scripture!** //
- We would do well to listen carefully! ///

Sermon

- I have now been in this role for close to four years... it's been a privilege to get to know many of you personally...
- it is clear to me, that many of us have known some hard, sad, challenging times.

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- The loss of someone close...
- A serious illness
- Ridicule for following Jesus
- Financial circumstances which were stretching...
- Some of you have been through divorce and family breakdown..
- That drought which seemed endless
- Then floods which were devastating...
- And presently... stock prices way down on this time a year ago...
- ...and a lot less rain than we'd like to see! ///
- How do you react then, to James' opening statement – *consider it pure joy, whenever you face trials of many kinds...*
- For many of us – “pure hell” would be a more accurate **description**...!
- We're not exactly sure what trials the original readers faced... but certainly later in the epistle – in chapter 2, James speaks of rich people exploiting his readers, dragging them into court and slandering the name of Jesus... Ch 5 – speaks of people who are sick...
- So we need to wrestle with what James is putting before us... how is it that we can face **trials** of many kinds and consider it 'pure joy'? It just doesn't seem to make any sense.
- We there are four keys - here is the first – to see the big picture of where we're **heading** as Christians – and then see **trials** as part of that..

1. By seeing the big picture

- There are two things to which all Christians are heading – **maturity** in our trust in Jesus – and the **crown of life**.
- Let's take the first one first

Maturity

- My great hope and prayer for all of us as believers is that we be “*mature and complete, not lacking in anything*”.
- That doesn't mean perfect or sinless... it means becoming the people God wants us to be...
- Isn't that what **you** want?
- One of the great frustrations I face as a Christian – is that I'm not the godly man the Lord wants me to be...
- I **waver** in my **trust**
- My prayer life is poor
- I'm impatient and lose self-control... //
- I'm a work in **progress**... but **there's** the direction I'm heading – mature, complete, not lacking in anything.

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- And James is saying that **trials – hard times** – God **can** and **will use** them - to **test** your **faith**, develop **perseverance** and bring you to **maturity**.
- So if the **goal** is **maturity** – and that’s what you **want** in your relationship with Jesus
- ...and **trials** play a part in that...
- ...then you can see that **trials** will be something for which you can give thanks...! There’s a certain **logic** to **that!**
- Now – we ought not to be **silly** about this – or **trivial** – ... we don’t go around saying – oh great – I’m **bankrupt** – what a joy – or - someone’s taking me to court – what **joy**...!
- ... but, there is a **deep – mature** sense in which – perhaps more in **retrospect** than in the **moment** – when you can say – I’m **glad** I went through that time – I **learnt** so **much**, **grew** so **much**...
- ...I **persevered**...
- ...my trust in Jesus **deepened**...
- My prayer life grew..
- ...I know him **better**... //
- How many times have I heard stories of someone who has come through a terrible **illness** or some amazing terrible **time**... and say ‘**I wouldn’t have it any other way**’. Because of how they’ve grown through it. Because of what they learnt in it.
- I wonder if that is **your** testimony?

Crown of life

- But there is one other aspect of seeing the big picture... for not only are we all heading for **maturity**... but we are also all heading for the **crown of life**... have a look at v12 with me.
- *“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial, because when they have stood the test, they will receive the **crown of life** that God has promised to those who love him.”*
- The Christian life is always to be lived with an **eye** to the **future**.
- There are many times when what James writes reminds us of what his brother, the Lord Jesus said – you’ll remember the beautiful beatitudes of Matthew 5 – and this one – blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... See the big picture.
- The **crown of life** – a metaphor from the **sporting** arena... the apostle **Paul** writes of a crown that will last **forever**... 1 Corinthians 9:25. (See also Revelation 2:10.)
- It’s life **itself** – a place in God’s eternal **kingdom**.
- Persevere through **trials**... and the **crown of life** will be **yours** – it’s for **all** those in right **relationship** with **God**...
- Tour de France... a couple of months back now – late June – early July... but you see there the ... concept of perseverance under trial ... and the concept of the crowning jersey...
- that keeps you **going** - pedalling – training – day after day – mile after mile...
- You can see the **impact** as you go – as you become stronger – as you learn.
- And you keep the crowning **jersey** in your sights.... /// That’s the concept here.
- How do you handle **trial**? /

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- See the **big picture**... **hard** times will help make you the person **YOU** want to be and the **LORD** wants you to be...
- And one day – there will be the **crown of life** handed to you... which will make the **trials** along the way fade in to **insignificance**.. //
- OK, but how do you handle hard times when you're in the **midst** of them?
- The second key:

2. By asking for wisdom

- v5 – *if any of you lacks wisdom, they should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given them.*
- Why **wisdom**?
- Wisdom in the Bible is not intellectual capability or great **insight**...
- It is knowing how to live in God's **world**...
- In our Old Testament overview series we saw that the **fear** of the **Lord** is the **beginning** of **wisdom**... and that wisdom – if we understand who God is and who we are – that will give us the clue of how to live in God's world. //
- Wisdom in the Bible is **practical**... **useful**....
- ...and what we need when undergoing trial – is how to **live** in the **midst** of it... how to **react**.. how to **behave**... how in fact to **persevere**...
- What we need is wisdom!
- **Where** do **get** it?
- You **ask God**... because he gives **generously** to **all** without finding **fault**...
- A **brilliant** picture of God's **grace**... even if we don't deserve it – he'll give it...
- There is one condition though... vv6-8 - ⁶ *But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸ Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.*
- James is saying – when you ask God for wisdom it must be from the position of **love** and **devotion** to **him** – not **doubting** God or keeping him at **bay**.
- If you have a **half-hearted** devotion to **God** – and the other half is devoted to the **world** – or to **yourself** – then you shouldn't expect to receive any **wisdom** from God.
- James says you are **double-minded**.
- We might say '**two-faced**'... ///
- Going through a hard time right now of one description or another?
- Ask God for **wisdom**... not **intelligence**... not the ability to be **smart** – but for knowing how to live **God's** way in the midst of all that is **hard**... Ask him to give you that reverent awe before him... and that will help you **trust** him through whatever it is you are going **through**.
- How do you handle hard times? By seeing the big picture, by asking for wisdom... and here's the third key:

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3. By seeing reality as God sees it

- Vv9-11 *Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position.* ¹⁰ *But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower.* ¹¹ *For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.*
- Let me see if I can put this simply...
- In this context... the 'Believers in humble circumstances' are the literal poor
- That will bring extreme **trials** by its very **nature**.
- And on the world scale of rich and poor – this probably doesn't apply to **any** of us...!
- But the **poor** person can and should – often reflect and give thanks that despite their **physical poverty** – God has **rescued** them... brought them up from their otherwise **low position**... and that one day – God will lift up the **lowly** and bring **down** the **high and mighty**...
- That is what they can give thanks for.
- So seeing **things** as God sees them... helps us in the midst of trial. Helps us understand the true nature of our position before God
- The **rich** Christian on the other hand... is also to see their reality...
- That their riches doesn't mean they are more **significant** than anyone else...
- You know... in the **morgue** – rich and the poor will lie on the slap side by side.... No difference.
- **Both are still be dead**...
- The rich man will fade away while he goes about his business... so don't be puffed up rich person... because you are just going to fade away one day...
- He's speaking to us... by any world scale – we are the rich in the world!
- James here reminds us of his brothers' words – *how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God*...
- Wealth – often **puffs** us up – makes us think they are superior – that everything is in our **reach** – under our **control** – we're self-sufficient... that we've **made it**... **we've arrived**..
- And we do very well to reflect on the reality of who we are before God... that one day – we'll just pass away... So that keeps us **humble** before God, in the midst of trials... ///
- We are no one special because of the amount of wealth in our properties or in our banks...
- We are God's special people – that is what makes us significant...
- So in the midst of trial – the poor person can give thanks that they are a unique child of God...
- And the rich person can give thanks that they are – a unique child of God.
- That is where our significance is found... our identity – our stability... *not* our physical wealth or circumstances. ///
- The fourth key, finally:

4. By seeing temptation for what it is

- v13 – *when tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me".*

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- Temptation is different from **trial**.
 - Trial arises out of the circumstances of life... of living in a fallen world with everything that throws up for us. God may even **test** our faith through trial – so it grows stronger.
 - Temptation is never from **God**. *God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.*
 - Temptation comes from our own **desires**.. and when we let our desires run away with us.. or lead us away... then we sin.
 - And sin, when unchecked – when it **rules** – leads to death.
 - James’ point is that instead of blaming **God** for our **temptations** we must keep our desires in **check** before they **conceive**.
 - Desire and temptation are not in themselves **sin**; but they certainly **lead** there if they are not dealt with **firmly**.”¹
 - What **desires** do you do **battle with**?
 - Are you dealing with them **firmly**? //
 - Again we are reminded of James’ brothers’ teaching – “if your right hand causes you to sin – cut it off”
 - He’s using rhetoric - he’s overstating the point to make the point – but the point is clear – get rid out of your life – anything which stirs up unhelpful, unwanted desires which unchecked will lead to **sin**!
 - For sin **unchecked** will lead to **death**... spiritual **death**. /
 - Fascinating isn’t it the contrast in this passage between temptation and trial?
 - Trial > testing > perseverance > maturity > life
 - Temptation > desire > sin > death
 - It couldn’t be **clearer** ////
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- Are you the midst of a trial of some sort right **now**? //
 - This opening chapter of James says: stand back and see the big picture... that these hard times are developing **perseverance** and leading to the **crown of life**..
 - ask for **wisdom** – for grace to have that reverent awe before God which means that you’ll trust him in the trial...
 - see your situation as God sees it
 - And then see temptation for what it is – something entirely different from trial – trial leading to **life** – and temptation – unchecked - leading to **death**! //
 - May the Lord strengthen you your trials... to keep trusting him; to see him at work in and through the trial – and in and through you!
 - *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

¹ From *James, The wisdom of the brother of Jesus*, John Dickson, p 24