

When You Encounter Various Trials

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Time away gives you a chance to kind of think about some things and to consider maybe a little tweak here and there that you might be able to do. and tonight's a reflection of some of that kind of thinking in my mind. I want to do just a brief two week survey of James, just to kind of set it in your mind to give you a framework to understand it, and it's an immensely practical letter and it's going to be obviously even more practical in what we see in the next couple of weeks or so.

Now when you read James and when you open it up, you find that he is writing to readers who are suffering in the midst of trials. Look at the first two verses here with me. Context is always everything but it's especially true in James. It's quite possible that you've never seen the letter from the perspective that a full understanding of context will give to you. In James 1, beginning in verses 1 and 2 it says, "James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad," indicating that he was writing to a predominantly Jewish audience, "Greetings." Then he says in verse 2, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials." Stop there. James is giving us a template, he is stating upfront what the purpose of his letter is, it is to encourage the brothers who are going through trials and to call forth from them a particular kind of response. "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials." Now that's not just an opening that covers the first 10 or 12 verses and then it goes on to talk about other things, and this is so vital for you to understand, beloved, that throughout this entire book, chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, are all designed to be part of an instruction to you, to me, on how to respond to trials and you can see that by seeing the way that he concludes his letter, looking at the end of James beginning in, let's say, James 5:7, he says, "Therefore," he's gathering together everything that he said in the first 4 ½ chapters and said, "Here therefore is what I want you to take away from the instruction." He said, "Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near." Then he goes on and says in verse 10, notice the theme of patience, how he concludes like fireworks on the theme of patience as he draws the letter to a close, he says, "As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. We count those blessed who endured." And what did they endure? "You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful." Job enduring his trials with a sense of

patience with perseverance, and this becomes an illustration to bring the letter to a close and then in verse 13 of chapter 5 he says, "Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises."

So here's the point and we'll see this more as we go through, he opens on the theme of suffering, of trials, and he immediately places this subject matter of the letter on the table and says, "Consider it all joy when you encounter trials of various kinds"; he introduces it with trials, he closes it with trials, so like a pair of bookends he's gathering together all of this instruction in one way or another is related to your response and my response to trials as a Christian. Now and so throughout the letter, I'll just say this again because this is so important and as you listen to God's word being read in coming Sundays, understand, remember, keep it in your mind that in one way or another as we read through that letter together on Sunday mornings, James is telling us how to respond to trials, okay? That's so important I'll say it one more time: he is telling us how to respond to trials in this letter.

Now let me back up and just put this in the context of the theology and teaching of Truth Community Church over the years. I consider it an established fact that we understand as a congregation, at least, whatever our different levels of comprehension may be individually, it is an established fact at this church and in this congregation that we understand that we are to trust God through our trials and we are to understand that our trials are measured out to us by the providence of God. His hand is in everything that comes to us. It's not that Satan has an independent ability to change the course of our lives contrary to the purposes of God in our lives, Satan is simply a tool of God, as we saw in the book of Job, Satan is simply a tool in the hand of God to accomplish his ultimate purposes. God is always overriding sin and evil and Satan to accomplish his purposes and we have the words of Romans 8:28 telling us that, "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose," and so even if Satan attacks us, somehow God is going to turn that and work through it in order to accomplish good in our lives. That means that we can trust him. That means that our hearts can be at rest and be at peace even as storms are buffeting us from many different directions. I consider that to be an established fact and what we have tended to emphasize is the fact that that means that we can have an inner response of tranquility and peace and quiet, I mean this in a positive way, quiet resignation as life comes to us. Whatever the challenges may be, to say, "It's okay. I am in the hand of a loving gracious Father who is working all things according to His will. He has planned my life. He has given me the life that I have and therefore I can be at peace even while others might be in turbulence if they were in similar circumstances." That kind of peaceful, gracious, patient response is one of the marks of a true Christian and it is what the doctrine of providence and an understanding of God's love and sovereignty over us, that's where it leads us is to this place of inner tranquility even as the storms are going on about us. I consider that to be an established fact in our teaching here at our church.

James is giving us, coming at it from a different perspective. He's augmenting that. He's giving us additional instruction that goes beyond simply that inner sense of tranquility and he is giving us instruction on how we are to actually behave in our trials, and how it is that we are to think, and what our response is, and how that humble trust that we're

talking about, how that works out, then, in real life. So he's telling us how to respond to trials in many different ways and so we'll work all of this out as we go along.

Now if you've read James at all, if you've heard anyone teach on James, you know that it's fair to say that James is a blunt letter. He'll sometimes use words like, "You adulteresses," in James 4, and "faith without works is dead," and he says a lot of blunt things that we'll see as we go along. It's important for you to understand something really important as we consider the overall context of this letter: James is writing to his readers, and by extension God has given this letter to us, in love, and that is evident in the way that James writes and addresses his readers. I'm not going to take you through each one of these references, in fact, I'm not going to take you through any of them, you can count them on your own, but 15 times in these five chapters James addresses his readers as brethren or beloved brethren, and so he is writing in a family spirit, he is writing with a sense of family Christian love as he speaks to us, but that doesn't mean that he doesn't speak directly to us. Perhaps you have a spouse or you have a family member that you know loves you but they speak directly to you, they will confront you and they will tell you things the way that they are and sometimes it stings a little bit, sometimes it's as though someone is stepping on your toes, but because of the context of the relationship you receive the rebuke, you receive the counsel, you receive the direct instruction differently because you know that this person is writing to you, this person is speaking to you, I should say, in a spirit of love and the context of relationship tells you that. Well, the context of the book of James tells us and shows us decisively that he's writing to us in love even when he speaks to us so directly and gives us direct commands without apology.

We really need to understand that and going just a step further, when we remember that James comes to us by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that blessed third person of the Trinity who caused us to be born again, who gave us new life in Christ when we were dead in our transgressions and sins, then this shapes and conditions the way that we should receive everything that is said to us in this letter. We receive it with a humble spirit. We receive it recognizing that he writes with our best intentions at heart and this is the very word of God to his people, and so we recognize that James is telling us how to respond to trials, he's speaking to us very directly and bluntly, but he is speaking to us in love, in the words of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians, he is speaking the truth to us in love and that means, for us as we read it as the people of God, as we hear God's word and we read what James has to say to us, it means that we should receive it submissively, receive it gladly, we should do that, and it means that we can do that because we understand that this is a letter of love written from one brother to another telling us the way that it is, and not catering to our temptations and our tendencies toward self-pity in our trials, but rather saying, "This is the way that you must respond. You cannot give in to self-pity. You cannot give in to pride and arrogance in your trials. No, this is how you are to respond." That's why James is writing.

So at times we're going to hear him say things that are tough to hear. It's gonna hurt. It's gonna sting. It's gonna convict. But beloved, you and I need to remember that we need this loving rebuke in our lives even in our trials. This is a brother who has our best

interest coming along, putting his arm around us and saying, "Let's get in the game." You could say it another way, you could say, you know, sometimes what we need is not another sympathetic word but sometimes we just need a little kick in the pants to motivate us out of our self-pity and into the place of a productive response to the trials that God has ordained for us.

So with that introduction, let's just go through the first two chapters here tonight very quickly, very generally, and what is it that James says in James 1:2? He says, look at it again with me, he says, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials," trials of all different colors that come. And why should you consider it joy? Because, verse 3, "we know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." He says God has a purpose for your trials. God is producing endurance in you much the same as a coach puts his team through very difficult conditioning drills in order to bring them to maximum ability to perform in the midst of the game. When the championship comes, the prior training has prepared them to succeed. Trials, James says, build endurance in you so that you are able to run the race of life and to run it well.

Now the word "perfect" here has more the sense of bringing you to maturity. We understand that true, ultimate, final, sinless perfection awaits us in heaven when we're glorified, it's not that here on earth, but that you might be perfect, that you might be made complete and lack in nothing. So how is it, what is it that we find when we encounter these different trials? What is it that endurance is designed to produce? How is it that we participate in that? How is it that we respond in trials so that that result attains? That's a key question, isn't it? It doesn't just automatically happen like a thermostat adjusting the temperature of the room as it gets warmer or colder and just holding the temperature to a steady place, there's a place, there's a responsibility for us to exercise our effort, to consider and exercise our will and to act upon things.

In the book of Philippians 2, Paul tells us "to work out our salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure," and so we are not simply passive in our trials, we are not simply passive in the Christian life, it is not true that we are simply to let go and let God and to make no effort in our spiritual growth. That's not true at all. There is an element of effort that we contribute to as God works sanctification in our hearts, we are to put forth effort and James is helping us to see what that effort looks like as he shows us how to respond to trials.

So what is it that we bring to the table? Well, trials perfect us, James is going to teach us. Trials perfect us when we react in patience and humility. Patience and humility. And as we go through the book of James, we see how he gives us positive instruction that implies the negative that we are to avoid and so for tonight, we're going to look at the first four of eight principles that he gives us to respond to trials so that we develop this kind of endurance that he speaks of, and point 1, and we're going to go through these things really quickly, this is a different kind of instruction that we're doing here this

evening, point 1 is that in your trials you are to do this, you are to respond in trust instead of bitterness. Respond in trust instead of bitterness.

Now as we've said often, the carnal aspects of our character are prone to question God and to doubt God when trials come. Why would a loving God allow this to happen to me? Why would God take this loved one from me so prematurely? Why these trials? Why these health problems? Why this or that? And we're tempted to doubt God in that way. Now beloved, what James shows us is that rather than giving in to that realm of self-pity, he sets forth the promise that God gives wisdom in trials to those who humbly ask.

Now look at verse 5 and remember this – this is so very important – remember that what he has just been talking about is finding endurance in your trials. This is how the testing of your faith produces endurance. Where does this endurance come from? How do you develop this endurance? Well, as he starts in verse 5, he is expanding on his theme. He's not changing the subject, he's starting to explain his theme and so he says in verse 5, he says, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8 being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." And so when trials overwhelm you, when trials are too much and it seems like you don't know where to turn, I've been there and I know you have been too, "God, I don't even know where to turn here," well, what you are to understand is that you are to slow yourself down, you are to actually go to God in prayer whether you pray standing up, walking, getting on your knees, however you find it best to pray, and to lay your heart out and say, "God, this trial goes beyond my ability to understand and to bear. I ask You, God, to give me wisdom to find my way through it." You actually pray that way. You ask God to give the wisdom that he has promised to give rather than letting your heart and letting your emotions run away with you into places of confusion and doubt and bitterness. You actually humble yourself and you actually do this.

Now I think that a few years in pastoral ministry have taught me that the people of God know to say this, the people of God will talk a lot about prayer, but the people of God, it's a lot easier and it's a lot more frequent to talk about prayer in glowing terms than to actually get down and trust God and ask him for wisdom and to actually pray rather than talking about praying in the midst of our adversity. We must recognize and if you want to grow in the midst of your trials, you must recognize that actually praying and asking God for wisdom is the first ordained step that James has given you to act upon, and this goes for whether we're rich or poor. Look at verse 9. Trials come to believers no matter what their earthly station in life is. They come to us equally. They humble us at the foot of the cross. Verse 9, "But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away." He's saying that even the wealthy, they're not exempt from these

trials. They need the same instruction that the poor man does. Whether rich or poor, this is the common response to the common reality of trials in the Christian life.

So beloved, what I want you to see is that while we cultivate, while we cultivate that inner sense of calm that comes from the doctrine of providence, we go further and we actually pray, we talk to God, we ask him, we request him, we beseech him, "God, give me wisdom in this," with the confidence that he is a God who hears and that he answers that prayer for wisdom and so we respond in trust instead of bitterness.

Now where does that idea of bitterness come? Well, let's keep reading. Let's look at verses 12 through 18. He set forth the trust that should mark it and then in contrast we start to see something else, and we can see that he's talking about trials throughout here because he comes back to that even in this more immediate context, trials verses 2 through 4, trial in verse 12. Look at it with me, "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." So he's talking about trials all along here, and now he goes on and says in verse 13, "Let no one say when he is tempted," or when he is tested, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted," that is, towards sin, "when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren." Do you see it there, "beloved brethren"? "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures." When he tells us and when he's teaching us to respond in trust instead of bitterness, he's teaching us to go to God humbly and to pray for wisdom in our trials and to avoid that temptation that makes accusations against God, that blames God, that questions his goodness in the midst of it.

Beloved, and I failed this in years gone by and so I speak from sad personal negative experience, I know what it's like to question God, to shake my fist at the sky and say, "God, why this? Why me? Why now?" At the time, I even justified that response. James would have come to me in the midst of that and said, "You should not speak that way. You should not talk to God that way. You should not blame God this way. Rather you should humble yourself, you should trust Him, you should ask Him for wisdom rather than accusing Him of doing evil to you." James tells us as believers, he says, "Don't blame God. He is not a tempter to evil. He's not tempting you to sin. Your heavenly Father is the one who gives you good gifts and even these trials He gives to accomplish good purposes in your lives, and so don't look at Him and think and harbor in your thoughts that God has ill motives toward you. Trust Him. Trust Him enough to ask for wisdom. Trust Him enough to believe Him for wisdom and to recognize that He is the giver of perfect gifts and that He does not vary or shift in His character." So you respond in trust rather than in bitterness and that trust is expressed in believing prayer that asks for wisdom, "God, I don't know how this is going to work out and this hurts. Please give me

wisdom to show me how to endure and to live righteously in response to it." There is an active response of believing prayer that we offer to God in the midst of our trials.

Now secondly and closely tied to that is this: you are to receive the word instead of speaking your mind. Receive the word instead of speaking your mind. Now having established a proper perspective on trials, James gives a summary in the following verses about what his primary point is and what the source of our response is and how we respond.

Look at verses 19 through 21 now of James 1. He says, "This you know, my beloved brethren." Do you see it again, "my beloved brethren"? You read this and he's been so direct to us about responding in trials and then he reminds you, "I care about you with what I'm saying." "This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls." James says what you need in your trials is a humble attitude toward the word of God. You must come to God's word and receive its instruction with a teachable spirit, to humble yourself under the word of God and rather than making accusations against God or simply speaking out your carnal thoughts in response to your circumstances, you be quick to hear the word of God. You go to it in a hurry. You go to it often. You go to it for extended periods of time and just like everyone of you in this room are doing when the people of God gather together, you're there to hear God's word proclaimed. Be quick to hear it, slow to speak your opinions, slow to speak your complaints, slow to anger against the trials that are in your life, and rather than asserting your opinions and asserting your thoughts and your contrary desires as we've said in the past, put your hand over your mouth to quiet your heart and adopt an attitude that says, "God, give me instruction through Your word. Give me wisdom, give me understanding, give me discernment and, God, I come and I humble myself, I receive Your word. Speak Lord, Your servant listeneth," in other words, as you have an open Bible in front of you. You receive the word rather than speaking your mind against the trials.

So what James is saying here and we realize that in one sense this sound so basic but, beloved, it's at the very point of basics that we tend to fail, isn't it? It's when athletic teams forget the fundamentals that they lose the contest. Well, in the same way when Christians depart from and abandon and stray away and drift away from these simple principles of asking for wisdom and humbling themselves before the word of God that trials don't perfect us in the way that they can and should. So James is saying the word of God and your humble response to the word of God is the key to responding to trials. So the response deep in your heart, I mean this is just a fundamental inflection point that changes the trajectory of everything. The plane can take off and, you know, in the first few feet of its ascent if it's on a 30 degree angle, it's gonna go one direction, a 60 degree angle, it's gonna go completely different places even though at the moment it seems like there's not much space between the two. Well, in the same way, your attitude in what I'm about to describe, sets you on a trajectory that takes you into completely different places so that, and joining with James in addressing you as beloved brethren, James is

addressing your heart deeply here. The attitude deep in your heart is one of humility and humility does not say, the response in your heart is not, "Why does God make me suffer so," but rather the response is, "What would Scripture teach me in this trial?" Those are two fundamentally different questions and the believing heart properly instructed from the book of James understands that accusatory question against God, blaming God, "God, why this? Why now? Why am I suffering? What have I done? Why are You like this toward me?" The believing heart puts a muzzle on that. The believing heart clamps the jaw that would speak that way and does not tolerate such thoughts in its heart and instead comes consciously, beloved, comes consciously, comes intentionally, comes exercising the spiritual effort to say, "What would God's word say to me in this trial that I would respond in a right and proper way?" So we, you and I, we must go to God's word in our trials to learn how to respond to them as we should.

Look at verses 22 through 25 now. He says, "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does." This man will find that perfecting effect that trials have on the endurance of his faith. This man will be blessed in what he does and in the context, the overall context of James, he's saying this man will be blessed as he exercises persevering faith in the midst of his adversity.

Now I don't know about you, I don't know about you but if I'm going to live the Christian life for a period of years here on earth, and if I'm going to go through adversity and trials and difficulties as a result of living for Christ, I want to do it right, don't you? I want to please God with the way that I go through them and I want the benefit that God has embedded in my trials, I want to obtain that result. It would be foolish to have the trials come and not profit from them simply because I harden my heart against God's word, against James's instruction and adopted a self-pitying, proud, arrogant response that says, "I don't deserve this." I want what God has for me. I want to know the blessing of God and as much as I might not prefer it, God has deemed it wise that he mediates our spiritual growth to us in the midst of adversity. So often that is the case and what James is saying is you will encounter trials and here is the path by which you can respond so that that adversity profits your soul.

So he tells us that we must adopt an attitude of humility. Now what does humility do? Well, we toss that word around a bit. How can we know humility? Well, you can know humility, humility is expressed in the same way that Jesus said love is expressed for them. Jesus said in John, he said, "If you love Me, you'll keep My commandments." Humility expresses itself before God in the same way. Humble faith obeys God's word in trials. What James does is now he takes this principle of humble obedience and he applies it as he goes on in his letter, he applies it in a lot of different ways. He applies it in different areas. He illustrates what obedience looks like so that we know and we have a picture of how we are to respond, and as he begins in verse 26, we come to our third

point for this evening and I'm gonna put it this way, I made my points very colloquial, I've made them very homespun, you might say, here tonight, again, just treating things a little bit differently than perhaps I normally do. Point 3, what does humble faith look like? Well, it's a long one: reach out to others instead of isolating yourself. Reach out to others instead of isolating yourself, and this is a great point of humility to recognize, and this is a great suspension bridge to cross in your faith and to embrace in the midst of your adversity, is to recognize something that is humbling and that often our carnal ears don't want to hear and it's this, beloved, you are not the only one that is in need. You're not the only one that is having a hard time. Others are also and it is your privilege even in the midst of your trials to reach out and to minister to them, to step outside of your own disappointment, step outside of your own adversity and say, "Oh, even though I'm carrying a weight on my back, there's someone with a weight on their back and I can help them. I am in a position for them." And so you soften your heart toward others.

Verse 26, James says, "If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world." Pure and undefiled religion in the context of James is being expressed in the midst of these oppressive trials that have the potential to cause us to stumble. James says you are to exercise pure and undefiled spirituality in the midst of your trials by recognizing that there are others in need as well and you go out and you look for the opportunity to serve them, and not as I've seen others do in the past, I'm not speaking about anyone in this room so this is not targeted at anybody in here by any means, not to be someone who just announces their trial and just invites and asks everybody to come in and help them. You've seen that happen. You know what that's like and they just get wrapped up even in the midst of, you know, okay, your trial is serious, the response of obedient faith is not to get in an ever-closer, tighter, self-centered vortex of my need, my need, my need. That's not the way it is to respond. Beloved, think about our Lord Jesus in his hour of greatest need on the cross, what was he doing as he was bearing our sin, as he was suffering not only the physical agony of the cross but as he was entering into the bearing of the wrath of God on our behalf? What was Christ doing? He looked out and he saw his mother and he said, "Woman, behold your son," and committed his mother to the care of John. When the thief next to him said, "Remember me when You come into Your kingdom," our Lord in his hour of greatest need said, "Truly I say to you, today you'll be with Me in paradise." And even on the ones who were mocking and cursing him, he looked down and he said, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they're doing." Our Lord illustrated, as he does all things, our Lord did this best, our Lord did this perfectly and we look to our Lord in his crucifixion and we look at him in his great hour of need, his great hour of abandonment, and he's ministering. He's caring for the people immediately around him in a way that takes my breath away, in a way that humbles me in my selfishness and self-centeredness.

Well, here James speaking to those who are in trials, says there are orphans and widows in your midst. Reach out to them. Minister to them. And he goes on and tells us and shows us that trials should have a purifying effect on our attitudes toward others as well. Look at chapter 2, verse 1. He says, "My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious

Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, 'You sit here in a good place,' and you say to the poor man, 'You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,' have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? Listen, my beloved brethren," do you see it again? "Listen, my beloved brethren, did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?" You see this humble obedience that James is calling forth, this humble ministry even in the midst of your adversity. Beloved, mark this, this is one of the purifying aspects that trials are meant to bring into your heart and into your life, is that there is an impartiality about it; that you don't make distinctions about who you will minister to or who you will be kind to based on their particular station in life. Whether it's the poor man or the rich man, they're equally there, you serve them, you love them, you reach out to them but you particularly don't push aside the poor man. You develop this sense of kindness that is distributed to everyone in your sphere without regard to who they are in life.

So you reach out to others instead of isolating yourself and you can see this principle of love in verse 8, "If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not commit murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment." Now here James is being very bold, very direct in what he says to us and even in the midst of the adversity he's telling us that we must not lose sight of the fact that there is a coming judgment, and that we will be evaluated by Christ, and that part of the evaluation that Christ will give to us is the way that we responded to our trials. It is like breaking open an egg, it is like breaking an egg so that the nutritious things inside can come out. When you are under the midst of trials, that should be designed and that is in part designed to cultivate mercy in your heart, mercy toward those who are of lesser position, mercy to those who are suffering. Trials are to break open your heart so that mercy comes out in response. So you reach out to others instead of isolating yourself and trials produce mercy. Stated differently, you are to seek to exercise and to show mercy even when you, yourself, are in the midst of your adversity. This is what James says to his beloved brethren.

Now finally for tonight, point 4, renew your obedience instead of excusing sin. Renew your obedience instead of excusing sin. So just to give you a review of our four points for tonight, we've said to respond in trust instead of bitterness; secondly, receive the word instead of speaking your mind; thirdly, reach out to others instead of isolating yourself; and now fourthly, renew your obedience instead of excusing sin. And here's the point,

this is a familiar passage beginning in verse 14. I taught on it a year or two ago. You can look that up under the Catholicism series. We're going to look at it in a much broader perspective here tonight and much more briefly.

Renew your obedience instead of excusing sin. Beloved, beloved, in your trials, in your adversity, true faith is shown by righteous works. True faith manifests itself in obedience to God even in your trials, and that I believe is James's point here is that in this book that is addressing trials from beginning to end, he addresses this matter of obedience in the heart of it, showing you that your adversity does not excuse your responsibility to obey God. In other words and I'll just be really candid and direct here: the fact that you're going through adversity, maybe you're having struggles with your spouse, that is not a license for you to go out and commit adultery. The fact that you're having difficulties and there's a lot of pressure on your life is not somehow a twisted sense of permission for you to go out and to get drunk in order to alleviate the pressure that you feel. No, it's not like that at all. True faith in the midst of your trials is shown by righteous works.

Look at verse 14 and remember going back, let's go back and just remember that James had said in chapter 1, verse 22, let your eyes slide over there for just a moment again, he says, "prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves." He's picking up on that theme again in verse 14 when he says, "What use is it, my brethren," do you see it again? He loves us. He loves his readers that he's talking to here. "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food," do you see the principle of mercy coming in? You see how he's weaving this together? "And one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself." Now beloved, let me say the same thing in maybe a little different way here: your adversity in life, maybe what's happening right now, today, this week, your adversity is testing your faith. You must learn to look beyond the outward circumstances of your trials to understand in a spiritual and to understand them with spiritual eyes, and understand that God has brought this adversity to you in order to have a positive impact on your faith as you respond in obedience. This adversity is testing your faith and what you are to do is to not shrink back in disobedience, not to stumble around, but to let it bring an even clearer sense of devotion to Christ, of a sense of honoring God with your obedience even in the midst of your adversity, even when it seems like the dearest things in life are at stake for you. You obey even then. You trust even then. You pray even then. You turn to the word especially then and not step away. The adversity is testing your faith. Do not shrink back but rather go forward in trust and obedience. Trust and obey for there is no other way, right?

Now James goes on in illustrating this principle of renewing obedience instead of excusing sin. In verse 18 he says, "someone may well say, 'You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.' You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?" And if you think about it in the context of trials, what good is faith if you can't obey in

the midst of them? What good is your profession of faith if you won't trust God in the midst of adversity with it? What good does it say that you are a committed believer of the Lord Jesus Christ if you won't follow him and obey him and love him when life is on the line? What good is that? That's useless.

So he points to a couple of Old Testament examples. He says, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?" God said, "Offer your son to Me on the altar." His faith is being tested. Abraham obeyed. He lifted up the knife and was ready to plunge it into his son's chest when God stopped him and his obedience had been proven.

Verse 22, "You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,' and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone." And what James is saying here is that Abraham's work displayed his faith before men. I have a whole message on relating this to Sola Fide and justification by faith alone. You can look for that, that's not what we're addressing here tonight.

Verse 25, he gives another illustration, "In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead."

So, beloved, James is showing us and pointing us in the direction of what an obedient sanctifying faith looks like in the midst of our adversity, and we will see more of this next week and be able to meditate on it as we read Scripture together on Sunday mornings, and I trust that this will be a help to you in that.

I want to close with this, the editor's introduction to John Calvin's "Institutes of the Christian Religion." It says this and it just seems very fitting for tonight, and I quote, "God is not known by those who propose to search Him out by their proud but feeble reason, rather He makes Himself known to those who in worship, love and obedience consent to learn His will from His holy word." Beloved, I ask you whether you know the faith like that that says, "God, I submit myself in humility to You. Lord Jesus, I submit myself in faith to You. I worship You. I love You and I consent in my obedience to learn Your will from this great book." Is that you tonight? I trust that it is. I invite you to Christ and his atoning work at Calvary if it's not.

Let's pray together.

Father, You've promised the crown of life to those who follow You in humble faith and obedience. In the midst of the various trials that we encounter, help us to work out this faith that will have the perfect result of completing us, of perfecting us, and conforming us to the image of Christ. Bless each one here as they seek to honor Your word and responding to it tonight. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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