

## JAMES 1:12–18

## “ENDURANCE UNDER TESTING”

29 MARCH 2020

<sup>12</sup> Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. <sup>13</sup> Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. <sup>14</sup> But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. <sup>15</sup> Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. <sup>16</sup> Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. <sup>17</sup> Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. <sup>18</sup> Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

This passage of Scripture starts with what’s known as a beatitude. You may be familiar with the term because of the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said, <sup>3</sup> Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. <sup>5</sup> Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Those are beatitudes. A beatitude pronounces a blessing. And that’s what James does in v. 12. He pronounces a blessing upon one who endures a test of faith. <sup>12</sup> Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

The one who remains steadfast under trial, the one who by patient endurance has stood the test, will receive the crown of life. That’s the consummative blessing of glorified, eternal life in the age to come. The theme of this verse is parallel to the theme of verses 2–4. <sup>2</sup> Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, <sup>3</sup> for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. <sup>4</sup> And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Endurance in the midst of trials of various kinds, by which God tests our faith, leads to a state of perfection in which we are made perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. The same doctrine is stated in other words in v. 12. Endurance under testing brings the crown of life. <sup>12</sup> Blessed is the

man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

The present age is an age of testing. The future age is an age of perfection. This present time of testing is ordered to and leads to the future state of perfection. The trials that we face on earth are preparing us for our translation into heaven, the realm of glory. In that translation, we will be glorified. We will be crowned with the unfading crown of glory, as Peter puts it (1 Pet 5:4). In the words of James, we will receive the crown of life. That's life in the consummate sense of the term—glorified, eternal life in heaven.

This doctrine is parallel to the doctrine that we noted in Gen 2 regarding Adam's probationary test. When God had created man in his own image and likeness, he put him on earth in the garden of Eden in order to test his obedience. God entered into a covenant of works with him in which he promised to give him glorified, eternal life upon condition of his personal and perfect obedience. God purposed to test his obedience in a probationary event connected to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

If Adam had remained steadfast under testing—if he had overcome the tempter and stood firmly in the face of that test—he would have received the crown of life, which God had promised him. But Adam failed to do that. He was lured and enticed by his own desire to exalt himself to the position of God. When that desire had conceived, it gave birth to sin, and that sin produced death. As God had said to him, in the day that you eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you will surely die (Gen 2:17).

Adam was the first man to whom God promised the crown of life if he stood the test. By his disobedience, he forfeited the crown of life and merited eternal death for himself and for all his children. But there's another Adam in Scripture—a second man, the last Adam—who did remain steadfast under testing, who overcame the serpent and stood firmly in the face of his test. And as a result, he has received the crown of life. The Lord Jesus Christ is the blessed man who endured the test and received the reward of glorified, eternal life.

In his resurrection and ascension, Christ was translated by the Spirit of God from earth—the realm of testing—to heaven, the realm of Sabbath resting, the realm of glory and perfection. Christ received the crown of life on the basis of his personal, perfect, exact, and entire obedience.

Christ merited that reward by his obedience to God. And he freely shares that reward with us who believe as a gift of redemptive grace.

The contrast between the disobedience of the first Adam producing death and the obedience of the second Adam producing life is what Paul has in mind in Rom 6:23 where he says, For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Eternal life is a gift of grace freely given to us by God through Christ Jesus our Lord. Christ earned or merited the reward of eternal life by his obedience. That reward is received by us through Spirit-gifted faith alone. But that faith, which is produced in us by the Holy Spirit, is faith that endures under testing, just as Abraham's faith endured when he was tested in Gen 22 (which event James points to in chapter 2).

One of the marks of a true and living faith is steadfast endurance in the midst of trials. By faith, we persevere. By faith, we endure to the end, looking unto Jesus, who is the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:2). True faith in Christ gives us the staying power, as it were, that enables us to endure, to persevere, to remain steadfast under trial. Faith endures; faith perseveres. By faith Abraham endured when he was tested (Gen 22).

By faith, Job endured. He remained steadfast under testing, when he was surrounded by trials of various kinds. Later, James points to Job as an example of patient-steadfast-endurance under testing. In James 5:11, the author says, remember the patience of Job, his steadfast-patient-endurance. Job's faith was tested by trials of various kinds, and by faith, he endured with patience and steadfastness. And having stood the test, he was blessed by God.

Job's life anticipated and foreshadowed one who is greater than Job, who would face a greater test and who would stand firmly under trial and receive a greater reward, namely, the crown of life. The suffering of Job foreshadowed or prefigured the life of Christ, who in the ultimate sense, manifested steadfast endurance in the face of trials. And having stood the test, he received glorified, eternal life as his reward.

In James 5, the author points to the patient endurance of Job as an example for us who must endure trials until Christ returns. 5:7 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. We must patiently endure until Christ returns because until he returns, we will face trials of various kinds by which our faith is tested. James says, <sup>7</sup> Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the

coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. Keep in mind that farming metaphor; the farmer waits patiently for the harvest. The time of the harvest, according to James's illustration, corresponds to the return of Christ at the end of the world.

<sup>7</sup> Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. <sup>8</sup> You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. <sup>9</sup> Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. <sup>10</sup> As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

In verse 11, James points to Job as an example of one who patiently endured his trials; he remained steadfast under testing. James is urging us to do the same thing, and to keep in view the harvest that comes at the end of the world when Christ returns.

In verse 18, James refers to believers as the firstfruits of that harvest. Of his own will, says James, God brought us forth by the word of truth (the gospel of our salvation), that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Believers have been regenerated by the Spirit of God and united by Spirit-produced faith to the risen and ascended Christ, and we are, therefore, the firstfruits of the new creation that God is bringing into existence by his Spirit. Being redeemed by Christ and regenerated by the Spirit, we are the first ripe fruit of the harvest that will come at the end of the world when Christ returns.

The Apostle Paul uses the same metaphor in a similar way in 1 Cor 15 where he says that Christ, being raised from the dead, is the firstfruits of the resurrection harvest that will occur at the end of the world (1 Cor 15:23). Paul and James use the same metaphor in slightly different ways, but it amounts to the same thing.

At the consummation at end of the world, God will bring to fruition the new creation that he accomplished in the person and work of Jesus Christ. All of that is tied to the beatitude in verse

12 because the crown of life refers to that perfect that of affairs that is brought about by the return of Christ in the consummation.

Christ is the blessed man who remained steadfast under testing and having stood the test, he has already received the crown of glorified, eternal life. Because God of his own will has brought us forth and given us new life by his Spirit through the redeeming work of Christ, we are destined to receive that crown of life when Christ returns. So we must be patient and wait for that harvest.

In the meantime, in our present state of affairs in which we face trials of various kinds, we must remain steadfast under testing. How do we do that? We do it by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Saving faith—a true and living faith—will endure to the end. Saving faith produces patient-steadfast-endurance.

Here's why. Saving faith unites us to Christ, so that we are conformed to the image of Christ. Through our trials, we are conformed to the image of the blessed man who remained steadfast under trial, who stood the test and received the crown of life. The trials that we face in this life replicate the trials that Christ endured. In other words, God is replicating the life of Christ in us in order to conform us to his image in his suffering and glory. We are being conformed to the trial-tested-identity of Christ. That's how Paul expresses it in his letters (especially Romans 8), but James is teaching the same thing by using the metaphor of firstfruits in v. 18.

Saving faith makes us part of God's new creation. We are the firstfruits of the new creation. And God will bring us, as the firstfruits of his new creation, into a state of consummate perfection at the time of the harvest when Christ returns.

And so, James says, in chapter 5 <sup>7</sup> Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains.<sup>8</sup> You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. To endure our trials, we must stay focused on the return of Christ, on the great harvest at the end of the world, on the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. That's what the beatitude teaches us in James 1:12. <sup>12</sup> Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him (James 1:12).