

## James 1:12—18

February 23, 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." James 1:12—18

Intro:

There are places that you can go where you hear the pop of leather, the crack of bats and the chatter of young men for the first time in months. Why? Because pitchers and catchers have reported and honest to goodness real baseball, albeit in the form of Spring Training games, is upon us.

Baseball is a quirky game. There are unique facets to baseball completely absent from other sports. The Manager wears a uniform like the players. Every field dimension is different. Every game—every game—is a different length of time. The longest 9 inning game was 4 hrs. 45 min., in 2006 (Yankees and Red Sox). The shortest 9 inning game was 51 minutes in 1919.

In a quirky game, one thing rises to the top as the quirkiest. The distance between the pitching rubber to home plate.

It is 60' 6".

How did that happen?

According to a Baseball history website,

"Prior to 1892, the pitcher's box, as it was called then, was 50 feet from home plate. Pitchers would fire the ball from there, giving the opposition scant chance to react to the ball. Although it was at the same height as the rest of the diamond, that distance was still uncomfortably close.

Something needed to change with that distance. On this day in 1893, the National League, which was essentially the MLB at the time, eliminated the

pitcher's box. Instead, they opted to place a chunk of rubber on the field 60'6" from home plate, establishing the modern pitching distance.

That distance itself was a mistake. The rubber was initially to be exactly 60' away, or five feet behind the back line from the pitcher's box. Instead, the zero was accidentally read as a six, leading to the strange distance it is today."

60' 6"

Misinterpret a digit and the American pastime has quirky little story. Misinterpret God and his intentions toward you and your story can go completely sideways.

James wants to speak directly to our temptation to misinterpret God's intentions toward us. What does James want you to believe? That God is good all the time.

You might say—that is silly. How juvenile. I know God is good all the time. I have a portrait in my living room that gives that very message!

Having a picture in our living room that proclaims, "God is good all the time" is one thing and it is quite

another thing when you sit in that same living room having just received a call that, it is cancer.

It is one thing to say God is good a chorus of cash and congratulations cascading down on you to but quite another thing when joblessness is shouting in your ear.

It is one thing to say God is good when the cool breezes of family serenity are blowing and quite another when a tornado of strife is spinning in your home.

It is one thing to say that God is good when success blossoms from all your efforts, it is quite another when failure threatens to choke your hope away.

It is one thing to say that God is good when you the vibrant colors of hope and possibility shimmer, and it is quite another thing when depression takes hold and all is gray.

In other words, it is easy to say God is good all the time but quite another thing to really believe it. James wants us to really believe that God is good ALL the time.

It is urgent that you NOT misinterpret God. It is not enough to say that God is good all the time. James

wants us to take a step further. James want us to make it personal. A vanilla—God is good all the time—is not enough.

Here is the conviction that we must take away today—

PROP: God is good ALL the time to YOU.

### *1. Love our ALWAYS good God (James 1:12)*

Where did we get that from? Verse 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.

We talked about this last week and the week before—blessed the one who remains steadfast under trial. Trials are the means by which God has chosen to purify, grow, and mature his people. And as we persevere—we know that in the end we will receive the crown of life (eternal life).

In other words, remain steadfast!

Hang in there.

Don't give up.

And if you do, you will receive life eternal.

One thing we haven't talked about is how to—

Remain steadfast

Hang in there

Don't give up

Is it just

Grit your teeth and get on with it?

Gut it out keep going?

Tough it out?

If remaining steadfast was merely just making a decision not to quit, no one would get very far. But James gives us a word in verse 12 that lights our way—

<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.

Love.

Without love for God you will never remain steadfast.

No one remains steadfast to God without love for God.

The reason is obvious—you can't stay loyal to someone you don't love. You can't follow God for a lifetime if you don't love him.

Love is not a feeling that comes and goes like the rain. Love is a choice. The Scriptures are full of reasons that we have to love God. There are two implicit in verse 12.

James says that those who remain steadfast will receive a crown of life.

What right do we have to life?

None. We are a people steeped in sin and owned by death. How is it that James can say that we who remain steadfast can receive a crown of life?

Does our faithfulness purchase that crown? No. Does our fortitude earn that that life? No.

The crown of life has been won by another. The crown of life is ours because our Lord wore a crown of thorns. The creator of all things, the author of life came to the land of sin and death and gave his life.

The light of life was swallowed up power of death. But death could not conquer our Lord for long.

The author of life burst the clutches of death and won the crown of life.

Now, any who follow him and remain steadfast—not perfect—but steadfast will receive this crown of life.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16. What kind of love did our God have?

The kind of love that compelled him to send his son to die.

What kind of love is that?

This God sent his son so that we might be with him forever.

It is not just that we get to live forever—we get to live forever with God. Now, that is not amazing at it should be to us—but we will understand it one day.

One day we will hear a sound like a multitude of raging waters say,



“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. [4] He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” Revelation 21:3–4

How can you not love him?

Keep loving God. You have great reason to love him.

God is always only good to you. No one will question on that on the day when the former things have passed away and every tear is wiped dry.

Everyone questions God’s goodness during hardship.

And in those moments James understand the purposes of God.

## ***2. Our Good God NEVER tempts (James 1:13-15)***

When we face hardship we can believe God is behind it. The thinking goes like this. God is all powerful—responsible for all things. This hardship that has come upon me is evil. God must be sending this evil thing upon me.

Right? Wrong, says James.

Look at verse 13,

<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.

This is a verse that is rife with misunderstanding. Even more so when you realize that the word for 'test' in verse 12, (stood the test) is the EXACT same word as "tempt" here in verse 13.

What are we to make of this?

We know that God tests his people. We see this very clearly in verse 12. There are other examples in the scriptures. I'll remind us of two.

God tested Abraham by asking him to sacrifice Isaac—right before he plunged the knife in we hear:

"But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." [12] He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." Genesis 22:11–12

God tested the Israelites in the desert.

“Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not.” Exodus 16:4

They gathered up more than a day's portion and it was infested by maggots.

God tests his people.

So how can we say that God on the one hand tests and yet on the other hand does not tempt? How does that make any sense?

It begins to make sense when we look closely at verse 13,

“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,””

For someone to say, “I am being tempted by God,” means they are saying God is sending evil things to me so that that I might fail. And that is just what God never does. He has nothing to do with evil. He is not

the author of evil. He does not ever want his people to fail.

God will never tempt his people to fail.

Another question. How can God be all powerful, all knowing and yet not be responsible for evil? Could he stop evil? Yes. Will he? Yes. Has he? No. That is a question the scriptures do not answer for us. God is all God and all powerful and never responsible for evil.

God tests but does not tempt. We can't say—God gave me no choice—he is tempting me to sin.

What happens?

James sets us straight by saying. Here is how it works. When we face life's hardships and fail. Here is what happens—

<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.

Why do we fail? Because we are lured and enticed by our own remaining sin. We are responsible for the failure, not God.

In other words, the reason we are tempted is that there are things that we desire besides God.

Let's do a bit of a review—James helped us to know how to respond to trouble—remember?

When hardship intrudes we are going to be tempted. Temptation is NOT a sin in and of itself. James is speaking here about how we respond to the temptation. He has already told us how we ought to respond—

**Hardship → Ask God for wisdom → Faithfulness → Complete, lacking nothing.**

There is another way to respond.

**Hardship → Blame God → Failure → Sin, full of death**

What is the difference between the two responses?

How you think about God?

Is God there for your help, or there for you to blame? And the answer to that question right there determines whether hardships in your life lead to life or death. How can we ensure that we are those who

ask God for wisdom instead of blaming God for our troubles?

By mastering our desires.

Steadfast—believes God is good even in hardship.  
Faithless—blames God especially in hardship.

Let's us a real life example to put some skin on these bones.

There are innumerable hardships that we face on a daily basis—but I'll mention one that all of us will face from time to time.

Sickness. (A hardship that is morally neutral)

Illness, especially chronic illness is an especially difficult test. I have dealt with chronic illness and know all too well all the questions that swirl around. Chronic Illness a bewildering journey of doubt and fear and loneliness.

Chronic illness is a hardship. James warns us against thinking the following, "God must not love me, that is why he is allowing me to be sick. He could heal me, but he is not. What is going on? Does he care?"

That is the temptation.

What is your desire? To get better. Is that wrong? NO!

But it IS wrong to want to be healed more than you want to please God. It is wrong to say to God, "You must prove you love me by healing me." God proves his love through his son NOT by always healing us.

Get sick – you blame God.

The desire is good to want to be healed. But people can be so consumed with feeling better that they give their lives to that. Their desire becomes completely consumed with healing—and then the hardship becomes a temptation. And slowly you start to believe—God is doing this to me and he doesn't care.

And bitterness settles in.

You cease to be someone who struggles with bitterness but someone who is defined by bitterness. You are bitter. And when that bitterness is fully grown death follows.

<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.

Do you see?

Hardship → Blame God → Failure → Sin, full of death

But if you are convinced God is good all the time to you—then you fight differently.

You struggle with the illness. You fight it. You hate it. There are some days that you fail and fall. You struggle with bitterness. You refuse to believe that your pain is proof of God's abandonment.

With this test you go to him and ask for wisdom to make it through. Wisdom for the next few minutes. Wisdom for the ability to fight against disillusionment and heartache and remember that God is good. And he helps you. In that moment.

You keep fighting for perspective and asking for help crying out knowing that he gives generously—and you remain faithful. That day. Then the next. Then the next.

In the end you will have lived a faithful life by the strength of God and you will be reminded every day that he is ONLY good to you. Even when you go



through bad things. And what James says in verse 4 is true of you—

And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:4

Hardship → Ask God for wisdom → Faithfulness → Complete, lacking nothing.

There are two paths—

One who blames God the always good God.

And another who follows the always good God.

Which path are you on?

We have no cause to blame our always good God.  
God is only always good to you.

James gives us further reason to believe God is only always good in verse 17,

### ***3. Our Good God ALWAYS Generous (James 1:16-18)***

Not only does our God not tempt—he is generous.

Vs. 17,

<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.

All good things that you have ever enjoyed have come to you from him.

He is the Father of lights.

The one who as fixed the sun and the moon and the stars in the heavens—these lights he created go about their courses and change. But he remains the same. There is no shadow of changing in him.

What does not change?

All good gifts come from above.

What good things have you received?

Everything good that you have ever received has come from his hand to your life. It is a custom made blessing coming down for you from the father of lights.

Do you see what James is helping us to do? See God for who he really is, to see him as the one who does not tempt but gives us good things. Not just a few good things but all good things.

PROP: God is good ALL the time to YOU.

When we face hardship our eyes zoom in on that one area that we want to change and we miss all the different custom-made blessing God gives us. It is not wrong to pray for your situation to get better—but it is always wrong to ignore blessings from his hand.

What has he given you?

Here is a partial catalogue of the good things I experienced from God yesterday—just the morning.

- I woke up
- Breathing
- Seeing
- Inside
- Internal Organs
- Greeted by two dogs
- Quiet house
- 4 wonderful kids
- Rain
- Clothes to wear
- Contacts

- Coffee to awake
- A wife who loves me
- Legs sore from hike
- Men's Breakfast
- My car started
- Taste buds fired
  - o Bacon
- Fellowship
- 50 men together
- All love Jesus
- Sang together

All of that is before 8:30.

Do I have hardships? Yes.

But I must not be so myopic as to only see my hardships—I have many, many, more blessings direct from God for me to enjoy.

PROP: God is good ALL the time to YOU.

We need to be sensible to the blessings and not go about ignorant and presuming.

God is good ALL the time to YOU.

And then James reminds us of the best thing that has been given to us.

Vs. 18,

<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.

‘Word of Truth’ Means Gospel.

In other words, not only does he give us every good thing he has ‘brought us forth.’ Why?

Did you see what verse 18 says?

Because we are worth it? No.

Because we obeyed? No.

Because we prayed the right way? No.

Because we prayed a prayer? No.

Why has he brought us forth from death to life?

From Sin to forgiveness?

From lost to found?

From rebels to saints?

Why has he brought us forth from death to life?

"Of his own will..."

Because he wanted to.

Why would he want to?

God is good ALL the time to YOU.

Do you misinterpret God? Maybe a better question is,  
Are you misinterpreting God right now?

Misinterpret God and his intention to you and it is  
ruinous. He is only always good to you.

APP

- Not following Jesus

James is a book written by a Christians to other  
Christians so that they might think rightly about God  
and follow him. His concern is that we Christians  
might authentically follow him and not be hypocrites.

Do you see how good God is?

He has blessed you even though you don't follow him.  
Can you imagine what it is like if you did?

- Followers of Jesus

Don't misread God.

He will help you. Ask. Keep asking.

PRAY

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." Phil 4:23