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Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life . . . James 1:12.

Trials of Our Faith

Lesson Aim: To encourage the Christian to remain steadfast under trials.

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Topic: Faith: Trials of; Suffering.

INTRODUCTION

God had one Son without sin but He has no son without trials. The Lord Jesus warned the disciples, *“In the world ye shall have tribulation. . .”* (John 16:3-3) and the Bible later testifies of Him as being *“tempted like as we are”* (Hebrews 4:15). Indeed, it is well that testings come. An old proverb states, “All sunshine in nature or in man makes a desert!”

Testings may take many forms. A man may be tested in different areas of life. A student is given a test in school to measure his academic attainments. An athlete is put through the plays of the game to determine his physical prowess. But today's study is concerned with the testing of the Christian believer's faith.

Faith is trust, unquestioning belief, confidence, and reliance. Temptations to sin and hardships in service challenge the faith of the Christian. Can he maintain a continued steadfast adherence to and confidence in God when things go wrong? Is his assurance of the reality of things unseen vital enough to bring him through? It is in this area that today's study is concerned. The subject is “Trials of Our Faith.” The purpose of this study is “to encourage the Christian to remain steadfast under trials.” These are now the last days of this age. A time of great trial is approaching. Christian believers in America will be challenged to prove the vitality of

their faith. Such testings will determine the quality of our faith and the strength of our Christian character.

EXPOSITION

I. FAITH IS TRIED

Testing of the believer's faith is to be expected. *“Beloved, think it not strange the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you”* (I Peter 4:12). Every believer passes through times of trial. It is a universal experience and none should be surprised or disappointed by it.

Jesus said of believers **“The world hath hated them, because they are not of the world,”** John 17:14. **“If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, therefore the world hateth you,”** John 15:19. The believer lives in a hostile environment. He claims to be different since he belongs to the Lord. It is no surprise, therefore, if the world challenges him to prove his faith under testings.

Christian faith is tested by many methods. It may be tested by delayed answer to prayer when *“Hope deferred maketh the heart sick,”* (Proverbs 13:12). It may be tested by sorrow and loss, as in the case of Job.

It may be tested by the world's enticement of prosperity, power or position, as in the case of Moses in Egypt, Hebrews 11:24-26. It may be tested by God's own call to sacrifice in His service, as when Abraham was challenged to offer up Isaac, Genesis 21. But however it comes, faith will surely be tested.

Sometimes the testings through which a believer passes are very severe. In Luke 21:12-17 the Lord Jesus warns of arrest, abuse, imprisonment, and even death which awaits some believers. But these things are not indication that God has forgotten his children. They do not mean the believer is being punished for any sin. They are a means of testimony to the world of the reality and vitality of Christian faith. They also work good to the believer who endures the testings faithfully.

Rather than trials being an indication of God's displeasure, they are an opportunity for God's provision to be especially magnified to the believer. Listen to this gracious promise of Jesus: **“And it shall turn to you for a testimony. Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer; For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist . . . But there shall not**

an hair on your head perish. In your patience possess ye your souls,”

Luke 21:13-15, 18-19. When believers pass through the fire they can be sure that One goes with them whose form is like the son of God, Daniel 3:25.

II. WHEN FAITH IS TRIED

1. Rejoice when your faith is tried. **“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations,”** verse 2. One translation gives this verse, “When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives, my brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends!” Another gives the verse, “Now and once-for-all count it whole and unmixed joy at any time you find yourself surrounded by trials of many sorts.” Whatever the version of translation, the meaning is clear.

This scripture sounds strange. Indeed, to those who are interested only in their own comfort and advantage the statement seems contradictory. How can a time of trial be an occasion for joy? Especially, how can this be a time for “whole joy” in which trials are “welcomed as friends”?

One must have a vision of eternal things to find joy in trials. Like Moses, he must be able to envision “the recompense of the reward,” Hebrews 11:24-26. Those who live only for this world, and who have no interest in eternity can never find the meaning of such a scripture as this. But let a person measure present trials in the light of eternal glory and he agrees with Paul, **“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us,”** Romans 8:18. **“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,”** II Corinthians 4:17. Count a time of trial, therefore, but an occasion of blessing in disguise.

2. Grow when your faith is tried. **“Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing,”** verses 3-4. Christian patience is much more than a mere passive submission to fate. It is a vital grace. Through trials the believer learns the grace of patience. He is improved by what he learns for tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed . . .” Romans 5:3-5.

Patience is active, not passive. It works its blessed ministry of maturing a believer. James says patience produced through trials will make one “perfect” — mature and complete in all parts — and “entire” — lacking in no part which is essential to full and healthy spiritual life. Look at what the

Apostle is writing: "If you endure trials in the proper spirit you will find that they produce endurance and fortitude, and if you give fortitude full sway you will grow into a balanced character which falls short in nothing!" Thank God for any trial which will bring such a blessed result.

Christian brother, don't fuss, worry or rebel against God's providence. Let the joys of confident trust in the Heavenly Father keep your heart calm in trials. "Let patience have her perfect work" and you will enjoy effective service and victorious living.

3. Pray when your faith is tried. Read verses 5-8 very carefully, Phillips suggests it may be phrased thus: "And if, in the process, any of you does not know how to meet any particular problem he has only to ask God—who gives generously to all men without making them feel foolishly or guilty—and he may be quite sure that the necessary wisdom will be given him. But he must ask in sincere faith without secret thoughts as to whether he really wants God's help or not. The man who trusts God, but with inward reservations, is like a wave of the sea, called forward by the wind one moment and driven back the next. That sort of man cannot hope to receive anything from the Lord, and the life of a man of divided loyalty will reveal instability at every turn."

How true that often we lack wisdom to understand and rightly respond to our situations. "Lack" is a banking term which means "to have a shortage" or, as we would say it, "to be in the red." How patient God is under such circumstances. "Without stinging words of rebuke, nor accusation, nor blame, He gives all that is needed. Not wisdom only but all "good things" are available from Him. Read Matthew 7:11.

4. Endure when your faith is tried. Jesus teaches that "men ought always to pray, and not to faint," Luke 18:1. So James says, "The man who patiently endures the trials and temptations that come to him is the truly happy man." See verse 12.

"Endure" is more than submission. It is the active bearing of trials, recognizing them as God's doings. The verb tense suggests that believers are to "keep on enduring" trials. When they come immediately one after the other, when they come and linger long without changing, the person who endures them without rebellion will be counted "blessed" of the Lord. Such temptations are for the purpose of showing one to be "approved unto the Lord" because James writes "having been approved" (that is, "when he is tried") he will receive the crown of life. This is reward sufficient. Hold faithfully, Christian brother, for the reward is worth it all. **"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not,"** Galatians 6:9.

III. WHY FAITH IS TRIED

1. Faith is tried to develop Christian maturity. Trials are lightened when a blessed result is seen behind them. Job, in the midst of his adversities testifies, **“when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold,”** Job 23:10. Applying this principle in the realm of divine discipline, Hebrews 12:11 states, **“Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”**

James is careful to point out that trials result in increased patience (verse 3), wisdom (verse 5), faith (verses 6-8), and steadfastness (verse 12). Psalm 119:67 states, **“Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.”** Psalm 94:12 adds, **“Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law.”**

Just as the athlete works out to develop muscles required in his game, just as the student concentrates to accumulate knowledge demanded in his classes, so God makes believers pass through trials to mature them. This is one reason why trials come. The trials may be hard but the results are blessed.

2. Faith is tried to glorify God. There is one supreme reason why God saves sinners: “That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ” Ephesians 1:12. All that the believer is and does must be related to the glory of God. All that God does to and through His children is related to this purpose. Even trials are intended to glorify God through His children.

But how can trials glorify God? Jesus answers, **“every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit . . . Herein is my father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples,”** John 15:2, 8. If the testing of the believer's faith works to his spiritual maturity and increased fruitfulness, praise the Lord for testings! If trials work out to the glory of God, praise the Lord for trials! Oh Father, if my life needs purging that you might be glorified by its increased fruitfulness, use whatever means are necessary; let me but glorify Thee.

3. Faith is tried that we may receive a reward. When testings, trials, and all enticements to evil are faithfully endured, a reward is gained. The reward is “the crown of life, which the Lord promised to them that love Him.”

A crown is a sign of authority. It is also evidence of victory in honor. The kings of the earth wear crowns of the first sort. Those who overcome in contests of strength and skill wear crowns of the second sort. James has in mind a crown much more enduring than either gold or laurel leaves. He

speaks of “the crown of life.” “The crown of life” is an expression peculiar to the Epistle of James. It appears no where else in the Bible. This might either be a crown which is life in its fullness or a special reward awaiting those who have eternal life in the Lord. Either way, this crown will be received only by those who faithfully endure trials.

This scripture by no means teaches that the one who endures faithfully will receive eternal salvation as his reward. Eternal life is the present possession of the believer, I John 3:1-2. It could not be a future reward and a present possession at the same time. Perhaps it is enough to know the reward is waiting. What a loving Father we have in heaven for He offers a reward to us for doing what it would only be our duty to do.

CONCLUSION

The term “temptations” in this study has a two-fold meaning. (1) It means “trials” of any sort. When they are faithfully met and endured, there is a reward. (2) On the other hand, when these “trials” become points of doubting and rebellion against God, they become temptations to evil. Whether a trial will be an occasion of improvement or an enticement to evil will depend on the spirit in which a believer meets it. **“Happy is the man that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth,”** Romans 14:22.

Today's study has set forth several evident truths. (1) All believers have times of trials. (2) Trials are of many different types—”manifold temptations.” (3) Trials are profitable when met in humble dependence and trust in God. (4) God uses trials to promote the mature character of His children. (5) The prayer of faith is a great aid in times of trial. (6) The crown of life is a special reward for those who endure trials. (7) God offers help in the midst of trials.

QUESTIONS

1. What is faith?
2. Why is a trial of faith to be expected?
3. How is faith tested?
4. What assurance does God give in the midst of testings?
5. How can trials be an occasion of joy?
6. How do trials produce growth?