

III. James in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel Life According to James
“Why Do Bad Things Happen to Saved People”
Book of James
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James 1:2-4 says [2] *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness (endurance). [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

The grass withers and the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

We are in our third study as we have embarked upon the Gospel of James. The title of this study comes from a book in the 1980s. This book then took the culture by storm and the title was Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People. All the preachers then had to take that on and the first thing we noted is that there was no good people. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). There is no one good, no not one (Romans 3:10). The Scriptures are clear in that regard but that question continues on in the church of Jesus Christ and there is one whole segment of the church that has said if there are trials and adversities (one preacher said) then that means God blinked. Another said that it was because you have a lack of faith. Trials in life are bad. Sickness, death and sorrow are bad and that can’t be of God. Therefore there must be something wrong with you in terms of that being in your life.

Why do bad things happen to saved people? Peter doesn’t dodge it. John doesn’t dodge it. Paul doesn’t dodge it and James doesn’t dodge it. They take it head on and their answer is a lot different than the church today, in either avoiding the subject or misrepresenting the Gospel, denying the sovereignty of God and the presence of God in trials in this life and what God has to say. It’s absolutely amazing when you read Romans 5 and this passage in James 1, I almost want to tap Martin Luther on the shoulder and say “I know you have a problem with James and Paul but boy they sure seem to line up with each other here.”

We have been in James and it is probably the first book of the New Testament that was written in early 40 AD. It was written about fifteen years after the resurrection of Jesus and the author of it is James the brother of Jesus. It is called the wisdom book, unlike the wisdom books of the Old Testament although it has allusions to Proverbs. He uses thirteen parables and fourteen times he talks about what it means to live by faith. Fifteen times he talks about what it means to be in Christ. There are twenty nine quotes from the sermons of Jesus and twenty one of them are from the Sermon on the Mount. This is a book of wisdom but here is the difference. Ecclesiastes, Job, Proverbs and Psalms are anticipating the Gospel life with wisdom. James is delineating and defining the Gospel life of wisdom. So he brings us through forty eight commandments.

Now that you have been saved by the cross here is what King Jesus calls you to do. Today we are at the first of forty eight commandments found in 108 verses. Now which one would it be that James would be led by the Spirit in his own heart to say to us? Let me remind you that the Gospel of James has a theme. The theme is the Gospel life of

persistent ministry and joyful maturation in a sin-cursed world informed by the God-sent gift of “wisdom from above.” God’s grace allows you to minister in a sin-cursed world and in fact the curse of sin provides platforms for ministry. In the midst of a sin-cursed world God allows you to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. He does that because He gives you wisdom.

In other words, for those who are saved they have a Gospel foundation. I am right with God. I am adopted into the family of God. I have a new heart, a new record, and a new family. I have a Gospel motivation and that is the love of Christ compels me. Now I have a Gospel life where the old is passed away and behold the new has come. In this Gospel life, in this broken world, how do I live out my motivation with my foundation? I need Gospel wisdom from above. I need to see things differently. I need to see things from God’s perspective, not mine and not the worlds. That is what I desperately need.

James really manifested that and we saw that in our last study. How did James present himself? James does not identify himself by his functional identity. He doesn’t give his title or job description or job title. He just says James a bond slave of Jesus. His functional identities are shaped by his confessional identity – I’m a slave, which is embraced because of his salvation identity – a saved son of the living God. Because he is a saved son of the living God he confesses to be surrendered to Christ as Master, a slave, and that shapes every function in his life as a man, as a pastor, as a citizen or whatever he may be. Whatever it is it shapes everything in his life.

Now he takes us to his first commandment and he will answer for us why “bad things happen to saved people.” James will walk us through that step by step. This week I prayed with two people that are just on the verge of eternity. They are members of this church who know Jesus and they are days maybe weeks from the presence of the Lord. They are about to face death and family will be left behind. These are trials of life. I prayed with a man who has two kids in college, whose business due to the economic situation and uncertainties closed down and he doesn’t have a job. He has a wife to care for and his children are at one of the most expensive times in their life. These are the trials of life. I have had phone call and visit after visit to people who are sick. There are the sicknesses of life. A family called me to tell me their teenager has informed them that they want nothing to do with Christianity and there is a broken heart of a father and mother. If I interviewed everyone reading this you could give me the trials of life. How do you look at them and how do you deal with them?

We need wisdom from above and the very first word of James tackles this issue of the trials of life in this world. I will first give you an overview of these verses. There are some wonderful word choices he has made in the Greek language that help us understand what he is saying. Then I will take it to an in-depth view and close with one takeaway. So we’ll start with the overview.

James 1:2a says [2] *Count it all joy, my brothers...* Look at the phrase ‘my brothers.’ James is not writing an evangelistic tract. He is assuming he is writing to professing believers who say they have a Gospel foundation and Gospel motivation. The Greek word for brothers here is *adelphos* which literally means from the same womb. It’s interesting because James who is writing this who is saying ‘my brothers in Christ,’ James was from the same womb as Jesus. So he has one level of that but that is not what he is talking about here. He is talking about all of us who have been brought from the womb of God’s grace preached and the work of the Spirit of God that we are in Christ

together. We have been born again and adopted into the family of God. Based upon your profession of faith, 'my brothers' that is the first of twenty one times James will use that phrase in this book.

Then James gives his first command in James 1:2 [2] *Count (or consider) it all joy, my brothers when you meet (encounter) trials of various kinds.* Now let's look at the word consider or count. It means place in front of your mind. Consider, put something in front of your mind. Put a filter out there through which is you look at various trials and count it all joy. Some translations say 'pure joy,' others say 'full joy' or 'sheer joy.' Basically he is saying put in front of your minds all kinds, fullness, sheer, unmitigated, unadulterated joy and he wants you to do that when you encounter various trials. Notice he says 'when' and not 'if.' So nobody reading this will get through this life without various trials.

The word trials is very interesting. The Greek word for trials is *peirasmos* and it's one word from the Greek but from the context it's translated with one of three words. Usually in your Bible whenever you see the word trial, tempt or temptation, or test those are the three English words that are used to translate the word *peirasmos*. James 1:2 is our first encounter using this word. By the way, the word 'meet' or 'encounter' means face to face. James 1:2-3 says [2] *Count (or consider) it all joy, my brothers when you meet (encounter) trials (peirasmos) of various (multiple) kinds, [3] for you know that the testing (peirasmos) of your faith produces steadfastness (endurance).*

Now James 1:12-15 says [12] *Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial (peirasmos), for when he has stood the test (peirasmos) he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. [13] Let no one say when he is tempted (peirasmos), "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted (peirasmos) with evil, and he himself tempts (peirasmos) no one. [14] But each person is tempted (peirasmos) when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. [15] Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

So that same word is used but contextually it is used different ways. Satan (*peirasmos*) tempts to sin. God brings trials of life. God's trials become tests. What is the purpose of it? James 1:2-3 says [2] *Count (or consider) it all joy, my brothers when you meet (encounter) trials (peirasmos) of various (multiple) kinds, [3] for you know that the testing (peirasmos) of your faith produces steadfastness (endurance).* Knowing that the trial from God has a purpose and the immediate purpose of the trial of life is steadfastness. Another word for steadfastness is endurance and the Greek word for steadfastness is *hupermeno*. We get the word super in our language from the Greek word *huper*. For instance *hupernike* means super overcomers.

When trials of life from God come into your life, what are they designed to do as a test? One, is to make you a *hupermeno*, to super stand. The word *meno* means to hold fast. Hold your ground when the tests come, but you don't just hold your ground for then you take ground. He is perfecting you. He is completing you. The immediate purpose is for you to hold fast, endure, steadfast. The ultimate purpose is that He is completing you. He is perfecting you and the results are you will be lacking in nothing. He is filling you up to overflowing through this. So that is what James is laying out before you.

Consider is all joy when you face up to the trial. The trial is not joy but you face up to the trial because you have put it through a filter. The filter is that you know this trial from God is a test designed immediately to manifest super standing firm, super

holding fast and super standing. Then I can take ground, completing me, perfecting me which means for now you are not complete. You are not perfect and there is something experientially that you're lacking in life. Positionally you're not lacking anything in Christ. Experientially there is yet much to learn of Christ and in Christ, so that you are lacking in nothing.

Let's take a closer view. From this overview I am going to extract five things that you and I need to understand and know. It is Gospel wisdom that we need. The first one is the trials of life in this world are inevitable. If you're a Christian, except for God's condemning judgment and wrath, everything an unbeliever faces in this world you will have to face and probably more because the adversary Satan doesn't go after those who are following him, but he would go after you, the believer.

Why are the trials inevitable in this life? Here are a couple of reasons. One, is you live in a sin-cursed world of chaos for sin has brought chaos into this world. It has brought sickness, death and all of those things and Jesus has not done away with this sin-cursed world yet. So you might be thinking why doesn't God just get rid of all this suffering? The reason is because suffering comes from sin and to get rid of suffering He would have to get rid of sin and to get rid of sin you would have to get rid of sinners. Then you wouldn't have gotten saved. God is patient with sinners that are producing this brokenness but He is patient to save them and then the brokenness that they produce He is using in this life to grow you and to develop you.

Trials are inevitable because we're not perfected yet or completed yet and haven't yet ceased the sufficiency of Christ as I ought to and He is growing me to understand that. Every time I suffer it reveals something I think I have to have plus Christ. What is suffering? It is something I am not having or something that I am experiencing that I don't want to experience and I either need to get rid of that or I need that and if I don't have that or don't get rid of it then I can't have joy. So the Lord is continually showing us His sufficiency. He is continually working in us what is lacking. He is continually completing us and perfecting us so the trials will continue as long as we need to be perfected, completed and developed in this world to know the sufficiency of Christ.

Secondly, the trials of life in this world are both multiple and multi-faceted. Notice how James said "Count it all joy when you meet all kinds of trials." Notice the plural on the word trials and there are various kinds of trials. Here are some – poverty, riches, sickness, health, defeat, success, adversity, prosperity, death, life. All of those can be trials in this life. There are various kinds that are multi-faceted and multiple and many times there are more than one impinging upon us at any one time in our life.

Thirdly, the trials of life in this world are to be met with joy and not avoided in fear or drowned in self-pity. When trials come our default is either fear or self-pity. How many of us don't anticipate the day of our death if Jesus hasn't come back yet? As your days are so shall your strength be and the Puritans would say "You're right. I have a problem now but there are things that God is bringing me through now that are assuring me that when the dying day comes I in grace will be there because I have living grace right now." However our immediate reaction is fear. When God takes us through a trial He is banishing fears in our life.

Another default we have is self-pity. We drown in self-pity and miss the trial and what can happen in our life. I'll admit, I am the number one expert of all here. Lord, I love You and I'm a preacher so why is this happening to me? I know how to throw a pity

party. At my pity parties I am both the host and the guest of honor. This is my default in life. The Lord is telling me “Don’t avoid it in fear for I’m going to use it to banish fear in your life and don’t drown in self-pity for I am going to use this to get you out of the center of life. I am going to do something in your life through this encounter. I want you to know the joy of the Lord through the trial.”

There are so many examples I could give you of this but I will just give you one right now. Let’s look at Acts 5. Here persecution has hit the church. Peter and John, two pillars of the church, are being faced with persecution. These are the men who’ll write things like ‘God is refining you in it’ and ‘you’re to rejoice in it’ but let’s see what happens in their life. Acts 5:40-42 says *[40] and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. [41] Then they (the apostles) left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. [42] And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.*

All they are doing is preaching and leading people to Christ and they get thrown in jail. They get brought before the same council that sentenced Jesus to death and that would put James and Stephen to death. As they are there they own Christ and they will not recant. One says to let them go and so they bring them in and beat them. After they beat them they say “Don’t you dare continue to preach in His name” and they left not with a pity party, not with fear but they left rejoicing in the Lord. They stood ground! They went back preaching. Then they took ground. Thousands more start coming to Christ in the next chapter.

In Acts 16 Paul gets to Philippi. He leads someone to Christ. The Lord is doing a great work. They arrest him and put him in jail. If that had been me when I was put in jail I would have had a pity party. When they put Paul and Silas into jail they sang joyful praises to the Lord. So when the Lord sent the earthquake and the jail falls apart all the prisoners are standing there and the Philippian jailer and his household are converted. They not only joyfully stood ground they took ground and that is what God calls us to do. So when the trials come we face them with the joy, not of trials, but with the joy of the Lord facing the trial. He knows trials hurt. He wouldn’t be saying this if they didn’t know it. He knows grief is real. He wouldn’t be saying this if He didn’t know it but He knows there is a Gospel prism of a sovereign God of grace who is at work so when it comes you begin to filter it with joy.

Here is my moment to super stand firm. I’m going to keep my quiet time, keep my worship, keep sharing the Gospel, keep loving the lost and God’s people and I’m going to super stand. On the other side of this there is not only the immediate purpose of steadfastness but there is an ultimate purpose. We’re going to take ground for I’m going to be completed, perfected and He is growing me so that I begin to learn the sufficiency of Christ even in the affliction of the sufferings in this world.

Fourthly, God’s purpose in the trials of life has not been revealed for grief counseling but for disciple making. So when someone is going through a trial like terminal illness, loss of job, apostasy of a covenant child, you don’t walk do what Job’s friends would have done and use this as a time of counseling 101. This is disciple making 101 so that people have that framework when it comes. What do you do when people are suffering in the trials of life and they are grieving? You grieve with them. Jesus is a perfect example of this. Lazarus dies and Mary and Martha are grieving. Jesus

doesn't walk up to them and say "Buck up for you ought to see what I'm about to do here." No, He comes in and weeps with them. He makes comforting statements about Mary and Martha like "She has done what she could." Then He takes over and does what He can. So when people are grieving we grieve with them. We work with them. This is disciple making. How do I get a Christian life view that will inform my life style in the days of a broken world? That is what He is giving it to us for.

Fifthly, the trials of life from God and the temptations to sin by Satan are different in purpose but may be found in the same event. In other words, when Satan comes to tempt you God's sovereign over the same thing. God is working it as a trial. What do you do? You flee the temptation and you face up to the trial. Satan's design is to tempt you to sin. He brings the temptation to marry it with the old man so that when the old man inside of you, the lust of the flesh inside of you marries the temptation it produces sin and Satan's desire is to deceive you and to destroy you. Satan is a liar and a murderer. He brings a temptation to deceive and destroy. So you flee temptation. Then you face up to trials because God's trial marries the grace of God in your heart and its child is endurance, steadfastness and you begin to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

I want to show you a great example of this. The four pillars of the church take on the same thing with the same message and that is the trials of life that are given by God are there for a purpose which is to produce endurance and then to develop Gospel character in our lives. Notice how Paul is able to see this same thing in the same event. After recounting God's wonderful ministry and the vision he was given this is what he says. II Corinthians 12:7-10 says [7] *So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn* (We don't know what his thorn is, now watch how he deals with it) *was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. [8] Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. [9] But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. [10] For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Here is this same event. On the one hand is a temptation from Satan to harass him to give up. On the other hand there is a sovereign God that co-ops the temptation of Satan that Paul flees and the trial of life that begins to frame him and form him. So he gladly embraces it and says "Look what it is doing. It is dismissing the pride and arrogance in my life and bringing me humility. The suffering is showing me my utter reliance upon the Lord. He is destroying the idols in my life and I find out that Jesus is enough." That is what it shows.

I'm going to press you here. It's not a husband or wife that makes your life meaningful. In fact, you're about to get another trial. It's not that job promotion. I know we long to have God's good gifts in life but don't let any of them be put ahead of the sufficiency of the Lord. The trial has come and I have found the foundation holds the anchor and Christ is enough. Now I am able to deal with adversity and prosperity, health and sickness, because I found out that it's not me and it's not about me. I have found that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever and I have abandoned this Western view of the Gospel which is the chief end of God is to gratify me and exalt me

forever. He has done much to save me not to make much of me, to free me from me that I can see much in Him and set free to make much of Him.

The takeaway is maxim number one and destroys myth number one. It is the multi-facet and inevitable trials of life are designed and sent by the sovereign grace of God to both prove and improve your Gospel life in Christ. It is to manifest and to grow. It is demonstrate your Gospel life and develop your Gospel life. It is to manifest and mature your Gospel life. How many of you have had a teacher in your life? Good teachers always give tests. Good teachers give good tests. Good tests have two purposes so that the one being tested one, finds out what they know and two, what they need to know. The trials of life that are designed by the grace of God are there to show you what you know – stand firm – and then to develop you in what you do not yet know as you are completed, perfected and being grown in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

It destroys the myth that trials are bad and can't be of God. That is myth number one that James destroys and therefore when bad times come I'm not going to fire God. You didn't hire God to make this your best life now. God saved you that your life might grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ and people see His glory and joy in you in a way they can't explain it because the trials of life that come to you like them are faced and you super stand, stand firm. Then you begin to take ground for the Lord.

Why do bad things happen to saved people? It is because God loves you. Those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, He tests, He strengthens, so that the weak knees are strengthened and the hands are strengthened. They happen because the Lord loves you and is growing you. Christians are like tea bags. You don't get to drink them until you get them in the hot water. I'm going to paraphrase Charles Spurgeon here. The number one book in the library of your life besides the Bible is the book of adversity. That is the best book in your library. It is not because you're a stoic so grin and bear it when trials come. There is grief and suffering that is there but in the midst of it I face it with joy because the Lord is doing something.

Every trial in the life of a believer is a shout from heaven "God loves you and He is not finished with you yet." There is nothing that has taken you that is not common to man and with it He makes a way of escape as He completes you, grows you and develops you that you might know Him and love Him. Super stand and then take ground. What's the prime expression of this? There is a reason we end it with the words from that great hymn on the trials of life with 'turn your eyes upon Jesus.'

Hebrews 12:1-2 says [1] *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

The Christian life is a marathon. I have done two and I found out how to train for them. I have two towels that I received from those two marathons that have my time on them which I am not going to tell you and then I had knee surgery and those were my gifts from two marathons. To train I had to build a base and then one day every week I added ten percent further. The endurance had to grow. God is sending the test and He is pressing you on ten percent more, ten percent more. He is completing you and perfecting you. You are finding out that nothing in this world makes your life. Christ is my life and

now the things of this world I can deal with in the joy of the Lord because He is making me whole in Him. He is taking me to be with Him.

Hebrews 12:1 doesn't end there. Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us and turn your eyes on Jesus. Fix your eyes on Jesus the Author and Perfecter of our faith. Do you think Satan had designs against Jesus at the cross? Can you not hear the fiendish laughter of hell as the Son of God is being crucified by sinful men? Hebrews 12:2 says [2] *looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured (super stood) the cross (angels stay back for I have a people to save), despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.* Now He is taking ground. This is my Father's world, making disciples of every nation.

When the trials of life come, stand fast for your sons and daughters are watching you and take your ground. New believers are watching you, old Christians and they are taking ground. We fix our eyes on Jesus, who faced it with joy and super stood His ground and defeated sin, death, hell and the grave. We get the privilege of knowing Him in the trials of life. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You Jesus that You have gone before us. You may be reading this and thinking "I do not want to be tossed by the temptations of Satan's deceit and destruction. I want the One who stood the trial at Calvary because He loved me and saves me and He will take me through the water and the fire. He will take me to glory to be with Him, ultimately to be like Him lacking in nothing." Please come to this Savior today. I am not asking you to be a member at this church but we can tell you about Him. Just simply come to Christ. Father, may I ask that Your people will see the power of God in the raindrops and trace the rainbow through the rain and know that the days of disappointments and despair are banished with all of our fears and idols that we might humbly know the sufficiency of Christ and now compassionately bring that same hope to others for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.