

James, the half-brother of Jesus has introduced himself as a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. He lets us know that he sees the Father and the Son in perfect unity for a person cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24<sup>i</sup>). He is addressing the need for the fledgling church to express its faith in actions. Since persecution had driven many of the believers out of Jerusalem, he begins by telling them it was to be expected and should not discourage them, but rather invigorate them.

<sup>2</sup> *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,* James 1:2 Verse 2 begins with a word play on the last word in the previous verse. Greetings (*chairein*) is very similar to the joy (*charan*). That is why Moffett translated the first line as “Greet it as pure joy...”

What do we greet with pure joy? It is the trials of various kinds. But let us again look to the original language to find a deeper meaning of the expression “when you meet trials.” It would be more accurate to translate the Greek as “plunged into affliction or persecutions.” This gives us the seemingly absurd instruction to greet with pure joy being plunged into a variety of afflictions or persecutions. What in the world is James trying to tell us? He is telling us what his half-brother, our Lord and Savior told us in the Sermon on the Mount. <sup>10</sup> *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* <sup>11</sup> *“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.”* <sup>12</sup> *Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.* Matthew 5:10-12

However, James broadens it to afflictions in all their various forms. For the early church it meant such things as we see in Hebrews 11. <sup>36</sup> *Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.* <sup>37</sup> *They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—* <sup>38</sup> *of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.* Hebrews 11:36-38 That is quite a bit more severe than what most of us in the west endure. We may be mocked and even recently some have suffered imprisonment, but flogging, stoning, sawn in two, and killed with the sword is more likely to take place in the North Africa, China, or India. In chapter ten of Hebrews, the author tells how they joyfully accepted the plundering of their goods. <sup>34</sup> *For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.* <sup>35</sup> *Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.* <sup>36</sup> *For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.* <sup>37</sup> *For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay;”* <sup>38</sup> *but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.”* Hebrews 10:34-38 Plundering of your property is another form of “trials of various kinds.” Faith sees past the present loss of the temporal to the Lord’s return and eternal reward.

Could you accept joyfully the government confiscating your bank account because you stood for Biblical values? These heroes of the faith did so because they knew they had laid up their real treasure in heaven, and that treasure, as Jesus said, cannot be stolen and does not rust or decay (Matthew 6:19,20<sup>ii</sup>). It is forever! But the Hebrews were being

shaken by the constant threat, so the author tells them to endure with eyes on the prize. That is what James tells his readers is the outcome of their affliction: endurance. We walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7<sup>iii</sup>). We know we are in God's hands and that a glorious future awaits us. We are on the narrow road that leads to eternal life and at Jesus' right hand are pleasures forever more (Psalm 16:11<sup>iv</sup>).

The tyrants and thieves who cause us to have trials are really blessing us. They are taking away our hope in the temporal and causing us to focus on what really matters (2 Corinthians 4:17,18<sup>v</sup>). They will go down the broad road and find it ends in being forever with people like themselves away from the presence of the Lord (Matthew 7:13,14<sup>vi</sup>; 2 Thessalonians 1:9<sup>vii</sup>). The narrow road we travel leads to overwhelming joy forevermore. That does not mean following Jesus is easy. He warned us that it would not be (John 16:2<sup>viii</sup>). Trials are often quite painful and stressful. We even grieve over some trials. But James is saying the heart of the believer can still have great joy amid the pain. We have a hope that is greater than what this world can offer. It is a sure hope. **Jesus will be glorified in us, and we will forever marvel in His presence (2 Thessalonians 1:10<sup>ix</sup>)!**

This perspective means that we do not need to fear what man can do to us because man cannot take away what is eternal (Matthew 10:28<sup>x</sup>). He can try to squelch our faith and cause us to doubt, but when he does remember Psalm 73. The psalmist talks about his envy of the wicked. They seem to get away with everything and thrive doing so. They have no fear of God, and it seems God is letting them get away with it.

This harsh reality confused the psalmist until he went into the temple and had the following revelation. Psalm 73:18-28 *<sup>18</sup> Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. <sup>19</sup> How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! <sup>20</sup> Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms. <sup>21</sup> When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, <sup>22</sup> I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you. <sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. <sup>24</sup> You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. <sup>25</sup> Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. <sup>26</sup> My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. <sup>27</sup> For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. <sup>28</sup> But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.*

The psalmist says in his state of envy that he was like a wild animal, only thinking of what would be pleasing for the moment. They will perish and their hopes and dreams and worldly pleasures will perish with them. But God is continually with the psalmist, guiding him, and holding his right hand. He will receive the him into glory. Even if his health fails, God is the strength of his heart. He wants to always be close to God who is his refuge. God showed him how temporal worldly pleasure is (Hebrews 11:24,25<sup>xi</sup>).

Therefore, when trials come our way, we should count it as a blessing to mature us and keep our heart fixed on the eternal. Instead of envying the wicked and asking, "Why God? Why are you allowing this?" We can sing, "I will praise you in the storm, for you are good and always do good. There is a reason for my trial, and by faith I believe it will help to draw me near to You and make me more like You. Show me what I need to learn in this trial." When the Sanhedrin had the apostles flogged, they were surely in pain, yet they left rejoicing that they were counted worthy of suffering for Jesus (Acts 5:40,41<sup>xii</sup>).

We just read an account of that very thing at the end of Jonah. Jonah was angry because of God's grace upon Israel's enemy. Pouting in his little makeshift shelter, God appointed that plant to give him shade. The next day God sent a worm to kill the plant. Jonah learned that he was more concerned about the plant than he was about the 120,000 people and their animals because he was thinking more about himself and his comfort than he was concerned for their eternal souls (Jonah 4:10,11<sup>xiii</sup>). What a lesson in selfishness and our fleshly attitudes! What a necessary trial in which he should have thanked God for having such patience with him to teach him that lesson.

We are either going into a trial, in it, or coming out of it. Life is full of trials for everyone, including the rich and comfortable (Job 14:1<sup>xiv</sup>). We just do not see their trials because they can hide them. So many of the rich and famous die from a drug overdose.

The believer has additional troubles because as Jesus said, <sup>19</sup> *If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.* <sup>20</sup> *Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.* John 15:19,20a Those on the broad road are challenged by the lives of those on the narrow road and they do not like that. They will use us as scapegoats whenever they can because it helps them to avoid conviction. James is telling us to expect it and thank God for it. Is your goal to be on that narrow road that leads to life eternally with Jesus? Then when you are persecuted for your stand or just have difficulties in life because you follow Jesus, you can rejoice (2 Corinthians 7:4<sup>xv</sup>). It is affirmation you are on that narrow road. It is a sign that God is molding and shaping you. Is that what you want? Or do you want to live for temporal pleasure?

Peter tells us, <sup>12</sup> *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.* <sup>13</sup> *But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.* 1 Peter 4:12,13 Jesus, Peter, and James are all saying the same thing. Expect trials joyfully knowing God is in control and will use them in your life for your growth and His glory. You will suffer one way or the other in this fallen world. Make it count! *James is commending the conscious embrace of a Christian understanding of life which brings joy into the trials that come because of our Christianity. James says, "Consider it pure joy," which means to make a deliberate and careful decision to experience joy even in times of trouble.*<sup>xvi</sup> Pastor Lloyd John Ogilvie said, "I can have joy when I cannot feel it – artesian joy."

<sup>3</sup> *for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.* James 1:3 James tells us that we already know from experience or common sense what he is about to tell us. Why should we be joyful when various kinds of trials test our faith? It is because God is producing in us through our exercise of faith a steadfast spirit. Trials do not produce faith; they test our faith like metal is tested in a furnace to burn off impurities (Isaiah 48:10<sup>xvii</sup>). Precious things are tested. Faith is essential to our salvation as the heart is to the body. That is why the enemy of our souls attacks our faith and shoots his arrows of doubt (Ephesians 6:12<sup>xviii</sup>,16<sup>xix</sup>). Trials do not produce faith; God's Word does that (Romans 13:17<sup>xx</sup>). The test of our faith makes it stronger and more capable so that we remain steadfast.

This is a fascinating word in Greek, one of my favorites (*hupomone*). It is called the queen of virtues.<sup>xxi</sup> It is the ability to hold up under a burden until completion, like a

person carrying a load to the finish line. We could also translate it as active endurance or patience. ESV chose a word that implies spiritual endurance: **steadfastness. It is not only standing firm in faith but also resisting the temptation of trials and learning from them until the trial is over.** Then we are stronger in faith to endure the next trial. We are maturing.

The carnal reaction to trials is to complain and become bitter, sometimes even angry with God. Of course, that only makes the trial worse. James is telling us the way to avoid that is to receive the trial joyfully. That does not mean you become masochistic and seek out suffering. It means that you exercise your faith and believe that God will use it to mature you. With that mindset we can face our trials with pure joy.

We find in Paul's letter to the Romans that Paul is in agreement with this point as well. *<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup> Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup> Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.* Romans 5:1-5 The Greek word here translated as endurance is the same word translated as steadfastness in our James passage. Paul is telling us that the only way to rejoice in suffering that we all experience is first to be justified by faith. That results in peace with God and being under His grace. If you have peace and grace with the all-powerful Creator, then you can know that whatever is allowed to come into your life can be used for your good. Not only do we have the future hope of eternity in His glorious presence, but we can rejoice because we know that suffering that we go through will produce endurance in us. That produces the character like Jesus' character. When we see Him changing us like that it encourages our hope that He will finish what He started (Philippians 1:6<sup>xxii</sup>). We will not be ashamed when we meet Him because we are experiencing His love poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

Notice how James abbreviates this whole concept in the next verse. *<sup>4</sup> And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.* James 1:4 What Paul calls character and hope and being unashamed in God's presence James refers to as being perfect, complete, and lacking in nothing. *"These expressions in their present application are by some thought to be borrowed from the Grecian games: the man was perfect, who in any of the athletic exercises had got the victory; he was entire, having everything complete, who had the victory in the pentathlon, in each of the five exercises."* (Clarke)<sup>xxiii</sup> We can be victorious over our old nature when we walk in the Spirit (Romans 8:37<sup>xxiv</sup>; Galatians 5:16<sup>xxv</sup>). He will help us to see our trials from a positive perspective and enable us to praise God by faith knowing that victory is ours in Christ Jesus.

Another way of looking at the Greek word translated as "perfect" is the way it was applied to a sacrificial animal. They were declared perfect if there were no obvious blemishes. If we apply the word in that sense, it will mean the casual observer of the steadfast and patient life would not see any obvious sinful attitude or behavior.

One of man's most obviously sinful expressions is anger. We express anger over politics, differences in opinions, the way others drive, when we feel slighted, and on and on. We should be careful to distinguish between righteous indignation and anger. The

former will address the sin and pray that those involved come to the light and receive conviction. The latter exalts self over those with whom we are angry, not considering that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23<sup>xxvi</sup>). We tend to forget the grace that we have so bountifully received and how patient God is with us.

This brings us to the doctrine of perseverance of the saints. The concept is that if you are indeed born-again, you will persevere to the end of your life. I know of several cult leaders who were once in denominations that adhere to the Word of God. In one case one of their children died at a young age. This led them off into forming their own ideas of what was true and rejecting Biblical truth. They gain a following because their concepts are man centered instead of God centered. They had fallen away from the faith. We do not keep ourselves. It is the Lord who keeps us (2 Thessalonians 3:3<sup>xxvii</sup>; John 10:9<sup>xxviii</sup>, 28,29<sup>xxix</sup>). We cooperate with the Holy Spirit only because He has given us new life with new desires (2 Corinthians 5:17<sup>xxx</sup>). We persevere through the trials of life as God preserves us. We may stumble along the way, but in the end, we will cling to our faith in God and the salvation we have in Jesus. If we try to persevere in our own strength, we will certainly fail. It is God who has given us eternal life and therefore it is He who will keep us. As James will show us throughout this letter, **faith results in life that produces fruit unto God** (James 2:26<sup>xxxi</sup>).

Jesus explained that there will be those who receive the Word with gladness but in times of testing they fall away (Luke 8:13<sup>xxxii</sup>). We cannot always know who are chosen and have been born-again except by the long-term fruit of their lives. It is not for us to judge, but we can say for certain that those who endure unto the end are saved (Matthew 10:22<sup>xxxiii</sup>; Matthew 24:13<sup>xxxiv</sup>).

A great example of steadfastness is seen in the oldest of the Old Testament books, Job. While Job endured trials of every kind and the worse intensity and his friends only looked for a fault in him, Job did not sin with his mouth (Job 2:10<sup>xxxv</sup>). We can learn from Job that questioning why God has allowed the trials is normal human nature, yet it is not a sin. It is only natural to want to understand what is happening and why. Job remained steadfast in his conviction that God is in on the throne of heaven and does as He pleases for His own good reasons.

Job persevered under unbearable conditions all the way to the end of the trial. God blessed him with twice what he had before, but more importantly he was blessed with a personal relationship and understanding of the greatness and sovereignty of God.

The only greater example is our Lord who endured the wrath of God for our sins until it was finished. The book of Hebrews tells us that He endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him (Hebrews 12:2<sup>xxxvi</sup>). I believe that joy is not only that He would return to the Father's presence and former glory, but that we would be perfected and made into His perfect bride (John 3:29<sup>xxxvii</sup>). We too should offer our lives as a living sacrifice to the One who gave Himself for us and by His grace joyfully endure to the end (1 Peter 4:1,2<sup>xxxviii</sup>; Romans 12:1<sup>xxxix</sup>).

Questions: 1 Review who James is and his introduction 2 What was the word play in verses 1,2? 3 What kind of trials did the early church endure? 4 What is the lesson of Psalm 73? 5 Why are we persecuted? 6 Where does Peter say the same as James? 7 How did Paul express the same? 8 What is the meaning of the word translated as "perfect"? 9 What is the doctrine of perseverance? 10 Who exemplified that doctrine? Why? How?

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<sup>i</sup> **Matthew 6:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

<sup>ii</sup> **Matthew 6:19-20 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

<sup>iii</sup> **2 Corinthians 5:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> for we walk by faith, not by sight.

<sup>iv</sup> **Psalm 16:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

<sup>v</sup> **2 Corinthians 4:17-18 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

<sup>vi</sup> **Matthew 7:13-14 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. <sup>14</sup> For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

<sup>vii</sup> **2 Thessalonians 1:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,

<sup>viii</sup> **John 16:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.

<sup>ix</sup> **2 Thessalonians 1:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

<sup>x</sup> **Matthew 10:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

<sup>xi</sup> **Hebrews 11:24-25 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, <sup>25</sup> choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

<sup>xii</sup> **Acts 5:40-41 (ESV)**

<sup>40</sup> 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. <sup>41</sup> Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

<sup>xiii</sup> **Jonah 4:10-11 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> And the LORD said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. <sup>11</sup> And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”

<sup>xiv</sup> **Job 14:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> “Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble.

<sup>xv</sup> **2 Corinthians 7:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy.

<sup>xvi</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *James, Faith that Works*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), p 18.

<sup>xvii</sup> **Isaiah 48:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction.

<sup>xviii</sup> **Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

<sup>xix</sup> **Ephesians 6:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;

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<sup>xx</sup> **Romans 10:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

<sup>xxi</sup> Philo cited in Hiebert

<sup>xxii</sup> **Philippians 1:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

<sup>xxiii</sup> David Guzik, *James*, David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible (Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, 2013), Jas 1:2–4

<sup>xxiv</sup> **Romans 8:37 (ESV)**

<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

<sup>xxv</sup> **Galatians 5:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

<sup>xxvi</sup> **Romans 3:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

<sup>xxvii</sup> **2 Thessalonians 3:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.

<sup>xxviii</sup> **2 Thessalonians 3:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.

<sup>xxix</sup> **John 10:28-29 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

<sup>xxx</sup> **2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

<sup>xxxi</sup> **James 2:26 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

<sup>xxxii</sup> **Luke 8:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> **Matthew 10:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> **Matthew 24:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

<sup>xxxv</sup> **Job 2:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> **Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> **John 3:29 (ESV)**

<sup>29</sup> The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> **1 Peter 4:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, <sup>2</sup> so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.

<sup>xxxix</sup> **Romans 12:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.