The Results of Facing Trials with Faith!

James 1:12

**“Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”**

Good morning. I am so encouraged to see all of you this morning and especially feel honored that we can spend this second Sunday of advent together. In today’s message we will be looking specifically at chapter 1 verse 12 of the Epistle of James. So far in this epistle we have been talking a lot about trials and the way in which God uses the trials we face in this life to bring us into a better relationship with Him. Not only that, but God uses these trials to help mature us in the faith so that we may share our faith with others. In verse 12 we will be discovering that there is a reward we can expect to receive if we stay patient in our trials.

**“Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial;”**

The first part of this verse that is important to note is that James is talking about perseverance, which means that the trials of this life are something that we can expect to hit us at any time and at any season of our life. When we face those with patience and with a humble heart God promises us rewards for that steadfast faith. In the first statement of this verse, we read “blessed is the man who perseveres under trial.” This has a very similar format and rhythm to one of the beatitudes that Jesus taught in His Sermon on the Mount. For each beatitude there is a blessing for a believer in God having a particular attitude in this life. James tells his readers that it is a blessing to have the attitude of facing trials with patience. Not only are believers in Christ encouraged to have patience as they endure trials, but this patience comes in the form of perseverance, which means that the believer in Christ has withstood all these trials without having lost their faith. Just as we discussed last time, having to endure a trial does not mean that God has cursed someone, rather He is using those trials to help the believer become more mature in their faith. The Apostle Peter in his first epistle has this to say regarding the trials of this life “In this your greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while , if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith , being more precious than gold which perishes though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ…” (1 Peter 1:6-7). Peter confirms the teaching of James that persevering under trials is a proof of faith and has more value to God than any other precious mineral in the earth.

**“for once he has been approved,”**

This leads us to the second aspect of this verse which mentions that when a man has withstood the trials of life this will result in approval by God. So, the question we need to ask is “What does it mean to be approved by God?” The approval we are speaking of in this situation is the promise of eternal life that God offers all of those who place their faith in the saving power of Jesus Christ. When a person goes through their entire life facing trials without losing their faith they will be approved by God at the end. Jesus taught that reaching the end of life and finding eternal life is not something that all people will experience. In the Gospel of Matthew, He says “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is narrow and the way is constricted that leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matt. 7:13-14). What we learn here is that reaching the gates of heaven is not easy and it is few who will find their way there. Jesus is the only one who can get us there and if we follow Him we will have to be willing to bear our crosses with Him so that we may be honored by God. Even though it may seem that the trials of this life will never end we must take heart and encourage each other with the good news that this life is not all that there is. Our God has promised us a crown of life if we remain faithful to Him and His Word.

**“he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”**

The crown of life that James is speaking of here is mentioned many times in other parts of Scripture. The Apostles Peter and Paul use this phrase in their epistles as well. Let us first look at how the Apostle Paul describes this crown of life as he was nearing the end of his life on this earth. *“…in the future there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8).* Paul is telling Timothy his young friend that staying faithful through the challenges of life has a great benefit for all, they will be rewarded with the gift of eternal life in the presence of Christ. This reward cannot be overstated, because it will be so great that it will make all the challenges of this life seem like nothing.

The Apostle Peter also addresses the crown of life in his first epistle. In chapter 5 verse 4 he writes *“And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”* Both Apostles make it clear that staying loyal to Christ in this life comes with a marvelous reward that is so hard to describe that they liken it to a reward that an athlete back in that time would receive when they won a great race. A crown would be placed on their head, which resulted in that person being treated with reverence and respect.

As we near the conclusion to this verse James makes another statement we must take a few moments to analyze. He says that the crown of life is awarded to those who love God. Why does loving God play such a big role in this verse? What we need to understand is that those who love God will obey His Words because they understand that everything God does reflects His love for them. God has shown so much love to us by sending us His one and only Son to give His life for our salvation. That love for His creation does deserve payback, which we can do through the way we live our lives. If we truly love God we will want to live for Him and we know that living for Him will allow us to be with Him forever in His heavenly kingdom. If a man does not love God do you think he would want to be in His presence for all of eternity? I would surely believe not. Frank Turek, a contemporary Christian Apologist, has expressed the point this way “Our God loves us so much that He will not force us to be in His presence for all of eternity against our will.” God does not force Himself on us, rather He stands at the door of our hearts asking for us to let Him in. When we open the door and allow Him in He is willing to work His will in our lives, which will then result in our salvation and eternal life with Him forever.

**Application**

How can we go through the trials of life without losing our faith? Here are a couple of points to keep in mind when we face a trial in this life:

1. **We must not fall into the trap of this world’s thinking that everyone who faces a trial has been cursed by God.** This world is suffering from many evils because it is a world full of sin and rebellion against God. Therefore, when man rejects God and decides to go his own way there will be consequences to that choice. In Romans 1 Paul explains carefully what happens to mankind when they reject God. He begins in the chapter by explaining that all mankind knows that God exists because He has provided adequate proof of that fact. However, man chose to go his own way and then this resulted in a depraved (or sinful) mind. Beginning in verse 21 *“For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their reasonings, and their senseless hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible mankind, of birds, four footed animals, and crawling creatures. Therefore, God gave them up to vile impurity in the lusts of their hearts, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them” (vv. 21-24).* What we learn from Paul is that the trials of this life are the result of mankind rejecting God. Our God loves His creation so much that when it rejects Him and says it no longer wants Him to be a part of it He allows it to try to get through things on its own. A forceful God would say you have to accept me, or I will send bolts of lightning down to get your attention, as we often read in mythology. So, when we face a trial we need to remember that these trials are the result of man’s rejection of God. We must hold ourselves accountable, not spend our time blaming God for all the problems in this world.
2. **The goal, when facing a trial, is not to escape it to improve our life. The goal is to face those trials with faith knowing that when we do there is a crown of life awaiting those who have kept their faith in Christ despite those trials.** In this fallen world trying to explain this concept to someone who is going through a trial in life is not an easy thing to do. This is especially hard when helping someone who may be enduring a health crisis such as cancer when that person has been a faithful follower of Christ their entire life. We have a tendency as followers of Christ to sometimes believe that we should be sheltered from such trials. Instead of making this about us we need to focus on what this teaches us regarding the faithfulness of God. Going through a health trial like cancer with security in God and our faith intact teaches those around us that we do not allow the circumstances of this world to shake our faith in our Holy God. When others see that rock solid faith they will be so impressed by it that they will want to know where that faith comes from. Let us faithfully serve our Lord by showing our faith to others so they will want to come to know Him better.

**Conclusion**

Trials in this life, even though they may at times seem unbearable, serve a very important role in the life of a believer in Christ. When we face these challenges God uses them to mature us in the faith, He also uses them to show us the results of sin and to teach us to depend on Him, but He also uses them through us as a testimony of our faith. We must be diligent to face these tough times with humility and thankfulness knowing that when we do we are promised a future hope in glory that surpasses all our understanding. We worship a just and loving God who will take care of those who have faithfully persevered through trials in His name. As we prepare our hearts for the arrival of the Messiah let us remember that through His sufferings Christ opened the gates of heaven for all to enter who seek eternal life in His name. Let us pray.