

Audio file

[9925gsm_james_1_v1-4-2.mp3](#)

Transcript

00:00:00

Please turn with me in the New Testament to the Epistle of James and chapter 1.

00:00:07

James chapter 1 and reading the first part of this chapter.

00:00:15

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the 12 tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

00:00:25

My brethren, count it all joy.

00:00:29

when ye fall into diverse temptations.

00:00:33

Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience, but let patience have our perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting or lacking nothing.

00:00:49

If any of you lack wisdom, let a man ask of God, that it giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.

00:00:59

and it shall be given him.

00:01:01

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.

00:01:05

For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed.

00:01:11

For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.

00:01:18

A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.

00:01:23

Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted.

00:01:28

But the rich, in that he is made low, because as the flower of the grass, he shall pass away.

00:01:38

For the sun is no sooner risen with the burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth.

00:01:48

And the grace of the fashion of it perisheth, so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

00:01:56

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for whom, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

00:02:13

And the Lord will bless his word to our hearts.

00:02:18

Now we're continuing this journey through James this morning.

00:02:24

And this word suffering is brought before us, or trials.

00:02:29

And we'll see in a moment how this applies to those in the mind of the writer James.

00:02:39

But as we turn to this passage, let me just share this fact.

00:02:43

According to researchers, the 20th century was the worst to be a Christian, a believer in Christ.

00:02:54

Perhaps the 21st century will outstrip the persecutions and executions of believers.

00:03:05

We live in very strange times where the Lord's people are not only despised but marginalised, and the hatred that some have to the Lord's people has intensified over the last few decades.

00:03:24

The Apostle James knows what it is to, sorry, the Apostle James knew what it was to suffer, and this writer James, the brother of our Lord, also knew what it was to suffer.

00:03:37

So did the people who he was writing to.

00:03:41

Now I'm just going to give a brief overview of this epistle, and then we look at the first, verses 1 to 4.

00:03:50

First of all, chapter 1.

00:03:54

James pastorally comforts those in trials, we'll see more of that this morning, and in temptations, even in the spiritual struggles we all have with sin and temptation.

00:04:10

In chapter 2, there are various expositions or examples of tests of faith

00:04:18

and we'll work through those.

00:04:19

In chapter 3, there's a focus on the practical, worked out faith of the believer.

00:04:27

In chapter 4, there's a highlight on the wars, the spiritual battle that we face as believers, focusing on Satan and the remedies to this temptations.

00:04:44

And chapter 5 is about perseverance

00:04:48

and faith.

00:04:50

Now, what is this portion before us this morning?

00:04:55

We, well, last time, if you remember, I know it was a little while ago, we looked at three things.

00:05:03

We looked at who the identity of the author was, James, the brother of our Lord.

00:05:09

We raised 4 possibilities, and each one we showed that they could not be the man who wrote this

00:05:17

epistle.

00:05:19

The second part was about the receivers, those who received this epistle, the original congregation that received this epistle.

00:05:28

And we saw certain things about these men and women.

00:05:31

They were scattered, they were suffering, they were dispersed, and they were despised.

00:05:39

And the third thing we saw, just very briefly, was the purpose of this epistle, or purposes,

00:05:46

of this epistle.

00:05:49

And if you remember those purposes, we'll come back to those as we look at this study together.

00:05:58

Perhaps surprisingly, as you read this epistle for yourself, you might be surprised to discover that the first application of the writer James is not doctrinal, nor

00:06:16

Is it theological?

00:06:18

It's practical.

00:06:20

Perhaps even pastoral.

00:06:25

He has in his mind those whom he's writing to.

00:06:31

He's separated from them.

00:06:34

His affection and his love for them has not dwindled with the distance between them.

00:06:40

And he reaches out to them under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit,

00:06:46

to encourage them, to strengthen them in their faith, to fortify their resolve to continue in the faith once delivered to the saints, as Jude says.

00:07:00

And that should be an encouragement to us.

00:07:03

The Bible does not ignore suffering believers.

00:07:08

The Bible does not eradicate suffering.

00:07:14

It doesn't give us

00:07:15

a pill, if you like, that we can swallow and get rid of all the suffering in the world.

00:07:22

That's not the Bible's way.

00:07:25

The Bible is realistic.

00:07:28

The Bible deals with subjects head on.

00:07:34

It's not a philosophical treatment on suffering.

00:07:39

It's pastoral and it's wonderful.

00:07:44

The phrase that we have before us in verse 2 begins with, my brethren, we'll see this in a moment, count it all joy when ye fall into diverse temptations.

00:08:03

The word temptation here, immediately we might think of the temptations we all have.

00:08:11

Some of us are tempted to things that others would never even be dreaming of.

00:08:17

Some are tempted to shop too long, especially this time of year.

00:08:21

Others of us couldn't imagine shopping very long at all.

00:08:26

Some of us might be tempted to buy new clothes.

00:08:30

Others would never be tempted to buy new clothes.

00:08:34

Some of us might be tempted to have the latest gadget, the latest electronic gadget.

00:08:41

Others wouldn't care less if there was ever another gadget.

00:08:47

You see, temptations for us, immediately the word is, oh, that means I'm tempted to sin.

00:08:53

I gave you illustrations of covetousness because it's something nobody ever talks about.

00:08:58

Everybody focuses on those things that seem to be much more heinous, but this is much more common.

00:09:06

The temptation here is not to sin.

00:09:09

We'll see that later on in this chapter.

00:09:13

Temptation could be translated as trial.

00:09:16

The Greek word is perasmos, periasmos.

00:09:20

And in the original Greek, James was an excellent Greek scholar.

00:09:26

He gives alliteration of four P's, even in this one little section from verses 2 to 4.

00:09:36

Periasmus speaks of affliction.

00:09:39

It speaks of suffering.

00:09:41

It speaks of being pressed in.

00:09:45

And that's the idea that James has in his mind as he seeks to encourage these believers.

00:09:54

But also, these temptations are for a purpose.

00:09:59

They're God-given.

00:10:01

God has ordained these temptations or these trials, and I will refer to them as trials from now on.

00:10:08

to purify his people, to test his people whether their faith is genuine, and to prove to them that he is greater than their trials.

00:10:25

The Puritans often spoke of the danger in sinning and suffering and trials.

00:10:32

Temptation, one man says, never means simply affliction.

00:10:38

but in every case conveys the idea of a moral trial or a test of character.

00:10:46

So how does James begin?

00:10:49

Look at the word my brethren.

00:10:53

My brethren.

00:10:55

And under the heading, this is the reality of suffering.

00:10:59

The reality of suffering.

00:11:02

My brethren.

00:11:04

What a beautiful term.

00:11:06

Here he's thinking of his brothers and sisters in Christ.

00:11:10

He uses this word, Adelphoi, 15 times in this short epistle.

00:11:17

Five chapters, 15 times.

00:11:22

He loves the people he's writing to.

00:11:25

He longs to be with them.

00:11:27

Whether he ever got to see some of them again, we don't know.

00:11:33

But before he discusses the matter of trials,

00:11:37

He doesn't say, brethren, he says, my brethren.

00:11:43

My brethren.

00:11:45

You see, immediately he's identifying with them.

00:11:48

He's saying, I understand you're going through trials and suffering for the Lord, but I'm with you in heart.

00:11:57

I'm with you in spirit.

00:12:00

I'm with you through it.

00:12:03

In other words, he's probably implying, I'm praying for you.

00:12:07

I long to be with you, I can't be, so I'll send this epistle to you, and I trust it will encourage you.

00:12:18

know they often quote this text, well some people quote this text, a cup of cold water from a far country.

00:12:27

You know what a message from the Lord's people to a suffering believer means to them?

00:12:32

We as pastors understand this.

00:12:36

We go to somebody who's suffering, perhaps not suffering for their faith, but just suffering.

00:12:41

And they show you this letter, this card they got from a fellow believer, perhaps overseas.

00:12:49

It means the world.

00:12:50

And so it was for these believers.

00:12:54

They received this epistle from James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem.

00:13:01

And they're encouraged straight away by this little phrase,

00:13:05

My brethren, he is with them.

00:13:09

He owns them.

00:13:11

He identifies them.

00:13:13

And can I say he loves them in the Lord.

00:13:17

My brethren, but then notice something else.

00:13:22

Count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations.

00:13:27

The Bible does not hide the truth that suffering is real.

00:13:33

In Philippians 1.29, Paul writes to the church at Philippi, for unto you it is given on the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.

00:13:48

In 1 Timothy 4, verse 10, he writes to Timothy, who's the pastor of Ephesus, but in mind as the apostle Paul's, in apostle Paul's mind,

00:14:02

are the people at Ephesus, the believers, and therefore he writes, for therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe.

00:14:19

Friends, our Bible does not hide the fact we will go through trials.

00:14:23

It highlights its reality, yet it does not dwell on our suffering.

00:14:29

Nothing in the Bible is surreal

00:14:33

It doesn't belittle suffering.

00:14:35

Our God doesn't say, well, suffering isn't important or suffering is so small.

00:14:40

Yes, in a way we need to think about this next time on Count It All Joy, but as we go through suffering, God does not say to us, well, cheer up, get on, and, well, the old phrase was,

00:14:57

pull yourself up by your bootstraps.

00:14:58

But we don't wear bootstraps anymore.

00:15:00

No one pulls themselves up.

00:15:02

But that's the phrase I remember my grandfather saying to me when I was a little boy.

00:15:09

The only biblical, the only way the Bible sees suffering is as part of God's plan and purpose, particularly for his people.

00:15:20

And secondly, examples of suffering believers.

00:15:25

Job is probably the best Old Testament example.

00:15:28

When the Bible records his suffering, how he loses so much, humanly speaking, but he doesn't lose his faith.

00:15:38

And he doesn't sin against God because in Job 2 and verse 10, the book, these words, in all this did not Job sin with his lips.

00:15:53

I don't know if all of us could say that when we go through trial.

00:15:57

Paul is another great example in the New Testament.

00:16:01

He suffered a thorn in the flesh.

00:16:04

And yet Paul doesn't ignore the suffering.

00:16:08

He prays that the Lord would remove the suffering.

00:16:11

And yet the Lord in his infinite wisdom tells the Apostle Paul, my strength is made perfect in your weakness.

00:16:24

You see, having examples of suffering believers should encourage believers.

00:16:31

Indeed, the one who suffered most of all was our Lord Jesus Christ.

00:16:38

It's prophesied his suffering in Psalm 22, verses 6 to 8.

00:16:43

It's also repeated or delineated in Isaiah 50 verse 6, but perhaps the clearest picture we have of Christ's suffering in Isaiah 53.

00:16:58

In Matthew 16.21, our Lord Jesus predicts his suffering, the suffering at Calvary, but his whole life was a life of suffering, even in his birth.

00:17:11

Even in his infancy, he was endangered and his life was under threat.

00:17:18

He was despised and rejected by his own village, Nazareth.

00:17:26

He was hated by the chief priest and by the priests, by a few from the Sanhedrin.

00:17:34

But our Lord Jesus is not just an example of suffering.

00:17:38

His sufferings were redemptive.

00:17:40

He suffered to pay the price for our sins on the cross of Calvary.

00:17:47

And lastly, under this heading, suffering only has, sorry, suffering has a limit.

00:17:55

God permits suffering for his purpose and according to our needs.

00:18:04

Or better, God permits suffering because he has a purpose in our suffering.

00:18:10

He has a purpose in the suffering of believers this morning in Nigeria.

00:18:15

Though it's horrendous, though it's terrible, though it's unimaginable for us, he has a purpose in it.

00:18:24

He is proving and refining his believers, his church.

00:18:30

Indeed, the old church fathers would have said, the seed, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

00:18:40

Isn't it fascinating that in places where great suffering is experienced by God's own people, the church is strong, it's thriving, it's growing, and it's having an impact on the society.

00:18:58

Perhaps that's why in the West we're not seeing a great impact on the people around us.

00:19:04

Perhaps in time some of us will go through times of suffering for the Lord.

00:19:10

Be encouraged.

00:19:11

Even if we do, the Lord will preserve us in the suffering.

00:19:16

The second heading this morning is types of trials.

00:19:20

The first was the reality of the trials for suffering believers.

00:19:24

Secondly, the types of trials.

00:19:26

And this little phrase, diverse temptations.

00:19:30

Diverse means different or various.

00:19:35

It's translated in different ways and other versions of the Bible, but it takes many forms.

00:19:42

It's outward and inward.

00:19:46

It's seen and unseen.

00:19:49

It's visible and invisible.

00:19:52

Some are short-lived and tense and painful.

00:19:57

Others are slow burners, wearing us down and weighing us down.

00:20:05

The long-term suffering perhaps is more burdensome than the intense, sharp suffering.

00:20:13

This suffering can take three...

00:20:18

There's 3 main types.

00:20:20

There's open persecution for believers.

00:20:23

There's the anti-Christian government who despise and hate the Lord's own people.

00:20:31

The 5 most persecuting nations or countries in the last 50 or 60 years have been communist dictatorships.

00:20:44

If you read the history of the Lord's people in these places, you will read of millions of believers being executed, not because they were opposing the government, it's because the government hated believers.

00:21:02

Communism is no friend of Christianity, never has been, never will be.

00:21:07

Communism ultimately sees the reality.

00:21:11

When A Christian worships the one true God, communist leaders get worried.

00:21:20

Because they no longer are controlled by the state.

00:21:27

They are controlled, they are governed

00:21:31

They have a higher authority, God himself.

00:21:38

Open persecution from anti-Christian government also takes a second form, anti-Christian religion.

00:21:46

If you read the history of the Christian Church over the last 2,000 years, it's one great catalogue or litany of suffering for the faith.

00:22:00

Ever since the Reformation, millions of believers have been executed by the Church of Rome.

00:22:09

And we need to realise these things.

00:22:12

We need to realise that history tells a different story to the airbrushed news media of our day.

00:22:24

Our fellow brothers and sisters this morning are suffering

00:22:29

for their faith.

00:22:31

What a thing it would be if they knew that we were praying for them.

00:22:36

Perhaps even communicate to them that we're praying for them.

00:22:42

The other aspect of open persecution is an anti-Christian society.

00:22:49

Those of a previous generation didn't know anything about an anti-Christian society, but we live in one today.

00:22:57

We live in one which is entirely, is increasingly becoming not only antagonistic, but seeing Christians as a threat, Bible-believing Christians.

00:23:11

Not because we're strong militarily, not because we're there to cause disruption, but because of what we believe and who we follow.

00:23:26

There's secondly, there's the third, there's obvious personal trials that believers suffer.

00:23:34

So firstly, we saw the reality of trials.

00:23:38

They're real.

00:23:39

They do exist.

00:23:41

Temptations and suffering and affliction is real.

00:23:44

In context, this is for suffering believers for Christ, but the application can be widened.

00:23:51

Secondly, we saw the types of trials.

00:23:54

They're various, they're diverse, they're different.

00:23:59

They're even different for each person.

00:24:02

And 3rd, for this morning, we're going to look at the purpose of trials.

00:24:08

What does James say in verse 3?

00:24:11

Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience, but that patience have a perfect work, that he may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

00:24:26

The word worketh, we look in a moment, but it's more to do with experience of trials brings endurance.

00:24:35

God has a purpose.

00:24:36

There is a work in, God is working through our trials.

00:24:42

That's the whole point James has here.

00:24:45

And the word perfect doesn't mean what we might think.

00:24:53

It doesn't mean that we're perfect, that there are no flaws in us.

00:25:01

The word here has more to do with complete.

00:25:04

It's entire.

00:25:06

Notice the word he reuses.

00:25:08

The trying of your faith worketh patience, but let patience have a perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

00:25:18

In other words, believers suffer

00:25:22

trials to purify us and to make us complete.

00:25:29

That's not the message you might hear in certain quarters, but it is the Bible's message.

00:25:36

Trying speaks of purifying.

00:25:39

If you think of a silversmith, he doesn't just take the first product from the furnace.

00:25:44

He takes, he purifies it again and again and again.

00:25:48

And so it is with the Lord's purpose.

00:25:52

He's like the great silversmith, and he purifies us and refines us.

00:25:58

Now, there are 7 purposes I want to outline, and I'm just going to mention them very briefly.

00:26:03

Sometimes God is taking corrective action because of our sin and disobedience in our trials.

00:26:13

You find this in Hebrews chapter 12, verses 5 to 11.

00:26:17

Secondly, often God

00:26:21

permits us to suffer trials for instruction, to teach us that pain is part of life, but also to teach us that we are sharing in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.

00:26:35

Not that our sufferings can contribute anything to our salvation or to Christ's work at Calvary, but they are for instruction.

00:26:45

Third,

00:26:47

And you might have thought of this.

00:26:48

The Lord allows us to go through trials for the faith, so we learn how to respond in faith.

00:26:59

We see things from a different perspective.

00:27:03

Think of our Lord Jesus, who learned obedience from the things which he suffered.

00:27:09

Our goal should not be to relief from suffering, but to learn

00:27:16

God's purposes in our suffering.

00:27:20

Fourth, God permits us to suffer so that our lives will be a witness to others.

00:27:29

Think of two type of people here.

00:27:32

First, a fellow believer.

00:27:36

Paul writes to the church at Corinth in 2 Corinthians 1, 3 to 5,

00:27:42

And he says that they should comfort others wherewith the comfort they have been comforted.

00:27:47

Where do they get the comfort from?

00:27:50

God himself.

00:27:53

As we suffer, we are witnessing God's grace and comfort to us in our suffering to others.

00:28:02

Fifth, we need to remind ourselves that Christ did not evade

00:28:10

suffering.

00:28:10

He did not avoid suffering.

00:28:12

But in Hebrews 12 and verse 2, he endured the cross, despising the shame.

00:28:19

Why?

00:28:20

Because of the glory that was ahead of him.

00:28:26

Sixth, remember our suffering is brief.

00:28:28

We'll pick up this next week.

00:28:31

And that all our lives can be, as it were, squeezed into a very, very, very short time zone.

00:28:39

What is 70 to 80 years, maybe even 90 years, compared to eternity?

00:28:47

Even if we go through weeks and months of suffering, our suffering will end and glory awaits us.

00:28:57

Seventh and finally, God's purpose in suffering in this world is to conform us to Christ.

00:29:07

I like to think of God as the great potter who takes this clay and he puts it on his wheel of sovereignty and purpose and he molds us and shapes us and refines us.

00:29:23

But that might not be strong enough.

00:29:26

Perhaps we should think ourselves as a rough piece of diamond just dug out of the ground.

00:29:33

We're not very much to look at.

00:29:36

Have you ever seen a picture of a diamond before it is refined and before the diamond cutter comes along and cuts it in the right shape?

00:29:47

That's what God is doing with us.

00:29:48

He's conforming us.

00:29:50

He's molding us.

00:29:51

He is shaping us.

00:29:54

All things work together for good, for those that love God.

00:30:02

They're called according to his purpose.

00:30:08

So as we go through suffering, even if it's suffering, agony or pain or trial or difficulty, we need to remember that God has a purpose in that suffering.

00:30:25

God will carry us through.

00:30:27

Or as Isaiah says, he will bear us up on eagle's wings.

00:30:34

Sometimes, you know,

00:30:36

We think our suffering will never end.

00:30:41

Let's remember that God not only has a purpose in our suffering, but there's an expiry date in our suffering.

00:30:51

Our suffering will end.

00:30:52

Some of it will subside and we won't suffer as much, but soon it will end forever.

00:31:00

And that's what encouraged the Lord's people

00:31:04

no doubt, as they went through suffering.

00:31:07

And I'm sure it will encourage us.

00:31:10

How we respond to suffering for Christ will be a testimony and a witness to an unbelieving world.

00:31:19

Think of those in concentration camps and in places like North Korea for their faith.

00:31:29

What a witness they're bearing.

00:31:32

what bright light they are to their, even to their, the guards there.

00:31:40

Who knows whether out of that great hardship and suffering, God can bring even some of those cruel, cruel prison guards to Christ.

00:31:54

He's done it in the past.

00:31:56

You know the various stories of men who

00:32:00

were terrible.

00:32:01

There was one man who was a terrible Japanese commandant, and yet the Lord in His grace converted that man.

00:32:11

I won't even try to pronounce his name.

00:32:15

And as he, how do you describe his conversion?

00:32:19

Well, it was by the testimony of believers who, though they were persecuted for their faith,

00:32:29

They never denied their Saviour.

00:32:32

We may not be called to suffer in such a way, but let us be witnesses and examples to an unbelieving world of our faith in Jesus Christ, and that all our sufferings, and even tell those we know, will end when we go to be with him.

00:32:52

forever.

00:32:53

Let us pray.

00:32:54

Our gracious God and loving Father, we're so thankful that indeed thy word is so true and such a help to us.

00:33:03

We thank thee, O Lord, for this word from the Scriptures, and we pray that thou would encourage us and strengthen us and even embolden us to stand for the Saviour in these days.

00:33:18

We pray thy blessing upon us now in Christ's name.

00:33:22

Amen.