

Audio file

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Transcript

00:00:01

Turning this morning to the epistle of James in chapter 1.

00:00:07

James chapter 1 verse 9.

00:00:12

James 1 and verse 9.

00:00:15

Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted, but the rich in that he is made low, because as the flower of the grass, he shall pass away.

00:00:27

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

00:00:38

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

00:00:45

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

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The Lord will add his blessing to the reading of his word.

00:01:01

Now this morning we're going to focus on this one verse, verse 12.

00:01:08

James chapter 1 and verse 12.

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And as you know, as we go through this journey with James, we're going to learn certain things that will help us in our Christian life.

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One thing we have learned so far is that suffering is part of following Christ.

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That might not seem very palatable.

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It might not seem very acceptable.

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It certainly may not seem very encouraging.

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But we can look at it like this.

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At least we're told the truth, that as Christians, we will suffer.

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Some will suffer a pain

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Some will suffer physically, some will suffer in many ways, others will suffer for Christ.

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And in this context, that's the idea here behind this text and behind this section of James' epistle, that it's for those who are suffering for Christ.

00:02:12

Remember, he's writing to believers who are struggling.

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And although we're not struggling in the way these

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believers where, we can learn some lessons that will help us.

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Now I just want to focus on this text for a very simple reason.

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I want us to see that it is worth pressing on, though times are difficult.

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So if you like, it's got a pastoral application, straight away.

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It's worth pressing on, it's worth persevering.

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But we also need to remember, as those who hold to the doctrines of grace, that the doctrine of perseverance is only for God's chosen people.

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It's only for those who are elect in Christ.

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And therefore, if we're believers, the Lord will keep us in our perseverance.

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This is so important.

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Some people think that they need to persevere with all of their might.

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And in a sense, we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

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But in another sense, we are preserved in our perseverance.

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It's all of grace from beginning to end.

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I also want you to pick out this word blessed.

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It's not happy.

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I know, in some commentaries,

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It's this idea that the man is happy or the person is happy.

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Happiness is like the tide.

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It ebbs and flows.

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Happiness is intense sometimes and it wanes.

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Happiness is completely different to being blessed.

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The world speaks about happiness.

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The world loves its

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pronouncing happiness on people.

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In certain cultures, there's the New Year, and it's all about happiness.

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This time of year is the Chinese New Year.

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But happiness is different to blessedness.

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Blessing can only be conferred by Almighty God.

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Blessings.

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And we'll see in a moment where James is getting some of this inspiration from.

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Now, some try to buy happiness.

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But even the world, in its wisdom, tells us you can't buy happiness.

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Happiness cannot be bought.

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So the Christian needs to think in a different way.

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Now, it's not wrong for a Christian to be happy.

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That's not what I'm saying.

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Sometimes it's good to be happy.

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We can't all go around with miserable faces as long as your arm.

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So we need to be happy sometimes.

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But often, the world misconstrues happiness and doesn't understand that blessing is what the Christian has.

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Even the worldly Christians

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and the worldly church promote happiness.

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But the Bible speaks about blessedness.

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Friends, let me remind you of what it is to be blessed.

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To know God is a blessing.

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To know that we are His children by adoption is a blessing.

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To know that Christ Jesus is our Savior, our Redeemer, our Shepherd, the Captain of our salvation.

00:06:00

is a blessing.

00:06:01

To know the Holy Spirit is within us and working through us is a blessing.

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To have the Word of God is a blessing.

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To know that God has a purpose and a plan for each one of His beloved children is a blessing, and so much more besides.

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Now, just a moment.

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Last week we looked at the previous section and we looked at the idea of the poor being raised up or exalted, the rich being humbled, and both being reminded of the fact that life is very short.

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And I just had this little phrase, I found this this week.

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The poor man's sorrows and miseries are over.

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The rich man's riches are eaten up and his life is no more.

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What about the believers?

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What about the believers?

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What have we to look forward to?

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This is where James helps us.

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He speaks about a crown of life.

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Now, I've divided this verse into three sections.

00:07:10

Number one, it is a reward.

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The crown of life, that's the title of our message, is a reward.

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Look at this, Blessed is the man that endureth temptation.

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Now, of course, as soon as you see the word blessed, you know that this

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is a phrase that's common in the New Testament.

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It's also mentioned in the Old Testament.

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But you, I'm sure, you immediately thought of those famous blessednesses or those famous Beatitudes of our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 5.

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And it's so important that you realize that James here is not teaching anything novel.

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He's teaching something that's got a consistency and it's got a basis and it's got a context.

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If you look at the Beatitudes, you will see that the Lord Jesus speaks about being blessed even when you're persecuted for righteousness' sake.

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And why does James speak of this blessedness?

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It is a blessing, that's the first thing.

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It's a blessing to be a Christian, but it's also a blessing to endure temptation.

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What's the word here?

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Of course, we know that temptations can be negative, but in this sense, it's not speaking about temptations in leading to sin.

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That's in the next section.

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Next week, we'll look at that, God willing.

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But the word temptation here is to do with trial.

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It's to do with suffering.

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And the idea here is the blessed man is not the man who suffers, but he endures suffering.

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He perseveres.

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He or she presses on.

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He endures it to the end.

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He doesn't give up halfway.

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This word trial is to do with refining or temptation.

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When He is tried.

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When He is tried.

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Notice it's not if He is tried.

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It's when.

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It's expected.

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Of course, this is biblical Christianity.

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This is basic.

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As a Christian, we will be tried.

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As a Christian, we will be refined.

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As a true believer, we will go through trials.

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Peter uses this phrase in the original language, and it speaks of having become approved.

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So it's a blessing to endure temptation and to be approved, to be proved, to be genuine.

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How necessary this is!

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Some friends think, even young Christians think, when they face trials that God has discarded them.

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Perhaps not completely, but He has left them aside.

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That's not the way.

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The Lord proves us, refines us, molds us, shapes us in suffering.

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The old writers speak a lot about the crucible of suffering, the valley of affliction.

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The valley of humiliation, where we have, as one man puts it, all those rough edges smooth away.

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And sadly, some of us still have quite a few rough edges.

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But the thing is, although we might be rough diamonds, one day we'll be beautiful jewels.

00:11:01

And it's all true suffering.

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All through refining, all through purifying.

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This word's so important.

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It's a blessing to endure trial because there's a purpose in it.

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But there's one other aspect in this.

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It's a promise.

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He's blessed as He endures.

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Some people have this idea that when we go through affliction and suffering, we

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It's almost as if the Lord is displeased with us.

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The psalmist says the opposite.

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The psalmist says that, The Lord is my light and my salvation.

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Whom shall I fear?

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And David there is going through trial.

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He's suffering for his convictions and for his faith and for his calling.

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And so it is with us.

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Notice that we're tried, we're going through trials, but it's a promise when He is tried.

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It's not forever.

00:12:11

There's an end date.

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There's an expiry date.

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There's a process that the Lord brings us into the trial, brings us into the refining process, and we come out the other side, hopefully more like the Lord.

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That's the intention.

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What's much more precious than fine gold?

00:12:38

Peter tells us, doesn't he?

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The trial of our faith being much more precious than of gold, 1 Peter 1 verse 7.

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It's the trial of our faith.

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It's much more precious than gold.

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It stood the test.

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That's the thing.

00:13:02

God brings us through trials so we are proved genuine believers.

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I remember one of our visiting preachers to our seminary many years ago now, and he said this, and we were quite shocked.

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He was a well-known preacher.

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And he said, if you men have never gone through a trial in your Christian faith,

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I doubt your salvation.

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Now, you might be shocked with that.

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And we were all men training for the ministry.

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And some were quite put out with that.

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But actually, in hindsight, he's right.

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Why do we go through trials?

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Well, we face three great enemies.

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The world and the devil are the outer enemies.

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But we also have the inner

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indwelling sins or the inner flesh, the corruptions from the old man, and they are constantly wrestling.

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But God in that proves our genuine faith.

00:14:11

It's when we are proved and refined that the Lord is pleased.

00:14:19

Job was tried and proved in Job chapter 5.

00:14:24

oh you can read this later verse 17 but let's move a little further if this is a blessing and there's a reality in suffering that's the point there's a reality there's a reality in suffering there's reality in this trial there's reality in this temptation there's reality in this refinement it's good to

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face reality sometimes.

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Some people like to live in a bubble.

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Some people like to live in their own little world.

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Some people like to live in their own universe.

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But the Bible's very realistic.

00:15:02

We are blessed as we endure temptation.

00:15:05

We're blessed as we endure trial.

00:15:08

We're blessed in the refining process.

00:15:11

Secondly, we've talked to the reality, secondly, the reward.

00:15:16

What will he receive?

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We endure, we press on, we persevere.

00:15:23

What will he receive?

00:15:26

He'll receive the crown of life.

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This little phrase is also repeated in Revelation in chapter two.

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And it's very interesting.

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in verse chapter 2 and verse 10 of the Book of Revelation fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison that you may be tried and you shall have tribulation 10 days be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life it's for suffering believers it's for a church that was under great persecution this is so crucial God will give his people a crown

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of life.

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Now, of course, let me say this from the outset.

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It's not a reward because of our worthiness.

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It's a reward that comes forth from God's sovereign goodness and grace.

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But nonetheless, it is a reward.

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We're not going to look at rewards this morning for believers, but I want you to just look at the verse and look at the word, the crown of life.

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This is a very important word.

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It's the word stephanos in the original language.

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Most say it's a garland wreath that the ancient Olympic athletes received after being victorious in the games.

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But others would say, Well, that's something that James would not want to draw attention to.

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And others would say that it's actually literally a crown of gold.

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Well, whatever way we look at it, it's a reward.

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It's a reward from Almighty God.

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It's a reward because of his goodness and grace, as I've said.

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Is it a crown of gold or silver?

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Does it have precious jewels?

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Is it like the most opulent crowns in the world, one worn by the royal sovereign king?

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or queen in a land in Great Britain, there's the crown jewels and there's the crown that they were at this coronation.

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I don't believe so.

00:17:42

I don't believe that that's what the Lord has promised.

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Notice the definite article here.

00:17:48

This is why it's so important to have the Bible open before you, receive their crown of life.

00:17:56

It's not a crown of life.

00:17:59

It's not just a selection of crowns.

00:18:02

It's their crown of life.

00:18:06

And the crown is the life promised.

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That's the point.

00:18:12

It's promised.

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It's guaranteed, can I put it that way?

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It's certain.

00:18:20

If we persevere to the end, even through many trials and tribulations and suffering and difficulties,

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We receive that crown of life.

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The life which is promised begins here.

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The life here is eternal life, eternal blessing, but it begins here on earth.

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People have this idea that they just continue in their Christian journey and eventually they get eternal life.

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No, no, no, no, no, the New Testament has a completely opposite approach.

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Eternal life begins here.

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Our Lord Jesus told us when eternal life begins, or how we know we have eternal life.

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In His high priestly prayer, He said, That they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent, that this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.

00:19:22

Eternal life begins here on earth.

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Knowing God, saved by the grace of God and Jesus Christ, having the Holy Spirit indwelling us.

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That's part of eternal life.

00:19:37

Knowing that the life of God is in the soul of men and women.

00:19:42

That is eternal life.

00:19:44

This eternal life is guaranteed to those who have eternal life here, and this crown is guaranteed to those who have already received eternal life on earth.

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Now, of course, the quality of our eternal life, as it were, is still tainted and stained.

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And that's the promise.

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That's why Christians are always looking forward.

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They're not always looking down.

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I hope they're not looking around too much.

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You won't find much inspiration there.

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But you're looking forwards, looking up, looking onwards, looking upwards, looking heavenwards.

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This is why the Christian presses on, why the Christian perseveres, why the believer is not the one who starts the Christian race well, but the one who finishes the Christian race well.

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It's a reward.

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And of course, it's not because of any worthiness in us, friends.

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It's all of grace.

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It's all of God's goodness and grace.

00:21:01

I believe, like the older writers, that the crown of life, the eternal life itself, consists in seeing, beholding Christ.

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That's the life.

00:21:15

That's the joy.

00:21:17

That's the heaven of heavens.

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That's the crown of life for the believer.

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to see Christ, to be with Christ, and to live in His presence forever.

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We will see Christ in glory.

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We will see Him.

00:21:35

What a reward.

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And you see, that's why it's so important not to always let the world press in upon you.

00:21:46

Let the circumstances

00:21:48

become like a great weight upon you and weigh you down.

00:21:51

Lift your eyes up and see that, behold, the Son of God will come soon, and He take us to be with Himself forever.

00:22:02

It's a reward of faith, and it's a reward from grace, and it's a reward that's guaranteed.

00:22:15

This should encourage us.

00:22:18

This crown of life should stir in us the desire to persevere.

00:22:23

It's not the one that starts the Christian race well and he does not finish.

00:22:29

No, the one that starts well and leaves the Christian race later, but the one that endures, starts running through temptation, sins, failures, suffering, affliction, and reaches the finishing line.

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They are the ones who receive

00:22:47

eternal life.

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This reward and reality and the reason.

00:22:56

What's the reason?

00:22:58

Them that love Him.

00:23:01

Them that love Him.

00:23:03

Those that love the Lord, that love God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but love God and Jesus Christ, are promised this crown of life.

00:23:17

Do we love Him?

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You see, it's interesting how James doesn't say those that know Him, or even those that believe in Him.

00:23:28

No, no, no, no.

00:23:30

He says those that love Him, and that those that love Him, and love Him in spite of their own failures, and love Him

00:23:43

when it seems times are difficult and trials come, and that love Him.

00:23:51

They love Him, not love the truths of the Christian gospel or the truths of the Christian faith, but love Christ Himself.

00:24:01

This is the key.

00:24:03

This is one of the key distinguishing marks between a religious-minded person or even a religious Christian and a true Christian.

00:24:13

The Lord Jesus says that if you love me, you will obey my commandments.

00:24:20

Not that if you obey my commandments, you love me.

00:24:24

It's interesting, isn't it?

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He puts the love for Him and obedience follows.

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And that's the Christian life in a nutshell.

00:24:35

Loving Christ, loving Him.

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Why should we love Him?

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Well, we love Him because He first loved us, of course.

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God loved us.

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In the deep mists of eternity, before time began, God loved His own.

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The Father, the Son, and the Spirit counseled forth a great plan of salvation to prove to those whom He loved.

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And He sent His Son.

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And His Son gave His life on Calvary's cross to save those people from their sin.

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And one of the outworkings of that would be the love of God will be shed forth, poured out in great abundance into the hearts of His people, those that love Him, those that love Him.

00:25:37

Ah, it's one thing to love the things about Christ, but it's quite another thing to love Christ Himself.

00:25:46

It's one thing to love the things of God, it's quite another to say, I love the Lord, my God.

00:25:55

Or as the psalmist says, I love the Lord because He hath heard me.

00:26:01

Because He hath heard me.

00:26:04

You read in the Old Testament of times where the Lord questions the devotion and love of His own.

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And so it is the reason that we receive this crown of life is because we love Christ.

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And we may feel our love is very poor and very weak.

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And we might even sit here and stand here and think, Oh my, my love is

00:26:33

Nothing like the love it should be.

00:26:37

But the fact that there's even a spark of love for Christ in our souls at all is evidence of true conversion.

00:26:46

Because normally, naturally, sinful man, sinful women, natural humankind do not love Christ.

00:26:58

They despise Him, they mock Him, they laugh at Him.

00:27:03

with a Christian.

00:27:05

Dear Christian, if we love Christ, then that crown of life is promised to us.

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But let me just conclude with five very quick truths here.

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And I just want to note them so that you have them.

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First of all, this crown is a blessing.

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Now, I've already expounded this, but it's a blessing.

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It's a blessing.

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Secondly, it's a promise.

00:27:37

It's a promise from God.

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Third, it is a crown of eternal life.

00:27:44

Eternal life begins here in the soul of God's own children, and then is realized in its fullness in glory to come.

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Fourth, this crown is from suffering.

00:28:00

it comes forth because we've gone through trial and suffered for our Lord and fifth it is a crown which is promised to us not for talking not for thought not for vows but it has recorded something done something we've done that honoring the Lord well we what will we do with these crowns if they're literal crowns what will we do with them

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Charles Wesley tells us what we should do with them.

00:28:35

We should take off those crowns and cast all our crowns before they lost in love and wonder and praise.

00:28:46

Oh, gracious God and loving Father, we pray as we have been reminded of the crown of life, the crown that we'll receive

00:28:57

When we see our Savior face to face, bless us, each one.

00:29:01

Keep us this day.

00:29:02

Keep us in the life of grace.

00:29:04

Keep us on the Christian pilgrimage.

00:29:06

Keep us running the race set before us.

00:29:09

Keep us, O Lord, pressing on towards the finish line.

00:29:12

Keep us, O Lord, in our perseverance.

00:29:14

May we know thy preservation.

00:29:16

Hear our prayers.

00:29:17

The grace of Christ Jesus our Lord be with us all.

00:29:21

Amen.