

The Trying of Your Faith

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[0 : 0 0] Now, beginning in our series in the book of James, we established last Wednesday evening that James, the brother of our Lord, and probably the eldest of the family after Jesus, had himself been, after his conversion, you might say, steeped in the law and the practice thereof, he had been effectively a Pharisee.

And as the earthly head, if we can say that, of the church in Jerusalem, he commanded huge authority and respect. And James here is writing to Jewish believers. We know this because the opening of the letter says it is to the 12 tribes which are scattered abroad greeting. Now, it doesn't mean literally 12 tribes of, you know, Judah, Isaac, or Zebulun, and so on. It is a certain generic term for those belonging to the tribes of Israel, the people of Israel. It is to Jewish believers scattered abroad throughout the Roman Empire.

And James is writing to them. Why is he taking time and trouble to write to them as opposed to simply focusing on Jerusalem itself where he was based? Well, one reason is probably that because the church in Jerusalem, as you may recollect from last Wednesday, had written explicitly to Gentile Christians with regard to what they did and didn't have to do.

[1 : 2 6] We read that they wrote letters, Acts 15, verse 23, by them after this manner, the apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia.

Saying to them, basically, they didn't have to keep the whole law of Moses, but as long as they abstained from fornication, from things strangled and from blood, and kept themselves from things offered to idols, then they would be, okay, just follow the gospel and the law would kind of fall into place behind it.

So the Gentiles had been written to. Now James is writing to Jewish Christians. Almost perhaps we might say to reassure them or to give them a message to themselves. Remember that in the early church context, Jewish heritage, the Jewish, if you like, lens through which everything was viewed, was the norm.

It was only gradually as the gospel spread out to Gentiles who received it that it became more non-Jewish. Remember the entire Old Testament, the entire New Testament except for two books, the Gospel according to St. Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, both written by Luke, the only Gentile contributor to the New Testament.

All the other authors of the New Testament books are themselves Jewish. And James is writing to Jews. And Peter is almost certainly writing to Jewish believers when he says, Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

[3 : 0 3] Now if you've got a map at the back of your Bible, you'll see that what sounds like a whole lot of different countries is in fact different areas of what is now Turkey. Pontus, Galatia, the center, Pontus on the northern Black Sea coast, Cappadocia, again the interior, Asia.

The far west of Turkey, Bithynia, again up on the Black Sea coast, the four corners of what is now Turkey. Let's see what he's writing to the strangers. That sounds like the heathen.

That sounds like the Gentiles. But you remember, or maybe you don't, but it says specifically in Galatians that it says when Paul was meeting the leaders of the church, it says when they saw, this is Galatians 2 verse 7, that the gospel of the uncircumcision, in other words the Gentiles, was committed unto me, that is Paul, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter.

For he that brought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles, that we should go to the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

He gave to me in Barnabas the right hand of fellowship. So Peter was in many ways the apostle for the Jews. James is the head, in terms of administration, of the church in Jerusalem.

[4 : 18] But he's writing to the Jews. Why does that matter? Well, okay, you've laboured that point a bit. Why are you going on about it? Well, one reason is this. Although we are not ourselves Jewish, we are Gentiles, and although we're not in the situation that the Jews inherited all the heritage and the culture of the covenant, and Abraham and the fathers and so on, there is a certain parallel between those who were steeped in the Old Testament traditions, heritage, laws, teaching, temples, sacrifice, sacraments, the whole thing.

This was their norm. This was their natural inheritance. And the Messiah coming, if you like, completed it, the last piece of the jigsaw. There is a parallel between that, over against those who were, as Gentiles, receiving the gospel for the first time.

And there's a parallel here between those who may have grown up with the things of the Lord. Many of us in these islands may have had the benefit of a Christian upbringing, where we were used to the Bible, the psalter, perhaps the catechism, perhaps family worship, morning and evening.

We became steeped, perhaps, in the things of God, the word of God, the worship of God, church being the norm. Prayer meeting, as you can see, falling away a lot, but there was a time when it wasn't.

And if this is our inheritance, if this is our cultural background, then when people do perhaps receive the kurum, when they are perhaps converted in touch, it's almost like the completion of a process, which, when you hear words of testimony, nobody, nobody will say, well, actually, it all began, bang, that day when I was converted.

[5 : 56] They will say, well, I can see, looking back, how the Lord was working in my life with godly grandparents, or a Sunday school teacher, or so-and-so that was a Christian in our village, or whatever, because it is all around them.

There is a clear parallel in the first century situation of Jewish Christians who've grown up with the background of the word of God over against Gentiles, to whom this was all completely new, over against, now in the 21st century, you've got those who maybe grew up in the church, and the word of God, and the ways, and the practices of worship, and are familiar with it, to whom, if they're converted, Christ is just the completion of it all, over against those who are maybe from a completely non-Christian background, and perhaps receiving the things of Christ for the first time. So, the word of God is completely applicable to our situation, whatever our background here, if James is writing to Jewish believers, for that in a 21st century situation, we should understand it to be applying to those who have grown up with the things of God.

Those who are familiar, or more familiar with the scriptures, the content, the gospel accounts, catechism, all that sort of thing. So, he is writing to them, and what's he writing about?

Count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations. Wow, bang, straight away, he's in there. Why is he suddenly doing this? Why is he beginning with that subject? Why not a long reeking about how he's encouraged, about how they're standing firm in the faith, as Paul does when he writes the Gentile churches?

[7 : 30] Clearly, the indication would be that James is responding. It would appear that James didn't just sort of wake up one day and say, I know what I'll do today. I'm really bored, so I think I'll write to all the Jewish believers that are scattered throughout the empire.

That's a good idea. How will I start? Well, let's talk about temptation. No, the likelihood is that the Jewish believers had been experiencing not only temptation, but trial, maybe persecution.

Perhaps they were suffering from their fellow Jews who were not converted, and they were beginning to wonder, well, if we're trying to be good, solid, upstanding Jews, just like they are, but the only difference is that we believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, why are we getting such a hard time with us?

You know, it shouldn't be this way. If we're obeying God, surely God should be honoring us. God should be standing with us. We should be protected from all this. And he says, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations.

Now, this right away at verse 2 would imply, we cannot state it authoritatively, but it would imply a responding to something. James is almost certainly writing a response to a situation already existing.

[8 : 46] He is giving his answer, as it were, as the visible representative head, in that sense, of the church in Jerusalem to Jewish believers who will recognize his name, his position, his authority, and will listen to all these servants.

And clearly, the primary subject, right at the top of the billboard, as far as these people are concerned, is the fact they are being persecuted. They are suffering. They're undergoing temptation and trial.

So he goes right in there. First of all, the greeting there, count it all joy. What you see as a disaster is, in fact, a blessing. And I think, well, James, how on earth can it possibly be a blessing?

He says, knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. These diverse temptations, or as Romans puts it, you know, it's tribulations.

It's translated in Romans 5, which if you don't have to turn with me to it, then we quote in Romans 5 here, from verse 3. Not only so, Paul writes in Romans, but we glory in tribulations also.

[9 : 51] And it's the same word, translated there as tribulations, and here as temptations. And what Paul writes there is, we glory in tribulations, just as James says, count it all joy when you fall into temptations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience.

Patience. And this is exactly what James is saying here, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. And Paul goes on to say, and patience, experience, or evidence, we might say, and experience, hope.

And hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us. And then he says this, key verse, for when we were yet without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly.

And he then goes on to the whole subject of justification by Christ alone. But he's giving the same message as James. You know, sometimes, over the course of church history, or theological discussion, people might suggest or imply, that James is writing a different message from Paul.

That Paul is saying, it's all by faith, it's all by grace. And James is perhaps saying, no, you've got to put the faith into practice. And implying, well, there's going to be a bit of law as well. It's not what he's saying.

[11 : 06] What Paul is trying to encourage people to do, is to say, look, it's not by your own works, it's by faith. And what James is doing, it's the other side of the same coin. Saying, yes, but the faith has to be put into practice.

Clearly, they are singing off the same, Sam, we'll say, we'll have a hint here. Singing off the same, H. They're giving the same message, because they're both saying, write it early on in their letters, count it all joy, you'll rejoice, and count it privilege, when you enter tribulation, Paul says.

Temptation, James says, it's the same word. Knowing this, that the trying of your faith, worketh patience. Now, the other thing that we've got to recognise here is, remember how we said, James is writing to those who are already believers.

And if there's a parallel with us in the 21st century, it's those perhaps who aren't brand new, fresh Christians out of nothing, but those who may have come to faith, through a Christian heritage.

And the sense here is not, the trying of your faith, doesn't mean, God's trying to see if you've actually got any. You know, if you're wondering if you're a Christian or not, just turn the screw a wee bit, put you under a wee bit of pressure, see if you crack or not.

[12 : 22] If you've got real faith, you'll hold up. If you don't, well, you'll crack, and it'll all be over, like the parable of the sword. No fruit, no growth, no nothing. No, he is writing to people who already have faith.

So let's get that bit into our heads first. James is not writing to would-be, possible converts. Do you think you've got faith? Well, let's put it under a bit of pressure, see if you've got any or not.

No, he's writing to people who have faith. And this is the testing, the trying, the exercising of their faith, which worketh patience.

It builds it up. Nowadays, you tend to see, you know, there's ever, I'll say, a sportsman, a footballer, takes his shirt off or something, or a model you see on TV, but for men's shampoo or anything, they won't just be an ordinary guy, they'll all be ribbed.

They'll have like, you know, muscles bulging out their shoulder, like washboard, stomach and abs and so on. Now, how do you get that? You don't get it by just writing your bed, reading a comic and watching TV.

[13 : 28] No, it has to be. What that? They'll have to be pumping iron for ages. They'll have to be straining in the gym and running like mad, whether out and about or on the treadmill or whatever.

They'll have to be lifting weights. They'll have to be watching what they eat. They'll have to be putting their bodies under pressure. And as their bodies are put under pressure, all the excess, the fat, whatever, that gets burned off, gets eaten away.

And the muscle tissue that tears under the strain puts another layer of protection on top. That's how the muscle gets built. By being strained, by being torn, by getting internally torn, put under pressure, and as though to, in layman's language, to heal the tear or the wound, the body puts another layer, instead of a glistle or muscle, on top of that internal wound.

And that's what makes it bulge out. So it's working on that, which you already have. You've already got faith, in other words, that people James is writing to. There's already something there.

It's got to be tested. It's got to be tried. It's like raw recruits with a sort of maybe sloppy, loose muscles and long hair and jeans coming into army boot camp.

[14 : 42] And the sergeant, the first thing he's going to do is send them off to the barbers, get them out of those city clothes, put them in a basic uniforms or camouflage, first of all, start running around the square, start running up that hill, get those 20 press-ups, get in the gym, do this, do that, so that all their softness will be burnt off.

These raw recruits need to be turned into soldiers. These new, perhaps fledgling or perhaps soft Christians need to be toughened up.

Why do they need to be toughened up? Because if they don't, they won't last their pace. It's like in the parable of the sword. If they don't have the depth of soil, they will burn up the minute the sun gets hot.

What James is saying is the sun is going to get hot. There is going to be trial. There's going to be struggle. And when it is, it doesn't mean that God has forgotten you.

It means that God intends to take what you've got there and build it up. Most of you probably know how a pearl is made inside a shellfish there down at the bottom of the sea.

[15 : 48] It's a tiny little bit of grit or sand, which when it gets into the shellfish, into the belly of its flesh, it irritates the shellfish. So it puts a layer of whatever the substance is around it to protect it, almost like a protection, like a cushion layer.

And then on top of that, it puts another layer and another so that it's smooth and not rough and not gritty and not hurting its flesh. And it keeps putting this protective layer and layer and I tell you, you've got this sphere of what we would understand to be a pearl.

but it is created in that way to protect the interior of the shellfish from that which is otherwise an irritant or damage. So likewise, the purpose is to add layer upon layer of strength.

I remember what Paul wrote there and we looked at Romans there in chapter 5 and we said, Not only saying the glory of tribulation, tribulation worketh patience, patience, experience, experience, hope, hope maketh not a shame because the love of God is shed upon our hearts by the Holy Ghost.

Layer upon layer, tribulation, testing, trial, experience, building up. This is how you get spiritually fitter, stronger. Peter says the same thing.

[17 : 05] Again, apostle to the circumcision to the Jews, but he's saying the same thing as James, he's saying the same thing as Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. Peter chapter 4, 1 Peter chapter 4, 1 Peter chapter 1 from verse 4, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, that fadeth not away.

That's what we've got. Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Now this is the reason we can rejoice because you're already having this faith.

You're already kept in this power, this inheritance. That's what you've got. Wherein ye greatly rejoice in what you've already got, though now for a season if need be ye're in heaviness through manifold temptations.

That the trial of your faith being much more precious than a goal that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

The reason you're getting this strain, this testing, is because of what you've already got. Now you see, all the athletes who've recently been down in Rio for the Olympics and so on, when they get to their base camp or their Olympic village or whatever it is with all the athletes in their country, are they just going to take it easy, lie on the sofa, drink coke or whatever, you know?

[18 : 31] No, they'll be doing, you know, light work in the gym, what have you, testing, making it on top of their game, making sure they're fully fit and ready to go and as tip-top ready as they can be before their own particular subject, their own particular events.

But, why are they doing this? Why are they going to, because by the time they get to Rio, they have already been selected from hundreds of other athletes from Team GB or whatever country they would want to represent, from across their country, these are the best of the best.

That's why they're in the Olympic team in the first place. Whether they run for gold or silver or bronze or whether they don't get placed, the reason they are there representing their country is because they have already been chosen.

And their performance on the day will not depend on the last few bit of self-testing and working out in the gym whether we run they go for while they're down there getting acclimatised. It will be all the years that they put in beforehand which caused them to be chosen in the first place.

Now God doesn't choose us because of anything in us. But if we know we're in Christ it's because he has chosen us in Christ. The reason you're being tested, tried, put through the paces, have this nerve-wracking testing trial is because like the real athletes you're under this pressure because you're already there.

[19 : 57] You're already in the team. You've already been chosen for thousands, hundreds of others. And if we're already being tested in Christ, already being tried, it's because of a privilege we already have to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, that fadeth not away reserved in heaven for you, who are kept, not by your own strength, but by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last day.

Wherein you greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, given heaviness through manifold temptations. Likewise again in 2 Peter, as you know, chapter 1, verse 5 says, beside this giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue, knowledge, and to knowledge, temperance, and to temperance, patience, and to patience, godliness, and to godliness, brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, charity.

For if these things be in your band, they make you that you shall neither fail, nor be apparent, nor unfruitful in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is what is being added to your faith, patience, and all the other layers.

But let patience have a perfect work. Now, perfect doesn't mean sinless. It means complete, just as it says here, perfect and entire, wanting nothing, lacking nothing.

In other words, when we say wanting something, we think in terms of desire, I want that sweetie, I want that ice cream. But want, actually in its original, it means lack of.

[21 : 31] If I am wanting something, it means I do not have it. I don't already possess it. I am short on it, therefore I desire to have it. It's not simply an expression of desire.

If we are wanting nothing, it means we've got everything we need. So that your patience will have her perfect work after that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

Now, if we're going to be lacking nothing, wanting nothing, then obviously we've got to know how we're going to go, know how we're going to behave, what we're going to do in each situation. For that, need verse five, wisdom.

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not. I think, okay, fair enough, so that's the only source of wisdom.

No, it's not the only source of wisdom. There is an earthly wisdom, which is in a sense counterfeit. It's not the genuine article. Nobody looks like it. Anything you've got that's valuable, you go to some, let's say, some foreign countries and a market trader and say, oh, look, Rolex watch here or whatever, and it sparkles and gleams just like a real one.

[22 : 39] He says, oh, five dollars. You're not going to get a real Rolex watch for five dollars. You're not going to get the genuine article on a cheap market stall. It's imitation. But there's any amount of imitation wisdom that's going to be offered to you out there.

In James' own book, we turn a couple of pages, we see it in chapter three, for example. It says, if you've got bitter envying, verse 14, and strife in your hearts, don't glory, don't lie against the truth. This wisdom descended not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there's confusion and every evil work.

That's all that breaks down. There's tumultuous anarchy, confusion. That's how the word is translated there, confusion. Every evil work, this is what the devil does. He works strife, confusion.

But the wisdom that is from above, which you do ask God for, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, without hypocrisy.

[23 : 46] And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace. peace. The world, the flesh and the devil is always going to be pushing the counterfeit article in your face, whether it is false religion, whether it is false relationships, whether it is false morality, whether it is false wisdom, whether it is false belief, anything.

It will push the fake article under your nose. If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask your God. You want to know where the true source of wisdom and every other thing that you need is let him ask your God.

And what we have here for wisdom, we can apply to anything throughout. And we'll come to that in just a wee minute. He gives to everyone liberally freely and doesn't upgrade. He doesn't say, why did he ask that?

How greedy you must be, how tenable you must be. He's not going to upgrade, he's not going to give you a row. Ask and it shall be given. That's what Jesus says. Seek and he shall find, knock and it shall be opened down to you.

If we who are simple know how to give good gifts to our children, and none of us would deny our children if we could, if it's good for them, if it's right. And they ask, we want to give, we want to help if we can.

[25 : 00] How much more is your perfect Father in heaven? But let him ask in faith. Nothing wavered. You've got to believe. Well, Hebrews says, he that cometh to God must believe that he is.

These are a wanderer then that diligently seek him. You know, everybody will pray when they're terrified in a time of externity, but are they genuine? Are they believing? They're just crying out for help. When the help comes, they get what they ask for.

That's fine, right, just forget about whoever we pray to. Let him ask in faith. Nothing wavered. He that wavered is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed.

I know this word says driven with the wind and tossed. The implication is driven with the wind, that's like being back outside. Tossed is like when it's being battered on the inside.

From within and from without, there is this destabilizing of the way. I don't know if you know or not, but waves, they look like they're moving along the top of the sea, but in fact they're not, of course.

[26 : 00] A wave motion is by definition simply the surface of the water going up and down. And so the water itself isn't actually moving that much. When it reaches the shore, it moves a wee bit, yes, you can see it doing that.

When you see what you think is a big roller and a breaker moving into the shore, it's not actually doing it, it's the water moving up, and then more moves up higher, another comes down lower to fill it, and then it breaks down and it moves across into the shore.

But mostly the water is just moving up and down where it is, and it gives the illusion of it actually travelling. So it's being tossed up and down internally, just as the wave on the surface appears to be moving across externally.

If that's what we're like, without faith, we're easily blown about, anything can take our fancy. And people have, you know, we used this term in the past, when people give up on God, when they abandon true religion and the true God, it doesn't mean they believe nothing, it means they'll believe anything.

And we see that in our society now, we see a resurgence of paganism, believing all the spirits and stones and the hills, and this God that lives in this, this tree, speaks to us, we're going to be alive to this spirituality.

[27 : 12] And the conclusion, as we've mentioned in the past, of the so-called clever atheists that think, oh no, God didn't make the world this big bank, how did it all originate? What's the thing that zaps life into kick-starting, the process of supposed evolution from the primordial soup?

Oh, well, there must have been some kind of life force from outside, perhaps aliens. Or perhaps it's another universe that came and somehow translated its energy into ours. So in other words, literally parallel universes, literally aliens, Martians, and they say that, you know, we're the ones who believe fantastical things.

They'll believe anything once they give up on believing the truth. Let not that man think he shall receive a worthy of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.

Now this word all is key here because it means that as we are toward God, so we will be toward everything else.

If we're double-minded and double-dealing in our relationship toward God, then that's how we'll be in our business affairs. That's how we'll be in our relationships. That's how we'll be in our families.

[28 : 26] It's okay to be two-faced. It's okay to say one thing and do another. It's okay to treat people just as units of productivity or as a means to an end to get what I want. It's okay not to keep your word.

It's okay to have these double standards, to be double-minded. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. And Jesus said to you, he that is faithful in a little will be faithful also in much.

And he that is unfaithful, untrustworthy in a little will likewise be untrustworthy in much. What is people's attitude to God? Touch that and you will see what is their attitude likewise to everybody else.

It's not for nothing that the two, the twin commandments that Jesus said are the greatest. I love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength.

And to love your neighbor as yourself. And to go hand in hand. Because as a man is towards God, that is what he will be towards others as well. He will love him. He will respect him. He will contend him, concern him.

[29 : 30] He will seek to be truthful and straight with him. As he fears God and seeks to be truthful and straight with God. But if we're double dealing and double minded, then it's not just our so-called religious life which is affected by that.

It will in fact contaminate and defect every aspect of our lives. Just as when we are converted, it changes and leavens and has a positive brightening effect on every aspect of our lives.

So when we're living in the darkness, double dealing, double minded man, it affects likewise every aspect of life. Let the brother of Lord agree, rejoice so that he is exalted.

Well, we can all relate to that, understand that. If we're cast down, we're lifted up by God. He gives us our dignity. He gives us a place. He gives us a bargain, our love, which we never knew in this world.

God's only begotten son has gone to the cross, has paid the ultimate price for little money. How precious they must be in the sight of God. Though a brother of low degree in the world, precious in the sight of God.

[30 : 35] Well, we can understand why that's something to rejoice about. But the rich in that he is made low. Well, James, that's not exactly something to rejoice in, is it? I mean, nobody wants to be parted from their money, from their treasures, because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.

Well, how is that something to be excited about? Well, I suppose if we actually did have stacks and stacks of wealth, we would soon learn that an awful lot of headache and heartache comes with it.

I was reading just the other day how the, you know, following the death, you may have heard about the death of the Duke of Westminster, one of the richest men in the country, and his heir, the next Duke of Westminster, is 25 years old.

Young lad, basically, who has now become not only a highly eligible bachelor, but a billionaire as well, a multi-billionaire has inherited this vast fortune, but now, think of the pressure that goes with that.

You might think, well, I could do with some of that pressure. So you think, so we would imagine, but if you haven't, then see all the problems that will come with it.

[31 : 40] Now, when we understand not that all of our money is the root of all evil, although if we love it and make it our idol, yes it is, but when we are so used to people, if we are rich, double dealing with us, everybody wants a piece of your fortune, but do they really love you?

Are they really your friend, or they're just a gold digger? How will you ever know? Who's going to speak the truth to you? God is going to speak the truth to you. Christ is going to value the same whether you're a prince or a bopper, whether you're a billionaire or a beggar.

Let the brother who is a rich man rejoice in that he has made love. He's brought down to the same level as everybody else because his riches don't count for anything in the sight of God.

God already owns all the diamonds in every mine in all the world, the cattle up on a thousand hills, all the gold in all the bars and all the bank vaults in every all over the world. God already has that at his disposal.

He is not impressed by a few extra knots in a bank of cards. We are brought down to the same level. We are raised up to the same level. And the rich man will know that whether he's got billions or whether he's got nothing, he is loved truly for what he is and for who he is.

[32 : 53] Not for the money in the bank, not for the wealth, not for the riches. He's loved for himself. And it won't extend his life by one day. The sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, the flower will followeth the grace, the passion and perisheth.

So also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. If that's all he's trusting, it won't last. Reputation won't last. You know, we can be trashed in our reputations even if we die and everybody thinks we're brilliant.

If you just turn the clock back a year or so and remember that when Jimmy Savile died, everybody thought he was wonderful. And only post-death that all the accusations and allegations come out. Now, part of the difficult he is, of course, he's not able to stand in court and answer for himself. In one sense, it's not fair that all this stuff is coming out when he can't answer for himself.

But it just goes to show the point is how you can fill out your life, you can go to your death, fool, and everybody saying how wonderful you are, and leave aside eternity for the moment.

[34 : 03] Let's just focus on the earth and your reputation. And then, when you're gone, your reputation can be in tattles. It won't last. Nothing lasts in this world.

It is eternity and the Lord and relationship with him that lasts. So shall the rich man fade away in his ways. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation.

for when he is tried, when he's been tested, in other words, when he has passed through the time of trying, he shall receive the crown of life.

Now, this period of trying, of testing, in one sense, it goes on all of our lives. It's still possible to fall away, even when we're so close to the end, if we don't be vigilant, if we don't keep on, if we don't stay faithful.

You know, the foolish virgins, right up until the last minute, they wakened up and said, oh, James, the lamps are getting a bit empty, better get some oil quickly before the bridegroom comes. They'd have been okay. But right up to the end, they thought they were still okay and then they found it weren't.

[35 : 10] And right up to the end, you may think, no, I'm fine, I'm okay. And if we haven't anchored ourselves in Christ, then we're not. So we have to endure right to the end.

And then there is the crown of life. This is what Paul writes to Timothy, 2 Timothy chapter 4, verse 8. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing.

Now, if you're going to love the appearing of the great judge of all the earth, you've got to be confident. The only reason we can be confident is because of what Christ has done. You see, man in his own ideas longs for a man-made religion where he can contribute somehow to his own salvation.

Man thinks, if I do good, if I try to do good works, if I try to do my best, that should be rewarded. Okay? Might be rewarded for what you do, but it's not going to be enough.

And we like to think that we have somehow contributed to getting into heaven. But instead of our own pathetic, feeble efforts, what the Lord offers us is much better than that, better than you doing your best and getting done.

[36 : 25] I'm going to give my son who is the best. Your efforts can only get, you know, that far. He's all the way up to heaven with his glory. That's what I'm giving you. Because of what Christ has done, your salvation is guaranteed.

Because his sacrifice on the cross was perfect, not like our imperfect, filthy rags of righteousness. It's guaranteed. You're in there. When you endure temptation and triumph, when he has tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

This is what we have. This is what he's promised. Job likewise says, behold, when he's talking about his time of testing, 23 verses, behold, I go forward, he's not there, backward, but I cannot perceive him.

On the left hand, where he does work, but I cannot behold him. He hid himself on the right hand, but I cannot see him. He's been tried, he's been tested, so the Lord has withdrawn in from him, but he knoweth the way that I take.

When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My fruit hath held his steps. His weight have I kept and not declined.

[37 : 37] Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips. I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food. When he hath tried me, I have not come forth as gold because I've held on to it.

I have held fast. Also remember, of course, what it says about Jesus. After the time of his temptation in the wilderness, 40 days and 40 nights, no food, nothing tempted, tested of the devil, but he beats the devil and he resists the temptation.

Then you've got this wonderful verse in Luke chapter 4, verse 14. And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee. And there went out of fame of him through all the region round about.

And he taught in the synagogues, being glorified of all. Because he had just been through the most brutal time of trial and testing and temptation.

And he had overcome it. He had won. He had been getting all the gold medals in all the world, if you like. And he comes back triumphant into Galilee. He returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee.

[38 : 42] That's not what you get from never being tried, never being tested, never being troubled in any way, just having a nice, quiet, cushion, easy life, birth, all the way through to death, no difficulties, no hassle.

No reality either. One of the reasons for Jesus' power is because he is tested and tried and he, far more than job, he comes forth as God.

Lord, this is the one whom we encourage to put our trust in. This is the one whom we are taught to love and serve. This is the crown of life the Lord has promised to them that love him.

If Christ is tried and tested, so his followers will likewise also be. Not because the Lord has abandoned them, but because he wants them to be like him.

He wants them to be as he is, to share in his trials, in his sorrows, in his sufferings, not because he's some kind of sadist, but so that they can share in his triumph.

[39 : 48] It's like the Olympic team saying, now I want you to run down that track five times. You're going to be all the other athletes, you're going to go faster than them, you're going to really be pumping or working your muscle, it's going to be agony.

You're going to be burning up inside. Every muscle is going to be straining you. You're going to be tasting blood in your mouth with the strain and the effort of it. I want you to go fast. I want you to do your best.

I want you to beat them all. And it's going to be painful. It's going to be soaring. You're going to be gasping for breath. But the reason I want you to do that is because I want you to get going. I want you to be standing on the podium above all the others and seeing your flag go up.

I want you to be the one crowned. That's why I want you to go through the agony. That's why I'm calling you as my people to share in these times of trial.

My brethren, this is how James opens, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations, knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

[40 : 48] That's the reason you have these trials, to make you stronger, to make you more mature, to give you that kind of power with which Jesus comes into Galilee.

that he may come by his spirit into our lives and into scotty and into our day and age. Let us pray.