

What to do When Faith Gets Tested

Opening text: James 1:1-5

1. James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings. 2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

Introduction

V.3 ... *“the testing of your faith”*...

This letter was written by James, the pastor of Jerusalem, to Jewish believers in Jesus who were ‘scattered abroad’ (v.1). After the death of Stephen in Acts 8, a great persecution came against the church and many fled to other parts of the Roman empire. Some were killed, others arrested but many managed to escape and form Christian communities. These believers were displaced, many were separated from their families and lost everything they had. This was such a big test to their faith. By the time of this letter, almost two decades had passed since the persecution had started. Scholars believe that they wrote letters to James about their trials and this epistle was his reply.

Have you ever had questions? Have you ever had the metal of your faith tested by difficult and sometimes prolonged challenges? Well, we will let Pastor James preach to us today and tell us what to do when our faith is tested.

After today’s message we will understand 3 things:

1. The inner resources needed to overcome
2. Where do trials come from
3. What to receive and what to resist when your faith is challenged.

1. The inner resources needed to overcome.

... *“Greetings [in the Greek, *chairō* – literally ‘rejoice’]. 2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience [perseverance, steadfastness] 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*

In the midst of trials, we are encouraged to take hold of 3 resources that God makes available to us: joy, patience and wisdom.

- a) Joy (rejoice, count it all joy) – 1 Thessalonians 1:6: *And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit,*

- b) Patience or perseverance – steadfastness. Joy is the first step and then patience becomes a by-product. (*Hebrews 10:36: For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise*)

Joy and patience are both fruits of the Holy Spirit - inner resources that God makes available to us, so that in the middle of the battle we are perfect, complete and lacking nothing.

- c) Wisdom. In verse 5 James says that if we need wisdom, God will give it to us as well. God wants us complete in every way, lacking nothing, so we overcome every test.

2. Where do tests come from?

In our opening passage and in many other passages of the NT, our English Bible uses words like *testing*, *trials* and *temptation* in an effort to translate this one word in Greek: *pirasmos*.

Pirasmos means: “Examining through adversity, affliction or trouble”. One scholar translates that word as ‘being crushed or destroyed’.

I am sure that the believers who wrote to James wanted to know where do these ‘*pirasmos*’ had come from? What was the origin of so much suffering, affliction or trouble? Who was testing their lives with atrocities and persecution?

Let us allow Pastor James to answer that question for us:

V.13 - ¹³ *Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.”*

- a) It is clear that God tempts no one. The word ‘tempts’ here is, as we saw, *pirasmos* which means ‘examining through adversity, affliction or trouble’.

‘Let no one say when he is tempted’– the Greek is emphatic and literally reads: *“let no man, not, no man say”...*

- b) **Matthew 4:1** and **1 Thessalonians 3:5** say that the tempter is the devil. God and the devil do not share the same work, nor do they walk hand in hand.

1 Peter 4:12-13 - ¹² *Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you [pirasmos], as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³ but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.*

Even Jesus experienced ‘*pirasmos*’. We see that in **Luke 22:28**: *“you are of those who have continued with me in my trials.”* (*pirasmos*)

Probably these believers thought that God had allowed these events to test them and James is saying, no way, let no man say that! Let no one blame God. He is not evil, and his plans are not evil (Jeremiah 29:11).

- c) It was Jesus who brought the revelation that it’s the devil who is behind calamities, persecutions, sickness, that comes to kill, still and destroy. There

was no clear revelation of this in the Old Testament. These Christians were Jewish believers, accustomed to the OT but they lacked that NT revelation. At this stage, the NT hadn't even been written. The letter of James was the first letter of the NT.

Let no man say that he is being crushed or destroyed by God.

3. What does God give then?

If God is not the 'tempter', if He was not the one testing these early Christians with persecution and crushing afflictions, if He was not the one giving them all that trouble, then who is God and what does He give?

We'll let Pastor James explain that one as well:

Verses 16-17 - *¹⁶Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. ¹⁷Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.*

- a) "Every good gift" – In Greek: *agathos* - improving, enhancing and upgrading
- b) "every perfect gift" – In Greek: *telos* - something completing or perfecting

Pastor James is saying to us by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that if it improves, enhances and upgrades then it is a gift of God, it is from above. Anything else isn't.

God is not a capricious God, unpredictable and with a dark side.

- c) ... "and comes down from the Father of lights"

He is the Father of lights – He does not have a dark side!

"Comes down" in Greek: *Katabino* – the word for a downpour or a thundershower. God opens the heavens to shower us with the type of gifts that will improve, enhance or upgrade our lives!

- d) *with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.*

God never changes His position. He is the same. He can be trusted. From the Holy Spirit-inspired words of Pastor James, we know now what to receive and what to resist.

Conclusion

V.18 - *Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.*

Here is a last encouragement from Pastor James: We are not victims. God has created us to be a new kind of species the world has never seen before, a people separated from darkness, living under the downpour of His blessings. This is the 'word of truth' we have studied today: When our faith gets tested,

- God makes available inner resources like joy, patience and wisdom so we may be complete, lacking nothing
- It is not God orchestrating fiery trials but the devil
- God gives us good gifts – they improve, enhance and upgrade