3 Truths a Christian should know to trials

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[0:00] James wrote, and we continue to think about what he teaches about trials. This evening from verse nine to eight, three truths a Christian should know in trials. Let me begin with a scene from Thursday morning, a technology trial that I found myself facing. So I was trying to get a grip on the media desk up there, along with Daniel, our apprentice, and everything was going really well until we had to see what was up on the big screen. Because the problem was, I had no glasses, and Daniel had the wrong lenses. So I was kind of up here, saying left a bit, right a bit with the mouse, and it all went badly wrong because we had the wrong lens. That's no big deal. We can cope. But when we're facing serious trials, when people are suffering, if we're not wearing gospel glasses, if the gospel isn't the lens through which we look at our life and our circumstances, then our view will be faulty, and likely our response to our circumstance will be faulty too.

So today, we're going to look at another three truths that we find in the gospel that we need to know for ourselves when we are going through hardships. So that as we thought about last week, joy can be ours. So that growth and maturity in our faith might come even as hardships come.
So the first truth for us to think about together is this, we need to know our identity in Christ. This is verses 9 to 12. There's a connection in the section, verse 2, to remind you of last week.
Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds. Then down in verse 12, blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. So this section is all dealing with testing and trial, and how can we count trials joy? How can we persevere under trial?
Well, verse 9 to 11 says to us, we need to learn how to boast. We need to learn how to take pride. And maybe you're thinking, well, hold on a minute. I always thought that pride and boasting was wrong.
[2:35] We tell our kids, don't boast. Don't boast about yourself. You know, this isn't, Paul isn't saying, or James isn't saying, look at me, look at what I have, look at what I have done.

We're being encouraged to boast in a particular way, to boast in God and in the gospel. If you look at verse 9 and verse 10, we are to boast in our position.
And that's a position that's not based on our financial state. It's based on spiritual reality. So James, in his context, he is applying the gospel to financial difficulty. How do we deal with those trials, whether we find ourselves poor or rich? And that's helpful because there are different challenges and different challenges for thinking about our true identity in Christ. So we think about the poor, the brother in humble circumstances. What's the message often that the poor hear from the world? Well, it's you're a nobody and a nothing unless you are earning and consuming and acquiring. James is going to say, remember the gospel.
That in Jesus, you are a somebody. When the world says, I am because I have, the gospel says, in Jesus, you have everything. So we are not to think of ourselves based on our bank balance. We're told to think about ourselves in relation to who we are in Christ. When we put on the glasses of the gospel, for those who are poor, they discover Jesus is enough. Jesus gives dignity and value and joy despite poverty. I was reading this week of a Bible study taking place in one of the many garbage cities that there are in Cairo. So tens of thousands of people living around the various cities, city dumps, enduring some of the worst kind of conditions known to man. But there are Christian people in those dumps and there are others who are going in and they're sharing the gospel and they're giving them livelihood training as a way that they might escape the horrible conditions.
To the world, nobody's despised, but to their Father in heaven, precious and valued in His sight.
[5:20] To those who are poor, they are reminded of the gospel promise that there is in verse 12, this crown of life that lies in store for them, the winner's wreath from the Olympic Games. So just as

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Jesus urged people, store up treasure in heaven, so James is saying to the poor, consider yourself rich when you have faith in Jesus. So the gospel serves to raise the poor and that's often counter to the voice of society.

But then to the rich, very different. Verse 10, the one who is rich should take pride in his low position because he'll pass away like a wild flower. Again, on the surface, generally, if someone is rich, they are regarded as a somebody. That was definitely true in James's day, still true in our day. And it's often the case then that resources become a person's way to face the world. I am secure because I have financial reserves. But here James is giving that reminder from the Bible that money is fleeting and fragile and that for richer Christians, they are to rely on Jesus and not their wealth as their and our true security. Stocks and shares are not where security is found, knowing Jesus is. Ian read for us Luke chapter 12. And Jesus speaks a warning in that parable.
Remember the man who said, well, I could take life easy and eat and drink and be merry. Well, that can very quickly become, you fool, this night your life will be taken from you. And so there is that warning to rich Christians not to rely on their wealth, instead to depend and base their identity on Jesus. So the gospel, which raises the poor, also serves to humble the rich. And it's there in the very message of the gospel, isn't it? To the successful and the self-made man, the gospel says spiritually you're bankrupt. To those who come to the Word of God with many resources, humanly speaking, there is the message you cannot earn or buy salvation. To those who are self-reliant, there is the message that you need God's charitable gift. You need God's grace as it's found in Jesus. So James in his letter says to us, when we are facing a financial trial, and perhaps that's where we're at right now, or we've been there, certainly our country is still in a fragile state. He's saying to the church, don't think in the world's terms. Don't think in terms of, am I poor or rich financially? See yourself in Christ. He calls the church in verse 12 to pursue loving God and his reward and to recognize that our true value and our true identity and significance is found in Jesus. Perhaps we can think of Jesus's, the words that Paul records of
Jesus' ministry in 2 Corinthians 9, for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, that though he was rich, for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. The reality is for us, if we're trusting in Christ, we are eternally rich.
We have that treasure in heaven that cannot be taken from us. And so when we face trials, we need that as a solid foundation. So we need to know our identity in Christ. And then in verses 13 to 15, there's a change of focus. So the second truth we need is we need to know ourselves and we need to know the danger of temptation. So up until this point, he's been talking about trials. He's been talking about those external pressures that come to us. And those can be financial, it can be sickness, it can be grief, it can be injustice, and they're all in the letter. Temptations are different because they are our internal response to those external circumstances. And in verses 13 to 15, James is highlighting the problem of a problem of a blurred vision, where rather than seeing the problem of our own hearts, there can be the tendency to see the problem as lying out there, particularly here to blame God.
[10:33] God made me this way. God sent me these circumstances, therefore it's how I have responded. Verse 13, when tempted, no one should say, God is tempting me. And so what James is going to say to us, and he continues down to verse 18, is that we need a clear vision of the character of God.

We need to know the God of the Bible. We need to be clear on the personal work of Jesus and what he's done for us. And we also need to be clear on our own sinful human nature. Again, that's an important part of our gospel message, that there is still this war with sin that rages within us, that Jesus has come to win a victory over Satan and sin and death, but that victory is not complete until his return. And until that day, our hearts remain a spiritual battleground. And we need to be honest about that. We need to recognize that as Christians. So what does James teach about the temptations that come along with trials? So beginning at the top of verse 13, we recognize again that these temptations are normal, just as trials will come, so too will temptations when tempted. Of course, we recognize that temptations come in different forms, sometimes subtle, sometimes intense.
Sometimes they come just one time based on a particular circumstance. Other times it's a lifelong struggle. We need to understand too that temptation is not sin. It's only sin if we give in to that desire, to that impulse. We know that because we're told in the Bible that Jesus was tempted, but he was without sin. So temptation and sin are not the same. So temptations are normal. And when

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they come, James is saying to us, don't blame God. Again, in verse 13, we're told two things about God.
God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone. God would never desire evil for his image bearers. God is not a mean God trying to trip up his children. God tests. He never tempts. He never tempts us to evil. Rather, verse 14. He never tempts us to evil. Rather, verse 14, attention is drawn by James to the fact that the evil desire is ours. Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away away and enticed. It's the picture that the Bible presents of us as people. It's the picture that we get of Adam and Eve in the garden, tempted by that desire to overthrow God, to be like God, leading them to disregard God and his word. That evil desire lurks within. And God is not to be blamed for that.
Just as to think about a classroom setting, if a teacher sets a test paper and a student fails the test, the blame lies on the student and not the teacher. And so James is reminding us that we need to be careful about sin. We cannot be complacent about sin. We cannot be deceived and imagine that we have achieved a state of goodness such that we will not be tempted. We will never experience temptation and we'll never give in to temptation. Rather, he reminds us about that evil desire, the sin nature that still lies within us. He also tells us that these temptations that come are attractive, but they are deadly.
[15:00] The language in verse 14 again, he is dragged away and enticed. It made me think of the Venus flytrap.

You remember, you know, the Venus flytrap with the really attractive leaves, draws in the beetles or the spider. And as soon as they touch two of those tiny hairs on the inside of the flytrap, they're caught. Or to think of fishing. Now we stick some bait on a hook as a lure. The fish swims along, thinks it's getting a nice free meal and it finds itself caught on the hook. It's the way temptation works in our lives.
We can only be tempted by what we find attractive ourselves. And so we need to be careful. We thought about Joseph this morning. What did he do when he was tempted? He ran. He ran from Potiphar's wife.
We need to run from temptation to prayer, to ask for help, to resist, to have wisdom, to see what's going on. We need to run from temptation to Christ, to see that he is better and more beautiful and more lasting than that thing that is tempting us in a particular moment. Because these temptations come from our own evil desire, it figures that our temptations will not be the same.
They're based on my evil desires, so they are attractive to me and you have your evil desires and so there are certain things that are attractive to you and they may or may not be the same and therefore it's really important that we get to know ourselves, that we get to know our points of weakness. Where is it that we are most likely to give in to temptation? Where do I need to be particularly vigilant and prayerful in regards to? And then the last thing that James says about temptations is that temptations ultimately give birth to death and destruction. James is really not messing around here. The picture is very graphic in verse 15, isn't it? Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin and sin when it is full grown gives birth to death. Births are usually a thing to be celebrated but not here. James gives us this picture of a person who is tempted by desires and when those desires are fed. There is a pregnancy and sin is born. And as that temptation is fed still further as we continue in sin, James says that gives birth to death.
[17:56] And so we need to be so careful about the paths that we find ourselves on to be able to think down the road, to be able to learn to look down the path. What seems attractive now, what seems attractive in this particular moment may very well produce guilt and hurt, the loss of God's approval, may ultimately lead to spiritual death. We need to learn to starve our evil desires. As John Owen put it, be killing sin or it will be killing you. J.C. Ryle had a helpful image to remind us of how to deal with temptation when we see it.

He spoke of a tree, a sapling, newly planted in the ground. When you think of a sapling, they're very skinny and very small and a child can bend it, a child can snap it, but you let that tree grow.
And Ryle says, you know, a hundred men pushing with all their might can't uproot it. We need to show our sin no mercy. We need to learn to be ruthless in dealing with sin, in confessing it, in seeking help and being dependent on God for the help that we need to resist it.
And we also need to be profoundly thankful for Jesus, our Savior. Jesus, the one who took on human nature, the one who was tempted in every way as we are, but yet was without sin. Where we cave in to our temptation, he never did. And in his love towards his people, he died for every

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time we cave in to our temptation. And now Jesus, our perfect Savior, is praying for us. And he's sent us the Spirit and he's given us power so that we can say no to temptation. But we need to know ourselves and we need to know the danger that temptation brings.
And then James moves on to another truth that's so important for us to bear in mind, and it's to know the goodness of God and the goodness of the gospel. So while a person deceived might think God is tempting me, James will say, no, God is not your tempter. So what is God like?
[20:36] Verse 16, don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above. What we discover in the Bible, what do we discover in the gospel? We discover a God who is generous and a God who is good. Every good thing we enjoy physically, spiritually come from God's hand. And particularly, James reminds us, they come from our good creator. And that's the idea of the the father of the heavenly lights. This almighty creator is the one who loves us. And this good creator is unchanging. End of verse 17, he does not change like shifting shadows. Everything else in his universe that he created is in motion. You know, the earth is constantly revolving and rotating, and that's why we get shadows. But in contrast to his created universe, God is the great unmoved mover.

God is unchanging. His character never changes. So he is good eternally, which means he is good today, which means in our trial, he is our good, good God. And the same is true of his gospel. Verse 18, he chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created. Here is new birth language. Here is a birth to celebrate that through the word of truth, through the word of the gospel, there is new birth. And notice that it's God who chose to give us birth. Notice that that's a gift of his love and his grace. To back up that statement in verse 17, that every good and perfect gift is from above. And that new birth is a kind of first fruits.
It's just stage one of God's great salvation plan. First fruits in the Old Testament, someone would bring in the harvest, a sign that the rest would surely follow. What's the rest that will follow? Well, there's final salvation still to come at the second coming. When we, as the people of God, of our faith is in Jesus, we will be made new, we'll be made like him, and we'll get to live in a world that's been renewed and perfected. We'll get to live in a world where sin and suffering and temptation and trial and pain and death are all gone. And God and his people enjoy eternal life, where we, as the people of God, enjoy fellowship with him that will never be broken.
And so James says to the people he's writing to once again, when you face trials, you need to put on those gospel glasses to see things clearly, to understand that in Christ you have new birth and you have a new identity. That even as we fight against our evil desire, we do so in Christ and with the help of the Holy Spirit. And we trust in our good and generous Father. We trust in his character.
[24:11] We trust in his word. We trust in his promise to be with us and to be with us always. Let's pray. Lord God, we thank you that when we face...

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