

Blessed Endurance

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Date: 15 March 2020

[0 : 00] And then we shall read in the book of Romans and chapter 15. We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

Each of us ought to please his neighbor for his good to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself. But as it is written, the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us. So that through endurance and the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus.

So that with one heart and mouth, you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. I'm going to read now the words of Psalm 84.

How delightful are your dwellings, O Almighty Lord, to me. For your courts my soul is yearning.

[1 : 19] In your house I long to be. Heart and flesh cry out aloud for the true and living God. Even sparrows find their dwelling and the swallow builds a nest.

Near your altar, Lord Almighty, where our offspring may have rest. Blessed whose home is your abode. They are ever praising God.

Let us pray once again. Our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you that you tell us in your word. That you give good gifts to your children.

We thank you that when we come asking for bread, you will not give us a stone. We thank you that the greatest gift you can give us is the gift of your spirit.

We ask today, O Lord, that every one of us would have your spirit in our hearts, testifying to your goodness and your grace at work in our lives.

[2 : 24] We acknowledge, O Lord, the uncertainty of these days. We recognize that the world is the same today as it was this time last week. That we have changed.

And that many of our people have become filled with panic and anxiety. And we ask, O Lord, our God, that at this time you would give us wisdom and courage to be able to witness to our friends and our neighbors about the peace that we have in Jesus Christ.

A peace which goes beyond human rational understanding. A peace that guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Help us, O Lord, to point to the confidence we have in your direction of our lives.

Help us, O Lord, in our own personal time. We especially remember those of us who perhaps have to work now from home.

Aren't allowed out of our houses. And have to spend long days in our offices, in our studies, in our sitting rooms, with our computers. Lord, we ask and pray that you would help us to find productive things to do.

[3 : 39] We pray that you would help us not to give in to negative thinking. But rather, O Lord, to perhaps read some of those books that we've been promising ourselves that we'd read for some time now.

Some of those Christian books, perhaps. Or perhaps we'd get on plan with our reading, our Bible reading plans. Or perhaps we'd do those things with our children that we promised we would do.

Lord, we ask and pray that you would help us in every way to redeem the opportunities that this situation provides us with. Lord, we pray for those who are unwell.

We ask, O Lord, that you would raise them to fitness and strength again. We remember our health service. We thank you for our NHS. We ask and pray, O Lord, that you would bless all those who are working in our NHS at this time.

We especially pray for doctors and nurses on the front line. We ask, O Lord, that you would give them wisdom and strength. We recognize that many of them will be working way beyond their contracted hours.

[4 : 47] We ask, Lord, that in their tiredness, you would keep them from making mistakes. And Lord, we pray for ourselves in the choices we make. Lord, we thank you that your word tells us to do good, as much good as we can to those around us.

We ask, Lord, that you would help us to find ways to build one another up in the faith. Lord, we also pray for our nation, a nation which prides itself on its independence.

We recognize, O Lord, that at times like this, independence means nothing. That what we need is dependence upon you. Lord, we ask and pray that at this time, when so many difficult things have to be dealt with, that you would help our people to turn back to you.

Lord, we long for days of revival power here in Scotland again. We long for days, O Lord, when your places of worship would be filled with eager worshipers, and that we'd be turning our backs on all that we know to be wrong and pursuing Christ Jesus in the beauty of his holiness.

Lord God, tonight we remember also the work of universities in Glasgow and beyond. We remember our own seminary in Edinburgh. Lord, we thank you for those who teach and those who study there.

[6 : 14] And particularly remember those who are involved in the administration of our seminary. We remember Heather Watson. We remember Ruth Smith.

Lord, we thank and praise you for those who are involved at every level, whether they're librarians or administrators, in making ETS the place it is. And Lord, we pray for our world.

Lord, we ask once again, O Lord, that at this time, as people's minds turn to their own mortality, that rather than having a laissez-faire or deterministic attitude, people would turn to the living God and find in you the strength they need.

So, Lord, we ask all these things now with the forgiveness of our sin. In the name of Jesus. Amen. Amen. Please turn with me to James chapter 1.

And 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.

[7 : 35] Who is the most blessed person you know? I guess we'd all have different answers to that question, right? Perhaps some of us are thinking about friends who are happily married with 2.4 children.

Maybe others are thinking about friends who are high flyers in their careers and want for nothing. Maybe perhaps others are thinking about people who are just generally happy in life.

Well, I don't know. I guess we all have our standards of what it means to be blessed. Perhaps we wouldn't automatically think of the Christian who has spent half her life struggling with loneliness as being blessed.

Perhaps we wouldn't automatically think of the Christian who, for the sake of the kingdom of God, has given up home and career and spent her life on the mission field as blessed.

But James, following his brother Jesus, turns the standards of the world upside down and insists true blessedness in life is found in persevering through the trials of the Christian life.

[8 : 50] You will know the word blessed is found throughout the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, and it belongs predominantly in the thought world of the Jew. It certainly does not mean happy, as some translate and interpret it, because many are happy who are not blessed and many are blessed who are not happy.

In fact, it really has little or nothing to do with how we feel or what we do. To be blessed means everything to do with how God feels about us and what God says about us.

It is, to quote one of the commentators, a verdict. It is a judgment. It is God's proclamation that his favor rests on this person and that all delight, all his delight, is found in him.

And so that person, though she may have struggled half her life with loneliness on account of her faith in Jesus, God favors her. That person, though he may have given up home, career, and reputation because God called him to serve him in the mission field, that's the one in whom God is delighted and in whom God takes pleasure.

The divine judge, our heavenly father, proclaims in the hearing of heaven and earth of men and of angels and of demons and of Satan himself, I'm happy with that person.

[10 : 32] The verdict is in. The judgment has been pronounced. These poor first century Jewish Christians who had lost everything on account of their faith in Jesus in the ears of all God says about them.

Well, they're blessed. They may no longer live in their great houses in Jerusalem, but they are blessed. They may no longer be the bosses of their businesses back home, but they are blessed. They may be refugees, homeless beggars far from home, but they are blessed. The whole world may hate them, but God announces in the hearing of men and of angels, of demons and of Satan himself, that one, that one, he's my treasured possession.

Now, I'd like to think that it wouldn't really take much persuasion to convince us here that to be favored by God, to be declared blessed by him, is infinitely more important than to be favored by the world and to be thought of as being blessed by the world.

The world's favor lasts no more than a generation. Ten, twenty years. The favor of God lasts forever. The world's favor is as immaterial as the mist.

[12:00] The favor of God is shooed and certain. The world's favor consists in gold-colored rock. The favor of God consists in the crown of eternal life.

Well, here in James chapter 1, verse 12, the brother of our Lord, who had heard his brother pronounce many statements of blessing during his earthly ministry, writes, 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.

There's the blessed Christian. She's the one who's persevered under trials. She's kept on going right until the end. The world might look at her and say, she's just a broken wreck.

But to God, she's precious. And he proclaims in the hearing of men and of angels and of demons and of Satan himself, my heart delights in that broken wreck.

Do you want to hear these words spoken over you? Well, yes, of course, we know that our justification by the grace of Christ assures us of the favor of God.

[13:17] But here we are dealing with another important aspect of our relationship with God, namely, living in the blessedness of God, making our faith work.

Let's divide up this New Testament proverb under five headings. Blessed is the Christian who is animated by love. Blessed is the Christian who is assured by promise.

Blessed is the Christian who is active in perseverance. Blessed is the Christian who is approved by purification. And lastly, blessed is the Christian who is animated by love.

Motivated by love. 500 years ago, the German reformer Martin Luther expressed his dissatisfaction with the letter of James by calling it an epistle of straw.

He felt it was too legalistic, didn't really speak enough about the grace of Christ. Now, we are so thankful for Luther's contribution to the Reformation, but we don't have to agree with him on everything, certainly not with regard to the book of James.

[14:44] Because the last few words in verse 12 are powerfully poignant to those who love him. To those who love him.

Love and grace belong together. Like an old married couple walking arm in arm. Here then is the basic motivation of the Christian life.

That a woman loves God with all her heart, soul, strength and mind. That's not a truth made of straw, but of passion. The ultimate animating force of the Christian life and that which provides motivation for us to persevere through all the trials of life is that we love God.

Love moves her heart in affection. Love moves her mind in amazement. Love moves her will in action.

Love moves her strength in endurance. I'm often truly amazed by what a powerful force love is. I think of a wife whose husband is permanently disabled and she spends her entire life attending to all his needs.

[16:10] She bears with all his mood swings. She lives no life of her own at all. And why does she sacrifice so willingly and so enduringly over the course of many decades?

It's the powerful animating force of love. She'll overcome all the obstacles life places in her way and even the obstacles the man she loves puts in her way and she'll love him to the end.

And that's amazing. Do you love God? To know him is to love him. To love him is to know him.

You've seen his face. In the face of Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus moved with compassion and crucified on a Roman cross. You've seen his tremendous love demonstrated for you in that while you were yet a sinner, Christ died for you.

We know him. We love him for it. We love him for being infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

[17 : 20] We love everything about him. Not because we know everything about him, but because everything we do know about him, we love. So what about it then?

How long have you been a Christian? Could we not rephrase that question, albeit in rather pietistic terms, how long have you loved God? How long have you loved him?

You will notice from this passage, verse 12, that the tense of love here is present. In other words, the trials of this person's life haven't caused her to stop loving God.

Rather, her love for him sees her through the trials. She keeps loving him, and that's why she keeps enduring and persevering. From this passage, may I humbly suggest that the more we love God, mind, soul, heart, and strength, the more we will resolve to persevere through the trials of the Christian life.

So you ask me, what is the best way to prepare myself for the trials of the Christian life? To which James answers here, love God.

[18 : 38] Love God. Second, blessed is the Christian who is assured by promise. Blessed is the Christian who is assured by promise.

The last clause there of verse 12 really is very far from the legalism of which James is often accused. The crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

The crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. Here we have passion, our love for God, and promise, God has promised. Now to which precise promise of scripture James is pointing, we do not know.

Maybe James heard his brother Jesus say something that is not recorded for us in the Bible, or maybe James is just summarizing the whole teaching of the Bible that God promises eternal life to those who love him, who are approved by purification and to persevere under the trials of the Christian life.

It is very interesting that almost 40 years after the book of James was written, the risen and exalted Jesus appeared in apocalyptic glory to the aged apostle John.

[19 : 54] And having dictated seven letters which should be sent to the seven churches of Asia Minor, makes a conclusion at the end of each one of those letters, basically saying, to the one who overcomes, I will.

So for example, in Revelation 2 verse 7, in the context of his letter to the Ephesian church, Jesus says, to the one who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life.

And then in Revelation 3 verse 21, in the context of his letter to the Laerocene church, Jesus says, to the one who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me in my throne.

Overcoming, enduring, overcoming, persevering, they're all the same. Here's a family promise, both brothers, Jesus and James, emphasizing it.

Endurance, reaps, rewards, overcoming, all the obstacles, really is worth it. Persevering under trial is wise and brings glory to God.

[21 : 08] The promises really are peppered throughout both testaments. Listen to this one from Jesus in Matthew 10, 22, where he says to his disciples, all men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Or again, in Matthew 24, 12, 13, Jesus, speaking of the last days, says, because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Are you assured by the promises of Jesus, not just by the one here and the one here, but by the cumulative impact of them all, that not only does Christ command us to overcome the world, he will also give us lifelong grace to do that very thing.

Blessed are you if you believe this and are not shaken in your grace, but whatever life throws in your way with the help of God, you can overcome.

Well then, third, blessed is the Christian who is active in perseverance. Active in perseverance. One of the themes of this first section of James 1 is perseverance.

[22 : 41] You'll notice in verse 3 that the testing of our faith develops perseverance. Perhaps we wouldn't automatically associate perseverance with blessedness.

Perhaps prosperity maybe, but not perseverance. James is insistent. And so in verse 12 he says, blessed is the man who perseveres under trial. there's the definition these first century Jewish Christians need to hear most.

Not that prosperity is blessedness because they're dirt poor, but perseverance is blessedness. And so again we consider that Christian at the very end of her life and she's following Jesus.

Perhaps she became a Christian early in life and throughout her life she's faced many long and difficult challenges to her faith. Her husband loved her but he laughed at her faith. She lost her child in infancy and her other children want nothing to do with Christianity. She struggled with her health both physical and mental and the church to which she belongs has been repeatedly affected by division and strife.

[23 : 59] she's had it hard in her Christian life she's had a lot to deal with but at the end of her life she is still pressing on in faith. She has persevered to the end.

She's the blessed one. But here's another person and in his early years he appeared to be zealous for the truth of the gospel of God.

He prayed like an angel in public and he'd started even to preach. He was touted as a future minister but then in his mid to late 20s he got caught up by his career and pursuing a relationship with a beautiful girl he'd met at the gym and he began to lose interest in Christianity.

Well he proceeded to marry that girl and he had 2.4 children he drives a Range Rover he lives in a wonderful house and he retired recently as boss of his company.

He has had it relatively easy in life but at the end even though he is surrounded by his loving family he believes nothing. Now that man is not blessed in any way at all he is cursed.

[25 : 24] But then that man will say he'll say to me but was it not that God let me go? If God is as faithful as you say he is then surely he would not have let me stray from the path of faith in him.

Well indeed God is faithful to all his promises and God's grace is new every morning but the truth is God never promised to do the persevering for you or to do the enduring for you.

Rather look at the text he promised to give you the grace and the strength you need to endure and persevere. Notice the words James uses in this verse blessed is the man who perseveres under trial.

it's the person who has to persevere. The third person present active verb. Persevering in the faith is active.

It requires energy activity. It must be active. So let me ask you are you putting effort into persevering in faith?

[26 : 40] Into enduring the trials of the Christian life? sometimes I guess through gritted teeth resolving to follow Christ saying no matter how painful this trial is I am not giving up on him.

Or even resolving to follow Christ saying no matter how much I love my career and no matter how attracted I am to that beautiful girl on the treadmill beside me I am not giving up on Jesus.

Listen it takes us helped by the strength and grace of Christ to be active in perseverance that's what's rewarded by the blessedness of God.

Fourth blessed is the Christian who is approved by purification by purification there's something very special about saying I have achieved something I'm sure all of us can look back at times in our lives things we've done which have taken great endurance but at the end of it we were given an award it's not the award that gives us the sense of achievement but all the blood and the sweat and the tears we exerted to get that award perhaps it's a qualification sporting award personal goal but whatever it is you ought to sweat to get it now you've got this sense of achievement blessed is the man who perseveres under trial because when he has stood the test here's a

Christian who's achieved something magnificent he stood the test he's been approved she's been refined so that she's purer than gold remember how a few weeks ago I spoke about the process by which an ore is refined to remove its impurities we begin with a shapeless rock mined from the ground we end up with lightweight sheet metal beautiful aluminium which can then be made into a thousand different products that uber expensive bike you ride the frame of that bike was once a barrel of shapeless rocks under the ground but then it was refined if you had looked at the rocks on the ground and someone had said to you there's a space rocket in there you'd have laughed them out of town but the process begins the blast furnace is lit and before you know it are mapping out the edges of our solar system what is the greatest achievement of your life my brothers call me the alphabet man because of all the letters

[29 : 55] I have behind my name the truth is I prefer dad to doctor and husband to honors but you know the greatest achievement any of us can have in life is that we have stood the test and have been approved by purification you know we've got into that blast furnace and all the dross has been burned away man it's been painful but we've persevered we've not fallen away from our faith in Christ even though we've had to fight most of our battles bent down on our knees or having fallen flat on our faces you know when someone puts their faith and trust in Jesus Christ that's an

amazing thing but an even more amazing thing is when that person gets to the end of their lives having not given up having put their faith to work loving

Jesus more when they died than when they lived being more like him when they're old than when they were young we've seen life in the raw we've seen human nature red in tooth and claw but the grace of Christ has seen us through to the end and we've endured now that is an achievement it is blessed endurance which is perhaps even more important than blessed assurance well fifthly and lastly blessed is the Christian who is awarded by prize blessed is the Christian who is awarded by prize I've never worn a crown actually that's not strictly true a number of years ago to try and make the kids laugh

I wore a cardboard crown I got from Burger King but a real crown far from it indeed apart from watching the news I think the only place I've ever seen a crown is on the head of her majesty Queen Elizabeth the second so it's quite true I've never worn a crown I'm pretty sure that none of us have ever worn a crown but think again for though we have not until this time worn a crown of gold if we should stand firm through this life's tests of faith we shall receive the crown of life later on in his letter to the church in Smyrna modern day Ismir in Turkey the risen Christ promises them saying be faithful even to the point of death and I will give you the crown of life it seems to me that the crown is another way of speaking of eternal life that eternal life which is so full and free so rich and varied in the world of

James day a winning athlete wasn't given a gold medal he was given the winner's crown it was a wreath of golden leaves which encircled his brow the greatest race any of us can run is that of faithfulness to Christ through trial the greatest contest we can triumph in is that of persevering in faith under trial there's that blessed person she's been awarded with that golden crown wreathing her brow she's blessed by God he is delighted in her Jesus himself asked the question what can a man give in exchange for his soul before that he'd also said whoever loses his life for me in the gospel will save it there's a pattern of thought here which belongs to

Jesus and to his family James included that persevering through trial reaps rewards greater than this world can begin to imagine never mind the immediate family of Jesus the apostle Paul says the same thing in 2nd Corinthians 4 our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all Jesus message spoken directly from his lips or indirectly through the inspiration of the apostles is clear blessed is the man who perseveres under trial because when he stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him and sometimes that means James says you're going to have to hang on with your fingertips as the heat of the blast furnace clears away all your dross and another time

[35 : 17] James says it's going to mean that you're going to have to do something drastic to break a cycle of apathy in your faith which isn't helping you any but you're going to keep on going aren't you because it will result in receiving the crown of eternal life the world around us might call us cursed foolish and stupid sometimes we might wonder why am I living the way I am but in the last analysis those who have eternal life are blessed beyond the world's imaginings so where then are your eyes fixed today are you animated by love assured by promise active in perseverance approved by purification salvation awarded by prize by the grace of the Jesus who was all these things we pray so and then isn't that just the most amazing thing ever the most blessed thing ever that the voice of

God himself thunders through the heavens over the earth and into hell itself speaking to all men angels and demons and saying of you by name this woman you have always hated I love her to me she's precious and I'm delighted with her let us pray Lord we thank you that the standards of Jesus are not our standards and that it's not for him to get with our program but for us to get with his Lord we think of those we have known and loved who have given up their faith in

Jesus because they met a beautiful girl at the gym and rather than following Christ followed her or they got so taken up with their career that bit by bit their commitment to Christ fell away or any other number of reasons Lord bring them back to yourself we pray but as for us as for us oh Lord we resolve we resolve today that no matter how hot that blast furnace gets and no matter how much dross that blast furnace purifies away we shall not give up we shall endure by your grace and we shall persevere right till the end so that we shall receive the crown of life which you have promised to all those who love you now may grace mercy and peace from God the Father

Son and Holy Spirit one true and living God rest and remain with each one of you now and always Amen