

The Blessed Man

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[0 : 00] For those of you who are just joining us this morning or who are new here, just want to let you know that the sermon you heard this morning was not specially designed for you necessarily.

We are engaged in a series going through the book of James and Pastor Mark started it off, I think it was four weeks ago, and this would be our fourth sermon on the series of James.

Today's passage comes from James chapter 1 verses 12 through 18. Before we get started, let us pray. Father, you have said through your apostle Peter that when we speak, we ought to speak the very words of God.

We are warned constantly in the book of James to watch our mouths, the things we say, for our tongues can set things on fire and set the course of our lives on fire.

So what, as I speak this morning, may I speak the truth of your words, nothing more, nothing less. And may we hear and may we understand what it is that you are having to say to us through this passage this morning.

[1 : 22] May we hear, may we listen, may we obey. These things we ask in your name. Amen. My sermon topic this morning is the blessed man.

And the passage is taken from James chapter 1, 12 to 18. I'll read it for you. Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him.

Let no one say when he is tempted, I am being tempted of God or by God. For God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin.

And sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, brothers, beloved brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

[2 : 41] Of his own will, he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruit of his creatures. Let's be brutally honest.

When you think of someone as being blessed, what comes to mind? When you think of God's blessing towards you, or towards me, where does our mind go?

Even after just reading these words of James, I hardly suspect that any one of us thought, blessed is the man that remains steadfast under trial.

The opening lines in today's passage has a certain familiarity to it, reminding us of the opening lines of the longest sermon of Jesus as recorded by Matthew in Matthew chapter 5.

As we have sought to read, as we have sought to read, as we have sought to memorize the Beatitudes, let's see how well we remember them. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

[3 : 54] Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are the people of God.

Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the peacemakers. They shall be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Blessed are the people of God. For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

This is Jesus. On Jesus' account. Rejoice and be glad. For your reward is great in heaven. For so they, for so in the same honor, they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Hardly any of us thinks about the blessed life as being one that will be received persecution. Upon much reflection of James' Beatitudes, in today's opening verse, I have come to see his rendition as somewhat of a summation of the Beatitudes I recorded in Matthew.

[5 : 10] Let's look at James' blessing again. Blessed is the man who remains steadfast on the trial. For when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

While poor in spirit and remaining in humility, he is steadfast. While mourning over his sin and seeking for righteousness, he is steadfast.

While being merciful and with pure in heart, he is steadfast. While seeking for man to make peace with God and in the midst of persecution for himself, he is steadfast.

While being reviled and slandered, he remains steadfast. Blessed is the man who remains steadfast on the trial.

For when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Now the emphasis I want to place on today's sermon comes in a summation which I will now make to you.

[6 : 16] We all have our own set of ideas of who the blessed man is. Those deeply held values shape our behaviors as we pursue being whatever we believe the blessed man is.

What are those deeply held beliefs that shape us? What we think about the nature of man and the nature of God will determine who is actually the blessed man.

I wish to draw your attention to two foundational truths that James addresses here in today's passage. Number one, man's sinful nature.

That's foundation one. Foundation two, God's goodness. Foundation truth, number one, man's sinful nature.

Let no one say, reading from verse number 13, James 1, 13. Let no one say, when he is tempted, I am being tempted by God.

[7 : 27] For God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

Then desire, when it is conceived, gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death.

Sounds familiar to the passage we learn, we're learning what the mind of the flesh is? What things about man's sinful nature is it that James insists that we must acknowledge as true?

The nature of man. The refusal to accept responsibility. Rather than accept responsibility for doing what we know we ought not to have done, we blame our failings on someone else.

While Eve blamed the serpent, Adam did the unthinkable. He blamed God.

[8 : 40] God brought this woman who caused him to fall. This is at the very heart of all sin.

Blaming God. The tenth commandment reads, You shall not covet. Covetousness flows from the belief that we are somehow incomplete, inadequate, or deficient in some way.

Which itself is a belief that God has somehow deprived us of something that we deserve. There is this underlying belief that we deserve more stuff.

A sense of entitlement to what we want. So we lie. We manipulate. We cheat. We steal to get it.

Such stuff can even be the theft of another's husband or wife. Some even reject their natural God-given sexual orientation toward the opposite sex.

[9 : 56] Others refuse to accept their own gender. The sinful nature of man blames God about any and everything.

Our refusal to accept who we are is to blame God. Eddie Minnitz, the Bahamian songwriter, captures the same idea in a lighthearted manner in his song, Never Satisfied.

He says, and I'm just going to mention two of them, Curly hair won't get straight, and straight won't get curly. He says another thing.

Dark skin won't get light, and light skin won't get dark. Some people never satisfy, is his refrain.

You know, every time I hear this song, I think to myself, All people never satisfy.

[11 : 12] Apparently, God got something wrong in making us the way we are. Tall, short, male or female, Bahamian, rich or poor, you name it.

The blaming of God is endless. Think about it for a moment. If God is indeed sovereign, then every single difficulty that we face is one that is ordained of God for us to face.

James is clear. God does bring the trial. God does put us to the test.

But, it is us who sin. The refusal to take responsibility for one's own sinful behavior is at the very core of the unregenerate heart.

The nature of the flesh is one that refuses to think of itself as sinful, undeserving of just punishment.

[12 : 31] That's why we blame. It ain't my fault. It thinks itself as being basically good. So, it blames.

It ain't me. It's you. This refusal to take responsibility is the very thing that keeps the unregenerate mind separated from God.

And you gotta understand this. That refusal is the very thing that keeps him in a state of unregeneration. The believer must take responsibility for his sin.

And the believer must accept responsibility when he does sin. Repentance is impossible without it. Brothers and sisters, sin, that is unrighteousness, is the very act of suppressing the truth.

when we sin, we suppress the truth. Paul puts it this way in Romans chapter 1 verse 18.

[13 : 48] For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

Every sin, therefore, is a denial of our Lord who is the way, who is the truth, and who is the life.

the refusal to acknowledge and accept responsibility for our sins, therefore, like I said, is the denial of the Lord. So, if we know all of that, why then do we sin?

Which leads us to the second point about man, the nature of man. We sin because we desire to sin.

simply put, it is just like that we do what we want to do.

[15 : 00] Who can be tempted while at the same time be lacking of the desire to do so? Allow me to illustrate how desire or the lack thereof impacts the way we live.

Now, this is a personal thing for me. There are two Bahamian dishes that I absolutely, have absolutely no desire for even when hungry.

Crab-fartin' dough and guava duff. These are dishes that most Bahamians seemingly can't resist.

But for me, I can't even be tempted by them. Not in the slightest.

I have no desire. Zero zilch. Therefore, since I have no desire, you can't tempt me with that.

[16 : 20] However, now compare that to cheesecake. And not any cheesecake, cheesecake from cheesecake heaven right there on Madeira Street.

You all ever been there? Well, if you love cheesecake, don't go there. Trust me, you come and bark. and I will gobble two slices of cheesecake on a full stomach.

Why? Why would I do that? I can only do that because I have the desire. My own desire.

And what does James say? Let's read it again. Verse 14. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

You want to blame somebody? You know the blame. Then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death.

[17 : 44] brothers and sisters, we ought to pay attention. No one, listen to me carefully, no one out of the blue decides that they will steal your wallet.

Long before that wallet is stolen, there was desire. desire, desire for more stuff, the lure and the enticement, as James puts it.

No one wakes up one Thursday morning and suddenly decides that today will be the day, the day will start an affair. desire. That's not how it happens.

Temptation happens because one has the desire. There's a song that speaks to this matter of the lure and enticement.

The chorus of the song, some of which I'm sure you know, the chorus of the song, it's a slow fade, by casting crown, goes as follows. It's a slow fade when you give yourself away.

[19 : 09] It's a slow fade when the black and the white have turned to gray. Thoughts invade, choices are made, a price will be paid when you give yourself away.

People never crumble in a day. no one crumbles in a day. It's a slow fade. It's a slow fade.

Desire must be recognized the moment it raises its ugly head and it must be acknowledged for what it is. Sin.

The moment temptation occurs, we ought to know that desire is present. The desire to sin. And it is at that very moment that the trial has begun.

And it is at that very moment that we must remember what James said, says I should say, blessed is the man who remains steadfast on the trial.

[20 : 28] For when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

In reality, the test is not complicated. It's rather quite simple. love. The crown of life awaits those who love him.

Simply put, your love for God is being put to the test. I was listening to a sermon the other day when Pastor Alistair Begg, he pastors a church somewhere near Cleveland, Ohio, said, and listen carefully, the real danger zone or the intersection to be avoided is this intersection, the place where desire and opportunity meet.

Where desire and opportunity meet is a dangerous intersection. One without the other, you can probably handle it, but the two together, you're going to be a dead man.

Desire coupled with opportunity can be fatal. Young ones, older ones, the faith is slow.

[22 : 05] Sinclair Ferguson, another man of God, imposter, describes the cycle of temptation in six steps.

First, here's the attraction. Then comes the deception. that is then followed by a preoccupation.

It begins to take over the mind. Once that happens, conception, sin, occurs.

Then comes the subjection, that sense of being enslaved, consumed, addicted.

We like it. And finally, then there's desperation. Now, desperation is this place that we end up at when we say, how did I get here?

[23 : 25] Any of you have had that feeling? How did I end, how did I, of all people, end up here?

Desperation is the recognition of our colossal failure, where we feel that we might as well just remain right where we are.

The fall was so immense, that there is the feeling that there is simply no way back. And therein is the deception as James mentions in verses 16.

Which leads us to the second foundational truth, God's goodness. James puts it this way, do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from God, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

[24 : 43] Of his own will, he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of fresh fruit of his creatures. There is nothing greater than holding to and believing in the eternal goodness of God.

Every gift that is good, every gift that is perfect is of God.

And what greater and more perfect gift is there than forgiveness and redemption of God? God restores from desperation.

God redeems even those with the most colossal of failures. I've had a few.

I won't go into any details. It's not important. I think we all can relate to having a colossal failure. David himself experienced such a failure.

[26 : 12] Imagine the writer of all those wonderful psalms that we read for edification and encouragement. his failure, this same man, was of magnanimous proportions.

Adultery, compromise, betrayal, and murder. Brothers and sisters, every perfect gift is a gift of God.

our good and perfect God, the father and creator of all life, and in who there is even, not even the slightest variation of life, is one and the same God who redeems and restores even those in the darkest of places.

David was restored. Do not be deceived so as to remain broken in sin. Even colossal ones, God's goodness towards us is far greater than our sin.

He forgives, he restores, he loves. Sometimes language and the nuances of certain words can lead us to a misrepresentation of what is actually being conveyed.

[27 : 50] James leaves no such wiggle room here. When James says, coming down from the father of lights, with whom there is no variation due to change, he is saying that in God there is no varying degrees of light.

There are no shadows or levels of his goodness. James leaves no doubt. God is entirely good and entirely perfectly, entirely perfect in his goodness.

And in his perfect goodness towards us, God has, James 1.18, of his own will, he has brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of fresh fruits of his creatures.

What is James conveying to us here? I personally prefer, as it stated in the NIV, as it uses a word that we are more accustomed with.

God is so good, and I state the same verse in the NIV, he chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruit for all he created.

[29 : 09] Brothers and sisters, God has caused us to be born again. Peter says the same thing in 1 Peter 3 and 4.

Another verse I think was memorized. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

This confirms what Jesus said to Nicodemus in John chapter 3 verse 5. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.

God himself is good, perfectly good, and in that perfection, he raises us to eternal life.

He brings us forth. He causes us to be born of him. Amen. As I close, belief in the perfect goodness of God is the very affirmation that one has been born, brought forth.

[30 : 47] If, upon reflection, you think yourself good, you live in denial of your own nature, as Jesus said, only God is good.

James reminds us that God is absolutely good, and so much so that he even redeems those who are not.

Who, then, is the blessed man? he who is born of God. He's all in the passage that we done this morning.

He who is being tested. He who remains steadfast. He who loves God.

He who takes responsibility for his sins. He who recognizes his own sinful desire. He who knows that God is good.

[32 : 03] He who receives the crown of life. And he who is a first fruit. Now, I want to mention something here for the sake of those who may not believe at this moment.

There is a difference between having to deal with the struggles of life and being the blessed man. Every human soul has to deal with the struggles of life.

No one escapes pain, suffering, rejection, illness, discord, betrayal, disease, and death. No one escapes that. However, only the blessed man has been born again.

Therefore, only the blessed man is being tested. Only the blessed man is being tested.

Only having the ability to remain steadfast under trial. only the blessed man. Only the blessed man loves God and lives obediently to him.

[33 : 28] Stead fast. In your love and obedience to God, if your love and obedience to God is being tested, you can find comfort in the fact that you are born of him and are the blessed man.

God We thank you for your word that reveals to us that you are the perfect one.

You are the giver of all good gifts, all good and perfect gifts. We thank you that you make those and give those to us. We pray that we would, as your children, live obediently, that we would love you, and that we would remain steadfast in our lives.

In your name we pray. Amen. Amen.