

Faith In The Market Place Post Mortem

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- [0 : 00] We're looking today at James chapter 1, verses 12 to 15, and if you haven't got a sheet, there is one available, which I hope you will take advantage of so you can follow.
- I hope that by this time in the series, which is I think we're now about 10 or so into the fall, that the whole of Vancouver would be coming here at 1 o'clock at noon.
- But I tell you that only to tell you that even in the absence of the whole of Vancouver, I'm very grateful for each of you and suspect that God in his grace will prove something by all this and that we've got great days ahead.
- So with that, let me look at and have you look at James chapter 1, verses 12 to 15. And it basically gives, I think this is really basically, these three verses are the battleground on which Christianity is fought every day, all day, everywhere, all the time.
- I think this provides the grounds on which Christianity is regularly and summarily dismissed as being practically impossible and therefore not worthy of the serious attention of anybody who might otherwise be inclined to think twice about it.
- [1 : 29] And I think the reason is because of this wonderful character who appears in verse 1 with the crown on his head.
- And there he is. Now if you look at him, you find that the first thing that is characteristic of him is that he is blessed.
- And blessed is one of those wonderful religious words that nobody ever uses anywhere but in the, I suppose it does occasionally enter mild forms of profanity, but basically it's a strictly religious word.
- And I think it's a strictly religious word because the source of it is outside the object of it. In other words, blessed is something that happens to you.
- It's not something you do for yourself. Happiness may be something you create for yourself, but blessedness is a condition imposed on you.
- [2 : 30] And very often, if you have been the recipient of great wealth, you might say, I am very much blessed.
- If you have a very happy family, you would say, I am very much blessed. If you have a good marriage, you would say in my marriage, I am very much blessed. This is something that has happened to me.
- And of course, you know that Christ picks up the word and uses it in a quite peculiar way in the Sermon on the Mount when he says that the blessed people are not necessarily those with wealth, wife, children, and prosperity, but they are people who are poor in spirit, mourn, meek, hungry, thirsty, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, and persecuted.
- In other words, he takes the word and gives it to the people for whom in normal patterns of thinking we would consider it most inappropriate. The poor in spirit are blessed.
- The mourners are blessed. The persecuted are blessed. Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, which they can't seem to get, are blessed. We ask that question, and Christ gives a very affirmative answer.

[3 : 55] Yes, indeed, these are the blessed. This is the way the world works. I should just explain my cough.

I had a cough last week, but this is quite different because I got rid of it during the week, and this is a new one, so I don't want you to think of it in terms of my old cough. This is something quite new.

And the whole story of it is different, but I won't go into that, but I just want to give you that assurance. So this is the condition of this person, that he is blessed.

James goes on to add that he is blessed because he has endured, and it's interesting if you look at it. It's a singular word.

He has endured trial. That is, he's been through it. He's come out the other side. And that trial is part of the circumstance of his life.

[5 : 11] You know, I think we have a concept of life in which we tend to think of it as being blissful, blessed, happy, ongoing, and worthwhile, interrupted occasionally by sad circumstances that overcome us.

I think what James is saying here, and really the New Testament picture of life, is that it is a perpetual 24-hour-a-day trial.

You need an almost kind of spiritual wartime mentality to live your life. You don't have long sort of sunny days and blue skies and happiness flowing in upon you from every side.

You are caught in a trial situation that goes on and on and on and on. There are some happy interventions and things that take place, but basically it is the trial.

And that's what it says about this man. Blessed is the man who endures trial, the perpetual, ongoing trial, because it says, because it says, when he has stood the test.

[6 : 28] And so that you get this word test. Test, I think, is an important word in the New Testament because God uses it to strengthen people.

Satan uses it to break people. In other words, the same trial that God is using to strengthen you, Satan will use to break you. So you're in the same situation, only you have two people using it in different ways.

I always, when I think of this, remember in the days back many, many years ago when the Norwegians came to Canada to form the Norwegian Air Force and they trained at Little Norway down on Toronto's waterfront.

They loved skiing. And they used to ski with these long, sort of nine foot long skis, which they did great cross-country skiing with.

And they would go into a downtown store that sold skis and would ask, these were all wooden skis, would ask if they could test them. And the guy would say, sure.

[7 : 36] And so they would stretch them between two chairs and then jump on them to see if they would hold up. Well, of course, the idea is that if they were really good, they would hold up.

If they weren't, then they would break down. And so this testing process, which really tells you what you're operating from, what the basis of your operation is, is, and if the basis is one thing, then the testing will strengthen you.

If it's another, it will break you. So it sort of determines this testing that you have to stand up to, how you're going to make out. There is, I think, a sense in which this testing is over the long haul.

That is the same. It's not something that is going to happen to you this afternoon, though some manifestation of the testing may happen to you this afternoon. But over the long haul, over the years that you're given, this testing process goes on.

And you either stand up to the test or you break down under the test. The same testing, you see, like fire, which burns wood and refines gold, so our faith is tested to find out whether it will stand up or whether it will be broken down.

[9 : 06] But you'll see that one of the really interesting things about this, which I don't think you can take as being automatic. In fact, I think it's probably the central reality of this 12th verse.

Blessed is the man who endures trial, has stood the test. He will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

And that is, the reality is, that he is operating from the basis of loving God. That's the thing that sustains him during the trial that allows him to maintain whatever it is he has over the test so that the result of it is that the promise which God has made of the crown of life comes to him.

He will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him. That is, he doesn't actually go home wearing a crown, but the life which he lives will be the crowning of the process of his testing.

That's life itself is the crown, eternal life, that life which it is God's purpose we should have.

[10 : 26] And so this is the man whom everybody hates and despises. Because he does it where others don't. And just reading about this guy gives me feelings in the pit of my stomach and I just feel such a total failure.

So now I go on to tell you something about God. And I'm really telling you what I think James is saying in verse 13. He says, God doesn't make mistakes.

He says, let no one say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one.

And of course, this is one of the primary basic excuses that we all make. You know, God put me here, God made me like this, I'm only doing what God made me to do.

Therefore, whatever I do, the consequences of it are God's problem, not mine. You know, it's the devil made me do it. I am doing what comes naturally. I'm only doing what it is.

[11 : 33] You know, and we usually, we usually say that I am only being human. I mean, we explain this all the time when we, when we, evil breaks into our life, that we were only really being fully human.

And when you are being fully human, you decide that you are being fully in accord with what God made you to be. And therefore, if there is any responsibility, the responsibility is with God who made you that way, not with you for being who you are, because it was his responsibility in the first place.

So, James says, that's not a back door out of this situation. And he covers this, says, this back door is locked. You can't get out that way.

And that's what he means when he says, don't say when you're tempted that I am tempted by God, because evil is not an incident that God uses.

Evil and God don't mix. Evil is always evil, and God is never evil, and he never uses evil as an instrument of his purpose.

[12 : 47] So, when you're, before he tells you what he's going to tell you in the next two verses, he says, I don't want you falling back on that excuse. Then he goes on to say about the other man.

And this is the other man, and the person, of course, with whom we are much more familiar. And, here's the person, and testing comes to him too, but the testing is different for him, because there's a wonderful Greek word which goes like this, more or less, and it's *epithumia*, but it's the word for covet, it's the word for concupiscence, it's desire for what is forbidden.

So that, while a good man operates, as I suggested, out of a love for God, this man operates out of epithumia, or what's translated here as desire.

And so his life is focused on the expression of this desire which he has. The way it works, James says, is that it provides the bait.

And the bait is, and it inevitably is, and men just are drawn to it like a salmon is drawn to herring. The bait is, is desire itself, which entices and lures you.

[14 : 40] And the word is, the word used for bait, and it's laid in your path, and you are expected to take it.

You see, the way it works is that God says, if you want, I mean, it just says God says no. And as soon as God has done that, it's game over, because we, you know, that it then becomes a contest between us and God.

If God says no, then I've got to say yes. And to be human, to be independent, I've got to say yes. I read the most wonderful book this past week.

I suppose it's no great takes, but it impressed me a lot. And it had to do with, it had to do with hell, and what hell is like, and the terrible moral earnestness of hell.

And he says this, and this is Harry Blameyer's in a book called Cold War and Hell. And he says how the situation in hell is quite different. This is not a community, but a society.

[15 : 53] This is hell we're describing. Now, you've got to get this clear, because you'll get taken in by it if you don't remember. This is hell we're talking about. This is not downtown Vancouver. This is hell.

You may see similarities that confuse you, but understand that this is hell that's being talked about here. This is not a community, but a society of individuals, passionately concerned for their own freedom and independence.

Here, therefore, men cannot stumble upon external discipline in submission by thinking about the needs of others, if you try to help a man here, he has sufficient self-respect to fling your interfering patronization back in your face.

You see, hell is wholly inhabited by men of self-respect who abhor the indignity of receiving charity at the hands of others, who will not tolerate to be told that there's anything they can't do, because if they can't do it, it means that somehow their self-respect is suspect, and therefore, they have to do it.

They're compelled to do it. And when James says that's how they get there, they get there by this business of desire, and desire provides them with an alternative to obeying God.

[17 : 25] In other words, you have in you as a person a built-in alternative, and you become very much aware of that alternative as soon as God says no to you.

And that's what Paul experiences in Romans chapter 7 and verse 7 when he says, and it's basically the same word, desire. And it's the word that is forbidden.

We're forbidden to do this in the tenth of the Ten Commandments. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, his ox, his ass, anything that is his.

You're not to covet it. And this is the peculiar law because there's no way you can enforce it. Because nobody knows what you're coveting at the moment.

That's only your secret. Well, what happens then is that this coveting starts to work and it provides an alternative to the obedience of God and we pick up on this alternative.

[18 : 45] And James says the result of picking up on this alternative is that you are lured and enticed by it and then having been enticed by it when it has conceived that is the desire.

In other words, the temptation is there and there's nothing wrong with that. But then once the once desire gives into it then conception takes place.

death takes over.

So, you get that fairly strong picture in verse 15 of what happens once God says no.

God says no, our desire rises up and claims what God has said we can't have and we say we must have it. Life demands that we must have it.

[19 : 46] The purpose of my existence demands that I must have it. and so we go after it. And the result of that is sin and the result of sin when it grows up full grown in other words you've got to give it time to grow.

It's not something that just happens like that but it's something that slowly infiltrates the whole of your person and the whole of your character and when it is full grown it brings forth death.

and death is let me tell you that happy state where you are no longer aware of the trial.

In other words the first product of death is that you're no longer aware of the trial.

Enticement and allurements which comes from desire has conceived in action in your life in your mind in your heart and that conception has brought forth sin and sin has atrophied your capacity to be aware that there's a trial going on any longer.

There is no trial. You're free. And that's the freedom for which everybody in hell is struggling hard to achieve that kind of freedom by the fulfillment of themselves not by any kind of relationship to God.

[21 : 22] Well what happens then is that you get that kind of tension between desire which is over here and which seems to point us to everything in life that's worthwhile and the love of God which is over here which seems to be an inadequate sort of motivator for life.

You know it seems to be opting out of the nitty gritty of life. But what James does is give you the pathology of how this in fact works.

What happens when there is a long obedience in the same direction in response to the love of God in Christ and what happens when there is an immediate response to the allurements and enticements of desire?

What happens when your will determines the direction of your life and what happens when desire determines the direction of your life? What happens when you abdicate this in order to enthrone this?

Well James says it's very simple what happens. This leads to death and as far as you're concerned it's death to the reality of God's purpose.

[22 : 49] It doesn't mean that they're going to put you six feet under. It just means that you no longer are alive to the possibilities of life. A life which is a response to the love of God.

So then let me conclude by saying this the motive in the trial to which we are all constantly subject is either the surrender which is desire or the standing the test in the love of God and receiving the crown of life.

The crown of life is offered on the one hand because that's what life is all about. Life is to be lived in submission to and in obedience to God or life is to be lived under the allurements of desire.

And James makes it very clear. So that there is one last thing that I want to say about this and then I quit. And it's a word that comes up in Harry Blumeier's book.

It also comes someplace else in poetry. But it's this. And that is that the gate of hell is always open.

[24 : 13] You know, you can get in anytime. You know, it's there and available and the door is open and you're free to go in. But the other reality is that you can always get out of it too.

Now, what I mean is that I really do think that the terrible part of this is that when we are subject to it, we cannot believe there is any alternative.

You know. I mean, part of this is that we die and we don't believe that there is any alternative. We're trapped by it. We're caught in it.

There is no escaping it. We are there. And that is a kind of human, earthly, downtown experience of what hell is like.

We're caught and there is no way out. And what I think the reality of the love of God is, is in fact, there is a way out.

[25 : 26] All you got to do is do it. I mean, just as simply as you know that you're going to walk out the back end of this church, I think you can know that you're going to walk out of the failure and the disappointment of a life in which we're caught.

I mean, we understand this fellow who is caught by desire. We understand him perfectly, I think. But there is a way out of that and it's very simple. And basically it's as simple as taking the invitation of Christ seriously to believe in him whom he has sent, whom God has sent, to put your faith in Jesus Christ.

It's a very simple thing to do. I mean, I think the confounding complexity of it is the terrible simplicity of it. And that that belongs to us all.

And we can think of a hundred reasons why it's not available to me. You know, I mean, you try and persuade an alcoholic to give up alcohol, or a sinner to give up sin, or a dying man to give up death.

It's very difficult to do, because I visited one of my friends yesterday, and he told me he has six months to live. He didn't tell me that once, he told me that about a dozen times in the course of the afternoon.

[26 : 54] And he's just so convinced of it, that he's trapped by it. And I'm afraid that that's what James means when he says, desire produces sin, and sin produces death, and death produces despair and hopelessness in our lives.

And that what we're meant, I mean, what is available to us, and what God in his grace has granted to us, is a blessedness which comes from enduring the trial, standing the test, out in response to the love of God, which he's revealed to us in Christ.

Thank you very much. The sandwich man is here, or the sandwiches? thank you very much. Thank you very much. Thank you. We've got the one more of numbers.

We have to go through this test before we can make this thing going.

I know at St. John's we had this problem, numbers, and that. Numbers aren't the only thing that count, but I know we're all talking, you're all here, we'd like to build up the group and see if we can get it going.

[28 : 20] What I want to talk to you about, just a few minutes, and that is first to get your ideas on timing. We can be, quite a few people expressed the fact that we're such a small group in such a large place here, and they feel uncomfortable in here, would we be better off to be in a room downstairs or the Y, in a smaller room where we pack the room and feel, gee, the room's packed, and we couldn't do that.

That's number one. Number two is the timing, for the first thing of the time. We can't have the time then, we can't use this particular spot from 12 to 1. We only use 1 to 2, and that's why we're here.

But we can be downstairs or at the Y, or some other place from, say, 1210 to 1240. And often people say, well, if you had it that time, we could get a lot more of our friends out.

It's a lot easier. And so that's number one. And number two, how you feel about this place. And I'd just like to get a show of hands. What you yourself think, not what you think others think, but what you think regarding the time.

which is best? Is it from the 12 to 1 or from 1 to 2? For yourself first, not what you think of other people. If it was from 12 to 1, who would be here?

[29 : 38] Who wouldn't be here if it was 12 to 1 today? 1, 2, 3. 3 of you would not be here. Who, I assume all the rest of you, would be here for some 12 to 1.

That's right. Well, 12 to 1, therefore, is obviously a better time. Now, for other friends and people, would you, who feels, do all of you feel better from 12 to 1 in bringing other people here?

I assume that's the case. Okay, so therefore, the general feeling, am I right here, is that you'd rather have it from 12 to 1? Okay, now what about location? How do you feel about this spot here?

Do you feel better being, would you rather be downstairs in a room, a smaller room, where we'd be all kind of cuddled in there, you know, close together and feel, I mean, we kind of feel a little lost here.

Is that right? Do you feel lost here? Do you feel? Well, I thought I asked that.

[30 : 45] Okay. All right. Well, all right. How many would you rather just leave it the way it is and try to build up the numbers on the basis of exactly what we're doing here?

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Seven. Still a minority. I assume therefore, the opposite's true. You'd feel better from 12 to 1.

Unfortunately I said we can't use this spot called one. Well, now if we are going to be downstairs, how do you feel about meeting downstairs? Like you'd come in off the Broad Street entrance into the lower level and go into a room at 10 after 12 there.

Is there a possibility for 12 30 for this time? No. Or for any other? It doesn't really matter what time the other street runs over. Well, it'll be 12 to 1 as opposed to 12 30.

1 30. Well, how do you feel? Usually people have up 12 to 1 or 1 to 2. I thought people, anybody comment on that regarding 12 30 to 1 30 or 12 30 to quarter after 1.

[31 : 50] Would that be better? Harry, can we get this spot at 12 30? I think that's a little tight, isn't it?

They said quarter to 1 or serious. So that's why it's one of long. So we really can't be here if you want any other time other than the time we have. Am I getting anywhere?

Yes, I am. Okay. Go ahead. Well, that's a nice meeting room. We've got glass with some inside. Yes. You said you come in off the road. You've got its own work and strata night.

All right. We do. How does that sound? Say, from 1210 to 1240, downstairs in that room. Now, would you rather be there or would you rather be in something that's not so perhaps in Christchurch?

Would you rather be in the Y? Who would rather be in the Y than downstairs? In other words, everybody would rather be downstairs. Because that's a lot of people said, gee, they'd rather not, Christchurch kind of what they find is rather formidable.

[32 : 53] But that's not the case. All right. Well, then you'd rather be downstairs off Broad Street, coming in the back door. You don't need to have everybody see you walk in the front door.

Because it bothers a lot of you. You can kind of sneak in downstairs. Well, not for us so much, but if you're bringing somebody from your office who you feel is a little bit, you know, perhaps doesn't like, you know, okay?

All right. Well, then, can I assume then that we can, is that all okay with you, Harry? Then in January, I assume then that we'll probably will, you'll be getting one of these cards out.

If you're all on the mailing list, if you haven't filled in the form, you aren't, but we'll probably start then at 1210 to 1240. And I pray that we can all perhaps enliven it and bring out more people.

How about next week, seeing if we can't for the final one of the year, invite as many friends as you can. Let's see. Now, we're going to start after the year with a new group organizing, younger group, and we're going to be looking after kind of getting the thing going.

[34 : 01] We're going to get phone committees, and you're going to be, a lot of you who are regulars, are going to be given a list of names and people to contact, and you'll be hearing about this from the new group that kind of spearheaded this.

If you'd like to be part of that new group, please let us know, because we're going to be moving away from the sponsoring committee and that kind of stuff, I gather. research here is helping me to deal with that.

And Chris. Thank you very much. Thank you.