

Trials and Endurance 10am

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[0 : 00] James 1, verses 12 to 18, found in your Pew Bible on page 213, and it begins with a beatitude.

And a beatitude is an attitude of being. There is a radio station, I think, in this town that says it is radio with attitude.

I trust by God's grace this church may be a church with beatitude, and that that beatitude may be conferred on all of you as you take part in this service this morning.

The beatitude with which the passage begins is, Blessed is the man who endures trials, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him. Like Jesus' series of beatitudes in Matthew, the beatitudes are based on a blessedness which derives from being poor, mourning, being hungry, being pure in heart, being a peacemaker, being persecuted, and being insulted.

[1 : 28] The difference between being merely happy and being under beatitude are in these conditions.

And these are the conditions which provide the circumstances of all of our lives. The beatitude is something that begins not with you and your circumstance, but begins with God towards you in your circumstance.

We live in a society in which religion is a resort to which the weak-minded people in our society flee. While the success, the successful, and that is, you know, in our society, blessedness means, and it can't really be called blessedness, because blessedness means that somebody else is conferring on someone.

But success is something you do for yourself. Well, success is how we define our beatitude in our society, and that blessedness belongs to the aggressive achievers, the liberated and influential, in-control kind of people.

So, you would be blessed, if that's the source of your blessing, if you now hid it under the pew, just while you listen to this, at least.

[3 : 08] The solitary beatitude in James is one conferred on those who have won through the trials of poverty, hunger, mourning, insult, meekness confronted by arrogance, and implies membership in a community that has shared those trials and does not refer to an individual hero type.

In other words, we're not going to be made heroes. We're going to come into a community of people who are in a constant process of trial and affliction and tribulation, and in that community, we are going to find God's blessing conferred on us.

In order to have the blessing conferred on you, you will have to come to the realization that life involves an internal conflict, a perpetual internal conflict.

In the service at 8 o'clock this morning, we prayed for those who are at rest. And to be at rest means that the internal conflict is stopped, but until that time, it won't.

Please be assured. So, this internal conflict arises from our own self-generated evil desires, and within yourself, bringing to the demands of your evil desires a patient endurance rather than a pattern of surrender for purposes of immediate gratification.

[5 : 03] The evil desires come, we gratify them. That's the pattern of the world. The pattern of blessedness, which James is talking about, is the evil desires come in the same way, and we meet them with endurance.

And I just noted at this point that it's a lot easier to talk about this problem when you're 70 than when you're 17.

But basically the problem is the same. The whole of our lives is a perpetual battle on this unchanging battleground, and we all need help, and it's hard to come by.

So the special benefit of this beatitude with which James begins this passage is that it makes a clear statement as to where the battle is to be fought and what the consequences of the battle will be.

The consequences of the battle, if you read to the end of the verse, is a crown of life. And the other possibility is death.

[6 : 23] So this beatitude says that life is more than a rear-guard action against the encroachments of death.

The crown of life that it speaks of is to be conferred. I mean, it's a sort of metaphor, I suppose, a picture of what happens, and it's to be conferred like a garland, that you've been through the battle. It's like a veteran wearing his ribbons. These are the things that recognize that he has been through the battle. It was a great delight to me to read in the paper one morning this week that when the Canadian junior hockey team lost the final game to the Russians, the Vancouver Sun did not mark the occasion by big, bold headlines saying, We lost!

It marked the occasion by saying, They have done a terrific job, and we all need to commend them. That's what the crown is. Not caving in to defeat, but recognizing that even in defeat, you can win. So that's the first thing that comes in the passage. The second thing is a powerful reminder for all of us, that for each and every one of us, that there is no opting out clause.

[7 : 57] If you look at it, it says, Let no one say, When he is tempted, I am tempted of God, and opt out. For God cannot be tempted with evil, and himself tempts no one.

There is no opting out clause. In this battle that James speaks about, you can't say, The devil made me do it. You can't say, God made me this way, and so it's his fault.

You can't say, This problem, this battle, derives from genetic abnormalities, which I suffer. You can't say, The difficulty is with my family of origin.

Even though it may be. You're, In part. You can't say, I'm a victim of somebody else's mistake.

This is society's problem. It's not mine. And you can't say any of those things. You can see an example of it, in the almost intractable problem of drugs, in our society.

[9 : 20] And, when I think about drugs, the thing I always remember is, that there's more money made selling drugs, in this city, than there is made selling gasoline. Even at 55.9 cents a gallon, or a liter.

So, drugs is a big problem, in our society. And we have to face the question, of what agency can we set up, to deal with it? How much money, do we have to throw at the problem?

What happens, when all our jails are full? How dependent are we, on the fact, that persons with the problem, has to be, part of the solution?

In other words, that's what James is saying, to all of us. You may have a problem. It may be justifiable, in certain ways.

But, the battle is yours, and you have got to be part, of the solution to it. And, God will grant you that grace. Now, when, when, James then moves on, to tell you what the problem, where the problem arises from, he uses the word, epithumia, which, I commend to you, simply because, the word desire, isn't big enough, for, for our understanding.

[10 : 44] He says, this word, this desire, happens, it says, each, in verse 14, each person is, tempted, when he is lured, and enticed, by his own, desire.

In other words, the source of the problem, is, in us. And, we have to, accept that fact. And, James says, blessedness, comes, from accepting that fact.

No matter, what other circumstances, may apply, at the bottom line, you've got to accept, that fact. Each person, is tempted, when he is, lured, and enticed, by his own, desire.

James, James, gives us, this graphic picture, of how it happens.

The temptation, doesn't come, from overwhelming, external force, but, it comes, from, self-centered, desire. Then, it says, that this process, leads, to death.

[11 : 54] You see, how he describes it? He says, when he has stood, the test, he will receive, the crown of life. And, then it says, that, it describes, how, it's all brought forth.

It's, the same statement, that John makes, in the first epistle, of John, when in verses, 16 and 17, he says this. He says, everything, in the world, the cravings, of sinful man, the lusts of his eyes, the boasting of what he has, and does, come not from the Father, but from the world.

The world, and its desires, pass away. But the man, who does the will of God, lives forever. So, James tells us this, in so many words.

A man is enticed, by his own desires, desire conceives, and gives birth, to sin, and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth, to death.

That's, kind of a, contradiction there, that you give birth, to death, but that's how, you can understand, what he means. We are told this, because, the New Testament, has, a high regard, for every individual person, and, a profound challenge, for every individual, to take responsibility, for his, or her, own life, no matter what, the circumstances are.

[13 : 33] You can't pass it on. I'm being subject, to temptation, at this moment. I'm tempted, to say, that our marriage, which has lasted, for 43 years, has been really good, except for my wife.

I, you know, how, how deep, and intractable, is the desire, in all of us, to find, an excuse, outside of ourselves.

If anybody, was to make that statement, it should be my wife. That, I say that, just to make sure, I get lunch. The, ah.

So, this, this, this responsibility, then, we, we, we are to use, every trial, to learn, the endurance, of steadfastness, like, you know, that we're, in a sense, we are to look at, the trials, that come at us, with an eagerness, to meet them, knowing, that in those trials, we will find, ah, the awareness, of, the grace of God, poured into our lives.

It's in those trials, and in meeting them, and enduring them, and, ah, that that's, what's going to happen. James says, and, and you can see this, if you again, if you again look, look in, in, in the verse, verse, the end, in verse 16, do not be deceived.

[15 : 32] You see, it's so easy, to be deceived. And, we are so, capable, of deceiving ourselves. We are, we are our own, public enemy, number one, because we, we spend so much time, deceiving ourselves.

ourselves, we're not, to be deceived. And, that's, that's of course, why, in the order of morning prayer, which we've just been through, that we, it's very, it's very careful, and extremely helpful, to get us all, on the same level, playing field, when we all say, that we have followed, too much, the devices, and desires, of our own hearts, and there is no health, in us.

The resources, are not, in us. And, we, we acknowledge that. It's interesting, to me, that this process, of desire, conception, sin, birthing, and death, because that's, that's the, the, the process, of how this works, to destroy us.

It uses, the underlying, metaphor, of, human sexuality, which, on the one hand, makes us, acutely, I mean, our sexuality, makes us, acutely aware, of our own, human individuality, and at the same time, is taken to be, all that human existence, is about.

In our, foreshortened view, of what human life, is about, sexuality, has somehow, got to the place, where, that's what it's all about.

[17 : 15] And, it's for this, reason, that James, tells us, not to be, deceived, by that.

And, what James, makes clear, to us, is, that desire, that thing, which is in us, can be, short-circuited, it.

And, instead of, turning all the lights on, you blow all the fuses, and everything goes dark. It's for this reason, that James tells us, not to be deceived.

Because, having been deceived, we heighten the problem, by going to enormous lengths, to rationalize, our deceptions. You know, to justify ourselves, in the deceptions, that we use.

Then, you see, James goes on, to say, what, what is to happen, where this, where this thing, is to lead us. And, he says, in verse 17, every good endowment, and every perfect gift, is from above.

[18 : 36] The good thing, does not come, from, the gratification, of our evil desires. The good thing, James says, comes from above.

The gratification, of our evil desires, leads to death. Then, he says, the alternative is, the good endowment, or perfect gift, is from above, coming down, from the father of lights.

James, sort of, comes crashing in on us, and says this, the source of all goodness, and maturity, is, an endowment, from God.

It is a gift, you never expected, nor even have the right, to expect. It has been freely, and unconditionally, given to you, by God, the father of lights.

That's how James, describes God, in this passage. And he goes on, to describe God, as being, if you look at it, he is, he is the father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shadow, due to change.

[19 : 51] Soren Kierkegaard, has written an article, about, about this verse. And, in this article, he comes to, the place where, he says, we need to stand, in a place, of fear, and trembling, before the, awesome, reality, of God.

And I, you know, that, I feel that, we so often, don't get to that place, in our, I mean, that hymn, you just sang, was beautiful, to listen to.

I mean, it was, it was really, it was really, very uplifting, to listen to. And it is such a, magnificent, hymn. And in, in this sort of, in that moment, you get, you, of listening to that, you get some concept, of the glory, and majesty, the awesomeness, of God.

God. And, and, then this is what, this is what, James is saying here. He wants you to have, this, this picture of, the God who is the, father of lights.

The father, as it were, of the, of the night sky, with, countless, billions of lights. He is the creator, of all that. And he has granted, this endowment, to you.

[21 : 15] That's what your life, is about. What are you going to do, with that endowment, that he has given to you? Every good endowment, every perfect gift, is from him.

So that, our lives, in contrast to, this changeless, eternally present God, you know that, that, one of the things, Kierkegaard said, which I found very helpful, was that, we live in the consciousness, of the present moment, of the present moment.

God, lives, lives, in the consciousness, of our whole lives, every moment, of our lives, being, simultaneously, present to him. The whole of our lives.

And, that's the reason, we need to be, as, Kierkegaard describes it, in fear, and trembling, before such a God. our lives, are marked, by change, by darkness, we are double-minded, we lack wisdom, we are deceived, we are ruled, by desire, broken by sin, and delivered to death.

That's, the human process. Apart from, God breaking in on us, with this, good gift, this endowment, which is from above.

[22 : 39] And, James, explodes, in our hands, that such a God, should endow, such a gift, to such a people, with the expressed desire, that all people, of all generations, should come to claim, that gift from God.

The passage ends, with the beginning, of everything. If you look at it, you will see, verse 18, of his own will.

And, this, of his own will, is translated, in the Jerusalem Bible, by his own choice. And, how often have we prayed, thy will be done.

You see, this is the beginning, because, the whole of our lives, begins not, with the justification, or vindication, of ourselves.

It begins with, the purpose, and will of God, towards us. And, that's why, James, says this, of his own will.

[23 : 56] He, brought us forth, by the word of truth. Now, there's an amazing, sort of, juxtaposition here, of the fact, that sin, when it, that desire, when it is conceived, gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death.

It's the picture, of a birthing, taking place. And, it gives birth to death. But, this, this is, the good endowment, from God, which is, by his choice, towards us.

He brought us forth, that is, he brought us to birth, by, the word of truth, that we should be, a kind of, first fruits, of his creatures.

It is God's purpose, and God's choice, that we have been, brought forth, by, the word of truth. So, instead of being, the victims, of, the desire, that leads, that brings birth, to death, death.

We are, the recipients, of, the word of truth, which God has made known, in Jesus Christ, which we hear, and receive, and believe, in our hearts, and that, brings forth, life.

[25 : 18] He that believeth in him, should not perish, but have, eternal life. Of his own will, he brought us forth. So, there, there you have, the passage, set before him.

And you see, the reason, that we're a church, is, to come, in touch with, that life-giving, word of truth, which is the endowment, of the father, for us, in Jesus Christ.

And, our life, is, on the basis, of, receiving, that word. Our life, is not, in, caving in, to, evil desires, that bring forth, sin, and ultimately, death.

Our life, is receiving this. And, the whole liturgy, that we go through, this morning, in morning prayer, is just that. That we are, in a sense, reaching out, to that, by which God, has reached us, to us.

And, by, his choice, his purpose, has brought, us, to birth. By the word, of truth.

[26 : 40] And, that that birth, let me, just conclude with this. that birth, is, not because, God thinks, you're a good guy, and he'd like, to do something for you.

Because, it is God's, eternal purpose, for the whole, of humanity, that they should, hear the word, of truth. So that this, passage, ends by saying, you are to be, the first fruits.

You are the people, who have responded, in order, that ultimately, the whole world, will respond, to this endowment, to this good gift, this word of truth, that brings us, to birth.

God is not, in the business, of institutionalizing, religion, or making you, a card carrying member, of this, or that particular, religion.

James says, and, Dan quoted, this morning, that religion, is, is, the result, of, what God, has done.

[27 : 50] It's not, an attempt, to make God, do something, which is the way, most people, treat religion. Religion, is, the result, in your life, of what God, has done, for you, in bringing you, to life, through, the word, of truth.

Amen.