

God's Purposes In Trial

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in the letter to James, James chapter 1.

James chapter 1 and reading in verse 2.

Now as we know there is nothing more important in the Christian life than faith.

Because without faith we have nothing. It is by faith, well by grace you are saved through faith. And as we are told in the Bible what isn't of faith is of sin.

And so it is something that the Bible is always asking us to do. To examine ourselves whether we are in the faith. It is a very important thing. It is probably the most important thing that any person could do.

[1 : 18] Is to examine themselves as to whether they are in the faith. And we don't examine ourselves by just looking at our lives. We always examine ourselves against God's word.

Because it is there that we see how things really are. Now when there is faith we know that faith is something that must grow.

Faith is like a muscle. And God sees to it that our faith grows. That is part of the great purpose and plan that he has for us.

And here in verse 2 it talks of trials of various kinds. Now everybody in life faces trials. Everybody.

There is not a person anywhere, young or old, rich or poor, all the way from the palace to the prison that does not face trials of one kind or another.

However, the Christian, by the very nature of being a Christian, faces trials that are unique to being a Christian. Because the moment we become Christians, a spirituality comes into our lives and we see everything in a different way.

[2 : 34] And when you become a Christian, you begin to face battles and struggles that the world knows nothing of. There were days, I'm sure, in our own life that we weren't conscious of these struggles.

But the moment we become Christians, there is this ongoing war between the flesh and the spirit.

There is this conflict between what I am in and of myself and of the Holy Spirit working within us.

And that struggle, it's a good thing. And it's an encouraging thing to know. Because if you ever met a Christian who was going to say, you know, from the day I became a Christian, I have no struggles, I have no problems.

Everything, everything's plain sailing. And you'd say to yourself, that's not the experience I have.

And when you go to Paul's writings, despite the fact that Paul learned contentment, despite the fact that Paul was somebody who was enjoying the presence and fellowship of the Lord, he was also somebody who knew all about the struggles.

And you read about that, and whether it's in Romans or in Galatians or wherever it is, you will read about this conflict that goes on. But as I said, we all face trials.

[3 : 49] Now these trials come in various shapes and forms. Sometimes they're spiritual trials. And these can take any shape or form.

We can have trials, very simple trials, for instance, where we might find it very difficult to pray. And when we pray, we feel that heaven is like brass, that we just can't get anywhere.

And it's very hard when you go on day after day and week after week and month after month and you're praying and you say, you know, there's a, I don't think the Lord's listening to me at all. I don't, I just feel I'm not getting through.

That's hard going. And there are some times that we can be Christians and we can lose our sense of the assurance of faith. Now, of course, there's a difference between faith and the assurance of faith.

But we can lose sometimes, for a time, that absolute assurance. Because we know that God's Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are the sons of God, that we belong to God.

[4 : 50] And God's Word reveals to us in so many different ways of how we are believers. But sometimes, sometimes God, for various reasons, sometimes it's because of our own sin.

That can sometimes be such a block. Remember how it says in Isaiah, your sins have separated between you and your God. Because they're saying, God's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor is he heavy that it cannot hear.

But your sins, your iniquities, have separated between you and your God. In Psalm 66, it tells us, if I regard sin in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.

Now, that doesn't mean if I have sin in my heart. But if I regard it, if I nourish it, if I cherish it, if I hold it close to myself, if I fondle it, if I love it, that God is not going to hear me.

So, sometimes there's no end to the kind of spiritual trials that we can face. But we can face all kinds of trials which are in common with everybody.

[5 : 56] It can be trials with our mind. We can be facing anxieties, or stresses, or depressions, or darkness, or fears, or doubts.

There can be sometimes, these trials can be physical trials, of illnesses, or pain, and all these sort of things. They can be family trials. And these are often the sorest trials of those who are close to you.

Trials within the marriage. Trials with children. Trials through lack of no children. It could be through losses. It could be by being single. There's no end of the different things.

And so, as we go through life, we face all these different types of trials. For the Christian, it can sometimes be the trial of being misunderstood, being misrepresented, of being opposed, of being mocked, of being ridiculed.

Because you might be, wherever you are, at work, maybe the only Christian. And sometimes there's a conflict will arise between, even in your work.

[7 : 07] Sometimes you will stand up for something according to the truth, and you might be ridiculed and mocked for it. So, all these things are difficult. They're all part of the various trials of life.

But it says, count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials. In other words, trials will come. We don't need to go out looking for them.

You know, maybe you're saying, just now, well, you know, my life is going fairly smoothly. And if, if trials is an inevitable part of the Christian life, and right now, I'm not facing a trial, you might be saying, just now, maybe I'm not a Christian.

Well, the thing is, maybe tonight, you're not facing a trial. But trials will come. You've had trials, you'll have more trials. Because, you'll notice what it says, when you meet trials, trials, not if you meet, but when you meet.

And, when you meet trials, and I think it's in the AV, it says, when you fall, I think it's in the AV, it says, when you fall into trials. Now, when we fall, unless you're a stuntman, or a stuntwoman, you don't deliberately fall.

[8 : 20] When you fall, it's something that just, it happens to you, and you're taken off guard. And this is what happens. And, it's also the same, when you're out, you meet people.

I remember, when my father, God only, always asked, when I came in the door, who did you meet today? He always wanted to know, who did I meet? Because, you're always going to meet, somebody.

And, always wanted to know, who you met, and maybe what. And, when you look back, over life, you think of all the people, you've met. And, often it's through, these meetings of people, that doors have opened.

Your life has often changed, just by meeting somebody, in the day. So, that's what happens in life. Well, trials, come like that as well.

We meet them, so often, unexpectedly. They've come out of the blue, we didn't see them coming. All of a sudden, these trials, are here.

[9 : 20] But, you'll notice, what our attitude, should be to these trials. And, it's kind of strange, in a sense. It says, counted, all joy. Now, a trial, in and of itself, is not something, that you automatically say, oh, here's a trial, great stuff.

In fact, if you're actually, welcoming trial, and enthused, and excited about a trial, you'd, you'd actually say, there's something wrong here. Because, trials, are difficulties, in, in whatever shape, or form, that they come.

And, very often, when trials, come into our lives, we have, our attitude, isn't, the attitude, or joy. Sometimes, it can be bitterness, or resentment, or anger, or frustration.

There can be, lots of different attitudes. And, remember, Job's wife. Remember, how Job, had one, awful calamity, after another.

And, in the end, remember what she said, curse God, and die. That's what she said to Job. She had reached the end. That was it. Other people, they adopt, what we might term, the kind of, the stoic attitude.

[10 : 36] It's what we, what we would term, maybe the, the stiff upper lip. Where we have this sort of thing, well, I'll grin and bear it. I'll face this. I'll, I'll show my mettle in this.

I'm not going to give in to this. I know it's hurting my heart. It's breaking me. But, I'm just going to see it out. It's all I can do. Well, that's not what we're to do either.

We're told to, to count it all joy. And, how can we do that? How can we count this joy? Well, I think, one of the things that we, we've got to remember is that, whatever comes into our life, that God is in whatever comes.

God is never surprised, or shocked, or taken unawares, by anything that you have ever met, or confronted in your life.

And that God is in everything, as a Christian, but in particular, that comes into your life. And, not only is God in it, but God has a purpose, in everything, that comes into your life.

[11 : 51] Now, I know that sometimes, this can be hard to understand, and I know that there are times, that, we find it hard, to reconcile, God's love, and God's goodness to us, when we face heartache, and pain, and loss, and sorrow.

Sometimes, the Christian, for a long time, can be left confused, and broken. And I'm not saying, that straight away, a Christian, is going to be straight away, when they face real trials, that the immediate reaction, is going to be joy.

In fact, I would say, it won't be. But it is only, through God's grace, that that joy, can eventually, be found. And of course, the joy, that we discover, is not joy, of the actual trial itself, but joy, in the Lord.

And when we have the joy, of the Lord, it will be our strength. And it's like, how the Apostle Paul, remember, we often use the example, in the church, in the prison in Philippi, Paul and Silas, were praising God.

And you've got to remember, that they were bruised, and battered, and bleeding, and they were, in the inner prison, and their feet, were held fast, in these kind of stocks, they were, real, really, really, and they'd been, beaten up, severely.

[13 : 23] Their backs, would have been open, and bleeding. At a human level, they would be in misery, and yet, how do we find them? They're singing praise, to God. Because they're filled, with the joy, of the Lord.

This was a joy, in the face of the trial. And it's God given, it's a God given joy. It's not a joy, that you can produce, yourself, it's not a joy, that is found, in anything, it's a joy, within the Lord.

And so, we've got to remember, that, that the Lord, is at work, in our lives, through all these things. I remember, in the children's story, on Sunday, I was talking about, it was Marie actually, when she was a wee girl, and she was going to, pick up that big bumblebee, and I pulled her away, and she was really upset, because she thought, the big bumblebee, was so, so pretty, and attractive.

And I pulled her away, because, that bee, might not have, but it's more than likely, would have stung her. And God often, pulls us away, from things, or pulls things, away from us, because he loves us, he cares for us, he's looking out for us, he wants the best for us.

And some of these things, which may be, so appealing, and so attractive, and we think, that we need, and that our lives, will be the better of it, and God says, actually they won't, they're going to keep you, back from me, you will not serve me, the way you think you will, if you focus on this, I'm going to take it from you.

[14 : 58] And sometimes, there are things, that are, they're not sinful, in themselves, but we can make, a sinful use of them. And so, God is dealing with us, in all these trials, and there's so much, sin and corruption, still within our heart, that he's molding us, and breaking us, and he's, removing the dross from us, it's like the picture, in Malachi, of the refiner, of the silver, the picture, that we

have of the Lord, and with a picture there, that he's the refiner, and he knows, exactly how hot, to make it, in order that the dross, will all be taken away, and the beautiful silver, will shine through, that's what he's doing, with you and with me, and he's, he's in charge, and he's not somebody, who's, who's, putting you into the heat, and then forgetting, all about you, he's in the heat, with you, remember the picture, we have in the book of Daniel, of Shadrach,

Meshach, and Abednego, when they were cast, into the burning, fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar says, hey, how many people, did I put in there, was it not three, and they said, yes, what is this, I'm seeing four, and we know, who the fourth was, because this was, a picture of the, this was the presence, of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the fire, with them, and so he will be with us, he will be in the fire, with us as well, he's not a bystander, who's not interested, he is right in, with us, and like the refiner, he won't, put the heat beyond, what we can bear, but he will, also give us, the grace, to bear with it, but you'll notice, if we moved on, to verse 12, we see, the end result, blessed is the man, who remains, steadfast, under trial, now you'll notice, in verse 3, it says, count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials, of various kinds, for you know, that the testing, of your faith, produces, steadfastness, see that's, what God's doing, he's producing, he's producing, steadfastness, within us, that's his, patience, and perseverance, and this ability, to keep going, irrespective, of what is happening, and this steadfastness, verse 12, blessed is the man, or the woman, who remains, steadfast, under trial, for when he has, stood the test, he will receive, the crown of life, you see, this is what it's all, working towards, to the great, weight of glory, your light affliction, that's what the Bible says, which is working, in you, an eternal, weight of glory, there's the balance, the trials, the afflictions, of this life, that's them, in one side, the glory, in the other, you can't even compare, no matter, how difficult it is, the apostle, looks at us like, you look at, the apostle's life, he talks of, light affliction, he was left, for dead, remember, he was stoned, he was thrown, into prison, he was beaten up, loads of times, he, he faced, all kind of, food deprivation, and he was, shipwrecked, all for the gospel's sake, and yet, at the end of the day, he counts it, light affliction, but that's what, it's in comparison, to the great, weight of glory, the crown, of life, and you know, when you're crowned, with that crown, of life, and glory, which we begin, to receive here, in this world, you will say, Lord, it was worth it all, many a day, I couldn't understand, what you were doing, but now I know, that's why Jesus, said to the disciples, what I do now, you don't know, but you will know, hereafter, and he's still saying, that to us, so let us have the faith, to believe him, and to be persuaded, that everything he does, he knows what he's doing, and he has a purpose, for every single one of us, which is ultimately, for our good, let us pray, Lord, we give thanks, for your word, and we give thanks, for the great hope, of the gospel, and we pray, that we might, run the race, that is set before us, looking to Jesus, who is the author, and the perfecter, of our faith, bless us, we pray, we give thanks, Lord, for meeting together, we give thanks, for the prayers, that have been offered, prayers in public, and prayers in private, and hear, and answer, even beyond, what we've asked, and may the glory, of God, be upon us, and may that glory, be evident, even although, we feel so sinful, and so full, of imperfections, we pray, that it might be, the light, and the glory, of Christ, that will be seen, and that lives, will be touched, oh Lord, our God, as we pray, for all, who are tonight, outside Christ, there are so many, we know, and so many, we love, and we long, that they would come, into the kingdom,

Lord, open their eyes, open their ears, open their hearts, to see, to hear, to receive, bless us, and we pray, and do us good, cleansing us, from all our sin, in Jesus name, Amen.