

INTRODUCTION >

New Sermon Series

In school, the goal and assumption for a given semester and subject is that, at the end of that semester, you'll not only have completed the coursework, but **you will have some level of mastery of its concepts.**

So then, in early August, when I first started planning this sermon series on James, I was wonderfully excited about how it all fit together!

- It would conclude right before we jumped into our Advent Series, and then in January we could begin our mastery of a new book and so on and so forth.

But then I remembered, the Bible is not dead literature to master. It's alive!

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

So with that, I recalibrated the preaching calendar, and now it looks like we will get through James 1 and 2 by Christmas, and then next year we will jump into chapter 3.

Author Nicholas Carr wrote a book over a decade ago called The Shallows.

The main point is that the internet is rewiring our brains to treat information and life as if we are on a jet ski, rather than as scuba divers.

- And we do not know how to slow down and consider and contemplate.
- And so it is in the church; we might arrive and rightly treasure the truth of God's Word in our minds, but do we treasure it in our hearts?
- And we begin to believe that the goal is to spend our lives on jet skis through the content of the Bible, and we never get wet.
- And I don't just mean slower-paced sermon series; as if trading our jet skis for a slow-moving comfort cruise liner is the goal.
- Regardless of pace, do our hearts remain dry from the truth of God's Word, and SO THEREFORE our lives remain untouched.

And so, in this slowing down, the goal is not simply to go slow for the sake of going slow as if that were the destination; rather, the goal is to go deep for the sake of transformation!

We slow down to rightly feel and sit in the profundity of the Holy Scriptures in order that they might come to bear on our thoughts, intentions, and actions!

We do not want to be those who Paul wrote about in **2 Timothy** who are ALWAYS learning, but never arriving at the knowledge of the truth.

If you're visiting today, and then you leave for two months and come back in November, our hope, by the grace of God, is that we will look different when you come back to visit!

- That even by a degree, we would be more loving, more caring, more forgiving, more patient, more kind, more self-controlled, more generous!

This means that when we arrive on a Sunday Morning, we arrive not only ready, but also surrendered and expectant!

- We arrive ready to trust and obey the Word of God! Ready to be searched and known!
- Ready to confess and repent, ready to extend the grace we have received, and ready to serve where needed.

James Introduction: Structure and Occasion

James leaves little wiggle room for disobedience.

- The letter is full of very direct exhortations that demand an answer.
- It's as practical as any literature in the entire Bible; it's full of commands, and it can leave the reader with a matter-of-fact, terse instruction to the Christian walk.

Orthodoxy is right thought; orthopraxy is right practice, and the letter of James makes it clear that right thought cannot be divorced from right practice.

As a reminder, the reformers put forward the three aspects of Saving Faith.

1. Knowledge - Orthodoxy - right thought about God and His work in Christ
2. Affirm or Assent - That is, an agreement with the Gospel's claims about man's complete need for the work of Christ.
3. Trust - Resting in Christ and entrusting our daily lives to Him as our Truth.

For the most part, this letter assumes the first two aspects of saving faith.

- And so his letter gives us a relentless, unapologetic wisdom on how the knowledge we agree upon pushes out into our lives.
- **That is, here is what TRUSTING the Gospel looks like in the community of Christ.**
- Here are the marks and characteristics of those who have put their lives in the person of Jesus.

James 1:1

By way of introduction, we read this in **James 1:1 [1] James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.**

Who is this “James”?

We know of three Jameses in the NT.

- We have the two apostles and then James, the brother of Jesus.
- So which one of them, or was it any of them, who wrote this letter?
- Historically, it's been accepted that this is James, the Brother of Christ.
- BUT - in the last couple of centuries, there have been a bunch of challenges to that view, and after reading all of that wonderful detail, let me give you a definitive conclusion:
 - **It was probably, more than likely, James the Brother of Jesus, probably.**

Written around 46 AD to the 12 tribes of Israel who have been dispersed and scattered. The letter is viewed as a general letter to first-century Jewish Christians living outside of Jerusalem.

With all that, we move to what James wrote **TO** the dispersed Christians and **FOR** us today.

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Purpose Statement

In Christ, we have the confidence that the trials of this age will not consume us, but rather they are meant to complete us into His image.

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Today, we will look at the following:

1. The Destination
2. The Path
3. The Assurance

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I. THE DESTINATION >

Summary Statement

That We Might Be Mature and Made Whole!

Where is this Going

Before we agree to the Journey, we must value the destination!

Illustration: Crossing the Border to Chick-fil-A

Worth it! Why? Friends said it was not worth it.

So again, before we agree to the Journey, we must value the destination!

Read vs 2-4

So let's start with vs 4.

Let the steadfastness have its full effect

- Steadfastness is **endurance**, patience, and perseverance.
- So whatever is in vs 2-3 is going to produce endurance, patience and perseverance, and what we read here is that the effect, or the final product, will be:
- **that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.**

So here is the destination of this journey in these verses.

This is the thing we must first value, if we are going to consider whatever vs 2-3 is telling us.

That we might be perfect, complete, lacking in nothing.

So the question of this moment is: do you even want that?

Do you want to be made perfect, complete, and lacking in nothing?

I assume the first objection is, yeah, but!

- Perfect, complete, lacking nothing!
- Outside of Christ, no one has been, is, or will ever be perfect!

First, we need to look at what these words mean.

Perfect - mature

Complete - means to be whole and intact, with integrity

To not be missing anything.

So then, therefore, the product of this endurance and perseverance is that we will be made mature and whole.

And we can then say it in the negative: without this steadfastness, I will be left immature and incomplete.

But no one is whole on this side of eternity

Does this mean we should expect to be made perfect or complete in this age?

Illustration: Nobody plays a game saying, I want to miss three shots.

No, we go out trying to make every shot we take; we want to be perfect.

With the knowledge that we will never be perfect.

So we don't beat ourselves up when we miss; instead, we move on, aimed at the goal.

Or, in relationship language, it would be strange for anyone to say to you, "I love you, and I am not only content with my current treatment of you, but I have no aim to grow in loving you more completely."

By no means!

True love for other compels us to lack nothing in our love for them. We want to mature in our love for them!

So this MUST be our aim: The Full maturity of our faith!

- Not simply no lack in our knowledge of Him, not simply no lack of our affirmation of Him, but we long for, we are striving for, we are groaning for...no lack in our TRUST of Him in our lives!

Amen? Do we affirm that? If not, then we can go no further.

- Are we here declaring we WANT TRANSFORMATION, but we want it on our own terms; we will not repent; we will not submit and surrender our lives!

Verses 2-3 will be a cost too great, and a distance too far, if we do not first value and hope for what verse 4 promises.

If yes! Then we move on in fear and trembling!

Summary Statement

That We Might Be Mature and Made Whole!

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II. THE PATH >

VERSE - [2] Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

Summary Statement

We account trials as a purifying Joy that produces endurance

Count it all joy

First, this does not mean count EVERYTHING as joy.

- The word for “all” here is better translated as pure.
- It refers to the TYPE of Joy.
- **So this means a joy that is without alloy; it is a full, whole purity OF joy.**

This matters because we need to see that James is not saying we are meant to see everything that happens in this age as joy.

- He is not saying that when we are in the midst of pain and loss, we should grit our teeth and say, "What a joy."
- He is not commanding us to like hardship for hardship's sake.
- We are not masochists; discomfort and pain are not our joy.

James is telling the early church that, at the end of the day, when you sit down with your tear-stained cheeks and bruised bodies and go to your ledger books, you should reckon and account this trial as something that is not wasted.

- It is not arbitrary.
- This is not a U-turn or a barrier to the destination.
- This test that feels like it's against you will not consume you.
- It is not in the way of your destination.
- **This is**, by the gracious providence of God, something that will move us and draw us closer to wholeness.
- It is actually the path to our perfection.

So the message in this verse is to count trials with the confidence that God intends to do more than simply preserve you in the trial.

1 Peter 1:6–7

[6] In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, [7] so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

IN THIS YOU REJOICE, though now For a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials!

- Again, the trial is not the cause of our joy!
- The joy is what our God is doing in and through...

And so we read here in 1 Peter 1:7...SO THAT!

- So that the tested genuineness of your faith is tested by fire, and would result in praise at the revelation of Christ!

One other example from the Apostle Paul.

- Remember in Acts 14. He was stoned to death at Lystra.
- And he was tossed outside the city, but then the disciples gathered around him, and he came back to life.
- And he goes right back into the city that just killed him and preaches.
- And then we read this in **Acts 14:22:**
- [22] strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

And I wonder if he encouraged them with one of his eyes swollen shut from being stoned, saying Rejoice! This is the path upon which we will enter the Kingdom of God!

Illustration: Future Joy in Today's circumstances

If I told you that for the next year, you need to make a journey up the Appalachian Trail, but at the end of that trail is a guaranteed 10 billion dollars.

Do you think that would change how you view the things you are walking through today?

So then, how much more is it for us!

- We must awaken to the reality that is almost upon us!
- The unimaginable Eternity that is moments away!
- We must be SOBER to just how temporary this age is!
- We can rejoice in the Already, because we know what is coming in the Not yet!

As many others have said...the assurance of FUTURE JOY can't help but leak into PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES!

And this is what we see here in 1 Peter, and in James 1!

Assumed Providence

James goes on to say in verse 3, For you KNOW!?

How can we know?

A moment ago, I mentioned that our trials are under the providence of God; they are within His control.

- That is a vital part of our confidence in the midst of the trial.

And see clearly here.

James is saying that if you count the trials of this age as something to be ignored, disregarded, accounted as unlucky, viewed as something to be escaped from...then we will not be made mature.

- That we will lack, that we will be incomplete.
- Our faith will have alloys.

We can spend our entire life running from every uncomfortable situation.

- Leaving the room when things get challenging.
- Or even bury our heads in the sand and pretend everything is fine.
- If that is how we face trials in this age, our faith, our trust in Christ, will be in lack, because it is never forged in the fire.
- Nowhere in the Bible do we see a posture of trying to skip through the trials, as if to say, the goal is a trial-free life!
- And we say things like, we just have to get through this one thing, and then!
- Then we will have peace, and we miss the refining work that the Spirit of God means to do in us, and therefore we waste the materials that were meant to build us up into Him.

Again! No one is inviting fire!

But...If necessary, if this is the only way to the destination.

- If this is God's path to how we enter His Kingdom.
- If the only way I might be made mature in Christ.
- If the only way my faith can be an unalloyed gold at the appearing of our Beautiful Christ and King...then in this we rejoice.
- We say, if this is what it will take, if this is what is Necessary, then we count it as a purifying Joy that will produce an enduring faith.

Transition:

Again, in 1 Peter 1 he wrote: **though now for a little while, if necessary**

For a little while!

How can we know that this fiery trial of our faith is temporal?

That this is not our eternal state?

Which moves us to our third and final point.

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III. THE ASSURANCE >

Summary Statement

Christ is our Confident Assurance in the Trial

For a Little While

How do we know this is only for a little while?

How do we know for sure that these things will not undo us but rather, they will make us perfect?

We don't want to die like fools rejoicing as we're plundered and defrauded.

And we turn our eyes to Jesus!

Hebrews 2:7–8

[7] You made **him** for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor,

For a little while, Christ was made lower than the angels; His position and glory were veiled in flesh.

And we read on that **Hebrews 2:10**

[10] For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. (ESV)

Christ made perfect through suffering?

- Was he IMPERFECT before the cross?

Not at all!

- To be made perfect through suffering means that what was started was fully completed through the cross.
- Our salvation was made WHOLE, without LACK, through what Christ did in our place!
- So then, therefore, ultimately, it was through HIS tribulation that WE enter the Kingdom of God.

And then we read this in Hebrews 12:2

[2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, **who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross**, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hear all the echoes from our passage in James and our calling to follow Him!

- For the Joy SET BEFORE HIM He endured the cross!

- Christ prayed in the Garden, Father, if this is the ONLY path to their Joy, if bearing the weight of THEIR curse is the only way, then not my will. But yours!

And see that the CROSS, the suffering, was not the end of Christ!

On the third day, the tomb was emptied of its power to consume Him.

And He is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God!

- Fully restored to the position and power that He did not COUNT as a thing to be grasped, or held onto!
- Rather, for a little while He was in the likeness of a servant, and was obedient, all the way to completion, to the point of death! (see Philippians 2)!
- The cross that was meant to rip Him apart was the very thing that would put us back together!

And so, we too follow Him in this!

- We count the various trials of this age as a purifying Joy,
- A “for a little while” suffering that CANNOT ruin us; rather, it’s actually producing an endurance, a steadfastness, that is meant to mature us! To complete us!
- His scars and holes in His hands do not proclaim His lack; they proclaim that His work as our Christ was made whole!

So then, therefore!

Paul was very aware of these paradoxes of our current suffering.

And so he suffered with a steadfast hope that made no sense to the kingdom of man that seeks its own protection, comfort, truth, and self.

In 1 Corinthians 15 he orients all of his suffering in light of a joy that was set before Him.

He says, **19 If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.**

- In other words, if we suffer in this way for the sake of Christ and HIS CHURCH, and there is no resurrection of the dead, if there is no “being made whole” in and through it, then pity us. We are fools.
- The watching world saw Christ as a fool as He suffered, because they could not see the empty tomb.
- So then, we who have been united with Him in death, DO NOT THEN live lives in this age that DENY the resurrection by refusing to ever pick up a cross.

BUT

if we don't believe that we follow Him in a resurrection, then let's have integrity and stop torturing ourselves with all of this talk.

Eat, drink, be merry, for tomorrow we die, and that is all there is.

- Don't be a fool!
 - When the cost of love gets uncomfortable, move on.
 - When relationships get hard, run.
 - Find a place where you're comfortable and never challenged.
 - Insulate yourself from the mess that is being known.
 - Commit yourself to no one or no thing.
 - Only care for that which cares for you.
 - Only sacrifice for investments with returns that only benefit you.
 - And anything or anyone that stands in opposition to your kingdom must either be destroyed or disregarded, for there is NO joy set before us that is worth enduring for.

We could avoid and minimize our suffering and loss in this age...All we have to do is love no one other than ourselves.

- BUT if we choose the wide path without a cross, and forsake the One who calls us to follow Him, we will only find that an eternal curse awaits.
- That death still has its sting.
- That the only treasure we'll ever have will be eaten by moths, destroyed by rust, and stolen by thieves as you live in forever exile and eternal decomposition.

BUT

IF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST IS TRUE!

Then may we live with integrity to THAT truth!

May we live a life of WITNESS that testifies to that reality!

And so, therefore!

May we do what we have heard!

We follow our King and Bridegroom, and we pick up a cross of self-denial that WILL ABSOLUTELY lead to trials of various kinds.

- Our flesh will suffer as we learn that love will always cost us.
- Stepping out in faith will lead to scar tissue and things that feel like loss.

- Followers of Christ, count the cost and, in light of His grace, present your WHOLE bodies as a living sacrifice.
- Live your life as though you're on an altar as a pleasing, fragrant aroma to our Beautiful Savior!
- Seek out the one in need who cannot repay.
 - Don't despise the one who begs from you!
 - Care for the widows and the orphans.
 - Look to the roadside for your enemy who is suffering and in great need.
 - Bandage and mend his wounds; give him what is yours, and love him like yourself.
 - Put yourself in lack for the sake of the other!
- We ought to live in a way that seems strange to the kingdom of the dead, who believe our joy ends in a casket!

And in the suffering we do not lose heart - Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

And know this! In the end...

1 Peter 5:10

[10] after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

Romans 8:18 [18] For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

A glory, a beauty, a radiance, a worth, that will eclipse all suffering!

No one who suffers for the sake of Christ will, on that day, when we stand before our inheritance, be put to shame.

There will only be the forever exhale of those who have been made COMPLETELY WHOLE as they sing, The Lamb of Great Worth was, is, and will forever be worthy of our temporary suffering in this age!

Summary Statement

Christ is our Confident Assurance in the Trial

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CONCLUSION >>>

It makes sense that the book of James begins with a word of wisdom on how we ought to account for suffering.

As I mentioned, this book is calling us to live out what we say lives within.

And Christ is clear: living out our faith will mean a cross of various acts of self-denial.

- But also - we can count that suffering for His sake, as we know it is the path to a pure joy.
- Our faith being refined in the fire!
- We are not cast down by that which cannot destroy us!
- Rather, we're being made perfect in and through these things.

In Christ, we have the confidence that the trials of this age will not consume us, but rather they are meant to complete us into His image.

Pray

Consider

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Communion

In a moment, we'll take communion together.

And it's good for us to slow down and remember what we are doing here.

The bread and cup point our gaze to the cross of great suffering!

The cross that He did not avoid!

The intersection of God's love and Justice.

The place in which Christ was ripped apart so that we could be restored.

- Our sin counted to Him, and His righteousness counted to us.

And He endured; He remained steadfast for the Joy set before Him, and so when we rise and come to the table, we are declaring that we aim to follow Him in these things!

- We are acknowledging that we find completion through loss.
- We are proclaiming that it is only by His great mercy that we are not uncreated through the death we deserve.

As we prepare our hearts, there are some questions on the screen for us to consider.

And after that time, Jesse will lead us in song, and as He does, for those who affirm and trust the word of Christ, please come and take, be reminded and provoked by His Loving Loss for your wholeness.