

In James 1:1-11 we learned that James, the bishop of the church in Jerusalem, wrote to members of his church who had been driven out of Jerusalem and scattered throughout Israel and Asia Minor for their faith. James encouraged his persecuted brothers and sisters to consider what they were suffering as an occasion for joy knowing that the testing of their faith would produce steadfastness and that if they continued steadfast, God would use the trial to make them perfect and complete, more like Christ.

In addition, James encouraged them that if they struggled with counting their trial as an occasion for joy, they could ask God in faith and God would help them come to this realization about trials.

In a nutshell, we learned that we all will meet trials of various kinds through which God desires to change us to become more like Christ.

From the earliest days of the church to the present, Christians the world over have experienced the trial of being persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ.

In the 1950's, in North Korea, Pastor Kim and 27 of his flock of Korean saints had lived in hand-dug tunnels beneath the earth. Then, as the Communists were building a road, they discovered the Christians living underground.

The officials brought them out before a crowd of 30,000 in the village of Gok San for a public trial and execution. They were told, "Deny Christ, or you will die." But they refused.

At this point the head Communist officer ordered four children from the group seized and had them prepared for hanging. With ropes tied around their small necks, the officer again commanded the parents to deny Christ.

Not one of the believers would deny their faith. They told the children, "We will soon see you in heaven." The children died quietly.

The officer then called for a steamroller to be brought in. He forced the Christians to lie on the ground in its path. As its engine revved, they were given one last chance to recant their faith in Jesus. Again they refused.

As the steamroller began to inch forward, the Christians began to sing a song they had often sung together. As their bones and bodies were crushed under the pressure of the massive rollers, their lips uttered the words: "More love to Thee, O Christ, more love to Thee."<sup>1</sup>

Not all Christians have remained faithful under persecution.

In the 1970's, a woman named Natasha Lazareva was arrested for printing a Russian Christian underground magazine. The Communists showed Natasha pictures of several Christian women who had been arrested and imprisoned. One picture was of a young Catholic nun who, by the age of 21, had lost all her teeth and hair because of the

camp.

This is what awaits you,” they told Natasha, “unless you cooperate with us and denounce all your co-workers.”

To save her own physical beauty, Natasha gave the Communists the names of fifty other Christians. She put her co-workers in the underground church at risk for prison and torture. She was still sentenced to six years in prison.<sup>2</sup>

James anticipates that his suffering readers will be tempted to abandon their faith in Jesus because of the persecution they are suffering. He encourages that if they will resist that temptation and remain steadfast in their faith, God has something very special in store for them.

Turn with me to James 1:12

### **GOD PROMISES THE *CROWN OF LIFE* TO ALL WHO REMAIN STEADFAST IN TRIALS**

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.

**James 1:12**

Not only do trials have the potential to change us to be more like Jesus, but God also promises a reward if we stay steady through trials and allow them to have their full effect on us. That reward is the crown of life.

The New Testament Scriptures reveal that all church age saints will stand before Jesus in judgment.

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

**1 Corinthians 3:10-15**

The New Testament reveals that there are five crowns that Jesus Christ is going to reward to church age saints. Those five crowns are:

the *imperishable crown* for those who have victory over the flesh (1 Cor. 9:24-27);

the *crown of boasting* for those who win others to Jesus (1 Thess. 2:17-19);

the *crown of righteousness* for those who keep the faith doctrinally and morally (2 Tim. 4:6-8);

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*the crown of glory for church elders who serve faithfully (1 Peter 5:1-5).*

The crown of life is promised to those who remain steadfast in faith through trials. Our Korean brothers and sisters will each receive the crown of life from Jesus on that day.

James himself, the author of this letter, will receive the crown of life at the judgment seat of Christ because he remained steadfast in trials. As an elderly man, James was persecuted by the chief priests and scribes in Jerusalem. He was taken to the highest point of the Temple in Jerusalem and threatened to be thrown down if he did not renounce Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God. James refused and instead used the occasion to preach Christ to those in the street below. Furious, one of priests pushed James and he fell to the street, but survived with broken legs.

The chief priests and scribes decided to stone James to death who was on his knees praying “Lord, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” One of the priests, when he heard James praying, begged the others to stop...

While he was shouting this, another man ran up with a big, heavy stick in his hand and struck James in the head. James died instantly from the blow, still in prayer.

Remaining steadfast in trials is not easy. The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were worn out and worn down by constant persecution and abuse for their faith in Jesus. They were contemplating abandoning Christ and going back into Levitical Judaism in order to escape further persecution.

In the midst of severe persecution, Christians down through the ages have been tempted to renounce their faith in Christ to escape suffering. Through James, God promises that those Christians who resist that temptation and remain steadfast in their faith in Jesus Christ will receive the crown of life.

**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.**

**James 1:12**

When the pressure is really on; when the pain or fear is overwhelming and a Christian gives in to temptation to doubt God and disobey God or even renounce Christ, some Christians might be prone to blame God for giving in to the temptation as if God set them up for failure. But as James explains in verses 13-15, God does not set us up to fall.

### **GOD DOES NOT TEMPT US TO SIN IN THE MIDST OF TRIALS**

**Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted 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.**

**James 1:13-15**

Often when this section is taught it is essentially divorced from the context around it. Whereas from verse 2 through 12 James has been writing about trials, in verse 13 he is

Greek as the word translated trial throughout this passage. What James is addressing is the temptation within each trial to doubt and disobey God. That is why I gave this definition of a trial:

**A trial is a life experience that puts to the test our faith in God and our obedience to His will.**

What is the temptation for those persecuted for their faith in Christ - to deny Christ and apostatize.

Down through the history of the church Christians have been tempted to deny Christ and betray fellow Christians in order to avoid persecution.

Illustrations

Within every trial there are temptations to doubt the goodness of God and to doubt His Word. Within every trial there are temptations to disobey God and take matters into our own hands rather than trust God.

Within every trial there is the temptation to blame God and accuse God of putting us in a “no win” situation; to accuse God of allowing a trial into our lives that is so intense we can’t resist the temptation to disobey God. Under pressure a person might blame God for his or her sin. But God does not tempt us to sin. If we sin, it’s because the inclination to sin is within us.

**Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted 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.**

**James 1:13-15**

We are vulnerable to temptation because of the desires within us that are not yet surrendered to Christ.

**Trials reveal the desires in us that are not yet surrendered to Christ and have the potential of leading us into sin.**

If I fall prey to temptation and doubt God and disobey Him, it is not because God did it to me, but because of my choice to fulfill my desires outside of God’s provision.

Illustrations.

If you are undergoing a trial and find yourself tempted to doubt God and disobey His Word, know that God is not trying to trip you up and make you fall – He is not tempting you to doubt Him, but to trust Him fully. Whatever desire within you that is tempting you to doubt God is exactly the area of your life God wants to change and conform to the character of His Son. The trial, like a crucible, causes the dross to bubble to the top and be revealed. God uses trials to reveal what needs to be changed in us.

James offers proof in the next section that far from trying to trip us up, God is perfect and the giver of only good things.

Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

**James 1:16-18**

James tells his readers to not be deceived. About what should they not be deceived?

About what should we not be deceived?

That God does not tempt us to sin!

God will never tempt us to sin because of His character and because of His purposes in our lives. As James teaches, God only gives good and perfect gifts and because of His unchanging nature, He will always and only give good and perfect gifts. James then goes on to prove that God gives us only good and perfect gifts by reminding us that God is the One Who brought about our salvation through the Gospel! The God Who saved us from sin will never tempt us to sin! That is unthinkable and contrary to the changes He wants to make in us through trials. Though trials may be painful and full of temptation, we realize that those points of temptation are exactly the things in our lives God wants to change. God wants to work for our good through each trial, not for our failure.

We must always remember:

God is using trials to change us and to reveal what yet needs to be changed in us.

### **SUMMARY**

God promises the *crown of life* for those who remain steadfast in trials.

God does not tempt us to sin in the midst of trials. We are tempted to sin by those desires that are not yet surrendered to Christ.

God gives only good and perfect gifts – He saved us!