

**James**  
**Bridge Over Troubled Waters (Part 3)**  
**James 1:2-12**  
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Well, we return again this morning to look at the first full paragraph of James' letter. James 1:2 - 12. We're looking at the issue of trials, troubles in the life of believers: pressure that comes into our lives. You know, as I thought about the spiritual pressure that comes into our lives this week, I was reminded that you and I face a different kind of pressure every day. That pressure comes from the very air we breathe.

Air that surrounds us is a mixture of gases that surround our earth. Air is made up of 78% nitrogen, 21% oxygen, and 1% argon and other gases. You may be surprised to learn that air, the air in which you and I live and move and have our lives, has weight. At sea level, each cubic foot of air weighs about one and a quarter ounces. The weight of the air that presses down from the top of our atmosphere is called air pressure. At sea level, its 14.7 pounds per square inch. That means that scientists tell us that as you live your life and you move around, as I do, day in and day out, the pressure that bears down on our shoulders weighs about one short ton, or 2000 pounds. We don't really sense it or feel it because that pressure is equalized all around our body. And yet we live in that pressure. And when that pressure from air is removed from us, as it is with astronauts, our muscles begin to deteriorate. Because we need that resistance, that pressure, for them to stay healthy. You know, as I thought about that, I thought there's a powerful illustration of the value of trials in our lives.

Just as, in the physical realm, if the air pressure were removed from our bodies, our physical bodies would begin to deteriorate, our physical muscles would begin to lose their strength, even so, if God were to remove the trials and pressures that come at our spirits from us, our spiritual muscles would begin to lose their strength. God uses the weight of the constant pressure in our lives of various trouble and trials to build and develop our spiritual muscles. That's the issue we've been studying in James 1.

Now, it's obvious when you look at this paragraph, beginning in verse 2 down through verse 12, that James is discussing the matter of external tests or trials, those external difficulties outside of our control, every external trouble and pressure that comes into our lives. And if we could

reduce everything that James says in this section to a single proposition, it would be this: God uses the troubles of life to refine our character and to mature us in our faith. But, and this is an absolutely crucial caveat, we must respond to those troubles correctly if we're going to benefit from them. You see billions of people in our world encounter the same sorts of trials and troubles and difficulties that you and I do, and they reap absolutely no spiritual benefit from it because they don't respond correctly. Neither will you or I benefit from them if we don't respond correctly. And so, it's crucial that we learn the lessons James has for us here. To enable us to truly benefit from life's circumstances, James, in these verses teaches us four godly responses to our trials.

We've already looked at two of them together. The first is: develop the right attitude. Develop the right attitude. We saw this in verses 2 - 4. That is, the attitude of joy. Not enjoying the trials and troubles of life, but seeing them with joy because of how God will use them to produce spiritual maturity and endurance in us.

Secondly, we saw in verses 5 - 8: that we must use the available resources. God has provided for us in the midst of our difficulties and troubles and trials incredible resources; the resource of prayer; the resource of His wisdom; and the resource of His grace. We looked in detail last time at how you and I can take advantage of those amazing resources.

But today, we come to the next paragraph, verses 9 - 11. Let me read it for you, and through verse 12, which we'll examine today as well. Beginning at verse 9. You follow along.

But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; and the rich man *is to glory* in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him.

Now when you look at verses 9 - 11, they don't, at first glance, seem to fit into the flow of James' argument. What in the world do those verses have to do with trials? Well, as we'll see,

in reality, verses 9 - 11 provide us with the third godly response to trials: don't focus on your circumstances. Don't focus on your circumstances.

Now, before we look into the text in detail, we have to answer a crucial question to begin with. And that's who are these people in verses 9 - 11? Who is the brother of humble circumstances, and who is the rich man? There's been a lot of ink spilled on this issue, but let me just tell you that the most natural reading of this passage is that both of these men are believers. They're believers. Let me just literally translate verse 9 for you from the Greek text. This is how it reads in the Greek text. "But the brother, the lowly one, he must glory in his height, but the wealthy one in his humiliation." You'll notice that there's not even a verb repeated for the second part of the sentence in the Greek text. The implication here is that we're talking about two brothers, two Christians: one who finds himself in poor financial condition and difficult earthly circumstances, and the other who finds himself living in wealth and relative ease. And regardless of which we are, James says we are to boast in our spiritual position, not in our material circumstances.

Now why is this important for him to bring to the issue of trials? Well, to understand why it's important, we have to go all the way back to the first century and put ourselves into the mindset that was characteristic of first-century Judaism. First century Judaism embraced what theologians call "retribution theology". Some of you embrace it, and you don't even know it. Retribution theology teaches this: that God immediately, in this life, rewards obedience with blessing, and disobedience with hardship and trouble and curses. Now, think about it for a moment. If you believe that when a person is obedient, they get nothing but blessing and good things from God, and when they're disobedient they get nothing but trouble and trial and difficulty, what conclusions are you going to come to?

If you see someone who is rich, that is, financially blessed, who finds themselves in good circumstances in this life, what are you going to conclude about the nature of their spiritual relationship with God? That it's wonderful. They must be a deeply spiritual person. On the other hand, if you believe that, if you see someone who's struggling, who doesn't have adequate financial resources, then it must be because of what? ... sin. There must be sin in their lives.

You see, Job's friends believed in retribution theology. When Job said, "I don't know why this is happening. I served God faithfully. There's no sin I know of in my life." What's their immediate response? "Come on Job, we know there's something. For God to be treating you this way, there's something in your life."

It is true that God blesses obedience and curses disobedience. And God will eventually settle the score. But here's the key: not always in this life. In fact, the Scripture is filled with passages that talk about the ungodly prospering and the righteous suffering more than their share. Read Psalm 73. It's not always the way it appears.

In fact, you see this even in the words of Christ. In Luke 16, and I won't spend much time there, but let me just read this verse to you. In Luke 16, we have Abraham talking to the rich man in Hell, the story that Jesus told. The rich man asked for some relief for his pain. Verse 25, "... Abraham said, [to him] "Child, remember that during your life you received good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony." Now, this doesn't mean that all rich people are going to hell and all poor people are going to heaven. What this means is, things don't always look in this life the way they are, in reality, spiritually before God. The rich man looked like everything was great, but he ended up in hell; and the poor man was in the worst of circumstances in this life, and yet he ended up in the presence of God.

By the way, it's really important you understand this principle because this flies in the face of a form of retribution theology that's very prevalent in Christianity today. And that's what's called "the prosperity gospel". There are men on your television and mine who will stand up, men like Joel Osteen down in Houston, who'll stand up and say, listen, if you're a Christian, then God wants you to be healthy. He wants you to be wealthy. He wants you to have a lovely wife like mine. It's not true.

Now, here's the question. Why did James bring the issue of finances into a discussion about trials? Why would he do that? It's because the effect of trials is much harder for those who are poor, those who have humble circumstances. In Proverbs 10:15 it says, "the rich man's wealth is his fortress, the ruin of the poor is their poverty." The poor don't have a fortress to run into when hard times come. They don't have that protection, that insulation from trouble that those who have more wealth have. We understand this. Think about, for a moment, two people in our country. Two people in our congregation who lose jobs: one who is wealthy and the other who is relatively poor, in humble circumstances. Think about the differing effects of their job loss. The wealthy person probably has other resources from which he can pull to insulate himself against that trouble. The poor family, on the other hand, may go without. They may accumulate a great deal of debt. They may go without food. They may even lose their home.

So, here are two Christians with greatly different earthly circumstances. How should they respond? Well, notice verse 9. “The brother of humble circumstances must constantly glory in his high position.” To glory simply means to rejoice, to boast. As one writer puts it, to profess loudly something you have a right to be proud of. Boast in your high position. Now clearly the contrast there is between this man’s earthly circumstances, which are humble and poor, and his spiritual position which is high. He is to glory, not in his physical condition, not in his earthly circumstances, but in his present exalted spiritual position as a Christian. You see, if you find yourself in what might be termed humble circumstances, in financial difficulty and trouble, whatever your temporary circumstances are here, you are an adopted child of the King. James Hiebert puts it this way. “He may be financially poor and looked down upon by the world and considered as just a nobody, but in the eyes of God he has a position of lofty dignity.”

This is what Paul says in Romans 8. Turn there for a moment. Romans 8 beginning in verse 15. He’s talking about our adoption as sons, verse 14.

For you have not received a spirit of slavery [Romans 8:15 you have not received a spirit of slavery] leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we [call out or] cry out Abba! Father! The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,” [Now watch verse 17.] “... if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*.” [Now watch how Paul changes from the issue of adoption to the issue of trials.] Verse 18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us.

You see however difficult your current circumstances may be, don’t focus on those. Instead, choose to glory in your high spiritual position. Your spiritual riches more than offset your material poverty. Back in James, the letter of James 2:5, he puts it this way. “Listen, my beloved brethren; did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?”

Every year *Forbes Magazine* publishes a list of the 400 wealthiest, richest people in America. Over the last several years positions 4 - 8, five positions, are occupied by the five heirs of Sam Walton’s estate. Each, according to the magazine is worth 18.8 billion dollars. Now, imagine if today or tomorrow, probably tomorrow, a work day, you were to receive a call from one of the attorneys representing Sam Walton’s estate, and Sam, before his death, being the generous

person that he was, decided that he wanted his attorneys to pick an American at random to receive an equal portion of his estate. And they've just now gotten around to that issue with all that had to be settled, and they put their finger on your name in the phone book. And they've called to tell you that in just a few days' time, as soon as all the details can be worked out, you're going to be receiving a check for 18.8 billion dollars. And you'll essentially be part of the family.

Now, you tell me how that would change your perspective about your circumstances this week. If you knew that in a week's time you were going to receive that, be a lot easier to deal with, wouldn't it? Because you know what's coming. James says, that's how we're to think as Christians. It doesn't really matter what your difficult circumstances here are because of who you are in Christ, and because of the future that's soon coming for you. James goes on to say, verse 10, the rich brother, now we are to the other Christian, the rich brother, the brother of wealthy circumstances, he must boast in his humiliation. You see, wealthy Christians must boast not in their wealth but in their spiritual condition, and that condition is humiliation. Now why is it the poor gets exalted, and the rich, here, get humiliated? What's his point? This is what James is saying.

If you're wealthy, don't rejoice in your wealth. Instead, rejoice that God has humiliated you, that God has humbled you and brought you to true faith and repentance. Technically, the word "rich" here refers to those who don't have to work to make a living. But in another sense, compared to most of the five billion people on this planet, all of us are rich. You know, I've often thought that and said that, so this week I thought, you know, I'm just going to do a little research, and put a few numbers to that. So, let me just give you a little perspective on your life and mine.

The average U.S. income is \$36,000 and change, \$36,000. How does that compare with the rest of the world? Well, let's take the two greatest populations. Let's start with China. In China, more than a billion people, and the average income in China is \$3600 a year, 10% of the average American income. Take India, another billion people plus. The average income in India is \$2200 a year. Now, when you add China and India together, you're talking about 40% of the world's population. That means 40% of the world's population makes less than \$3600 a year on average. A study in 1993 found that those Americans in the poorest 10% of the U.S. population were better off than 66% of the rest of the world's population. So, we're very wealthy. And while in a temporal sense, that's an asset, it is a serious spiritual liability. Why is that? Because Christ tells us that it's hard for rich people to truly come to saving faith.

Turn to Mark 10. Jesus has some interesting words to say after his interchange with the rich young ruler. Mark 10:22, the rich young ruler, because he “was saddened went away grieving for he was one who owned much property.” He wasn’t willing to give it up to gain Christ. It’s not that Christ demands everyone who’s wealthy to give up their wealth to come to Him, but you have to be willing, and that’s what He touched on with this young man. Then Christ says this in verse 23.

... Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples, “How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!” The disciples were amazed at His words, [because the rabbis taught that wealth meant God’s blessing, which meant you had a greater opportunity for being in God’s favor and being saved. So, they’re amazed by this.] Verse 24, But Jesus answered again and said to them, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” [Now there have been a lot of efforts to downplay what Jesus says here, but let me just tell you, the bottom line is, He’s saying it’s a whole lot easier for a literal camel to go through the literal eye of a needle than it is for a rich person to be saved. In other words, it’s impossible.] Verse 26, ... [His disciples] were even more astonished, and said to Him, “Then who can be saved?” [I mean, if the rich who supposedly have an advantage can’t be saved, then where does that put the rest of us?] Verse 27, Looking at them, Jesus said, “With people it is impossible [it can’t be done] “but not with God; for all things are possible with God.”

Jesus makes it clear that salvation is, from beginning to end, of God. It’d be impossible for any of us. It’s hard for the rich to come to true saving faith. Why is that? Well, Matthew 13:22 tells us why. It’s because wealth is deceitful, and it chokes out the gospel. Paul gives us another reason in 1 Corinthians 1:26 and following. He says God hasn’t chosen the wise and the mighty, the noble, the rich of this world, as it were. God has chosen the foolish, the weak, the base, the despised. Why? So that no man would boast in God’s presence. So, James says, listen, don’t boast in your wealth. Boast in the fact that God did the impossible; that He humbled you, and me, and that He brought us to the place where we were willing to bow the knee to His Son.

In the words of the first beatitude, Matthew 5:3. Blessed are the beggars in spirit. Thank God that He made you a beggar in spirit, that He brought you to the place where you understood your true condition. You see, the path to salvation always begins when God brings us to understand our spiritual bankruptcy. And let me tell you. If you have never been brought to that place; if

you've never realized that you have absolutely nothing to claim before God, then you're not a Christian. It begins there, according to Jesus, by being a beggar in spirit. One writer puts it this way. The rich Christians could always remember that he has found something of incomparably greater value than his wealth, something that, by its greatness, makes him feel small. So that, disillusion in his old ground of glorying, he attains a basis for a better glory. He now glories not in his wealth, but in Christ.

Now, notice in James 1, the reason that James gives the wealthy not to put their hope in their financial resources. It's because their lives and their wealth are fleeting and temporary. You know, it's really hard for us to think this way. Proverbs 18:11 says, "A rich man's wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall [listen] in his imagination." We think that our wealth can shield us and make us secure against trouble and difficulty. It's in your mind. It's in your imagination. James says it's not true. And he gives us a vivid illustration here of the passing of earthly wealth. And it's an illustration that we can appreciate, that's very familiar to us here in Texas. It's the brief life-cycle of wildflowers. Now this was a familiar Old Testament image. He's probably drawing on Isaiah 40:7, or perhaps on Psalm 103:15 - 17. This was a common thing in Israel.

Israel's climate was very much like Southern California where I was for 16 years. What would happen is, that the rains would come in February and March, and with those spring rains the grass would begin to sprout up everywhere, and the wildflowers would bloom all through the land. But their lifespan was very brief. By May those wildflowers are gone. The grass is dry and brittle. And so, those wildflowers became a common biblical illustration of the transitory nature of all human life: here today, gone tomorrow. So, in verse 10 James says the rich man is to glory in his spiritual humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. In other words, don't glory in your wealth because it's going to pass. And you're going to pass with it.

Now notice verse 11 details the process. He says in his illustration here; the sun rises with a scorching wind. This is probably a reference to the famous sirocco, that blast furnace kind of condition caused by the Arabian desert. And that comes, and it withers the grass. Its flower falls off; it drops its petals; and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed. Literally, the beauty of its face is destroyed. As I mentioned, we had a very similar circumstance to these in Southern California. Starting in the late spring and going into the late fall, we had kick up often: the Santa Ana winds. That's what they called them. They came off the desert like a hot oven. Temperatures would be often in the hundreds, and the wind would kick up on a cloudless day. The wind would be blowing 40, 50 miles an hour and the humidity would drop to 10%. This



sucked the life right out of you, and anything that wasn't watered, any tender vegetation that wasn't watered carefully and daily, would dry up in a matter of hours. That's what James is describing. Notice, at the end of verse 11 he applies his illustration. So too, the rich man, in the midst of his pursuits, will fade away. While he's busy with his activities, he'll disappear from this life. Now don't miss James' point here. Either wealth will leave you, or you will leave your wealth, but one way or another, it's extremely temporary. It's just like those annual wildflowers that spring up for a short time, and then quickly disappear. So, wealth is never a place of true safety. Instead, James says, listen, anchor your hope in God.

This is what Paul says in a passage we often refer to, a passage that's very appropriate for our culture, for Dallas-Fort Worth, for Southlake. Turn to 1 Timothy 6:17. Paul writes to Timothy,

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited. [Don't for a moment imagine that your intelligence got you where you are.] or to fix your hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God. [Don't imagine your riches can protect you. Don't imagine the wealth that God has allowed you to accumulate can protect you. He is the One who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.] *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed. [That's what James is saying.]

Now, let me summarize what James is saying in those verses—verses 9 - 11. I love the summary that James Moo gives in his commentary. Listen carefully.

To the poor believer, tempted to feel insignificant and powerless because the world judges a person on the basis of money and status, James says, take pride in your exalted status in the spiritual realm. You're seated in the heavenlies with Jesus Christ Himself. To the rich believer, tempted to think too much of himself because the world holds him in high esteem, James says, take pride not in your money or in your social position, things that are all doomed too soon to fade away forever, but paradoxically, take pride in your humble status as a person who identifies with one who was despised and rejected.

Listen, as you sit here today, if you would characterize yourself as the brother with humble circumstances, let me ask you, do you often envy and complain and chafe under the difficulties

that come with your circumstance in life? James says, don't. Instead, boast in your present exalted spiritual position. You've been adopted by God, and you have an incredible future ahead of you. Think about that. Focus on that and not your earthly circumstances. If, instead, you find yourself today in wealthy circumstances, then don't boast in that. Who, after all, gave you the power to get that wealth? Who gave you the gifts and skills that you've used? Who sovereignly orchestrated the circumstances? Who made your plan succeed? God.

So, boast in the fact that God in His grace has spiritually humbled you, made you a beggar in spirit, and drawn you to Himself. Because life here is brief. You didn't bring anything in, and you're going to take nothing out. So, whether you're rich or poor, James wants you to know that your earthly circumstances don't really matter. Don't focus on your circumstances. Glory in what God has done in you. If you want to benefit from the trials and troubles of life, you have to respond in a godly way.

You must first of all: develop the right attitude.

Number two: use the available resources.

And thirdly: don't focus on your circumstances.

Now that brings us to the final godly response to trials: live with an eternal perspective.

Verse 12. "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him." Here is the conclusion to James' profound paragraph about our earthly troubles and trials. If you want to respond rightly to the trials of life, you cannot be totally absorbed in this life. Because if the world is what really matters to you, then the troubles that come to you here are going to be devastating. Instead, you must live for eternity.

Notice how James begins, "blessed". Now, that word is not primarily "happy" as we use the term. You can be blessed by God and still be not happy at all, because our emotions change with our circumstances, and you can be blessed and be in difficult circumstances. I think we can find insight into this word "blessed" if we look back in the Old Testament, because that's where James would be coming from. It's from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, and this word is used in the Psalms in a way that means this: to be envied, fortunate. There's a note of congratulations in the word. It's the verdict by a third party, looking on a man

in his relationship to God and saying that person is worth envying. That person should be envied. Why? Well, James says, to be envied is the person who perseveres, literally the same Greek word as endures in verse 2. The person who endures under trial. You see, the person who, as a pattern of life, endures under various kinds of pressures and difficulties, the kind of person who never gives up, who stays true to Christ, that person is to be envied. Why?

Well, notice the rest of verse 12. "... for once he has been approved," By enduring, he shows himself to be approved. This Greek word was used of testing metals and coins to determine if they were genuine. In other words, endurance in trial proves you to be the genuine thing, or the real deal, a true Christian. Therefore, James goes on to say, having been approved, he will receive the crown of life. Perseverance, endurance demonstrates God's approval of you as the genuine thing. And to those He approves, He gives the crown of life.

Now, what exactly is the crown of life? The word "crown" translates the Greek word "stephanos" which you've probably heard is one of two primary Greek words for crown in the New Testament. It's used primarily by Paul. And it's used to describe the victory crown that was given to those who won in the athletic contests in ancient Greece. He uses it this way in 1 Corinthians 9:25 and following, talking about that wreath that was put on the heads of the winners in the games. He says those who endure and show by that, they are approved, they will receive, that's a reference to the judgment seat, to Christ's judgment seat, and of course the allusion is to the judgment seat of the one overseeing the athletic event, he will receive the crown of life.

What exactly is this crown, though? Well, there are several ways to understand that relationship, that's called a genitive relationship where you have a noun of some other noun: "The crown of life." Probably the best way to interpret this expression is life is defining the crown. In other words, we could say it this way. He will receive the crown which is life. The crown is eternal life. When we endure trials, staying true to Christ, someday we'll stand before Him and will receive the victory wreath which is eternal life.

Jesus says the same thing to the church in Smyrna in Revelation 2:10. He says, "Don't fear what you are about to suffer. ... the devil is about to cast some of you into prison ... you'll be tested ... you'll have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown ... [which is] life." Now that doesn't mean that enduring trials earns eternal life. Perseverance doesn't result in salvation and eternal life. Instead, listen carefully, true salvation results in

perseverance. Those who are truly Christians will endure. They will persevere. And they'll receive eternal life, still as a gift of God's grace.

What James wants us to grasp here is that to respond to trials in a Godly way, to endure them with joy, demands that we live with an eternal perspective. We must live in the light of heaven. We must live in the light of the reality that you and I will stand before Jesus Christ. And the day is coming when we will receive a reward, the crown which is eternal life.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 4, 2 Corinthians 4:17. Let's start in verse 16. How do you do that? How do you keep that kind of perspective? How do you live for eternity? Verse 16, Paul says,

Therefore we do not lose heart, but [al]though our outer man is decaying, [that's true of every one of us, just look in the mirror, you'll see it every day] yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction [you've read Paul's life story. How could he refer to the things he endured that way? For momentary light affliction] is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison," [How did he keep that mindset? Because he lived for eternity. You find it in verse 17 and you find it in verse 18.] He says ... we [don't] look ... at the things which are seen, [we look] ... at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

He says, listen, I don't live for this stuff. I live for what can't be seen and touched. I live for God. Now, back in James 1, James continues in verse 12. He says, you're going to receive the crown which is life, and the Lord has promised that crown. In other words, not in one particular verse, but throughout His Word, He's promised eternal life to those who endure, to those who persevere. And He's going to give it to those who love Him. That is just another biblical way of describing every believer. Starting in Exodus 20:6, flowing through the Old Testament into the New Testament, those who love Him are believers. Every believer, in other words, will get the crown which is eternal life.

But there's another implication here. Enduring life's troubles with joy ultimately shows our love for God. Look at 1 Peter 1, 1 Peter 1:6, Peter puts it this way:

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you've been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, *being* more

precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; [How can you do that? How can you keep that mindset?] Verse 8, [Because] ... though you've not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, you believe on Him, You greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. [Staying under trials, enduring them with joy, staying true to God through them, reflects our love for Jesus Christ.]

Last night, I went for a walk; took some time to pray, to think about how the Lord has used this passage in my life over the last several weeks. I shared with you a couple of weeks ago some of what the Lord has taken us through as a family. Well, as often happens, when you teach on trials, the Lord has continued to help me learn these lessons very intimately and personally. Last week the doctors came across something suspicious in some symptoms that Sheila was experiencing, and told us that she needed a biopsy. Well, cancer runs in her family. Over the last several years, we buried both of her parents with cancer. Her sister has had breast cancer and been treated for that. So, we had the test, and then, as many of you have, we waited for a week to get the report. On Friday, it came back negative.

Also, this week, however, on Wednesday, I spoke probably for the last time in this world, to my mother. She's now unresponsive, and the doctors tell us that she will soon die. I expect sometime this next week or the following at the very latest, to be preaching her funeral. As I had my walk last night, I thought about these circumstances and others, in light of this text that we've studied together.

And I have to tell you, I realized what a profound source of comfort and encouragement and joy the truths in this passage have become to me. I can tell you, not only on the basis of the authority of the Word of God, but also from personal experience that this is how we need to respond to trials. And when we do, James promises us that we will gain joy and endurance and maturity and wisdom and grace to deal with the ongoing trials and troubles in this life; and then, if we endure, the crown which is eternal life, when we see the Lord whom we love.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for this incredibly profound and helpful passage. Lord, we live our lives in trouble, facing trials of various kinds. Thank you for giving us this insight into how to respond in a way that honors You.

And Lord, we thank You, even as we look at this passage together, we thank You that it's only through our Lord, it's only through His death, through His sacrifice, through the justification that we receive as a result, that even our troubles can be beneficial; that You use them to our sanctification. Lord, we don't take that lightly.

We thank You that while most of the world lives facing the same trials and troubles that we face, they find no benefit, but because of Christ, we find help for our souls. We find ourselves made into His very image. Lord, we praise You and thank You.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.