

# The Problem of Pain: Part 1

*Epistle of James*  
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Turn with me in your Bibles to James 1. Ted and Todd Guthrie are both in Greenville with their family seeing their brother Mark. I just mention one thing about Mark, he is a missionary in Uganda and that's one of the reasons that he was home for two weeks and it turns out he was able to be there. He's a missionary in Uganda and he's home for just a couple of weeks and it turns out they didn't think he was going to be able to get to Greenville but he is and so they wanted to be with him. Pray for him. He's had a very difficult time. The ministry there is going well but he has just recently gone through a very painful divorce. His wife left him on the mission field. Just a bizarre situation and pray for Mark Guthrie. I know Ted and Todd are wanting to minister to him and encourage him so they wanted to take this opportunity to be with him.

The title of the message this morning is "The Problem of Pain." The problem of pain. You could debate it calling it the problem of evil.

The title of the message, that's one of the things that we learn as we grow older from a baby, there are some things wrong in this world and sometimes things just don't work the way they're supposed to and it's painful. But seriously, the problem of pain is the title for the message and it's something I think we see that James deals with in a sense in verses 12 to 18 but we're going to focus this morning on verse 12, so it's the first of probably two or three messages titled "The Problem of Pain." It could be called the problem of evil in this sense, that one of the key words for evil actually in the New Testament as well as the Old, emphasizes that evil is that which harms; that which hurts. You know, God has made things good and he is a benevolent God and made everything to be wonderful and a blessing and evil came in through sin and has damaged. So evil is that which damages, that which produces pain and suffering.

But "The Problem of Pain" is the title and James, we've noted as we began looking at his letter over these last few weeks, that there are some things we see in the way that he writes. He writes as a pastor. There is a pastoral tone to his letter. He's concerned as a pastor for people that he loves and cares about like a shepherding concern for those Jewish Christians that have been spread throughout the first century Roman world by the persecution that happened in Jerusalem. So he writes as a pastor but he also writes not

just with a pastoral focus but with a practical focus. He's answering the question: how? How can you live out the Christian life?

So in this sense, he turns to how do deal with pain and suffering. He's been doing this, actually, in this whole first section of the book is about trials. I would submit to you that verse 2 to verse 18 is really about trials, dealing with trials. And here in verses 12 to 18, he's dealing in some ways with some of the philosophical elements of it that really have great practical import in helping us to deal with difficulties: suffering, pain. He realizes that if we don't understand God's purpose for trial and his character in the midst of trials, we're going to struggle even more to deal with suffering and so the question: if God is good, why does he allow evil? Why does he allow pain and suffering? It's a very real practical question, isn't it? The Bible teaches that he is good, that he made all things good, and that sin brought death and evil into the world but why did God allow that and why does God allow that in the hearts and lives of his people? Why does it sometimes seem that the people of God suffer even more than unbelievers?

This passage begins to explain that and expound that. It carries forward what's already been shared in the previous verses and so I want us to, well, we'll read verses 12 to 18. We're going to focus in on verse 12. James 1:12,

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. 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. 18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you that in it we have a perfect record of your revelation, that you have spoken without error, that you used errant men to write a perfect book by superintending them by your Spirit. We pray that you would help us now as we open it and as we study it. May your Spirit that inspired these words illuminate our hearts and minds to understand and to submit ourselves to your truth, repenting and trusting in Christ. We pray in his name. Amen.*

Why does God bring trials into the lives of believers? Why does he allow us to suffer? Why is it that suffering sometimes goes on for so long in the lives of Christians particularly? What is God's purpose? That's really the focus that I want us to look at today, it's the purpose of God in suffering, in difficulties. In fact, our first point this

morning is the purpose of God. There are three points this morning to organize our thoughts around verse 12. We're looking at 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." We're going to consider that verse under three headings and the first is the purpose of God which is really the main point of verse 12. What is God's purpose in allowing us to suffer in this fallen world?

Now, we understand that it wasn't God's original intention to bring suffering into the world; that when he made things, when you read Genesis 1, he's emphatic on he made things good. When you read the account of the creation in Genesis 1 and 2, what you see is that God has made things good. Over and over the summary of each day of creation, God saw what he had made and, behold, it was good. Six times that rings out: God saw that what he had made and, behold, it was good. It's actually said on the sixth day there is a second time he says it. After he makes man male and female, God saw all that he had made and, behold, it was very good. So the Lord has made a perfect world for man to dwell in his presence with him, loving him in perfection, but man sins and in sinning he breaks fellowship with God, he dies spiritually the moment he sins, separated from God by his sin because God cannot dwell with sin, and that sin was cosmic rebellion, and so the effect of that, the Lord allows to be felt by the whole creation. Romans 8 makes this clear, that he subjected the whole creation to futility because of sin.

Things don't work the way they're supposed to; suffering, pain happen. Everything that was good and perfect, what Eden must have been like. You know, still there are so many amazing realities. The more that people study the human body and the more that they study nature, isn't it amazing what we find out? I mean, things like, you know, we've known this for a little while, that the symbiotic relationship between our bodies and bacteria. How you have to have certain things in your body so that you can even digest things correctly. That when you take penicillin, it kills the bacteria that you need, the good bacteria, so then you start having problems that are complications of killing these bacteria which are foreign things that live inside your body. God made it so that there's this...and originally all of those things were perfect in the mutually interchange of these different beings were all perfect. You wonder what the purpose of mosquitoes was originally. It wasn't what it is now.

Things are messed up and that's a picture of why did God do that? Well, God subjected things to futility, we're told in Romans 8, in hope. In hope. If he had not subjected things to futility we would have been spiritually dead and not known it because part of sin is not only are we separated from God but we are blind and dumb. We are. That's one of the images God uses. Jesus in his ministry healed a man born blind and part of what he was doing was showing that he's the light of the world; that everyone is born blind from birth spiritually. He said, "Except you are born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God."

So he subjected the world to futility, allowed these consequences to happen from sin so that we would see around us testimony that things are not as they ought to be, and ultimately we would realize that things are not as they ought to be in our hearts, that we need a Savior, that we need to come back to our Father, for the unbeliever has lost that

relationship. We all had lost that relationship. We were born separated from God but the glory of the Gospel is that God sent his Son into the world to save sinners and part of the plan was to let us by dying even physically. You face the reality of eternity, don't you? When you're young, you think you're going to live forever. I mean, sort of. You don't really think you're going to live forever but you sort of do. You feel invincible. You think your youth is going to last and then suddenly it's gone. Why is that? Well, part of what God is doing is showing us, "You were made for a perfect world and this world's not perfect. Something's wrong with this world. Something's wrong with me."

So that's God's big picture of why he has brought suffering into the world and we brought it. He allowed it but it's a good purpose. The worst thing in the world would have been to allow men to live their whole lives, to live them independently from him, because we were made for him. Every good and perfect gift, which we read earlier, comes from him. Everything that is wonderful in this world is a reflection of his beauty, of his goodness. So if the things that we enjoy that we eat, the beauty of a glorious sunset, a landscape that you see and your heart is arrested by the beauty of it, those are all tokens of the beauty of God. Everything that is good, relationships. We're talking about family. The most wonderful moments in our lives that we've had in connection with family or friends, those dearest moments are a reflection of the God-head, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a communion of Trinity. And God invites us into that relationship with him where we will really find that we are home.

So he has set the world up good. When we sinned, he then subjected it to futility, suffering came in. Now, the question though is, once you become a believer, why do you still need to suffer? "Hey, Lord, I know, I want to go to heaven so I don't need to suffer anymore." I think it's fine for us to ask. I mean, it's crazy to ask for suffering. "You know, I just hope today I really suffer a lot. Man, I'm just really looking forward to a great day of suffering." No one thinks that way and it would be wrong and foolish to. Suffering is not a part of what is good but the Lord is going to show us in this passage as he has been, that suffering can be used to do great good.

So the problem of pain. We're talking about in the life of the believer, why do Christians suffer? The purpose of God is the first point. We need to understand the purpose of God. If we're going to understand how to deal with suffering, we need to first of all understand the purpose of God and it's there in the first verse, "Blessed," the first word, "Blessed." That's the key word to this first point. "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial." That word "blessed" is the Greek adjective, makarios, which is found at the beginning of Jesus' first recorded lengthy sermon in the New Testament, the Sermon on the Mount when he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are they who mourn. Blessed are the meek." And this word basically means "oh, how happy are." Oh, how happy are the poor in spirit. Oh, how happy are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Oh, how happy are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

James is saying, "Oh, how happy is a man who perseveres under trial." In fact, the word "blessedness," it pictures having all that you need to fullness; that everything...it was used in Greek culture to reflect a time when everything was perfect; that you were striving for

this kind of situation. That's what makarios is. So the authors of the New Testament take that word and use it to describe the blessedness that can come to people when they are rightly related to God. That's what the Sermon on the Mount is about, it's showing you how you get rightly related to God. How do you come to know the Lord Jesus Christ? How do you come to know God? Blessed are the poor in the spirit, the first Beatitude. Those are the Beatitudes, right? The first Beatitude is, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." That is, "Oh, how happy are you when you realize you have absolutely nothing. Oh, how happy are you when you realize that you have absolutely nothing spiritually; that you are bankrupt, destitute, completely helpless spiritually." Jesus, that's the first statement in that sermon, "Oh, how happy are those who realize they have nothing to commend themselves to God. And when you get to that point, yours is the kingdom of heaven," because you've stopped trusting in your own righteousness, you've stopped striving to save yourself and you look outside of yourself to God to do what only he can do. Then he says, "Blessed are those who mourn, who mourn over their sin. Blessed are those who are meek, who surrender everything to God."

So when you realize you have nothing, when you mourn over your sin and you surrender everything to God, trusting in Christ fully, that's salvation and, oh, how happy are you because you have found what you were created for. Augustine said, "Thou hast created us for thyself. Thou hast created us for thyself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee." When we find God through Jesus Christ, we find life, we find our rest, we find that everything is right.

This blessedness has that idea. In fact, it's interesting, this word "blessed, makarios, oh, how happy," is a word that Paul uses twice as an attribute of God. In 1 Timothy 1:11 and in 1 Timothy 6:15, he speaks of the blessed God. Oh, how happy God. The God who is filled with joy and pleasure. And so James is saying that you can have the same joy of God in a certain circumstance and it's God's purpose. God's purpose, the first point, the purpose of God is to make believers happy, infinitely happy. And so the question is: why does God bring suffering into our lives? The surprising answer is to make you happy. To make you truly truly happy. It doesn't feel like that, does it? But God's ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so are his ways above our ways and his thoughts above our thoughts and when we disagree with him, we can know that we're wrong, and when you linger and you don't run away from him and you stay there, you find out, "Yes, yes, I was wrong." He's always right. He is the blessed God and he knows how to bless his people.

So the purpose of God is to make you infinitely happy. It's to fill you with joy. In fact, it's really interesting to note a parallel here. You have in 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." You have an amazing parallel in verse 12 to verses 2 to 4, and so James is happy to repeat and to go over the same things. That's why I love James so much. He loves to repeat and go over the same things. Anyway, I thought that was funnier than you did. Okay.

But look at how verses 2 and 4 tie together with verse 12. In fact, the three main words in verse 12 are there, in fact I would say four key concepts are there and they are there in 12, are there in verses 2 to 4. First of all, look at the word "perseveres. Blessed is a man who perseveres" in verse 12, "under trial." That word "perseveres" is actually the same word as "endurance" in verses 3 and 4. Now, this is one of the rare times where the NASB, I'm reading from the New American Standard Bible, and normally the New American Standard Bible is really good at translating the Greek word the same throughout a passage but in this case, they really messed it up. If you're reading the ESV or the NIV, you see the connection.

Let me show you this. In the NIV and ESV when it talks about, well, when the NIV, when it talks about perseverance in verse 12, it uses, "Blessed is the man who perseveres," but in verse 3 it says, "faith produces perseverance and perseverance its perfect result." You see, it uses the word "persevere" all three places. The ESV uses the word rather than "endurance" or "perseverance" uses the word "steadfast" and it's there in verses 3 and 4 and also verse 12. It says in verse 12, "Blessed is a man who remains steadfast under trial." Back in verse 3 it says, "the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." You see, it's easier to see this, it's the same word.

Not only that word but the word "testing, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance." In the NASB, the word "testing" is translated "approved, having been approved." They messed it up again. But the ESV has "testing, and stood the test," so that the idea of that word is there as well.

Endurance, testing and then finally trial. "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial," verse 12. The word "trial" is there back in verse 2, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials." They got it right, the NASB did this time. Trial and trial, the same word. So trial, testing, or trial, perseverance and approved are all there in both places.

Now, also the idea of joy. I just said in verse 12, "Blessed. Oh, how happy is a man who perseveres." Look at what verse 2 said, "Count it all joy." So he's saying, "Listen, when you go through trials, you're being tested and the testing needs to produce endurance. So when you go through trials, you're being tested and you need to produce endurance, be happy." In both places that's what it says. But he's not just repeating himself, he's tying these things together and adding something new as well. He's coming back to that theme that when you go through trials, you ought to be happy. "Count it pure joy," verse 2, "when you encounter various trials," because God is doing something wonderful in it. He's saying the same thing in verse 12, "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial," but he's going to add something to it.

But first of all, the purpose of God in your trials is to make you happy. As a Christian, that's his purpose. The second point: the plan of God. The plan of God. His purpose is to make you happy. How does he carry out that plan through trials? How does he carry out his purpose to fill you with joy? There are two sub points under this second point. The second point is: the plan of God. And the two sub points are as well the plan of God is to

fill you with joy by, first of all, by giving you two things. Those are the two sub points. He wants to fill you with the joy by giving you two things that come only through suffering and the first is giving you assurance of salvation. He wants to give us assurance of salvation through suffering.

When he says in verse 12, back to verse 12 now, "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved." Oh, how happy are you when you continue and remain under a trial because once you have been approved, once you have stood the test. This word here "has been approved" pictures a completed process of testing and proving. It's actually a word that was used to speak of like the testing and purifying of gold or silver. The refiner's fire would be heated up and they would test it and prove the genuineness of the...you know, like the difference between fool's gold and real gold. You might think it's real gold but it's only fool's gold. What tells you if it's genuine or not? It's the test. And so what he's saying is that it's the testing, it's under trial, it's persevering under difficulties that actually proves the genuineness of our faith.

So he's saying that as you suffer and as you persevere, it results in you having assurance that you're truly saved. Now this is important because in our day there is much misunderstanding of the issue of assurance. When I was growing up as a young man and came to Christ, I've heard many times through the years false teaching, actually, about what it means to be a Christian, how to be assured that you truly are. I remember hearing a number of times that if you have prayed to receive Christ, you've confessed your sins, prayed to receive Christ, you can know that you're saved without any doubt forever. In fact, I remember talking with a friend of mine who said that when he was counseled, he went forward in a church service to pray to receive Christ and the truth is, how do you get saved? You pray and you receive Christ as your Lord. You surrender to him. But he was counseled by someone, "Listen, let no one ever cast any doubt on your salvation because you have prayed today. I heard you with my own ears. You know you're saved." Now, the problem is that's just not biblical. It is not biblical to give someone the assurance that because you prayed today, I know forever that you're saved because that's assuming that you know their heart and you don't.

You see, when you read the New Testament, what you find is that there are many who profess to know Christ who do not know Christ in truth. Jesus says in Matthew 7, some of the most frightening words in all of Scripture, "There will be many in that day who say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not cast out demons in your name?' and I will say to them, 'Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness, I never knew you.'" These are people who thought they were saved but who were not.

We see exhortations in Scripture like 2 Corinthians 13:5, "Examine yourself to see if you are in the household of faith." Paul is writing to a group of professing Christians in Corinth and he says, "Examine yourselves to see if you're in the household of faith," direct contradiction to what my friend had been counseled by. The New Testament would encourage you, yes, salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. You call out to Jesus for salvation. You call on the name of the Lord. It's all that he does for

you. But there must be a full surrender and time will tell the genuineness of that profession.

James is dealing with just that reality. He's saying, "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for it's the persevering under trial that will prove that he's going to receive the crown of life." The crown of life is just another way of saying the reward which is life, eternal life; that as you go through suffering and you persevere under trial, the persevering itself proves the genuineness of your faith, that you are truly receiving that which you hope for, eternal life. So this is the way to find true biblical assurance. Assurance of salvation is a wonderful gift of the Lord and it's something that there is a lot of complexity to it in really understanding it and finding it, each one of us. But one of the things that we see in the New Testament is that just because we have heard the word and we think we've made a commitment, we shouldn't assume that that's real unless we see evidence of new life.

Let me give you an example of this in several places. First of all, in the parable of the sower. Jesus tells the story of how the kingdom of God goes forth and he says, "A certain man went out to sow and he sowed seed," and the seed we find out later as he explains to his disciples, the seed is the Gospel of the kingdom; it's the message of salvation; it's the message that Jesus Christ has come to save sinners like you and me; that he's the way back to God; that he's the way to fix what's wrong with us; that he is the way, the truth and the life to come to know the Lord God.

So the Gospel goes forth and some of the seed falls on the wayside, that is, the path. Other seed falls among rocky soil. Some seed falls among thorny soil. And some seed falls on good soil. And the point of the story, Jesus tells us, is that those who are truly saved are the ones who are the good soil Christians and you know that because of their fruit. They produce fruit, some 30, some 60, some 100-fold. The fruit of new life is evident. When there is true spiritual life, you will see it in fruit. Jesus also said you will know them by their fruits. Those who profess to be Christians and who are false teachers, you know them by their fruits. He says a good tree produces good fruit, a bad tree produces bad fruit.

So the evidence of true salvation are the fruits of things like the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. These are evidences of grace. Love for God. And what we see from James is continuing in the faith even in difficulty is one of the great evidences of true salvation. I mentioned the three soils that were not true believers, he said: the wayside, that's some who just hears the word and immediately it is taken away; the rocky soil convert, apparent convert. He said some seed fell among rocky soil and in the parable he says as the seed germinated and it grew up quickly but because it had no depth of earth when the sun came out it withered and died. When he explained what that kind of a person was he said the rocky soil professor, professor of faith, is one who receives – listen to this – they receive the word of God with great joy, great enthusiasm when they receive it, but when tribulation comes because there is no depth of root, they fall away.



One of the other things that you see about our society today, evangelicalism, is people are so focused on experience and if you had a moving experience, that you were really moved to tears and you believe you trusted Christ at that moment because you were so moved, is that absolute assurance? No, not biblically. It's not to discount that that's a wonderful gift that God may give to a believer to really have that sense of emotion, but that's not the essential mark of a believer. In fact, Jesus said that sometimes the over-enthusiasm actually corresponds to one who is not a true believer. There is an initial burst of enthusiasm but there's no continuance and the New Testament makes clear over and over and over again that those who are truly saved are those who continue.

In fact, let me just show you a couple of places. Turn back, you're in James, the book right before James is Hebrews. Turn back to Hebrews 3 and you see this in two places in Hebrews 3. Verse 5 of Hebrews 3, "Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house--whose house we are," look at that next word, "if." He's writing, again, to people who profess to know Jesus Christ, Jews, Hebrews, who are professing to follow Christ, who are gathering like we are to hear the word of God, to worship together. And he writes this, he says we are of his house "if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end." Do you see that? The mark of the believer is he continues. That's what James is saying.

Now, look down there at verse 14. Actually, let's start reading in verse 12. "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God." He's saying to a group of Christians like us, "Listen, watch out for each other. Make sure that there's no one among you that has a sinful unbelieving heart. That is, when you see someone starting to struggle, love each other enough to encourage them to persevere in faith, to keep looking to Christ, to keep seeking Jesus."

He says in verse 13, "But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." And verse 14, "For we have become partakers of Christ." How do you know you've become a partaker of Christ? You say, "I went forward in a service and I remember, I have a card and I wrote it in my Bible. I'm now a partaker of Christ. The man that counseled me said, 'Never doubt,' so that's how I know I became a partaker of Christ." This is what the Bible says right here, "For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end." The New Testament is clear. Continuance. Continuing to walk with God and seek him even as difficulties, persecutions, whatever comes, the believer stays with Jesus. Now there may be backsliding moments but the overall direction is they won't be gone long. The Lord will discipline them and bring them back. That's the mark of the true believer.

John says something similar to this when he's speaking about the departures. Many of the people that formerly professed faith in Christ but are not truly saved. He explains, "Listen, don't be discouraged so much by the fact that they left. It's not that they lost their salvation." He says, "They went out from us for they were not of us." You see, they didn't

really have a relationship with Christ. They hadn't really in their hearts surrendered to him in faith and repentance.

So what he's saying then is, that it is actually the suffering that happens in our life that gives us an opportunity to have true assurance; that as you keep on, sometimes you feel like you're holding on by your fingernails, you want to turn away from the Lord because of the pain, but it is the fact that you keep holding on. He's saying you go through a trial, you go through a trial, you may have Christians coming over helping you like Hebrews 3 we just read about. "Hey, don't give up. Don't quit. I'm with you. I'm praying for you. How can I help you?" Listening to one another. Bearing one another's burdens. But at some point, there comes a time where the trial suddenly is past, you've been, as he says in James 1:12, you have now been approved. You've stood the test and you can then look back and say, "Wow, look what God did." And he's saying then you have the assurance that you're going to receive the crown of life. This is testimony, "he will receive the crown of life," having stood the test.

No one wants to go through the fire but when God takes us into the fire, we should never try to run into the fire, but when he takes us into the fire, we need to trust him that he's doing something good and to realize that no matter what he brings, whatever trial comes, he intends to purify our faith and to give us deeper joy. Assurance that's rooted in reality, not in some bumper sticker type theology.

So, you see, when you think about that, when you really have a sense of going through a trial and you think, "How did I get through that?" and the Spirit impresses upon you, "The only way I got through that is because God was holding me up. His hand is on my life." And the joy that floods the heart. "I'm going to be with him."

So his plan is to bring pain into our life to fill us with joy by giving us assurance of salvation. Secondly, he doesn't just seek to give us a true biblical assurance but he also seeks to give us a true biblical affection. To fill us with joy by giving us true biblical affection. This is the second point: the plan of God. His plan is to fill you with joy by giving you assurance of salvation and, secondly, 2B, to be or not to be, that is the question. To fill you with joy by giving you true biblical affection, that is, setting your heart on heaven. "For once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." Going through suffering does something profound in making you long for heaven. It shows you that God's at work in your life and part of that is redirecting your heart toward your true home. "I want to be home with God."

Philippians 3:20 says, "For our citizenship is in heaven." The mark of the believer is he is a stranger and an alien here, one of the key words the Scripture uses to speak of Christians. We're just passing through this world. We're not to love the world or the things that are in the world. We're just passing through. So Paul says in Philippians 3:20, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior." He's creating in our hearts more of a longing to go home and to have our Savior come and get us and he's saying that suffering helps us want that, which should be an encouragement to

us because as a believer when you are saved, when you repent and you believe the Gospel and you place your faith in Jesus Christ and you look at what he has done for you in dying in your place on the cross, paying for your sins, rising from the dead, and you place your faith in him, your citizenship is now heaven. That's your home.

That's the place we truly belong and he's saying that when we go through suffering, God uses that to break the hold of this world because as a Christian, when you're saved, you have a new heart but you still have an old nature and the old nature is still wracked with even unbelief and doubt, and the old nature still has affection for the things of this world. So that's why the Christian life of sanctification is dying daily. Jesus said, "Take up your cross daily and follow me." That's the walk of the Christian, is to die daily to the things that our flesh wants to do and realize that what we really want is Christ. So he's saying that suffering is one of the things that God uses to advance that cause of lessening the hold of the world on us and making the hold of heaven so much more real.

Now, we looked at the purpose of God and the plan of God, look at the precept or the application. The precept, the command. What do we do? What is this verse instructing us to do? There is not an imperative but there's an implied imperative in the word "perseveres." "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial." What are we supposed to do? We're supposed to persevere. When we're in trial, when we're in suffering, by God's grace we must persevere.

I mentioned earlier that the NAS and the NIV translate that word "persevere," the ESV translates it "remain steadfast," the King James says, "be patient." Well, the idea of the word itself in Greek is "to remain under." It's made up of two words, a prefix which means "under," and the verb which means "to remain." So it means "to remain under." So the idea is that there is this burden and you choose to remain under it. You don't try to escape the burden.

Now, James is writing to many people who were suffering persecution. Part of their suffering was they were being persecuted for faith in Christ and that as long as they professed faith in Jesus as Jewish believers particularly, it was true for Gentile believers too, but as Jewish believers they were rejected by their families, they were scorned, and if they would renounce Christ, they could be accepted back, that is, the burden of persecution could be removed if they departed from Christ. And James is saying, "Listen, when that's happening, remain under it. Stay with Jesus. Never depart from him." To turn back from following him is to go back to destruction, to lose everything of value.

And if you remain under it, even though the weight is unbearable right now, there will come a moment of relief. In fact, it's interesting, this "persevere," it's in the Greek present tense. "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial." The Greek present means, and I've gone over this but just to remind you of it again, it's not so much about time like it is in English. The present tense means present time, right? But in Greek, tense is more about the kind of action than the time of action and the Greek present speaks of continual ongoing. So he says, "Blessed is a man who perseveres in an ongoing continuous way," that is, that you're remaining under something and remaining under it and remaining

under it. Or you're being steadfast and being steadfast and being steadfast. It pictures suffering long. But then the next verb, once he has been approved, that's an aorist tense. That speaks of a point in time. So you're remaining under over a long period of time and suddenly you're relieved, suddenly the trial is removed. So you remain under and remain under and remain under and remain under, counting that God will in his time remove the burden.

So we are to remain under. I mean, we're supposed to try to alleviate suffering. I am one of the first people to take Excedrin Migraine. Praise God for Excedrin Migraine. You know, you have a headache, you take a pill. You have pain, it's appropriate to alleviate pain. But there are certain things we can't alleviate without sinning and he's saying, "Don't turn away from God to escape the burden that he's placed on you." And we can sometimes escape in lots of apparently not so evil ways, but if you really look at them, you know, we can escape from the burden sometimes by just distracting ourselves continuously. Some people look to alcohol or to other things to numb the effects. This is saying that there is a place for appropriate alleviation of pain and all of that, yes, but that basically the Christian is one who is not running from suffering. Not that he's running toward it but that when it's unavoidable and you can normally just, if you can't avoid it, you avoid it, you don't just walk into it, but if it means doing something, dishonoring Christ in any way, you don't run from it.

So remain under it. How do you do that? And I think there are two other sub points here I want to talk about. The precept is: remain under it. How do you do that? By trusting him and by loving him. By trusting him and by loving him. I mean, the way that you do it is you take what he says to be true, you trust his promise that he's not going to allow you to be tempted beyond what you're able. He's going to give you the grace that you need and you're going to be approved in his time. You're going to be relieved of the suffering in his time because he's good. He knows what he's doing. He's faithful.

It's true that sometimes we feel like that we can't take any more. All of us that are a certain age, you've probably experienced that and some of you are going through it right now, wondering, you know, you hear that old saying: God doesn't give you more than you can handle which really isn't super theology exactly but there is a principle that's right. God is measuring things out and for believers, he doesn't give you more than his grace will enable you to deal with, but actually it's always more than you can handle. Anything is more than I can handle but it's his grace.

But we trust him. That is, we don't panic. I love what Peter says in 1 Peter 4:12, he says, "do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which has come upon you to test you, as though some strange thing were happening." When you find yourself in a fiery ordeal, don't be surprised as though some strange thing were happening. I don't know about you, but just in life, if I walk into my house and there is a fire burning, that's not normal, I'm going to be active. I'm going to be panicked. Well, that would be true about your house but he's saying in life when it comes to suffering, don't be surprised when it comes like that, when the refiner's fire, but if you came into a place where they were purifying gold and there was a fire, you would understand. James is saying that's what the Christian is. The

Christian is someone who the Lord brings through the fire to purify them so don't be surprised. So don't be surprised. This is God's way. This is necessary. My faith must be tested. It must be proved. And actually going through the circumstance makes me believe more and trust more. This is God's way.

I noticed in doing a word study that there is actually an interesting word in the Old Testament. Remember the Old Testament is in Hebrew but they translated it into Greek in the second century BC and so you can read the Old Testament in Greek called the Septuagint and you can check verses and see how they translated certain things. Genesis 22:1 when it says that the Lord tested Abraham, it's the same word as the word "tried" here, "trial" here. The Lord tested Abraham. What did the Lord do? Abraham was a man of great faith. Abraham was a man who had already demonstrated incredible faith that the New Testament would commend to us as great examples of faith. He left Ur of the Chaldeans to a land that he did not know where he was going. God said, "Go," and he went. He believed God, that God could give him a son at 100 years old and God did. But Genesis 22 says after all of that and other things that Abraham had done, God decided to test his faith in Genesis 22 and that's when he said go offer Isaac as a sacrifice. It was all to test his faith.

If Abraham's faith still needed to be tested and proved genuine and improved, thus in the process purified and improved, then our faith is going to need to be tested so when it happens, just trust him. He knows what he's doing and he has a good end in view. Look at how he dealt with Abraham. Abraham would tell you that he had a good end in view when he tested me in Genesis 22. How glad I am that he tested me. How much I came to know more of the glory of my God through that and how Isaac even became more precious to me because of that, how God worked in my life.

So by trusting him. We remain under it by trusting him and, secondly, by loving him. He says at the end of the verse, "the Lord has promised to those who love Him"; that the crown of life is for those who love him and the mark of the believer is he loves God. So as you go through suffering, one of the things that we need to do is keep running to the Lord, trusting his word and actively seeking his presence and loving him. That's how we bear up and in the end, we find that God's purpose was right. On the other side of the fire is joy. He says, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial." He's the one who finds exactly what he's been looking for. He's the one who finds exactly all that he's ever wanted. You find that on the other side of the fire when you find Christ in a more wonderful and deep way because he gives you assurance of salvation and he gives you affection for heaven and he makes you long to be home. That's the glory of the Gospel. The problem of pain for the believer is solved because Jesus never brings pain into your life without a purpose. There are no accidents happening. Everything is measured and it's intended to bless, it's intended to make us infinitely happy people.

When we get to heaven, you know the Bible says he's going to wipe away every tear in heaven. You know, why are people crying in heaven? I don't know for sure but one of the things that I've often thought is that perhaps we will cry in heaven because we will cry over all of the doubts that we had about God in our lives. We'll suddenly see truly that

everything he did was right and good and we'll mourn the fact that we ever doubted his goodness. But even that he's going to wipe away when we enter into the full joy of heaven. May God help us hasten to that day.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we thank you for the glory of the Gospel. We thank you for the glory of your ways, your goodness, your rightness. We pray that you would help us surrender to your purposes. We thank you for your promise that says that all things work together for good to those who are called according to your purpose, who love God and are called according to his purpose, your purpose that we would be like Jesus and that's the most wonderful thing that we can experience because righteousness is the path of life. When we become more like Christ, we become more holy and more happy. Keep working in us to perfect us. Lord, we pray for those that do not know you here today, that you would help them press into the kingdom by faith, trusting in you and you alone, surrendering themselves to you and then evidence the reality of our faith, Lord, in real ways through our lives. We ask you to do what's necessary to prove and test us and to make us what you want us to be. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*