

God is in charge!

Our lives, Our faith - His pressure test

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Today I want to look at 2 troubling pieces of scripture and employ a process whereby we will let scripture help us understand scripture. Today I want us to take a very brief look at Job through the lens of James and vice versa. Let us first look the Book of James reading from the beginning of chapter 1

Jas 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

Testing of Your Faith

Jas 1:2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

Jas 1:3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

Jas 1:4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Jas 1:12 Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

Jas 1:13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;

Jas 1:14 but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.

Jas 1:15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Jas 1:16 Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters.

Jas 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Jas 1:18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created

Firstly a few thoughts on James

Servanthood and Authority

Recently Pastor Don spoke on the first chapter of James but unlike many other sermons on James his was essentially on James 1:1 which gives us James's self-description of "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ". And right then a light went on for me re my understanding the next verse about "pure joy and trials". Both are in the context, the understanding, the realisation, that we are in fact "SERVANTS" of the living God. We are under **His authority, He is in charge, He sovereign, He is Lord, He is King**

Much of scripture speaks about God's authority and the obedience of His people. The message that we heard last week from Pastor Hardy highlighted the correct, healthy, understanding of authority and obedience when he looked at the Centurion and his sick servant in Matt 8. I believe that Christ's applauding as great faith, the centurions understanding of authority and obedience, indicates how our relationship with the living God should be actually worked out. Indeed, Christ himself in speaking of His relationship with the Father, says it was one of "strict" obedience in that He "Only" did what the Father instructed.

Trials - Testing of Your Faith

Trials – the trials, are necessary. Now to understand this we need to realise what the process to maturity is all about. And that realisation, that understanding, will only come about when, and this is the difficult pill for some to swallow, we recognise who is doing the testing. Because if we agree and understand that it is God who is doing the testing, then the obvious question that most will recoil from is this, does He send or orchestrate the trials. Does He, God, initiate the trials?

Now many who looking at these verse, and pondering this question, will cite Jas 1:13 "When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;" in order to refute the idea of God initiating trials. And it is true that God does not temp but it is also true that He does test and if you don't agree with that then you misunderstand what being set apart, of being made Holy is all about i.e. the process of sanctification,

It is very important for us to understand that testing, that trials, are not in and of themselves temptations. A trial or test is about seeing "what will rise to the top". In the process of refining gold, heat is applied to turn the metal into a liquid. And when this happens all impurities float to the top, the "dross". Crudely put, the test for purity in this process is to apply heat to see what if anything comes to the top.

Temptations

Our scripture in James v1:14 defines temptation as that which leads to sin (14) but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. (15) Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin;

And sin simply put is disobedience to God. So, in the flow of our discussion;

- A trial or test is about seeing "what will rise to the top"
- If the trial or test is about our faith, and that in God
- The one who perseveres under trial is the one who trusts God regardless – faith in God rises to the top
- **The temptation is to not trust God**, and if we don't trust God we are by definition trusting in something else – dross rises to the top

A few thoughts on Job

And now we turn to Job, and if anyone is familiar with the Book of Job you will know that it starts talking about a righteous man by the name of Job who is described as the "greatest man among all the people of the East", a man who "was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. " But then in verse 1:8 it takes a turn in a way that is very unsettling for most.

Job 1:8 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." (9) "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. (10) "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. (11) But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." (12) The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man, himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

God initiates

Right here in v1:8 we have God Almighty, our Heavenly Father, He who James (1:17) writes of as He who "does not change", initiating a conversation with Satan, holding Job up before Satan as a righteous man. And from this God initiated conversation, Job's trials ensued. Now putting aside for a moment, the uncomfortable possibilities that this presents us with, about what God will or won't do regarding trials. It is important for us to look firstly at why He did this. And we garner that understanding at the end of the book with the help of looking through the lens of James chapter 1:1-18

In the beginning of the book we have the trials of Job, and Job trusting God regardless of situation and circumstance, summed up in chapter 2:9-10

Job 2:9 His wife said to him, "Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!"

Job 2:10 He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

The bulk of the Book of Job is then taken up with the discussion between Job and 3 friends who basically say God is good, you Job must have done something wrong to deserved what has happened. Job in turn defends himself, upholding his right standing before God as evidenced by his life. However, we can note a progressive subtle change in his tone as expressed through his frustration that God wouldn't answer him. Job's faith is being tested and he falters. We find his defence concludes at the end of chapter 31 with these words;

Job 31:35b.....I sign now my defence—let the Almighty answer me; let my accuser put his indictment in writing.

Job 31:40b.....The words of Job are ended.

When we look thus far at Job through the lens of James 1, through the understanding that a trial or test is about seeing "what will rise to the top". What does it tell us about Job, what conclusions can we draw;

- God held Job in high regard, one could say that he was indeed beloved of God
- Job was not perfect, for his true statement of faith in V2:10 was not yet fully worked in and through his life

- As such we can say that Job's test was so that the dross, the inconsistency between his words and his life, could be addressed.
- God choose to address the issue in Job's life, wanting the best for His beloved servant Job

At the end of the book of Job after Job had made his final defence, and God in His infinite wisdom and timing spoke to Job, **although not to address Jobs frustration**. We find this humble declaration from Job

Job's Confession and Repentance

Job 42:1 Then Job replied to the LORD: (2) "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. (3) You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge? Surely, I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. (4) "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.'(5) My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. (6) Therefore I despise myself and repent.

Now when we read the final verses of the Book of Job we find that He was blessed physically/ materially with so much more that he had in the beginning. And we may be tempted to think of this as lining up with the Jas 1:17 statement in regard to trials, that "every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father" in the context of physical/ material blessings being the benefit of our perseverance over trials. However, we must remember that Job didn't persevere through his trial, he faltered. And further to that, I believe the greatest blessing that Job received as a direct result of his trials and testing is found in Job 42:5

"My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you."

Christ's birth, death and resurrection was so that we could once again come into the throne room of Almighty God, into His very presence. He made a way possible for us to be able to once again come into relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Yes, there is much potential blessing, both physically and materially, that comes out of our becoming Christians, becoming Christ like ones. However, it is all underpinned by one thing, our new personal relationship with our Creator with our Lord and King, with our Heavenly Father.

Now James in 1:16 most seriously exhorts us "Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters." And this exhortation can and should be equally applied to every aspect of Christianity, especially in the area of trials and testing.

Our whole Christian walk is first and foremost about

- (A) drawing closer and closer to our Heavenly Father
- (B) becoming more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ
- (C) becoming holy as He is Holy

And let me tell you my friends that **it is not in us to be able to do on our own.** And praise God He has not left us to our own devices. For it is God himself who plans and purposes and brings it to fruition.

Php 1:6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus

Php 2:13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.

The tests / trials of God

The test / trials that are being discussed here are not primarily the everyday trials that we find ourselves facing that are the direct result and consequences of the effect of sin in and on our lives. Although that which is taught can be equally applied. No, the "Dross" in our lives, looked at here, is more specifically in regards to the testing of our faith. And the process of sanctification that I mentioned earlier is, put simply, the process of God's dealing with the dross. And that because He wants only the very best for us, and that best can only be found in close relationship with Him. He must deal with it because of His Righteousness, Holiness, Love, and Compassions.

One commentator writes, "In the passage before us internal temptations (trials), if not actually excluded, are certainly quite in the background. What St. James has principally in his mind are external trials, such as poverty of intellect (Jas 1:5), or of substance (Jas 1:9), or persecution, (Jas 2:6-7) and the like; those worldly troubles which test our faith, loyalty, and obedience, and tempt us to abandon our trust in God, and to cease to strive to please Him. The trials by which Satan was allowed to tempt Job are the kind of temptations to be understood here. They are material for spiritual joy, because

- 1) they are opportunities for practicing virtue, which cannot be learned without practice, nor practiced without opportunities;
- 2) they make us more Christlike;
- 3) we have the assurance of Divine support, and that no more will ever be laid upon us than we, relying upon that support, can bear;"

These are God's test, set to test the quality of our faith, the strength of our faith, the consistency of our faith. And provide opportunity to practice and build our faith, **to purify our faith by removing the dross.** And all this He does for our benefit.

And who is it who is more qualified to test our faith, than the one in whom we are to place our faith. At such times, James's writes (1:2) Consider it pure joy,

For when God, in His wisdom, has permitted such things to come upon us, the right course is, not to be cast down and sorrowful, as though something quite intolerable had overtaken us, but to rejoice that God has thought us capable of enduring something, of persevering through. And has given us the opportunity of strengthening our patience and our trust in Him.

Joy in suffering, which at first sight seems to be almost superhuman, is shown by experience to be less hard than the apparently more human response of resignation and fortitude. The effort to be resigned, and to suffer without complaining, is not a very spiritually uplifting endeavour. Its tendency is towards depression. It does not lift us out of ourselves or above our tribulations. On the contrary, it leads rather to self-contemplation and a brooding over miseries.

Between mere resignation and **thankful joy** there is a world of difference such as there is between mere obedience and **loving trust.**

**I exhort you - choose thankful joy & loving trust
at all times,
in all circumstances**

Php 2:13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.