

James 1:1-27

Real Maturity

Chapter 1 ¹ James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings. ² Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. ⁶ But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸

Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do. ⁹ Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. ¹⁰ But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. ¹¹ For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business. 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. ¹³ When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 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, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. ¹⁶ Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. 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. ¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created. ¹⁹ My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. ²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. ²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do. ²⁶ Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Some notes on the passage:

This passage is too long for you to deal with verse-by-verse in great depth. However, I still thought it was worth looking at in its entirety for two reasons:

1. Pete is preaching on basically the whole chapter on Sunday
2. It introduces all of the themes which will be developed later in the book.

The best way to deal with a text of this size is to find the main point, and focus on that, seeing how other points within the passage relate to the main point.

In my opinion, verse 4 is the key to the passage:

'Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.'

The goal is maturity, the means is perseverance.

How can they persevere?

- By understanding the value of trials (verses 2 and 3)
- Calling on God for wisdom (I imagine to give us a right perspective on what we are experiencing) (verse 5)
- By not trusting in financial position, or seeing either riches or poverty as permanent (verse 9-11)
- Know the hope that awaits you (verse 12, the 'crown of life', given by God)

The opposite of perseverance:

- Giving in to temptation or blaming God (13-15)
- Giving in to anger (19-20)
- Listening to God's word, but not doing anything about it (21-25)
- Letting your tongue (words) rule you, rather than ruling your tongue (25)

Notice the contrast: when perseverance is 'fully-grown' (when it reaches its goal) it leads to maturity and life, whereas fully-grown sin leads to death (verses 12 and 15).

Questions you could ask:

- What 'trials' were the people James was writing to experiencing? You may need to skim through the whole book to get a sense.
- What trials do we experience today?
- What is your usual reaction to difficulty? Why?
- James talks about perseverance a lot in this passage. What does he mean when he uses that word?
- Looking at the passage, what enables us to persevere?

- Looking at the passage, what might keep us from persevering?
- What is the ultimate goal of persevering? Why does James want that for us? Do you want that for yourself?
- Are you looking forward to the 'crown of life'?
- In what areas of your faith are you persevering? In what areas are you being tempted? What guidance does this passage give to you about that? What are you going to do about it?

Questions people might have:

- *Consider it pure joy to suffer? Are Christians supposed to be masochists?*
 - See also Romans 5:3-5, 1 Peter 1:6-7 for similar verses
 - The context of the suffering here is likely to be persecution
 - Rejoice in the future reward, *not the pain itself*. You rejoice in what the suffering is *doing*, not the suffering itself.
- *Verses 6-8 re: doubting. Does that mean we can't doubt at all?*
 - Tricky, but I *think* verse 8 'double-minded' helps explain this (as does 4:8, which uses the same word in the context of someone with two allegiances: one to God and one to the world). I think the situation being described is someone who is hedging their bets with God, who has a foot in two camps. I don't think this is describing the person who is committed to God but has occasional worries or questions about Christianity, but rather a person who has not made a strong commitment either way.
 - Matt 6:24 extends on this – Jesus points out that, in the end, it is impossible to serve two masters. You end up choosing one or the other (interestingly Jesus is specifically talking about serving money, and that's actually where James goes after this too).
 - In this context then, what could be meant is that a person who is 'double-minded' and who 'doubts' is one who is not sure that they actually want what God gives (in this instance, wisdom). You could put it this way: if you were not really on board with God and His agenda, would you actually want His wisdom which would make you see things with His perspective?
- *Does God hate the rich? (verses 9-11)*
 - The focus here is on the impermanency of whatever financial situation, and the spiritual reality beyond it.
 - Both the poor and the rich are addressed here: 'each is exhorted to see his lot in the light of spiritual reality' (Alex Motyer, 'The Message of James, p. 43), 'Each keeps life in the perspective of eternity' (Alex Motyer, 'The Message of James, p. 43)

- I think what is being contrasted is the sense of security: the rich should not see their security or hope as lying in their money, but in the security that comes from God: the 'crown of life that God has promised for those who love him' (verse 12), that comes as a result having stood the test.
- *Does God tempt us? Is testing the same as temptation?*
 - It's clear from the passage that God doesn't tempt people, but it's also clear that testing arises as a way of refining/developing our faith. What is the distinction? I think one distinction is the *goal*. Satan tempts us because he wants to lead us into sin and ultimately destroy us. God tests us because he wants to lead us into maturity and ultimately grow us. Testing has the capacity to show us where we were relying on things other than God for our comfort and security or hope, and it can help us to see our lives with a different perspective. One Christian says it is God 'weaning us off of the world and on to Him'.

Remember that we will be coming back to lots of these themes later on in the series, so don't get stressed if you aren't able to deal with everything or in much detail yet. Don't get so bogged down on individual verses that you miss the main point.