

Faith Perseveres

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Date: 27 April 2014

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- [0 : 0 0] Please take a seat and let's pray together. Father God, we are so thankful for this time. We're so thankful for this time to gather around your word.
- And Lord, our greatest need is that you would send your spirit, that he might make these words alive, that he might do his work of exalting the Lord Jesus in this place, in our lives, and as we go out into your world.
- So Father, bless us and help us. Father, teach us and instruct us. In the glorious name of your Son Jesus we pray. Amen. So today we are starting a brand new series in the book of James.
- And I am so excited, I've even made you a limited edition one-off bookmark to accompany the series. David's going to put them round.
- And I have to say, over the last three weeks, as I have looked at this book, I have got more and more excited about opening it up for us this morning.
- [1 : 0 5] We've called the series Faith Works. And I want to tell you why we've called it that. God, in his word, in the book of James, puts his finger on areas of our lives.
- And he starts to press them. And I have to say, this book is decidedly uncomfortable when we get underneath the skin. So why do we call it Faith Works?
- Well, firstly, we'll see throughout James that there's a lot that he says about faith, and a lot that he says about works. In fact, he mentions faith 38 times in the book, and he mentions works 59 times in the book, 59 times out of 108 verses he tells us to do something.
- So this book is going to tell us a lot about the relationship between faith and works, and that's important for us to know. Secondly, faith works, as in faith, brings success.
- We're going to see that faith succeeds and is fruitful and profitable to us. So in chapter 1, verse 12, he says, Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial, because faith, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life.
- [2 : 2 5] That faith works. Or chapter 5, verse 15, the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well. The Lord will raise them up.
- So we'll see that faith works. That in the end, faith will bring about success. And thirdly, faith works, as in faith must work.
- It must do something. We can't just have abstract faith. We can't just put faith in a compartment of our lives and do nothing with it. James is explicit that faith must work.
- James is addressing the tendency we have to say that faith alone means faith alone, and therefore relegates Christian living of no importance at all.
- And James says Christian living is absolutely vital. And a faith that doesn't work will be a useless faith that will never work. So please turn with me to James chapter 1, verse 1.
- [3 : 2 7] You'll find it just after Hebrews, towards the end of the New Testament. And let me read for us when you are. Did everyone get a bookmark?

No? It's all right, there'll be some on eBay later, I'm sure, and we'll print some more for next week. Let me read this. James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations, greetings.

Stop there one second. First thing that would be good to know of letter written by James is, who is James? That would be helpful, wouldn't it?

It's always nice to know who your letter is from. And in the New Testament, there are four people named James. And in fact, three of them are mentioned in Acts chapter 1, verse 13.

And I want to tell you why it's not any of these Jameses. So we have Judas, son of James. So James has a son called Judas, who's one of the twelve apostles.

[4 : 31] But really, James there is just a footnote. He's just a footnote included to differentiate Judas, son of James, from Judas Iscariot. He's very much a footnote.

And then we have a guy called James, son of Alphaeus, who is one of the apostles. But he's a very minor apostle. He's only actually mentioned in the lists of apostles when they are listed, perhaps in Mark chapter 4.

However, he is called James the Lesser on one occasion towards the end of Mark's gospel. But we pretty much know that around Acts chapter 9, James, son of Alphaeus, or James the Lesser, moves to Egypt to proclaim the gospel to the Egyptians.

And is martyred in around 43 AD by beheading. So it seems very unlikely that it's him. And then there's James, son of Zebedee, the brother of John, one half of the sons of Thunder.

Now this guy's a big player. This guy is one of Jesus' inner circle. He's one of the guys in the room when Jairus' daughter is raised to life. He would be a prime candidate to write a book of the New Testament.

[5 : 52] There's only one slight problem. That in Acts chapter 12, verse 2, Herod Agrippa cuts his head off. And that's in around 44 AD. And we're pretty sure that the book of James is written about 55 AD, meaning that he's been dead 11 years.

And I don't know about you, but to write a letter when you're dead seems quite difficult. That leaves one candidate. James, the brother of Jesus. The half-brother, if you like, of Jesus.

We're told multiple times in the Gospels that Jesus has a brother called James. Mark chapter 6, verse 3, talks explicitly about him. Are not his sisters and his brother James here?

We're also told in the Gospels that James doesn't believe in Jesus. In John chapter 7, verse 5, we're told explicitly that his brothers did not believe in him.

However, Paul tells us explicitly in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 7, that after Jesus' resurrection, he appears to James. That is, James, his brother.

[6 : 59] And it seems that this has a remarkable effect on James' life. As it would if your brother that you'd seen crucified met you. James then takes a prominent position in the Jerusalem church.

He is the chairman of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts chapter 15. He is the one who does the official greeting of the Apostle Paul when he finally arrives in Jerusalem in Acts 21.

Therefore, I am almost certain that James is written by this James. James, Jesus' brother. That's what the wide consensus of church history has set.

If you have a different opinion, then we can wrestle in the foyer afterwards. And I think that helps us explain this introduction. Because James is the pastor of this mega church in Jerusalem.

He has lots of congregants, lots of friends. But the problem happens when Stephen is martyred in Acts chapter 7. And this gets everyone to leave Jerusalem.

[8 : 05] This church empties. And everyone goes out into a society outside of Jerusalem that is largely hostile to the gospel.

And therefore, James, the loving pastor, writes to his former congregants. And he writes them encouraging them to live consistent Christian lives in the face of a hostile world.

It's very easy, isn't it? When society is hostile, you can do one of two things. You can either completely compromise and become like that society in order that you don't get persecuted because you don't stand out.

Or you can kind of mothball your Christian faith. You can kind of put your Christian faith on lockdown. Meaning that you just keep it to yourself and you live it out in the quiet. And therefore, when you're in society, you don't come in the crosshairs of society.

And James writes and says explicitly to his people, his former congregation, Don't do that. Don't do that. In the midst of a hostile world, don't compromise.

[9 : 13] And this brings the mega theme of the letter. You see, the problem with James, if we're not careful, it can seem like James has taken a lot of blog posts and put them together and collated them and just distributed them to his former church members.

Because it's kind of a weird letter because he addresses a lot of little things all the way through. One minute he's talking about favoritism. The next minute he's talking about trials, hearing and doing God's word, finance, prayer, how we use our words, our attitude towards charity, and on and on and on and on.

And if we're not careful, it can seem like he's just plucking topics out of the air. Oh, I want to talk a little bit about this, a little bit of that. And it becomes a bit like a buffet that you just take what you want from.

However, as we get below the surface of the letter, we see that actually there is this glorious mega theme lying in the background, which is so applicable to who we are in the society that we live in.

So please have James ready. Just flick with me and you'll see this theme start to emerge gloriously. So chapter 1 verse 8, he says, Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

[10 : 34] Double-minded. Chapter 1 verse 22, Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourself. Do what it says.

Chapter 1 verse 26, Those who consider themselves right are religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongue deceive themselves and their religion is worthless.

So even by the end of chapter 1, we've got this theme of double-mindedness, self-deception. Thinking one thing and doing another. Being one thing in public and another in private.

To be double-minded. To literally be this new word that James invents, two souls. To be this kind of split personality. Chapter 2 verse 4, Have you not discriminated amongst yourself?

Or literally, have you not discriminated against yourself? Have you not been one thing and then another? Have you got this split personality? Chapter 3 verse 9, With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father and with it curse human beings.

[11 : 43] Same person, two different things. There's two-souledness. And I guess this really comes to a four in chapter 4 verse 4. You adulterous people, Don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity with God?

Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. You adulterous people, you people that are two-faced. You people that are loving God, but literally having an affair with the world.

You people that in every way are two-souled. Double-minded. If anyone then, chapter 4 verse 17, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it.

It is sin for them. So we see that lying behind all of these practical instructions is this clarion call to live a consistent Christian life.

To let the gospel permeate all of your life. To live the gospel Sunday through to Sunday. Not be one thing on Sunday and something else Monday through to Saturday.

[12 : 59] To be Jesus's and all Jesus's. This is a real issue for us, isn't it?

The temptation is that we can be friends of God on Sunday and try and be friends of the world at work during the week. That we can say, Jesus, all for Jesus on Sunday.

And in our week at home, how much of that really plays out. This book is going to be great medicine for us. In our westernized, individualistic, compartmentalized lives.

To make sure that God has us and he has us all. To make sure that we're not those adulterous people. James is saying that a veneer of gospel respectability will not cover our fickle hearts.

James is saying, don't be duplicitous. Two-faced, double-minded, two-souled. He says, don't be a self-deceived, hypocritical charlatan. My favorite Arabic proverb says, to kiss someone on one cheek and to slap them on the other.

[14 : 18] And James is saying, don't do that with God. I say it's my favorite Arabic proverb. It's my only Arabic proverb. So by default, it is my favorite. So just take two minutes.

Firstly, discuss with your neighbor how much this double-mindedness affects your own life. And then, if it doesn't, maybe discuss some of the other things that you know about James.

Take two minutes. And then, ever so quickly, we'll get through the rest of our portion of scripture for today. Feel free to mingle. Brilliant.

Well, I hope you had some fruitful discussion. And even though we're containing them now, don't feel you can't continue to chat over coffee and a cake later. So, let's turn to James chapter 1 and verse 2.

Let me give you the big theme. Trials and temptations are inevitable in our lives. And God intends both of them to deepen our faith and purify our hearts.

[15 : 27] Trials and temptations are inevitable in our lives. And God intends both of them to deepen our faith and purify our hearts. The first thing James says is there are two ingredients needed to keep going and keep growing in the Christian life.

Chapter 1, verse 2. Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds. Because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

Let perseverance finish its work. So that you may be mature and complete. Not lacking anything. You don't need to be a Christian for very long before you realize that the gospel is an hermetically sealed existence.

That brings immunity from suffering. You soon realize that Jesus isn't a get out of suffering freak heart. So what do you do when it is really hard?

What do you do when the bottom falls out of your world and the walls cave in around you? What do you do amidst the trials of life? Well, James chapter 1, verse 2 seems utterly bizarre if we're honest, doesn't it?

[16 : 48] Chapter 1, verse 2. Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds. We don't consider trials joyful.

In fact, one of the things that makes them trials is that they suck joy out of our lives. Consider it pure joy when the doctor confirms the suspected diagnosis is true.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, when they're hostile to you at work. Consider it pure joy when your husband is impossible to live with anymore.

Consider it pure joy when your P45 is slid across the desk to you. Consider it pure joy when your mortgage company repossess your house.

I mean, this seems like a ridiculous bit of advice. It seems like a ridiculous instruction. Consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds.

[17 : 57] We need to be very careful with this bit of wisdom. Just because James writes it first doesn't mean that we should say it first when we're ministering to people going through trials.

If my wife comes in from work upset and uptight and says her boss is implacable, her colleagues unhelpful, her plans unproductive, her workload unmanageable, and her efforts unappreciated.

I guarantee if I say consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds. Quick, let's hold hands. Sing after me. I've got that joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart.

I'm going to get a slap. James is not giving us glib psychology. He's not saying you just need to rise above your situation.

He is giving us profound theology. Saying God is working out his plans for your life even in this. James gives us a perspective that will guarantee that not one tear, one drop of blood, or one ounce of sweat will be wasted in the eternal sanctifying good purposes of God.

[19 : 07] He says you need two ingredients when you face trials. Number one, you need perseverance. James says our God is so sovereign that he uses trials to cultivate perseverance in our lives.

He uses the hard knocks and the persistent bumps to work out his plan for you and for me. When tested, if our faith is worth anything, it makes us cling tighter to Jesus.

In order that we might get through this and every storm. When our faith is tested and we hold on, it is refined. And we cultivate this resolute dependence on Christ.

I don't understand what's going on. I don't know how I'm going to get through what's going on, but I trust you. I trust you. We foster this idea that God is in control.

No matter what it looks like in our situation, that God knows what he's doing. Even though it looks like it's all becoming undone. Richard Wurmbrandt, the guy who suffered incredibly in the Soviet Union for declaring Christ, he said, True Christians are like nails.

[20 : 26] The harder you hit them, the deeper they go. Corrie Ten Boom, another person who knew what it was to suffer. She wrote, you may never know Jesus is all that you need until Jesus is all that you have.

See the process? Faith in trials produces perseverance. And perseverance must finish its work. Perseverance is active.

And see what it results in. It results in maturity of faith and completeness in Christ, not lacking anything. Trials are a great catalyst, if not the greatest catalyst in the process of our sanctification.

They are the sharp chisel in the hand of a sovereign God, fashioning us into the likeness of his son, Jesus. Drop down as well to verse 12, and you'll see the result of these trials.

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.

[21 : 40] James writes, for those who keep going, for those who persevere, for those who are sanctified, and continuing to be sanctified, we receive a crown of life.

For everyone who loves God. Trials are common to everyone. For the unbeliever, these trials are nothing but meaningless hurdles in the futility of life.

But for the person who believes in Jesus and loves God, they are a purposeful period that prepares us for eternal life. Which we receive through the gospel.

This word crown of life is eternal life. And the Lord Jesus has an absolute monopoly on eternal life. If you are here today, and you are not a Christian, no, we just don't do this to fill up our Sunday morning.

We don't do this because it gets us anything from God. We do it because we've already got everything from God in Jesus' eternal life. And there is nothing more important than eternal life.

[22 : 53] Because for all of us, the destination we're heading to is when the heart monitor goes flat and our physical lungs deflate. And at that point, our only hope is Jesus.

That what he did for us in the gospel gives us, by grace, eternal life. We will receive a crown of life from the only one who has crowns of life to give out.

See then, that we persevere because it does us good in the present, but because we have this glorious future of living with God forever.

But see, there's a second ingredient we need. We need wisdom. Verse 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.

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. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

[23 : 56] Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do. This verse is not a verse primarily about guidance. This verse is about wisdom in the trials.

This verse is a prayer that we pray when we're struggling and we're suffering. And James says, when you don't know why what is happening is happening, you're to cry to God and say, I don't understand.

What are you trying to teach me through this? How am I going to get through what I'm going through? What am I to learn about you in the midst of this?

How can I go through this in a way that brings you glory? Glory. Isn't it incredible? Isn't it encouraging to learn that God isn't disappointed in us when we don't get it?

He's not annoyed at us when we struggle. He says, when you're struggling, ask. And I give wisdom. When you don't understand, ask for me to give understanding and I give it.

[25 : 05] That's encouraging. He's not like my maths teacher when we were doing simultaneous equations. And I'd say, Mr. Rimmer, I don't understand. And he would say, well, you better work it out yourself by tomorrow because we've got a test.

God says, I give wisdom when you struggle. Are you struggling? Don't know how you're going to get through? Ask for wisdom.

God says, I give it without finding fault. And I give it generously. But see, he's not just giving advice.

He's giving instruction. He's not just giving an opinion that you might choose to take or not. He's saying, when I give my wisdom, that is the wisdom you're to employ in your life.

He's not offering reasonable advice. He's asking us to respond to his infinite wisdom. Because when you ask, and he answers, you're to do.

[26 : 10] So there's a broken relationship in your life that's raw, festering and painful. And you don't know how to proceed and move forward. So you pray and ask the Lord for wisdom.

You read his word and you find his wisdom. You console others and they too confirm the wisdom that you suspect. That you're to forgive and reconcile with the person with whom there's a problem.

But you and your pride-filled arrogance decide that that's not the way I'm going to go. Actually, I'm going to harbor a grudge and disassociate from the offending party. James says you're like a wave of the sea.

Blown and tossed in every direction by the wind. James says you won't receive anything because you're double-minded. You say, God, you've got wisdom to give.

And when he gives it, you go, actually, I'm going to do this. Double-minded. God says, I give wisdom. And you're to take that wisdom. James says, get through trials with faithful perseverance through God's imparted wisdom and the hope of future glory.

[27 : 21] So many of us, I waste my trials. Because we so often just pray, Lord, I want to escape.

Lord, I just want it to go away. How much better it would be. Pray, God, give me wisdom. Teach me more about your goodness and your grace and your faithfulness.

God, empower me to go through this hard road in a way that brings you glory. In a way that's tangibly different to everyone around.

And then he gives us two examples of trials. Verse 9. Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. But the rich should take pride in their humiliation, since they will pass away like a wild flower.

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.

[28 : 25] I wonder when I said trials at the beginning, what you thought of. James gives us two examples. The first is poverty. And I guess many of us would see poverty as a trial when the two ends don't meet at the end of the week.

And James says, take pride in your high position. That you've got this brilliant opportunity, this glorious privilege to show faith in God.

To declare your dependence on God. God, the bills are rising. The wages are staying the same or going down. And I need your help. A glorious opportunity to show faith in the midst of a trial.

But I wonder how many of us saw riches as a trial. Because that's what James says. But the rich should take pride in their humiliation.

If I asked you which was a greater trial. To gain 20,000 pounds or lose 20,000 pounds. We'd all say to lose 20,000 pounds. But I think James says riches are actually a bigger trial.

[29 : 42] Because he devotes a lot more verses to talking about them. He says riches can so easily become our security.

And our safe haven. A bank balance can so often become our hope. And our focus. Our wealth, possessions and quality of life so readily become our God.

And we're so willing to sacrifice anything that we may have them. James says always remember the riches are fleeting. Wealth fluctuates.

And it fades. Always remember that at the end of the chess game. All the pieces go back in the same box. And what you have in life will be worthless in eternity.

George Muller. The man who started so many orphanages and looked after orphans. He was asked. Is it easier to trust God when you have no money or you have 300 pounds?

[30 : 48] And he says it's much easier to trust God when there's nothing in the bank. Because when I have 300 pounds my faith is in the 300 pounds. It's the great leveler of the gospel.

The gospel levels everyone that we all come to God by grace. The richer bought low. The humbler bought high. Because it's in Jesus. The one who was rich became poor so that through his poverty we might become rich.

Don't be blinded by the material. And forsake God in the pursuit of temporal worthless gain. Don't be double sold. Don't say Jesus you're all I need.

And Monday to Saturday spend all of your life. Trying to increase your position in life. We all know two-facedness in this area.

Our minds are full of gadgets and cars and food and scatter cushions. Holiday destinations. And James tells us to hold all of this so loosely.

[31 : 54] And to keep steadfast sincere faith in Christ. Not allowing our affections to be diverted by anything else.

He says if you are yourself deceived. You're double minded to face duplicitous. So comfortable. People say I love James.

And that just says you haven't really understood James. Because he's uncomfortable. I wonder if God is testing the western world with riches. I wonder if that's the trial we're all to go through.

Because just because of where we live. We are in the top 4% of the world's wealth. And I wonder how many of us are persevering in that trial. Or whether we've just been distracted and deflected.

And our affections which should be all gods. All focused on the Lord Jesus. Are actually just deflected towards the things of this world.

[32 : 59] James tells us despite doing our best to keep up appearances. We aren't getting away with it. God is all seeing and knows all of our idolatrous adultery.

He knows when our love is diverted away from his all satisfying son. And our trust is not placed in his all conquering gospel. James talks endlessly about double mindedness.

He says don't be double minded. And you know what? There's one person we can look to who is the ultimate example of single mindedness. We read of the Lord Jesus who set his face like flint.

To go to Jerusalem to endure the cross. We read of Jesus who didn't just say no greater love as any man than this. That he lay down his life for his friends.

But he lays his life down and is nailed to the cross. In order that he dies the most brutal death conceivable. And why does he do that? So that we don't need to be double minded anymore.

[34 : 07] So that we can be forgiven of our double mindedness. Because where we are so double minded he is absolutely single minded. And where we got deflected and diverted.

Where we tripped and where we stumbled. Where we gave up. He didn't. And that in the glorious gospel we get accredited.

We get given his single mindedness. James doesn't really talk about the cross all that much. He mentions Jesus in passing.

But when you get below the surface it's everywhere. Because the only answer to our double minded lives is Jesus' single minded life. Jesus is absolutely myopic.

He says my only joy is to do the will of the father who sent me. He lived absolute obedience. So that we who are disobedient might have hope.

[35 : 08] We're going to pick up the rest next week. But let me pray. And then we'll... Let's pray. Throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Fixing our eyes on Jesus. The pioneer and perfecter of our faith. Who for the joy set before him.

He endured the cross. Christ, Where in Christ, ius, qualcosa. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners.

So that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not resisted to the point of shedding your blood. strengthen your feeble arms and strengthen your weak knees Father God we thank you so much for your word to us this morning Father God I want to pray for my friends in this room who are going through trials Father I want to pray that you would give them your wisdom Father that this suffering would not be wasted but in the fullness of time perseverance would finish its work and they would know maturity of faith and completeness in Christ not lacking anything Father may the testimony written over their lives be I would never have chosen it but now having gone through it I wouldn't swap it for anything Father God for those of us who are experiencing plain sailing would we build up strength and dependence on you when it's easy that we might have faith that endures when it's tough

Father in our material lives Father would we have an undivided focus on you and wouldn't get distracted by the things of the world which are fading away and Father God would you give us hearts that are so inclined to your son that he would capture our every thought that he would captivate all of our hearts and that we would live all of life solely focused on him in a way that will make a tangible difference in our work in our spending in our recreation in our families Father God we want to be Jesus's and Jesus's alone and so Lord would you come and by your spirit take our divided hearts and make them consistently undivided with affection for the one who loved us and gave himself for us Father God bless our time bless our conversation after this service that we wouldn't be double minded but we would be wholly yours and therefore holy because you are holy bless us in the name of your son we pray

[38 : 06] Amen