



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Kerang

FAITH AND DEEDS

A BIBLE STUDY FROM JAMES

TESTING AND THE CROWN OF LIFE

READ JAMES 1:2-18

In our study up to this point we have seen the following:

The first main section of James 1 (verses 2-18) is about the testing of our faith and what it produces. We have discovered that the Bible indeed talks about:

- The testing of our faith (verses 2-12)
 - What testing produces – maturity and joy (verses 2-4)
 - How to be victorious in times of testing – faithful prayer (verses 5-8)
 - Material things are not everything – what counts is our riches in the Lord (9-11)

In the study for today the Bible teaches us about the outcome of “hanging in” when trials come – the crown of life (verses 12).

READ JAMES 1:12

Very important: Everything we have studied up to this point is directed at those who *Christians*:

- James, the servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ writes to his brothers (verse 1)
- they are called the scattered “the twelve tribes” (verse 1),
- They are called “brothers” (or brother) (verse 2, 9) – which means (as we have seen last time) that they are already part of God’s family

The reason why this is so important, is because the people addressed here are not belonging to Judaism, where it is preached that good works will somehow put one into the Kingdom of God, where they will receive a crown as a reward for being good.

The people addressed in this letter are, by God’s grace and mercy in Jesus Christ, already in the family of God. The “crown of life” is to ultimately enter eternal life upon the return of Christ. They, as all Christians who put their faith in Christ only, based on his merits on the cross only, receiving their righteousness from Him only, already experience eternal life now, but then they will see and experience it in all its glory.

"BLESSED IS THE MAN"

This phrase is very typical Bible language, and found right through the Bible. Let's look at a few verses in connection with testing (suffering, discipline, pain as part of God's refining process in our lives):

Read Job 5:17-18. What are the promises in these verses?

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Read Psalm 94:12-14. What do these verses teach us?

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"PERSEVERES"

In the Greek literature this concept describes the courageous endurance, which manfully defies evil. Unlike patience (which is more of a *passive* concept), it thus has an *active* content. It includes active and energetic resistance to hostile power, though with no assertion of the success of this resistance. In the Old Testament this word is commonly used to "wait" upon the Lord.

READ MICAH 7:7. Why does the prophet stand firm in waiting up the Lord?

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The point of nerving oneself is, to hold fast to God and not to mistake His power and faithfulness. With confidence in the God who protects and finally establishes the right, it grants indirectly a strong inner ability to persevere, which can then take on strongly the calm character of a patience which waits and endures. ¹

Why, then, are we "blessed" when we "persevere" under trail?

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"STANDING THE TEST"

Verse 12 talks about the Christian "stood the test" (or "is tried"). We are put before tests, or trails. James 2-11 instructed us about these trails. God gives it with a purpose: "testing of your faith develops perseverance" (verse 3).

Life for the Christian is to live under the faithful guidance and protection of God's hand. It is the purpose of God to refine us. (**ONCE AGAIN READ JAMES 1:4.**) Life, for the Christian, is therefore not just a chain of series of events without meaning: the Christian is constantly aware of God's refining work to prepare us for better service, now and for eternity. The purpose of God's testing is not to throw out the challenge to see if we will make, and *then* give us the crown of life as a sort of reward for being "tough" in trails.

¹ Theological dictionary of the New Testament. 1964- (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.) (electronic ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

In the process of being tested, the Christian always responds in a godly way: he submits to God's guidance, but also withstands the temptations of the Evil One in the power God provides. In a sense the Christian tests himself by asking, "*Am I glorifying God though the choices I make?*", knowing that God in the process of trial, is also testing him.

The man who has attested himself in life, and whom the testing of judgment shows to be attested, is tried. With the return of Christ in judgment, He will gather up the divine testing, which takes place in history and by which history is fashioned.

"THE CROWN OF LIFE"

In the ancient world the crown was derived from the twig, which was placed on the head symbolically granted life and fertility to its bearer. It was a sign of life and fruitfulness. In antiquity crowns were given to people in political life (kings), cultic circles (priests), the army (officers) and in sport (Olympic Games) and denoted joy and respect. A bride usually had a crown.

READ 1CORINTHIANS 9:25, PHIL 3:12-14, AND 2TIMOTHY 4:7.

What, according to Paul, can the Christian life be compared with?

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Paul draws on the perishable crown, which is given to the victor as an award in the games and he compares the Christian life to a sporting contest. The point of comparison is the self-controlled abstinence.

The crown of life is more than just a form of reward: it is life itself – even eternal life.

READ REVELATION 2:10. What is the threat, and what is the promise?

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READ REVELATION 2:7. What is the parallel between this verse and verse 10?

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CONCLUSION

James 3:12 is all about being faithful to God *because* of his mercies and grace: He called us to be his own, and will hold us in the hollow of his hand until the Day of the Lord, when He will crown us with eternal life itself. He does so for a reason.

READ JAMES 1:12 again. Why can we look forward for God's promise of the crown of life?

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