

The Battle for the Heart

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- [0 : 00] Let's turn to our Bible reading for this evening, and Willie is continuing his series in the letter of James. So do turn in your Bible to the letter of James. We have visitor Bibles at the side or the back. So if you don't have a Bible with you, please do grab one of those.
- And you'll find on page 1011 in the visitor Bible. So James chapter 1, and we're looking this evening from verse 12 through to 21.
- So James 1 and verse 12. Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial.
- For when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God had promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, I am being tempted by God.
- For God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin.
- [1 : 13] And sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.
- Of his own will, he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures. Know this, my beloved brothers, that every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.
- For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore, put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.
- Well, amen. May God bless to us his word tonight. Well, do turn with me, if you would, in your Bibles to James chapter 1.
- If you need a Bible, if you don't have one with you, there's plenty at the sides, at the front, at the back. It'll really help you to see what we're speaking about, if you have a Bible open in front of you. Now, the last couple of weeks, in the mornings, we have seen that James, the servant of the Lord, is a very careful physician of souls.
- [2 : 45] He seeks the healing, he seeks the health, of Christ's precious church, his beloved brothers, as he calls them often. And he introduces, in the first verse of the letter, his patient, if you like, the scattered churches, now Firth of Jerusalem, due to persecution.
- And he gives us the presenting complaint, in verse 2. There are trials of many kinds, that they're facing. And his prescription, for health, is unequivocal.
- Count it all pure joy, my brothers, when you meet these trials, of many kinds. And that is because, when you live that way, the prognosis, is wonderfully encouraging.
- Your faith will be proved, he says, you will persevere, and that will bring you, to the perfection of faith, as he says in verse 4, a complete faith, that will lead, ultimately, to, the crown of life, as he calls it in verse 12.
- But that battle, for steadfastness, is really a battle, for the heart. And it's for what the heart, our hearts, really do treasure, in life.

- [4 : 02] Remember what Jesus said, and I'm sure James, his brother, remembered it. Wherever your treasure is, there, your heart will be also. And you can't serve God, and mammon, worldly treasures.
- If your heart is divided like that, if you're a double-minded man, as James calls him here, in chapter 1, verse 8, literally double-souled, then, James tells us, you make yourself an enemy, of God, because of that friendship, with the world.
- And that is something, utterly, catastrophic. It says here, in chapter 1, verse 8, it leads you to be, utterly unstable, in all of life. The opposite of steadfast.
- So that as verse 7, says there, you can't receive anything, from the Lord. And you see, the problem is, as you read through the letter of James, it really is a pathology report, about James' patient.
- Well, the report on these churches, and these Christians, is very concerning. The picture you see, in chapters 2 to 5, really is not, by any stretch, a healthy one. And so, James begins his letter, by helping his readers, to see some of these hard facts.
- [5 : 20] That the way, of steadfast faith, persevering faith, is not passive. It's not easy. Christians, he says, are born for battle, and they're born into battle.
- And it is, above all, a battle, for the heart. And that's why, if we're to be steadfast, through this battle, of real living faith, in the real world, we need, real wisdom.
- The wisdom, that God promises, in verse 5, to give generously, without reproach, if, if, we seek it truly, with undivided hearts.
- Trusting God, and actually being willing, to accept, the wisdom of God's, truth for life. However, we might prefer, something rather different, something much more congenial. And the thing is, it's not easy, is it, to read a report, about yourself.
- I wonder if you've ever done that, in a reference, or something, or an examination report, performance report, about your work. It's lovely to hear, all the strengths, isn't it? The strong points. Not so easy.
- [6 : 26] The weaknesses, the criticisms, those things can really sting, can't they? But here's the thing, the great reformer, John Calvin, says in the very first line, of his great work, the Institutes of the Christian Religion, nearly all the wisdom, we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists in, two parts, the knowledge of God, and, of ourselves.
- So you see, having laid out, the prescription, for true health, in the life of faith, James turns now, in verses 13 to 19, to emphasize, why his medicine, of steadfast, enduring faith, animated by joy, that's fixed, on the ultimate crown, of life, eternal, why it is so necessary, because of the truth, about our human nature, and our deadly wills.
- But he also tells us, that it is navigable, despite all earthly trials, because of the truth, of God's heavenly nature, and his divine will.
- He tells us, in verses 13 to 15, that the truth about us, is that our old nature, our sinful nature, remains active, and that left to ourselves, our desires, will lead us, only to a deadly end, that end is death.
- So he says in verse 16, don't be deceived, about that my beloved brothers. But then he also tells us, in verses 17 and 18, that we have been reborn, from above, and that we have been given, a new nature, brought forth, from God himself, and for a glorious end, that we should be his, that we should be set apart, as holy for God himself.
- [8 : 20] And we need to know that also, he says in verse 19, my beloved brothers. So what we have is both, a grim reminder, about our true selves, and, a glorious reality, about God, in James' words here.

And then flowing from that, the genuine responsibility, for all true believers, to live lives, of daily, obedience, repentance, and faith. Putting off, the old self, putting to death, all that is earthly within us, and putting on the new self.

Letting Christ rule in our hearts, to which we're called. That's how the apostle Paul put it, in Colossians, as Fraser was showing us, just a couple of weeks ago. And James speaks very similarly here, doesn't he? Look at verse 21.

Put away all filthiness, the persistent activity, of our own human heart's desires, and receive with meekness, that is received, do not resist, the implanted word, which is able, which is powerful, to save your souls, to gain for you, the crown of life.

And the crown, in verse 12 there, the crown in the Bible, speaks about honor, doesn't it? It speaks of glory, and dignity. In Revelation chapter 2, verse 10, the risen Lord himself, says he will give it, to those who have proved, faithful through testing, to the one who conquers, I will give the crown of life.

[9 : 50] But notice what James says here, in verse 12, do you see? God promises it to all who, love him, love him. to love for Jesus, that is the real key, to steadfast, and conquering faith.

We can only love, can't we? Because he first loved us, says John. Paul says, we are more than conquerors, through him, who loved us. When we were still weak, when we were sinful, when we were enemies of God.

And yet he gave his only son, so that we would be born, from above, so that we could be called, children of God. And friends, you see the truth is, it's when we don't deceive ourselves, about the woeful failures, of our own hearts, but when we come to know, truly our wonderful father, and his heart, his heart of unchanging, goodness and grace, it's then, isn't it, that our love, for him will be kindled, so that we will live, lives of willing faithfulness, steadfast right to the end.

And so that's what, what James wants you see, for all his readers, including us, including you, my beloved brothers and sisters. So let's look carefully, at what he tells us.

First of all, in verses 13 to 15, verse 13 to 15, and then, pushed home in verse 16, is a grim reminder, a grim reminder, of a deadly reality.

[11 : 18] Don't be deceived, he says, about the grim tragedy, of our human nature. Our deadly will, gives birth, he says, to a natural path, that leads only, to the horror, of death.

And it is eternal death, he's speaking of. And Jesus told us clearly, that trials of all kinds, contrasting kinds, prosperity as well as poverty, all of these are opportunities, to prove our faith true, to make us persevere, to completion, to perfection, mature completeness.

But he's told us, it's never automatic. All depends on our attitude, our attitude in them, whether it's one of rejoicing, in what God is doing, or, whether in fact, we're resenting him, and resisting, what he's doing.

And God allows trials, God even sends trials, to lead us on in faith, to lead us on in wisdom. But trials, can, become, temptations, that instead, cause us to wander away from him.

That word translated, temptation there, in verse 13, is exactly the same word, is the word trial, in verse 12. But you see, when trials become temptations, that is only our doing, it is not God's doing.

[12 : 50] God may ordain trials, to meet us in life, indeed he does, because he's sovereign, nothing in our life, is outside his control, nothing indeed, is outside his command. But we cannot ever, blame God, for our wrong response.

No one can ever do that. That's absolutely emphasized, verse 13 in the Greek. It says, no one, literally, when he is tempted, let him say he's tempted by God.

You could put it this way, let no one say, when he is under trial, that he's being tempted, by God. That is never ever, God's purpose, in our trials. Because, and James is saying here, something that, the whole of scripture affirms, God cannot, be tempted with evil, and he himself, tempts no one, with evil.

God is holy, and completely, and utterly good, in all his doing, in all his desires. God is light, says John. In him, there is no darkness, at all.

It's us, unfortunately, who are not like that. God, doesn't have, what we do have, within our hearts. As Alec Mateer puts it, a deep well, of domineering, and alluring, desires.

[14 : 14] Which are, inherently, both evil, and, productive, of evil. Verse 14 says, look, each person is tempted, when he is lured, and enticed, by his own, desire.

There is, within us, says Alec Mateer, the fatal weakness, which guarantees, that we will, fall short, of God's, glorious intentions, for us.

And it lies, deep in our heart, the very center, of our being. It's what, one writer describes, as, the pervasive, tendency, which arises, from our sinful natures, to desire, the wrong thing, or, to desire, the right thing, but in the wrong, way.

There's a theological, term for that, and it's called, concupiscence. Seems a strange, word for us, but James here, in verse 14, just calls it, desire. Desire. Now that word, in the Bible, can be used positively, but very clearly here, it is negative.

And it refers, to this, fallen inclination, in all of our hearts, towards, actual sin. It's the sinful, disordered desire, which is, in itself, sinful, in its very nature.

[15 : 37] And that's why, James says, what it conceives, just shares, that sinful nature. Do you see? Gives birth, inevitably, to actual sin, whether it's sin, in our thoughts, in our words, or in our deeds.

And once that desire, gets our consent, it sets in motion, a fearful train, of consequences. Do you see? Sin, when it's full grown, brings forth, death.

Death. So what he's saying is, we ourselves contain, at the very depth, of our being, the seeds, of our own destruction.

What we conceive, what we give birth to, is the very temptation, that brings forth, sin, and death.

That is very disturbing, isn't it, what James is saying? That our temptation, is on us. It comes from within us. Each person, verse 14, is tempted, when he is lured, and enticed, by his own, desire.

[16 : 47] And that desire, itself, is evil, it is sinful. And when it seeds, itself, it can only conceive, and give birth, to a new manifestation, of its own nature, which is sin, and death.

And James says, it's our fault. It's our fault. Notice, by the way, James doesn't mention, the devil here, does he? He does later on. James is very clear, about the devil, about demonic activity.

He talks about him, in chapter 3, verse 15, calls it out. And in chapter 4, verse 7, he says, resist the devil, and he will flee from you. He knows full well, that Satan tempts us. But here, you see, he will not allow us, to escape, the discomfort, of this horrible truth, by blaming anyone else, even the devil.

Far less blaming God. It's on us, is what he's saying. We are to blame. Not just for the fruit, of our sin, but for the very, root of that sin, the deep disorder, in the desire, of our hearts.

For from within, said the Lord Jesus, in Mark chapter 7, out of the heart, of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

[18 : 08] All these things, come from, within. And they defile, a person. You see, our immediate instinct, when we face, temptation, and especially when we fall, in temptation, is it's not my fault.

It's not my fault. It's one of the first things, children learn to say, isn't it? It's not my fault. But it's what we all say, isn't it?

Especially in our culture, where we live in a culture, of victimhood. Victim status is so prized, isn't it? So cultivated by many. Everything, everything that happens to me, is someone else's fault.

My addiction, isn't my fault. I'm a victim, of a disease. And the government, hasn't done anything, hasn't done enough, to help me. My behavior, isn't my fault.

My anger, my violence, is due to my upbringing. Or it's due to my genes. Or it's due to my parents. Or it's due to my hormones. Or it's a hundred other things.

[19 : 15] Anything but me. And my children's behavior, certainly isn't my fault. It's the school's fault. Or it's the psychiatrist's fault. They won't give them any pills.

I'm the victim here. I'm the victim. I was born in the wrong family. Or I was born in the wrong country. Or I was born in the wrong color.

Or I was born in the wrong body. We say now. And on and on and on it goes, you see. It's not my fault. And friends, we have to be honest, don't we, that even as Christians, we often find ourselves saying that.

When we fall into temptation. God allowed me to face something that just overwhelmed me with temptation. There's nothing I could do.

It's not my fault. Oh, I'm sorry, says James. That's not so. You do what your own heart wants to do.

[20 : 14] You tempt yourself. God does not tempt you with evil. You do that all by yourself. He says we're lured. We're enticed. Do you see? By our own desire.

And that word enticed, Alec Mateo says, expresses the magnetism of desire. The hypnotic attraction of bait for a hungry beast. I remember once years ago in Zambia seeing a lion that had already killed and already eaten.

It was full. But an antelope ran past and that lion got up, chased and killed that antelope. It could not resist the instinct to kill. That's sin.

What it does within us. The hypnotic attraction of bait for a hungry beast. And it drags it off to a sorry end. That's really what the word lure implies.

It's like reeling in a fish that's caught on a hook into the net. And just so, James says, we are tempted when we are enticed, when we are lured by our own desire.

[21 : 20] The dark desire that's deep within us. And once that desire is consented to, well, it's an unstoppable process he speaks of.

The fertility of our desire breeds with a fecundity that is ultimately fateful. It brings forth death. The 8th century Northumbrian St. Bede apparently said there were three stages of temptation.

First suggestion, then experimentation, and then consent. And once there's consent, he says we've been carried away by sin.

Something is conceived which will grow. And it will give birth to a progeny of destruction. Not my fault, is what we say.

But it won't wash, you see, will it? It won't wash with the drunk driver after he's killed a pedestrian. It's not my fault. I didn't mean to do that. But you got into the car drunk and incapable.

[22 : 27] It's not my fault when the man is faced by a woman with an unwanted pregnancy. But your desire led to the conception.

And of what will now be surely born. Each person is tempted, says James, when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

And that desire itself, deep within you, he says, is deadly. Full grown, it brings forth death. Don't be deceived about that, my beloved brothers.

Verse 16. You can't shift the blame. It's on us. And be very clear. Do you see, James is speaking to Christians, isn't he?

Beloved brothers. He's warning profession Christians like us that we are in real danger from what is deep in our own hearts. And friends, it's so important to take that in.

[23 : 32] There are some Christians who think, no, no, that's not so. When you become a Christian, your old nature's gone. That becoming a Christian replaces that old nature completely with something completely new in Christ.

Or at least that that can happen subsequently. You can be fully freed from sin, done away with by some special experience of the Spirit.

Some special blessing, some second blessing, some new baptism in the Spirit, or some other great consecration, some great surrender to the Lord. That was a great word of holiness movements in the past, like Keswick and so on.

But it's the same thing still today, many charismatic movements, many prosperity gospel movements today. The Apostle James says, don't be deceived, brothers and sisters. The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit.

They're opposed to each other still, says Paul to the Galatians. There's a raging war within me, he says to the church in Rome. Peter says to his readers, the passions of the flesh wage war against your soul.

[24 : 37] So don't be deceived by anyone, says James, who tells you that the war will be over before the Lord Jesus comes again. Only when these bodies of sin are gone and we have a body that's changed forever to be like him will the war be over.

That's why, you know, the general confession in the old book of common prayer is right to have us confess we have followed too much the devices and the desires of our own hearts.

And there is no health in us. We can't get away from it, says James. Our hearts, our own hearts are the biggest problem in our lives.

And we need this grim reminder of that deadly reality. And James is setting before us very clearly two quite opposite trajectories.

You see, look at verses 3 and 4 and verse 12. You see, testing leading to steadfastness, leading to perfect completeness and leading to the crown of life in verse 12.

[25 : 48] But here, you see, in verses 13 to 15, it's desire leading to temptation, leading to sin and leading to death. And that death must be the opposite, mustn't it?

of that life eternal that he's speaking of. And the warning is very clear just as steadfastness, patient endurance under trial is the first fruits of that eternal life that encourages us on in the path of life.

Also, likewise, succumbing to temptation reveals in our lives, doesn't it, the first fruits of fructifying sin that is a harbinger of looming disaster.

It's a stark warning, isn't it, to beloved brothers, to Christian people. I find it very unsettling. And you might say to yourself, but surely, surely we can't lose our salvation.

God is sovereign. We have assurance. Well, yes, God is sovereign, but friends, nowhere, anywhere in the scriptures does it ever tell us that we can have assurance of salvation amid a life of indulgent sinfulness.

[27 : 07] God has made us responsible, even amid great trial, to bless him in it, to see that he is shaping us through it for blessing, not to blame him for it.

Don't blame God and don't blame the devil either for that matter. Resist him, James says later, he'll flee from you. He's not your main problem. You are. Don't be deceived about just how deep our problem really is.

As Alec Mateer puts it, the enemy is not only within the camp, within the heart, the enemy is the heart itself. I know that some of you here tonight are not Christian believers and you may find James' words very hard to stomach.

It might actually make you quite angry, I suspect. And maybe you do actually blame God if God does exist. Blame him for the trials in your life.

But all I can say to you is this is Christian teaching. This is the gospel word. And I would just ask you to look around in the world and see whether it seems to fit with the reality of what we see in our world and what does come from human hearts.

[28 : 29] But even as Christians, friend, I suspect we find it very hard to stomach. And if we do accept it as true, we may actually find it brings us despair.

It's rather overwhelming and fearful. But James says to us, no, this is certainly a deadly condition. And I won't hide that and he doesn't hide it.

It is fatal, it is utterly, but he also tells us there's an antidote. There's only one antidote, but it is a very wonderful one.

And that is what he unveils now, you see, in verses 17 and 18. And what he tells us at the start of verse 19 is something that we must also know. Otherwise, we will despair.

Having given us a grim reminder of this deadly reality, he now turns to a much more glorious reality, the glorious reality of a divine rebirth. Don't be deceived at the grim tragedy of human nature.

[29 : 35] That is vital, but don't diminish, he says, the glorious transplantation into us of God's heavenly nature. His divine will has given birth to a supernatural path that leads not to the horror of death, but to a holy destiny of life.

And it is eternal life. See, James holds before us the crown of life for those who are proved true through persevering love for God through all of these trials.

But how can perseverance in love to God be true if the truth is that our natural hearts, our natural desires are not towards God, but is towards sin and death?

If there's no health in us, if there's only horror in our hearts, how on earth can there be any hope for us? Well, look up, James says again, as he said back in chapter 1, verse 5.

Look up to God, he says here in verse 17. Do you see? Because all that is good, literally all good giving and every perfect gift, everything that we cannot offer or produce naturally, it comes not from our hearts, but it does come down to us from above, from God alone, from his unchanging generosity, which is manifest in his undeserved grace.

[31 : 02] And that will achieve his unswerving and unwavering goal for all whom he wants to be his and will be his, set apart for him and for that holy destiny.

See, verse 17 speaks of that unchanging generosity of God, our creator, the source of all goodness, all good giving and every perfect gift.

By the way, I think there's a reference there to verse 4, to the completing and the perfecting of our faith. Everything perfect, it comes only from above. It comes from God's work in us.

He first loved us so that we can love him. And our ongoing love for him depends entirely on his ongoing perfecting us in love.

But that is who he is and that is what he is. He's the creator, he's the author of all goodness, all beauty, and bountifully so. Look, he's the father of lights. He created the sun and the moon and the stars in all their bountiful array.

[32 : 05] But even the sun and the moon's lights might seem to shadow or seem to change at times. I guess we can sometimes forget, can't we, what the sun actually looks like and its light is like here living in Scotland.

But with God, there is never the slightest hint of change, far less any eclipse of his goodness. His creative light is unchanging, James is saying.

He's still creating life and light. The God who said in the beginning, let light shine out of the darkness. He's still bringing light and life out of darkness, out of the darkness and the void of our human hearts.

He's still saying, isn't he, let there be life. What is it Paul says to the Corinthians? He has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

And he is the source of all good giving. And he has given the greatest and the most perfect gift of all in this saving wonder. And it's the undeserved grace of God, the Redeemer.

[33 : 06] That's what verse 18 is talking about. Do you see? It's all from his sovereign divine will. It's not from us. Our hearts, our wills, give birth only to darkness.

We, by our very nature, are weak. We're sinful. We're enemies. That's how Paul puts it, isn't it, in Romans chapter 5. What can we bring to birth?

What can we bring forth? Only, only sin and death. But you see, of his own will, he has brought us forth. He's given us birth, new birth, by the word of truth.

He's brought us life from death. He's brought us light from darkness, you see, by a sovereign act of his undeserved grace. You didn't choose me, I chose you, said Jesus to his followers.

No one can come to me unless the Father draws him. And Paul tells us, doesn't he, that he chose us in him before even the foundation of this very world. Jesus and all of his apostles are absolutely unequivocal about the sovereign work of God in saving grace.

[34 : 16] Of his own will, says James, he brought us forth. And that language is exactly the same as that in verse 15 of bringing to birth.

He brought us to birth. This time it's new birth. Sometimes people say, you know, James doesn't speak very directly of Jesus. I think that's very odd because in his first verse he tells us he's a servant of Jesus and in the last chapter repeatedly keeps telling us about Jesus coming again.

But here he's echoing Jesus' own words, isn't he, about the new birth from above. New birth by the Spirit. And you see how he focuses here on the instrument of how that new birth comes to us by the Spirit.

Verse 18, he brought us forth by the word of truth. That is the gospel of Jesus. The life-giving word that's been implanted into you, he says in verse 21.

We might say transplanting a seed of the divine nature into us to grow in us, to lead us on through that transforming power of God himself and his seed within us to bring us to that complete and perfect salvation at last.

[35 : 34] Apostle John speaks very similarly of God's own seed abiding in us because we've been born of God. If you turn over just a few pages to Peter's first letter, you see, he speaks exactly the same way of believers being born again.

Not of perishable seed, but imperishable through the living and abiding word of God. Of his own will, he brought us forth. He brought us to birth by the word of truth, says James.

And all to fulfill the unwavering goal of God our Father, that we, says James, should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

His creatures. Don't miss the significance of that. Some people just think that it's a reference to these Christians being among the first of the Christians of the gospel age, but I think Alec Matera is absolutely right to say there's a much deeper significance in that.

He's writing, isn't he, largely to Jewish Christians who knew their Old Testament back to front. And the main reference here surely is to the first fruits offering, which you see in many places in the Old Testament.

[36 : 44] Leviticus 23 and Numbers 18 and Deuteronomy 26 and other places. The first fruits was that part that was very specially and particularly set aside for the Lord himself, only for the Lord.

His special possession. So I could only be used by the priests serving in the temple. And every year, every single year, the offering of the first fruits offering was a reminder every single year of God's promises to his people being absolutely unchanging.

That the Lord is utterly faithful to his covenant promise to gather an innumerable people for himself to be his, specially for him, set apart as holy, holy to him and holy like him.

That's why in Jeremiah chapter 2, the prophet calls Israel holy to the Lord, the first fruits of his harvest. And that's what James now is calling the church of Jesus Christ, the true and everlasting Israel, the 12 tribes.

Yes, scattered still in the earth, but holy to the Lord, his first fruits. When you come to Revelation, John's vision, remember chapter 7, that wonderful vision describing the church similarly as the perfect fulfillment of Israel, the 12 tribes, but 12,000 times 12,000 sealed with God's own name on their forehead, set apart for him, still on the earth facing great hostility, but every one of them numbered, sealed, protected by God himself.

[38 : 20] Even though the rest of that chapter tells us that those who are all personally numbered and sealed like that are actually innumerable. There's a multitude no one can number from every tribe and language and nation.

And that 144,000, that perfect number of God's people again, it appears in Revelation chapter 14. And now we're seeing them this time in glory, singing the song of the redeemed.

And John is told, these are those who've been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits, as firstfruits of God and the Lamb. The ones who wear the crown of life, the ones who followed the Lamb through every earthly trial, but now have the great reward.

They're His, they're with Him, they're like Him, holy to the Lord, the firstfruits, His own special possession. It's the same picture that we saw, do you remember when we a year or two ago studied Ezekiel and his great vision in the last chapter of his prophecy?

And again, repeatedly, over and over in that chapter, it's about the Lord's presence among His people amid the holy portion where everyone and everything is holy to the Lord and the Lord is there in the midst.

[39 : 34] And James says, of His own will He brought us forth, He fathered us that we might be firstfruits of His creatures, set apart for our Father, the Creator and the Redeemer, the Father of lights, the Father of life, set apart to be above every other creature in the whole universe, to be His, to be with Him, to know Him as the Father of life, to be like Him, You see what James is telling us?

Because however grim His reminder about the real tragedy of our human will, it's absolutely eclipsed, isn't it? By this glorious reality of the real transplantation of God's own heavenly nature into us to make us His, His special, holy, precious possession who is called, as Peter says, out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Know this, my brothers, he says, because this is the antidote, this is the only answer to the deadly reality of sin in the human heart. But it is the answer.

Don't ever diminish what God has done for you through the utterly undeserved grace of His unchanging generosity, which will achieve, will achieve His unswerving goal.

Because it's knowing this, you see, beloved brothers and sisters, it's knowing this that will enable you to embrace your genuine responsibility by way of response to God who has already given generously and will go on giving generously without reproach.

[41 : 27] Everyone who asks truly and faithfully trusts His fatherly love. And that's what He's going on to speak about, you see, from verse 19, the genuine responsibility of daily repentance.

Verse 21, go on receiving with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls. Don't deprive yourself of the ongoing growing transformation that comes only through God's heavenly nourishment.

Our daily walk must be on that spiritual path of humble direction, not from our wills, but from God's implanted word. Now we're going to come back to this section next time because really verses 19 to 27 belong together and it presents us with many hindrances that can deprive us of the nourishment and the strength that we need.

That only comes when we are wholly directed by God's word. And that means not just hearing, says James, but receiving it, doing it, obeying it, not resisting it, living it.

And James warns us again about being deceived about our Christian profession, especially about self-deception. We have to hear that. But for now, let me finish with a word of encouragement.

[42 : 44] If you are finding that trials of various kinds have become perhaps temptations for you, if we're conscious that we've not been growing in wisdom through them, but actually, if we're honest, we sense a growing wandering away from God.

And maybe James has convicted some of us tonight of that. Maybe we've realized that he's right and that the natural path that our heart is leading us on is one of sin.

We've begun to realize how dangerous that is. And maybe you've been woken up to where that will lead if you don't change things urgently. Well, friends, if that's you, James is saying to us, there is hope.

There is hope. There is a way forward. But what you need to do is listen up again to James. Remember we said in verses 2-12, he's telling us to look forward to the glory to come and look up at the grace that God promises us day by day.

But here you see in verses 13-15, he's adding to that and he's saying you have to also look in. You have to look in at your own heart and be honest about the reality that's there.

[43 : 54] Stop deceiving yourself. Stop pretending. And realize that of your own self you actually can do nothing. But he's also saying again, having done that, keep looking up.

Keep looking up at the unchangeable generosity of God who keeps giving gladly, generously, all things, every good gift to perfect your faith. And keep looking back to at what he's already done decisively.

transplanting his own nature into you through the new birth, a birth from above, through the forgiveness that comes through the Lord Jesus Christ who died on the cross for you.

Look back and look up and know this, my beloved brothers, he's saying. Know the unchanging goodness of the undeserved grace that he's shown you.

And he promises to keep showing you until his unwavering goal for your life is fulfilled. And you will at last be fully his, set apart for him, for his love, in his presence forever.

[45 : 03] Know this and you will be able to fulfill your responsibility of daily repentance and faith, of receiving his word, not rejecting it. The word that is able, it is powerful to save your soul.

But you have to look in and be honest first about where you really are with the Lord. Maybe you have been blaming God for your own temptations and not blessing him for his purpose and not trusting him to be at work in your life, to lead you his way through every trial to the crime.

Or maybe you've been thinking in all of that in the time of trial that God is some kind of heavenly tyrant, not seeing him as a heavenly father, which he really is, the giver of light and light, unchangeably generous and good.

And friends, if you have been thinking that, we have to ask ourselves what that tells us about where our heart really is, don't we? God's promised the crown of life to those who love him.

And progress to the crown is expedited not by our powers of endurance, says Alec Mateer, but by the depth and the reality and pervasiveness of our love for him.

[46 : 33] We live by what we love. The shape of our lives is determined by the joys of our hearts. You see, that's why the most penetrating question that James is really asking us is the same question that the risen Lord Jesus faced Simon Peter with on the shore of the lake.

Do you remember in John 21, Simon, do you love me more than these? Do you love me? Do you love me?

Do you know I love you, says Peter. Maybe you're saying the same tonight. Well, said Jesus to Peter, follow me.

Do as I say from now on. Live under my direction. Remember what I told you in the upper room the very night before I showed the extent of my love for you.

Do you remember what I said, Peter? If anyone loves me, he will keep my word. He'll obey me. And my father will love him.

[47 : 45] And we will come and make our home with him. He promises, says James, the crown of life to those who love him. But he's saying to us all, there's a battle for the love of your heart.

There's a battle for your heart. And you need to not be deceived about the grim tragedy that is your natural heart. But you need to never diminish the glorious transplant in you of the heart of our Heavenly Father.

And so don't deprive yourself of the growing transformation that he promises. Is that word of truth that brought you to life will go on day by day nourishing your life.

He will lead you to the crown of life. So he says, put away, put away all that resistance to him and receive with meekness the implanted word which is powerfully able to save your souls.

Amen. Let's quieten our hearts for a moment and respond ourselves to God's word.

[49 : 08] Amen. of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

Therefore put away all filthiness and wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls.

Lord help us we pray. Help us to love you and so to trust you and so to hear and to do your word for Christ's sake.

Amen. Amen.