

I. Intro:

- a. We all claim to be something, to believe in something
- b. The most profound ways that our true colors are shown is through testing
 - i. Testing-Refining fire
 - 1. Removing the dross, thus leaving the gold
 - ii. Thus testing is often referred to as “going through the fire”
 - 1. Through this process the truth about us is revealed
 - iii. James is very straightforward about this
 - iv. IMPERATIVES (Like a note from your mom)
 - 1. He tells us the truth! About testing

II. Testing reveals our truest resource (verses 1-11)

- a. If our resource is found in God (he is writing to Christians of course) then we have:
- b. A redemptive perspective of trials and suffering
 - i. We usually interpret trials and suffering as being evidence of one or two things
 - 1. God doesn't exist, or if He does, He hates me
 - 2. James, the whole Bible, provides another way of understanding
 - ii. Make no mistake: Trials suck. James is not a masochist
 - 1. Suffering is the result of a fallen world!
 - 2. Various trials (internal, external)
 - iii. But these trials will not destroy us, but rather strengthen us
 - 1. 1 Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. **13** But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed
 - iv. They will produce steadfastness
- c. Wisdom through the privilege of Prayer
 - i. We are talking about wisdom in situations that demonstrate your CHARACTER
 - ii. For example, this verse does not promise that that in your moment of indeciveness between a Toyota and a Lexus that God will supernaturally tell you “Lexus! The drivetrain warranty is far better!”
 - iii. I am not saying God will not guide you in those situations as well, but that is not what James is referring to here

- iv. But rather in a situation that demonstrates moral character in line with the gospel
 - 1. Should I earn or steal money to pay for such and such? JOB as example: 2 options
- v. Faith- is the exact opposite of trusting in yourself!
- d. The result is: steadfastness (bearing up with strength!)
 - i. With a view to maturity
 - 1. Perfect, complete lacking nothing
 - 2. He removes weaknesses and imperfections from our character
 - 3. As we endure trials He equips us with what we need to conquer!
- e. If our truest resources lie in the world (anything else) then we are left unstable
 - i. The double-minded man- not of logic but of loyalty
 - 1. Doubts will come!
 - a. To be strong in faith does not mean you will not have doubts!
 - b. *BUT we are not to build on doubts!*
 - c. doubts and mistakes were INCIDENTAL not FUNDAMENTAL!
 - d. You, in spite of doubts, build on faith
 - 2. A two-souled man, A walking civil war
 - 3. The one who *remains* in indecision! That is, you won't ask in faith because your loyalty is divided!
 - ii. Conflicting desires will always exist. The point is what do you choose?!
 - 1. Some of you can't even pray right now... it may be that you don't really believe that God is who He said He is! And you are basing that on something else!
 - 2. To doubt Him means that there is something else that you are trusting in (your own perspective maybe?)
 - iii. Trials and temptations ultimately reveal your RESOURCE!
At least your functional resource
 - iv. Trials usually consist of something being taken away: status, wealth, health etc.
 - 1. And when this happens is often exposes what is competing for our trust
 - v. we are shown where our resources truly lie
 - 1. Is it in your ability? Your wisdom? Someone in the place of God?

2. What is your functional resource?
 - a. Strength? Approval? Reputation? Possessions?
3. You know you trust in those things when they are taken away!
- vi. For example: poverty and riches (9-11)
 1. In the context, it seems that James is demonstrating two of the greatest trials that can come to Christians is the challenge of poverty and wealth
 2. There is huge pressure here to focus on this world, one way or the other. But our trust is to be in Christ, in the eternal not the temporal
 - a. The gospel enables the poor and the rich to boast in what they both have in Christ!
 - i. Possessions few or many change nothing about your wealth in God!
 - ii. Paul in Phil. 4:11-12
- vii. But this pressure of trusting in something other than Christ seems to be ever-present
- viii. Notice the term “boast”! what you brag about!

III. Testing reveals our truest desire/love (12-15a)

- a. If our desire/love is for the Lord it brings forth:
 - i. Renewal: “blessed”
 - ii. Reward: “The crown of life”
- b. If our desire goes elsewhere it brings forth: Sin
 - i. whenever we sin, it demonstrates in that moment, what we valued, what we desired
 - ii. And part of the sin nature is to blame shift (Gen.!)
 1. One tendency is to blame God when we give in within the trial. But He is not the author of temptation
 - iii. God allows the testing but is not the cause for the desire to do evil in it!
 - iv. The temptation toward evil lies within us. This is revealed in testing
 - v. Generally speaking, desire is not bad and is not always evil
 1. Noticed we haven’t gotten to the “sin” part yet
 2. But this is “over-desire”

3. Here is when it becomes evil: when desire substitutes its own personal and private goal in the place of God's will and design!
4. When we place people, status, wealth in the place that it ought not be, it becomes sin

IV. Testing reveals our truest need (15b)

- a. If left to our sins it brings forth death
 - i. There is nowhere to go!
 - ii. So where do we go from here?? If the problem is that our own heart over-desires things that leads forth to sin, and sin to death, what is the solution?!
 - iii. Give in: Oscar Wilde "The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself."
 - iv. Fight it: but you have no resource! It is "indwelling sin!"
 1. You can cover up, but it is still there!
- b. If you don't have something incorruptible at the core of your being, the fire that comes will be an all-consuming fire!
 - i. We Under God as our judge and alienated from Him as Father
- c. God's design in conviction is to expose our spiritual poverty so that we would not trust in ourselves but in something else: the Gift of God!

V. The Solution: the Gift of God (16-18)

- a. The good that we need cannot be found below... it can only come from above...
- b. Against this backdrop of death the light of God shines bright
 - i. It is because our situation was so grave that God went to great lengths to save us!
- c. Jesus, the truly tested One
- d. Stripped of all He had, all that we commonly esteem and value
 - i. Money, man's approval, long life, close friends
 - ii. He lost all of the things that we usually trust in!
 1. Strength/approval/reputation/possessions
 - iii. He went through the fire of judgement alone
- e. And was shown to be... perfect

Hebrews 2:14-18

14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, **15** and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. **16** For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham.

17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. **18** For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

- f. He stood fast in testing...for us!! He lost all of this so that we might gain Him!
- g. We are “brought forth” “born again” through the Word of truth!
- h. James does not want us to be deceived, the best defense is a good offense, He points us to the perfection of God! Revealed in Jesus. The perfect gift, the light of the world!
 - i. He meets our truest need
 - ii. And thus becomes our great desire/love
 - iii. And is proven to be the greatest resource we will ever need. He continues to give us gifts!!
- i. We are enabled to live by the Word of truth, which is the gospel
- j. This is only possible because of One who was truly tested: Jesus
- k. We now live in light of the gospel!

VI. A Community of the Word of Truth

- a. Brought forth by the word of truth, so that we might bear fruit
- b. It is precisely because we have indeed been brought forth, born again by the gospel that James can speak so directly! It is not because he is so *unsure* of our ability to obey, but because He is so sure that the truth does bear fruit!
 - i. The way that this word of truth flourishes is by obedience
 - ii. Don't be deceived! Don't settle for counterfeit religion!
 - 1. Those who do not practice what they preach!
 - 2. The evidence will be
- c. A Community of Concern
 - i. Ready listeners!

- ii. Speaking too quickly may indicate a lack of interest in others
 - 1. You may only care about what they “think” of you rather than how you can serve them
- d. A Community of Righteousness
 - i. People who are slow to anger
 - ii. IN place of wickedness and filthiness, you continue to receive the word of truth
 - iii. The gospel is continually brought to bear (by the Spirit) on your heart in a sanctifying, transformative way
- e. A Community of action
 - i. Doers and not just hearers
 - 1. The mirror analogy
- f. A Community of Justice
 - i. Visiting the afflicted!
 - ii. Christ was concerned for us! He was perfectly righteous! He acted! He brought justice!
 - iii. It is all in response to the beauty of God’s gift!

VII. We do not need to fear the fire of testing

- a. The fire you should fear is the fire of judgement
 - i. That is the fire that could destroy you
 - ii. Jesus went through the fire of judgement for us
 - 1. He took God’s judgement upon Himself for our disloyalty to Him, our devotion to sin, and our failure to do right
 - iii. so that we would only pass through the refiners fire and come through more like Him
- b. It will only push us toward the goal
 - i. They will reveal your faults and blemishes
 - ii. But when they are revealed you will not despair... your trust is in Christ in you the “hope of Glory”
- c. These trials, these testings, are, in a sense, the highest compliment to the Word of truth working in you.

“Severe testing is not the mark of divine disapproval, rather the reverse. Only Ore which bears precious metal is subject to processing and crushing. Only alloy in which there is valuable metal is placed within the refiner’s fire. Since God has pledged Himself never to subject His children to tests beyond their ability to bear, a severe test is in reality His vote of confidence” J. Oswald Sanders “Men from God’s School” pg. 20