

Book of James

Sermon #2: Persevere for the Crown

James 1:2-

Dr. Matt Cassidy, August 28, 2022

Turn in your Bibles to the Book of James. It's towards the end of the Bible. We're going to be studying the Book of James this semester.

I'll start with this. When I was in college, two summers I spent working at a sports camp not far from here called Camp Longhorn. It's out at Inks Lake. And the founder of Camp Longhorn, Tex Robertson, was one of these honest-to-goodness bigger-than-life people. He has an amazing life story. He was brilliant. The man invented the Frisbee. So there—you're welcome—thank you for that. And the Blob, if you've ever seen that out on lakes. He founded the University of Texas swim team. He started it. He was the coach for fifteen years. All fifteen years they won the Southwest Conference. He was an amazing individual.

He was part of the Olympic water polo team that won a bronze medal. He trained many world champion swimmers. During World War II he joined the Navy and trained the frogmen team, the Underwater Demolition Team which would evolve into the Navy SEALs. He was passionate about swimming.

So, when you went to Camp Longhorn, you were going to swim a mile. Everyone swims a mile at Camp Longhorn. All four thousand kids, even Cabin Zero, second graders that don't even know how to swim—by the end of the third week they're going to open water swim. It's across Inks Lake. There's no side of the pool of flip turns to coast. It happened every year for decades.

And here's how he did it. Two things—one, he would give a vision of victory. And the vision of victory was a mile swimmer patch. And it was orange and white and it was in the shape of a shark. You'd come in as a tadpole, but you'd leave as a shark. And it would inspire you for what you would be doing and it would remind you of what you'd done.

But in addition to a vision swim patch, he also provided a way to make the goal happen. He had a plan. And the plan included a lot of endurance and perseverance, steadfast swimming.

That's how it worked. But the expectation was clear: you go to Camp Longhorn, you're going to swim the mile.

Here's how he'd do it. The first couple of days we'd give everyone swim lessons or swim tests and make sure everybody was able to swim. And if they weren't, we'd train them how to do that. And then, after that was established, every time we went to the swim bay we'd put you out on these floating docks that had an outboard motor attached to them. We'd put every kid on one of those and then we'd just start taking them out to the middle of the lake. And we'd sing these songs. You might as well enjoy the trial or test that you're about to get into. And we'd swim these heroic swim songs. It would distract the kids from the panic that was inside their souls. We'd stop the barge and then kick everybody off and say, "Swim home." Yeah. And they did. I mean, we were careful about it. We made sure everybody was safe. But every day we would take them farther and farther out. And then the day came and everybody swam the mile—all of them. And they got their mile swimmer patch. Look at the smiles on these kids!



For some of them it was the greatest thing they had done all year. The parents that dropped them off would see their little second grader with a mile swimmer patch. You could knock them over with a feather. It was an amazing experience.

It's like a shadow of what God does for us. He has a plan. He has a vision for what we will become, and He has a path to get there. He has this glorious destination for every single saint. And He has a road, a method, to make sure that glorious destination is going to happen.

James' Audience Had Plenty of Troubles

In the context of the Book of James, you can see all of that being played out. And the context, the audience—if a single word would relate to that audience, it would be “trouble.” They had trouble in a lot of different ways. During that period of time there was a famine throughout the entire land, so people were starving and poor. And Claudius, the emperor, would allow people to take out their rage on the Jews. So, the Jews were being persecuted. They were getting kicked out of Rome and even Palestine and were having a very difficult time. It was a dangerous time to live.

And then the Christians (and this was the first book written, so it was predominantly, almost exclusively, Jews that were following Jesus Christ) were hated by the Jews. So, they're getting it three different ways. The Christians were living in poverty, persecuted by the Romans for being Jewish, and persecuted by the Jews for being Christians. And so, is it any wonder that James is going to start this letter right off the block saying, *Okay, let's talk about the trials that you guys are living with and how to live with persecution.*

One person wrote this. This was the fear. **“Persecution purifies, but constant suffering can crush you.”** And the saints were growing weary in doing good and living faithfully. So, James is going to come in and encourage them to endure. That's the theme. It's all about perseverance.

Living by Faith ... What Does That Even Mean?

Now throughout the entire book he's going to say ... the theme of the book is living with faith in God—growing your faith in God—those sorts of things. But here's the problem with that. What does that even mean—faith in God? And we're going to need to know what that means for the rest of our time together. So, I thought I'd spend some time explaining that.

[Pastor Matt starts writing on a whiteboard.]

Simple faith in God—right? And the problem with just having faith in God is that God says to be true to yourself. God says you should be happy. God says to just be a good person. He doesn't say any of those things. And the problem with just saying that we have to improve or strengthen our faith in God is that it's too vague—what faith means—and it's too obscure who God is.

So, when we talk about faith in James and from now on, we're going to talk about faith in Yahweh. That's the God of the Bible. That's who we're supposed to have faith in. And what kind of faith are we supposed to have, and what about Yahweh? Again, it's a little too vague and obscure, right? So, we're supposed to have faith in Yahweh. We're talking about in the Bible, how the Bible tells us the nature and the character of God—His attributes. Particularly in James—there are multiple attributes—but in James' case we're talking about Yahweh's attributes, that God is loving. God is kind.

And then the other thing we're having to trust in is that God is sovereign. (And there's a 50/50 chance I spelled that right.) Now, what "sovereign" means is that God knows, He has a plan, and He has the power to make the plan happen. That's what "sovereign" means. So, the point is this. When we say we have faith in Yahweh, we have faith that God is good and loving and kind and that God is sovereign—that He knows what's happening, He has a plan, and He has the power.

And we know this because of what? Because of the promises of God. And so, many saints commit multiple passages to memory that remind us and validate these truths. What comes to mind is Romans 8, one of my favorites—Romans 8, the whole chapter. But in one section it says, "How will God, who did not spare His only Son, how will He not also, along with Him, freely give us all the things that we need?" If God didn't spare His own Son because of His love for us, how is He not going to give us anything that's not going to be good for us?

His sovereignty—this one's a little more complicated. But in Genesis chapters 37 through 50 is an amazing story of Joseph, who has been a victim of evil, and he's a victim of accusations of injustice. And during that entire time the storyline is building to this single sentence that is repeated in the climax. It's repeated two times. And it goes like this: "What you meant for evil, Yahweh meant for good."

The point is that it doesn't make sense until God gets hold of it. He is loving and kind and sovereignly uses His power in Joseph's life, and those things need to be reinterpreted in the context that God is good and God is loving. And so, when James talks through the whole book—when he's talking about improving our faith or trusting, he's talking about trusting Yahweh; that He is a loving and kind and sovereign and powerful God.

And trials put this to the test, don't they? Isn't that the point of contention, that we're wondering, *Is He good? Or maybe He just doesn't know.* That's the cornerstone of atheism. *If there's a God, then why is there evil, if He's loving and He's powerful?*

It's About Our Response to Trials in Our Lives

So, this is the contest in our lives. This is the board that we'll be referring to when we talk about faith and we talk about growing our faith or where we're putting our faith. This is the theme here, in many respects. You don't get to choose the trials and the trouble that you get into; you get to choose how you respond to it. And when a person responds in faith, that means they're trusting, independent of circumstances or feelings, that God is loving and God is powerful and sovereign.

James 1:1-4

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the dispersion: Greetings.

² Count it pure joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ And let perseverance have its perfect effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Now with all of that in mind, let's read the first two sentences in the Book of James together. We'll start with last week, which was the introduction. "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in dispersion." They've been scattered. "Greetings. Count it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance"—that's endurance and steadfastness. "And

let perseverance have its perfect effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

So, let’s just look at that first sentence, that “when you meet various trials” ... There are some things we can know from even these first few words. One is that trials are assumed; they’re a given. He doesn’t say, “if you have a trial,” but “when you have a trial.” And then he says, “when you meet *various* trials.” Various in Greek is where we get the word “polka dot,” which is the idea of multitude, kind of the idea that they’re scattered. It’s all of the above. Yes, it is your reputation, it is your health, it is your wealth, it is your children, it is your marriage. It’s all of those things all coming at you as a means of testing you to see how you’re going to live in faith in Yahweh. Often when it rains, it pours.

In the translation we’re using here: “when you meet various trials.” Meet—it sounds like, *Oh, hey, trial, we haven’t met. Come on in the house. Let’s have some ...* No. The word in the King James version is translated literally and more effectively. It is “when you fall into trials—when you fall into various trials.” And the idea is to expect the unexpected, because this word is only used three times in the New Testament: here and one time in Acts 27 when Paul is on a boat that is lost at sea during a storm at night with seasoned sailors, and they’re trying to make sure they don’t run aground. So, they’re all looking, they’re all aware, and then they fall into a sandbar, and the boat starts being torn apart. They were looking and they still fell into a sandbar.

The other passage where it’s mentioned is when Jesus is telling the story of the Good Samaritan. And when He’s telling that story, He starts by saying there’s a journeyman that’s going through the kill-box street going to Jericho. Everybody knew it was a terrible street or road or path to go on. And so, you can bet this guy is looking around for bad guys. He’s certainly aware. But he needed to expect the unexpected, because it still says he was jumped: “He fell into thieves.” Expect the unexpected.

The best part of this sentence is, while you’re being mugged, “Consider it joy.” “Pure joy”—sorry, I left that out. “Count it pure joy.” Uncontaminated with bitterness or resentment ... yeah. I guess, the first thing is that joy and happiness are not even the same. So, you don’t have to be happy about the trials. And you’re not even supposed to have joy about the trial, but about what it produces. But joy is a state of awareness of being right with God. And so, you could be on a back stairwell at a hospital by yourself, weeping uncontrollably. And in that moment, those groanings could actually serve as worship. Because in that, you’ve not lost trust and faith that

God is love and that God is in control, and none of it makes sense to you. But in that, you are with Him. That's joy.

So, “consider it pure joy when you encounter different types of trials.” And again, he doesn't say that it's the trial you're supposed to be loving; it's the fact that you get an opportunity here. God is using this opportunity to give you a chance to endure and show that He is good and that He is powerful. Look what it says again—it's why. Verse 2: “Count it pure joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.” Why? Not because of the trials. We're not celebrating that, but we're celebrating what the trials can produce. It's the potential that the trials have—verse 3: “For you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance”—or “endurance” in some translations, or “steadfastness.”

Perseverance

Now James is going to use “perseverance” three times in this sermon—twice in the beginning and once at the end. Like a good preacher, he's going to sandwich these two. So, what is perseverance? Well, in other translations the coach is telling us that it's endurance and steadfastness. But it literally means “abide underneath.” And so, the idea is like you're holding a weight over your head, or you're holding—I don't know, a house? And it's the ability to stand that for a long period of time without being crushed. And the picture here is that God, in His love and His sovereignty, is giving us trials or allowing trials to come into our lives so that we can grow in our perseverance, grow in our endurance, get stronger and stronger as we go. Because, just like the Longhorn swimmer patch, He has a destination for us, a beautiful destiny. But the road to get there is long and it's uphill. And He wants us to endure that, because we're going to be glad we get there when we do.

And you ask Him, *Well, what's the destination?* What does God have for us? What is the good and the powerful Yahweh bringing us towards? This is the predestined plan for every believer in Jesus Christ. Be clear about that. This is the predestined plan for every believer in Jesus Christ. Let's read the passage: “Count it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, when you meet trials of various kind, for you know the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And let perseverance have its perfect effect, that you may be perfect”—that means “mature, complete”—“and lacking in nothing.”

Destination: to Be Made Perfect/Mature

The destination is that we would be perfect. That word is *telios*. James is going to use this word more than any writer in the New Testament. He loves this word. He wants us to know that's our destination, that's our destiny, that's our predestination. And so, he's going to define the word right there. It means "mature, complete, lacking in nothing." It means an undivided relationship with Jesus Christ. It means an uncontaminated devotion to Yahweh.

If you were here last week, we're going to add a word to our chant. It was, "I am a bond-servant/slave of King Jesus *alone*"—no one else. And just so you know, James isn't the only writer that says this is the end, this is the destination. As a matter of fact, James says it, but Jesus says it, and Paul says it, and the writer of Hebrews says it. They're all saying it because they all know that's what God is up to in our lives. And the means of getting there is to build us in perseverance. And to have perseverance, we're going to need some trials.

Matthew 5:48

Therefore, you are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Here's what Jesus said: "Therefore, you are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

2 Peter 3:14

Therefore my beloved ... be diligent and be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless.

Peter said it like this: "Therefore my beloved ... be diligent and be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless." There it is again.

Romans 8:29

For whom He foreknew He predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

And in Romans, Paul says, “For those He foreknew He predestined”—this is our predestination—“to become conformed to the image of His Son that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

Paul said it, Peter said it, Jesus said it, James says it—Grace Covenant Church said it. If you hear what our goal is around here—**our motto is that everyone would become like Christ in all of life.** And that’s what we mean—to be whole and complete and mature—to become like Christ in all of life. We say that. These authors say that because, then and now, people live fractured faithful lives. They compartmentalize their faith. They trust God and live by faith in certain areas where they think God is loving or God is sovereign. And so, you’ll know someone who is famously walking a faithful life at work, but not so much at home. Or sometimes, the other way around. *She is Christ-like in the way she is raising those children, but not the way she treats her husband.* Honestly, it’s the classic saint-on-Sunday, not so much on Monday.

And so, James is saying that the sovereign power of the loving God is arranging our lives to allow difficulties and trials so that we would learn how to live longer and stronger under the weight of those trials, not giving in to not believing that He is loving or that He’s in charge. This life that we live in is the playground that the sovereign, loving God enjoys. And He arranges things so that we can show people. We don’t get to pick the trials; we get to pick the way we respond to the trials and whether we’re going to live by faith or trust that He is these things. Because trials make us blink on one of these. We can’t bear underneath any more. And so, sometimes our lives get a little bit out of hand, out of control. And we say, *You know what? If God’s not going to be in charge, if He’s not going to do things the way I want them done, I’ll do it. And I will use my power, my wit, my resources, my contacts, and I’m going to get these things done. Rest and know the Lord is God—nah. That was last week.* And we become little gods. That’s how you don’t live by faith that He’s in charge.

Sometimes, often, when we're in a great deal of pain or suffering or loneliness or embarrassment, we just think, *Well, God says He loves and He says He's kind. I'm not feeling it. And so, if He's not going to give it to me, I'll take it myself.* And the way we don't live by faith in this is that we say, *I will absolutely do things that are against the holy decrees of God because I want this in my life.* That's how we express our lack of faith in these two attributes of God. That's how we get crushed by it.

And James is saying, *Look, God is sending these trials to you, not to crush you, not to cause failure in your life, but to get you back up and getting stronger and trusting that the King Jesus is in charge and that He is loving in His rule of your life and the kingdom.* And so, our lives are to help us swim longer. Each season of life has a new set of trials, a new set of difficulties, each time the bar going just a little farther out, getting us to swim in so that we would have perseverance about trusting and living under Yahweh's loving rule.

Trials Make Us Want to Act on Our Doubts

So, how do we live in the context of all these various trials where perseverance is what is being added to our life? Well, James says here's how you do it.

James 1:5

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

The first thing you ought to do is, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who give generously and without any reproach, and it will be given to him."

What Is Wisdom?

God's eager to give us wisdom. And wisdom isn't knowledge—sometimes today we think knowledge is wisdom. Knowledge is data; it's the stuff we memorize; it's how you get great grades on tests. But wisdom is the ability to take that and know what to do with it—the bigger picture. Wisdom is how life works—how life under the kingdom works—how He designed it and how we're to live that way.

The difference is seen in a great quote where a person said, **“Mankind has amassed enough knowledge to know how to go faster than the speed of sound. But the wise man knows that mankind in general is going faster and faster in the wrong direction.”** That’s the ability to distinguish the two.

And James is saying to just ask for wisdom. And He’s going to help you negotiate how God can be both sovereign and loving and work this out. Sometimes He gives you a Bible verse, a story to be told, or some kind of experience. And the wisdom is about what? A lot of times it’s about this—the nature of God and what He’s promised.

James 1:6-8

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

But James says, *Look, if you’re going to ask for wisdom, you’ve got to be in. You have to be a servant of the King Jesus.* Look what he says. *Don’t be doubting.* “But let him ask in faith, not doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; because he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

It says here that the Lord is not going to give him any wisdom because he’s double-minded. Double-minded means “two souls; two hearts.” I would say “two allegiances.” One writer says it’s like a civil war going on inside this person’s life. In other words, choose a side. A double-minded man says, *I want to be a saint; I want to be popular.* Well, which is it? You can’t be both. *I want to walk with God, but I want to be part of the cool kids.*

So, he’s saying here that it’s like giving directions. You wouldn’t give directions to someone if they said, “Look from here how do I get to California ... or Florida?”

“Well, okay, they’re completely different ways, so if you tell me which way you’re going I can tell you if you should go east or west.”

James is saying here that God’s not going to give you directions to His destination unless you choose that’s where you want to be. And God’s destination for every child—His

predestination for every follower of Jesus Christ, because He loves you and because He's sovereign—is that you would become like Christ in all of life; that you'd be mature, perfect, complete, lacking in nothing. You want to go there? Ask God for wisdom for how you should live, how you should interpret things. And He'll give it to you—generously. He's not going to be condescending about it. He wants you to know. So, just ask. But don't doubt.

Wisdom for Both the Rich and the Poor

As the passage continues, James is going to say, *Here's some wisdom. Here's some wisdom you can go with right now.* What's wonderful about this section is that it introduces a teaching style that James has. He's going to sound a lot like his half-brother Jesus and the Book of Proverbs. If you mix them up, you have James. He's going to teach some of the parables that Jesus teaches, and then he's going to teach a proverb like this is how you do it. Here's the value you should have (the Sermon on the Mount) and here's how to get that value. So, that's what he'll do right here. He's going to speak, Sermon-on-the-Mount-like, with eternal perspective. He's going to say, *Lift your eyes up. Look at heaven—don't worry about earth. You've got to choose an eternal perspective, you've got to be living for the King who's eternal. This stuff here is temporal, passing. Don't give your life or hope to that.*

James 1:9-11

Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,¹⁰ and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.¹¹ For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

Again, look what he says in verse 9: “Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes.” It's transitional. “So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.”

So, in summary here, it's saying that the rich and the poor are on level ground when it comes to trials, because everything is in passing. It's all temporary. The rich man's wealth is just

coming and going. And he's not talking about wealth as much as he's talking about anything you put hope in that can be lost or stolen or can rust, like Jesus said. And he's saying that you are a bond-slave of Jesus Christ the King alone. That's enough for you. And this stuff that you're holding onto is like everyone's front lawn right now. The scorching heat just toasted it this summer, right? He's saying that's what wealth is like.

And the poor man? He says, *Look, don't let poverty be the thing that defines you. Don't make that your identity, because that's passing too.* And in kind of a word picture, James is saying that this life is like high school. And college is coming. And none of that high school stuff really matters. It's like if you're the rich guy.

Look at you—you've got a letter jacket.

I lettered in several sports.

Oh, that's cute—you're a captain too.

You wear that letter jacket your first day in college and it's not going to be a good day for you for so many reasons. One, nobody cares. And you ought to be humiliated that you put your identity in something that was so last year. So, you might as well be bragging about being rich with Confederate currency. Who cares?

And again, James is saying, *Look, isn't it enough that you're a bond-slave of the Lord Jesus Christ alone? Yeah. Put your hope there.* But he's telling even the poor person, *You should exalt yourself, because you can. It's college.* And so, there's this guy walking around saying:

I don't have a letter jacket from high school. I never lettered in anything. I wasn't very popular.

And do you know what the college kids say? *Nobody cares! That was so last year.*

Why are you identifying with what was instead of enjoying where you are? Isn't it enough to identify yourself around the fact that you are a bond-slave of King Jesus Christ alone? It is. So, he's saying that's where your identity should lie. That's how you should be living.

That's the first piece of wisdom that James gives us—how to live in this way. Living and getting endurance is to live for the next life, not this one.

Last Bit of Wisdom: Look Ahead Towards that Crown

James 1:12

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love Him.

And then there's one more piece of wisdom that he gives us. And again, it's going to sound like Jesus. It's another beatitude here in verse 12: "Blessed is the man who perseveres ..." There's our word again—he's closing it. That's endurance. "... under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love Him."

Blessed—one of the beatitudes. Satisfied is the person who perseveres all the way to the end—the guy who doesn't quit, the woman who maintains her faith and trusts that God is loving and sovereign, entirely independent of circumstances. Because you don't choose the trials that come your way; you choose the way you respond. And if you respond in a way that shows that you absolutely serve a king that loves you and is in charge—if you endure suffering all the way to the end—he says—there's a promise here—one day ... and then ... and then ... and then ... you receive a crown, the crown of life. I mean, think about that. You receive the crown of life from Jesus the King, who also had a crown of trials and torture. His first crown was thorns. And that was replaced by an eternal crown. We get crowned by thorns, and then we get an eternal crown. We get to enjoy the overlap between our lives and the life of our Savior.

That's why you consider it pure joy to encounter various trials, because that gives us a chance to grow in our perseverance, and that perseverance can make us like Christ in all of life. Because that's what is right and real and true. This is the truth about how life is. James comes right at us, hard and fast. And this is a difficult truth to hear, that life is suffering but it has purpose. But when you hear it from a different perspective, maybe from a different angle, it all kind of makes sense.

So, if you'll just humor me and just be—I don't know—a camper at Camp Longhorn, let me read this to you.

“Hey, my brothers and sisters, when you are suddenly taken off to the swim bay area ... yeah, it’s going to happen. You can expect it. You’re going to be a mile swimmer because you’re at Camp Longhorn. And you’re going to be put on a barge and taken out to the lake and you’re going to be kicked off so you can swim back. You count that a joy, because—listen—you get to go to camp and that swimming back is going to be building endurance and stamina and perseverance in your swimming. And that endurance, if it continues (and it will) will allow you to become a mile swimmer. That’ll be you. That’s a mature swimmer. That’s the way you’re supposed to be.

“If any of you are going through this and you’re wondering, *How can all of this be happening to me? Is it any good? Is there a plan?* Just go to (hmm, I hate this)—just go to Tex. And Tex Robertson will tell you, and he’ll give you everything you need to know about how to make sense out of this, because Tex knows a lot about swimming. He won’t be condescending about it at all.

“But let me warn you (actually, this is a true story)—when you go to Tex, don’t go in there saying, *I don’t want to do the mile swim. I want to go back to be with my mommy.* Because he’s not going to give you any advice because you’re not listening. Because if you’re at Camp Longhorn, you’re going to do the mile swim. And he doesn’t care—don’t be embarrassed—if you’re a tadpole or if you’re a state-ranked swimmer. That’s not how he keeps score. All he wants you to do is not be embarrassed and not be cocky, but just learn to endure and enjoy that endurance.

“And then ... and then ... and then ... congratulations. On that day when you show that your stamina and your endurance has made itself complete, you will receive from Tex the mile swimmer patch. And you can wear that for the rest of your life so you will remember what inspired you and what you did. That’s a promise from Tex that you’ll get that patch—a little shark swimming patch.”

That is not what this passage is about. Can I read you what James said? He said this:

“Count it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you meet various trials of very many kinds. And you’ve got to know this: that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And let that perseverance have its full effect, its complete effect, its perfect effect, that you may be perfect and complete and lacking in nothing.

“Now listen—if some of you are wondering and you’re needing wisdom, you just ask God, and He’ll give it to you with abundance. He won’t be condescending about it. But you need to ask in faith. Because if you’re living for two worlds, if you don’t know where your passport is—heaven or earth—you’re like a windsock just blowing around. And you’re going to tear your own soul apart. And you’re not going to get the wisdom that you need to get through this.

“If you’re lowly, brothers, exalt yourself, because you are a servant of the King. And if you’re wealthy, that’s good too. But it’s passing. And you are a servant of the King. Just remember that in the midst of your pursuits that blessed is he who perseveres under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the very crown of life, which is a promise from Yahweh. And you can take that to the bank.”

So, the next time various trials show themselves in your life, remember that you can’t pick the trial; you can only pick the response. And living by faith is being steadfast and enduring the weight, knowing that God is all-loving and God is all-powerful and He is in that suffering with You. He has been there. We don’t have a high priest that can’t relate to us! We have a high priest that’s gone through everything we have, except without sin. He’ll ride that storm out with you. And there will be a day when you will say, “I thank God for those various trials, because that’s what gave me the endurance to the end. That’s why I wear a crown in heaven that He promised to give me.”

That’s James’ lesson for us today—to trust in Yahweh—that He’s good and that He’s sovereign.

Would you join me in a word of prayer?

Here’s how the writer of Hebrews tells us to live. He says, “Run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and the perfecter of faith.” And here’s how He did it. “For the joy set before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame.” He knew it was passing. “And then He sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” And so, we’re to endure all kinds of hostilities by the sinners around us, just like Jesus did himself, so that we too will not grow weary and we will not lose heart. Because regardless of what happens to us, these things you know to be true: that God is loving and God is sovereign.

Jesus, you’re the only one that will ever save. You’re the only one that is worthy of every breath that we take. We live for You. I will build my life upon this rock. This will be my firm foundation. And I will trust in You and You alone. And I will not be shaken. And I pray that this is our prayer. I pray that we would be a church that lives this way. And God’s people prayed in Jesus’ name. Amen.