

## A Tribe of Trials

### *Walk the Walk: James Pt. 1*

We are starting the New Year with a new series. When people set out to make a fresh start, usually that is based around some very practical steps – get a budget, lose weight, read a book a month, cook my own meals, etc. So in that spirit of practicality, we are going to take a look at the book of James. And the book of James is what’s called, in the New Testament, Wisdom Literature, which is very, very practical.

James is not a source of deep theology – he’s not Paul, and some people have tried to set them at odds over that, I’m sure we’ll talk about that later. But James is one of the most quoted books in all the New Testament and is probably in the top three most popular books in the church. Luke Timothy Johnson has a fantastic commentary and I love this from his introduction: “Even at first reading, the letter of James is a remarkably accessible, moral and religious exhortation. It’s call to realize professed ideals in appropriate action, has spoken with prophetic urgency to generations of readers, who have found James’ directives **difficult to perform rather than to understand.**” (LTJ, James, 3)

I have never taught extensively on James and I mean to correct that in 2023. So we’re going to go right through it, chapter by chapter, over the next number

of weeks. By way of background, instead of looking at the book, let me look with you for a moment at the one who wrote it. We really can’t ignore this. If you really want to understand the epistle, you need to understand something about the person who wrote it. Verse 1 gives us an introduction, and it contains a significant clue. **James 1:1**, “*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.*”

Now, right away, who is this? There are a number of people in the Bible named James. There was James the brother of John, and James the son of Alphaeus, but there was one man who came to be one of the four main pillars of the early church. In the very first generation of Christians, Paul, Peter, John, and James became the four acknowledged leaders of the early church.

But this James - who was the great leader of the church in Jerusalem - was the brother of Jesus himself. He was the son of Joseph and Mary. He was a younger brother, of course, because Jesus was born to Mary and Joseph before they were married. But he was raised with Jesus, and rejected him until after the resurrection. Which, as I like to say, what would *your* brother have to do to convince you that he was actually God?

But tradition and history tell us he's the writer of this epistle, this letter. He almost has to be, because this James, the James who was the brother of Jesus, was far and away the most prominent and famous James in the early church. Any other James would have had to distinguish himself. Any other James would have had to be called "James, the this" or "James, the that." Anybody who was just able to write a letter saying "James..." had to be this one, the brother of Jesus.

So with that settled, let's jump right into the text. I'm going to read you longer passages of scripture each week, because I want you to be familiar with these wisdom writings, even if we don't bore down on everything in detail. So I will read you the first half of chapter one this week and we'll look at the second half next week. We already read the greeting, so **James 1:2–18:** *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

*5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. 6 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.*

*9 The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. 10 But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. 11 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 man will fade away even while he goes about his business.*

*12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. 13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.*

*15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. 16 Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. 17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. 18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.*

So James gives the greeting and then immediately starts talking about trials. He is writing to a tribe of people facing trials. A community of suffering. They are facing something. And we are still facing it as well. And right off the bat, it tells us three things in this passage. It tells us *what* we face, *how* we can face it, and *who* we face it with.

Now first thing, it says, **#1, What we face.** What do we face? We face “*trials...of many kinds.*” A trial is a trouble. It’s a difficulty. It’s a problem. And it’s also a test. Do you remember this word “testing”? “... *you face trials of many kinds, which is the testing of your faith.*” That word “testing” is a word with connotations of smelting. Do you know what smelting is?

If you take ore and you apply enormous heat to it, the precious metals in it, like gold or silver, survive, but the worthless metals are either oxidized or they’re turned into slag; they fall off as they separate from the precious metal. And not only James, but 1 Peter and Hebrews, talk about suffering as a kind of furnace. It *tests* your faith.

In other words, as a pastor over the years, I’ve talked to people who have said, “Oh, I used to go to church,” or, “I used to believe in God, and then I went through some time of terrible suffering, and I just bailed. I just couldn’t believe in God after that.” And that’s exactly what James is saying; it is because suffering is like a furnace that will judge whether your faith in God was real or not. Whether is was mature or not.

So an awful lot of people go through suffering and say, “I realize I don’t really believe in God.” So suffering in trials that actually test your very *faith* is something the text says will happen to all Christians. Notice it doesn’t say, “*If* you ever face trials...” Does it say, “*If* you face

trials, then do this and that”? No, it says, “when,” which means it *will* happen. This is so realistic.

Jesus once said, “A servant is not above their master. Because I suffered, you’re going to suffer. Because I took it on the chin, you’re going to take it on the chin.” Pagan religions were always about doing things for the gods, so the gods would help you avoid suffering. I’m going to make a sacrifice to the goddess of the harvest so my crops won’t fail. A divine *quid pro quo*. That was what pagan religion was all about, but not Christianity. Oh no, not at all.

Jesus suffered to bring redemption into the world. In other words, redemption didn’t come just in spite of suffering, but through it. And Jesus says, “When you’re united with me and you’re seeking to live the life I have lived, then suffering is almost inevitable. You *will* face trials of many kinds.”

So James and 1 Peter and Hebrews, these three books back-to-back in the New Testament have a lot about suffering and say if you’re a Christian, you expect it. It’s not punishment because you did something wrong. No. You shouldn’t be surprised by it. It’s going to happen. It’s not *if* it happens. *When* it happens, you should be ready. The problem is we live in an American society that is probably the worst society in history for helping its members get ready for suffering. Do you realize that?

Because in ancient times, almost *all* ancient people believed this world, or this life, was not all there was. In all other cultures, all other centuries, most people said, “Well, you have this life, but then you have the next life. You have this natural world; then, you have the supernatural world.”

And almost everybody has always believed this life is nasty, brutish, and short. So throughout history, what most people, in most societies, have said is, “Well, I’d *like* to have money in this life, I’d like to be happy, I’d like to have love in this life, *but* this life is short and what’s important is I live in such a way that I will have love and happiness and joy in the next.” So in other words, “This life *isn’t* all there is. And if I don’t have many things I’d like to have in this life, there is consolation of the next life.”

But we live in a secular world – it’s a very recent fad in human history. And what does the secular worldview say? “This life is all there is. This world is all there is.” And do you know what that means? If you lose love here, if you lose happiness here, if you lose anything here, there *is no* consolation. See? You’ve lost *all* meaning, all happiness, everything. It’s *gone*, because there isn’t anything *but* this world.

And even if we’re Christians and even if we say, “Oh, we believe in the Bible,” we’re also members of our culture. Culture is essentially invisible to you. It’s like the fish and the water. It just so surrounds you, you don’t even see it. And as a result, we are soaked in our culture.

And our culture says, “If you suffer, you need to sue, because suffering is absolutely not the way it should be. Somebody has screwed up, and it can’t be you.” Or maybe it is you, but the point is, “No! No! Things are supposed to be good. Everything has to be good because this world is all there is.”

If you live in this country, then you’re going to be affected by that. And what it means is this culture does not prepare you for suffering *at all*. It “dis-equips” you for suffering. And therefore, to hear what James says, or what 1 Peter says, or what Hebrews says, about suffering is more important for us, probably, than the original hearers.

The original readers probably didn’t have nearly the trouble we do with it. See, we’re a crybaby culture, and there has never been a culture like this before, because there has never been a culture that has said this life is all there is. So anyway, the first point is you’re going to face trials; you’re going to face suffering. It’s going to happen.

**Point two shows us How we can face it.** And we're given here two resources for dealing with the suffering. Now partly because we've chosen such a long passage in order to move through the whole book in so many weeks, I can't get down into every little thing it actually gives us. For example, verses 9–11, about the poor man and the rich man...

We're going to deal with that later on in our sermon series, but there are two things I want you to see that are resources you have for handling suffering that are in the first part of the text, and they are a new perspective and a couple of new disciplines with which you can face suffering. So what are they?

First of all, a new perspective. (V.2) "*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds...*" Now on first glance, it looks like he's saying, "Be a masochist. Suffering? Live it up! What a joyful thing that you're suffering." That's actually not what he says. Let's look at it more carefully.

First of all, he says, "*Consider it pure joy...*" He knows that when you're in suffering, the visceral emotion you have is sorrow; it's not joy. It can't be. It shouldn't be. The visceral emotion you experience in suffering and trial and trouble is sorrow, but he says, "*Consider it pure joy...*" What that means is, "I want you to deliberately, in a conscience way, take another perspective." And what is that perspective? "Look at the possible results of suffering."

See, he says, "*Consider it joy,*" Why? (V.3-4) "...because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be **mature and complete**, not lacking anything." So what he's saying is, "I want you to consider the fact that suffering, if you handle it right, can turn you into a mature person." This last statement where it says, "complete, not lacking in anything," means equipped for every job. Suffering equips you for every job.

Now here's what this means. Some of you might think what I'm about to say... If you're younger, you probably think this is an exaggeration, and if you're my age, you know I'm right, and that is, suffering equips you to be a good father or a good mother, a good husband or a good wife, a good man or a good woman.

It equips you to understand yourself - to know your own limitations - and therefore, to make good decisions about yourself. It equips you to just make good decisions, *period*, because you know how things work. You know the times and the seasons, and you know how the human heart works. In other words, suffering equips you to do virtually *everything* you do *much* better.

And what he's saying is, "I want you to realize that perseverance," - which we'll get back to - "and full maturity *can* be the result of your suffering." Or, one more way to put it. Suffering can turbocharge that ordinary process of Christian growth. Suffering can be a furnace that just turns you to pure gold. He doesn't say you should be happy when you suffer. There's nothing good about the suffering.

You remember in the last series we said that Jesus, angry and weeping at the tomb of his friend Lazarus, means that suffering and evil and death are *bad* things. God didn't create the world like that. And yet, we spent a week on Romans 8:28 that God will *use* the bad things to produce good ultimate results in the lives of people who love Him.

Or as Paul puts it in **2 Corinthians 4:16-17**, "*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*" By the way, "light and momentary" - do you know what Paul is going through as he writes this? Thirty-nine lashes, beaten, stoned, left for dead, shipwrecked, running for his life. "Our light and momentary troubles..." see, that's all about perspective. What he says is, "As I'm outwardly wasting away, I'm being renewed day by day. And everything that's happening is *achieving* for me an eternal weight of glory."

What it means is you can lose *external* wealth and *external* health and, by holding onto God, that suffering can give you a kind of *inner* wealth and *inner* wholeness that is the real deal that lasts forever. And that's the perspective you're supposed to have. You're supposed to realize that's what *can* happen.

You say, "Well, how does that work?" For example, Paul, in 2 Corinthians 12, has a very interesting story he tells about himself. It says he had a "thorn in the flesh". Now, we don't know what that was; he doesn't say. It was something bad. It *could* have been a physical ailment, but we can't really be sure.

But he says, "I had this terrible suffering in my life, and I prayed to God... Three times, I said, 'Please take it away,' but God said, 'No, because the grace I want to get into your life can't get into your life any other way.'" And Paul was good with that. Do you know why he was good with that? You could argue that Paul was one of the most brilliant people who ever lived. Paul was so brilliant that he could take the teaching of Jesus and communicate it in a form that has such power that he did more to develop the early church than anyone after Jesus.

And he recognized that God had given him that thorn to keep him from becoming conceited. He says, “Do you know what? I was brilliant, but I was arrogant. And I’m *glad* that because of the suffering, I’m now one of the people who have had the biggest impact on the history of the world. I’m delighted that I have been able to serve and change the lives of so many millions, and maybe billions, of people because God made me suffer enough to get me off of my high horse. And I never would have been that useful to anybody without it.”

The fact is that trials come along and they show you your own limitations. They show you your own flaws. They teach you humility and self-knowledge. Also, trials come along, and they make you empathetic to other people. If you don’t suffer, it’s *hard* to understand what other people are going through. And trials show you that when everything is stripped away, the only thing you really can’t live without is God in your life, and that brings freedom. So there’s humility and self-knowledge and freedom and usefulness for others.

No wonder James says *that’s* the perspective. He says, “It’s not like the suffering is okay; if you just look at it like this, the suffering and evil isn’t really that bad. Of course, it’s bad! It’s terrible. It’s not supposed to be that way, Jesus raging and weeping at

the tomb of Lazarus, but I want you to see that if you hold onto God and you let God hold onto you, it can turn you into something good, and you can *defeat* the evil because you can bring good out of it; good inside you.” So that’s the first resource, that perspective.

But the second resource is a couple of disciplines. And the two disciplines are actually not usually seen as disciplines because we tend to take these verses out of context. Summarizing verses 5 to 8, “*If you lack wisdom, ask God, and He’ll give it to you. But you can’t doubt, you can’t be double-minded, when you do.*” Now this is a pretty famous passage, and generally, people agonize over, “What does it mean? What if I don’t ask just right?” But we forget that this isn’t talking about wisdom in general; it’s talking about wisdom to help you get through suffering. Now here’s why.

We did a series last year on grief, and I was reading about a theology professor who had experienced a great tragedy in his life – his wife had a terrible terminal disease. And he was utterly devastated. He said for a number of weeks, when he was sitting in darkness, people came by to try to help. They very often had Bible verses, and they had things they said to try to comfort him and things they said to try to give him perspective.

And he made a list. He said, “Well, when people said this, this, this, this, and this...one, two, three, four, five ...none of those things helped me; I hated them. They actually made me feel worse. But when people said this, this, this, this, and this...six, seven, eight, nine, ten...Boy, those helped me! So these are the things that really helped me. It helped me get ahead and helped me move on through.” In other words, it made him wise. He felt like he got some perspective. He got some distance. He was able to see what was going on, and he was able to get through.

But later he tried to codify what he had learned and put it in an article of what to say and what not to say, and he found as he talked to lot of people – did some research on his hypothesis - that what had helped *them* were exactly the points one to five that he hated, and the points that had helped him turned them cold. He loved them; they hated them. And he came to realize, when you are in darkness there really are no set pathways.

It’s a little bit like free-climbing. Have you ever seen people free-climbing? The 2019 Oscar for Best Documentary went to a movie called *Free Solo*. It was fascinating and horrifying! It followed a guy named Alex who was trying to become the first person to “free-climb” the 3,000 ft. rock face of El Capitan in Yosemite. Which means no ropes, no equipment; you just find footholds and finger holds and slowly pull yourself up.

And you can’t follow a map – not really – because somebody else’s foothold might not be right for your body. You just have to slowly, slowly find one safe spot that supports you for the moment and then look for the next one. That’s how you get through suffering. You find these footholds, you find these footholds. They’re Bible passages. There are things friends say. There are new perspectives. There are consolations. There are ideas that comfort you, ideas that kind of help you see why this is happening.

This is the kind of wisdom, I think, that James is talking about. This is the kind of wisdom he’s saying you have to ask God for, because without wisdom...See you can’t just close your eyes, grit your teeth, and wait for all the suffering to go away. No, no. Instead, you have to find a way to get over that mountain.

And the way you get over that mountain is through a process of prayer and reading and thought and counsel with friends, to find those footholds. And everybody has to find their own way. *Your* best practices are not *their* best practices. What comforted them might not comfort you. So it takes - not just knowledge, not just a Google search - but wisdom. But that’s not the only discipline.



The other discipline - which is really fascinating and it's missed as a discipline because we don't know what the word means - it says if you want this wisdom that helps you get through suffering, you can't doubt. Now right away, when you and I see the word "doubt", we think, "Oh, that means I can't have any psychological uncertainty, so I have to ask for wisdom and say, 'I know, I know you're going to give it to me.'"

No. That's not what it means, because the Greek word for doubt is a great Greek word that even non-Greek-reading people know. It's the word *dipsychos*. A psyche means your mind. *Dipsychos* means double-mindedness. In fact, it actually says that in verse 8. The word doubt means, "Don't be divided in your loyalties."

And the second discipline, which is something that's *hard* - If you don't know about this before the suffering hits, it's very difficult to learn to do it, and it's very hard to *tell* somebody in the midst of darkness. This is the reason we talk about this topic so often in church. You say, "This doesn't pertain to me, I'm doing fine." No, take good notes. You need to get this in your head while the light is shining, so you don't stumble when the lights go out. But here's one of the things you need to get down.

One of the reasons why we are thrown by suffering is we are **divided in our loyalties**. We say, "I believe in God. I'm loyal to God," but we're loyal to other things as well. Now there's a couple of ways of understanding what I mean by that. If you're *living for* a relationship, a person, and that person is really more important to you than God, then when you lose that relationship, you're kind of godless at the moment. Your *anchor* is gone, and so you can't persevere; you can't stand fast.

This word "perseverance" that's used in verse 4, is a really great Greek word. It's the word *hypomonē*, which means to "hyperstand" - to stand fast, nothing move you, because you have an inner poise and peace that no circumstance out there can shatter, and so *nothing* can move you. That's something we all want. To be solid. We're not thrown for a loop by anything that happens. We don't budge. We're standing fast.

Well, that's only possible if you have an anchor. And if you're divided in your loyalties, so God and His love is not an anchor...See, God, and His love, is the one thing circumstances can't mess with. Nothing out there can get rid of the idea that God unconditionally loves you. But if you have a *different* anchor, or even another anchor, if you're divided in your loyalty so the *main* thing you're living for is the love of this person and you lose that person's love, you're going to be shipwrecked, you're going to be tossed. You're not standing fast, because your anchor is gone.

If your spouse is your anchor, what happens when they divorce you – or just get lowered six feet under ground? Or, if you're living for power and status – that's your anchor - and suddenly, your career is gone, and you're never going to make anything like the money you made before - "Yeah, I believe in God, but *that's* the thing I've really been living for; that has really been the anchor of my soul." Suffering comes along, and it's gone. It can't help you anymore, and so you're tossed; you're not standing fast.

Here's the other illustration. In Matthew 7 Jesus gives a building illustration. He says a wise person builds their house on the rock – and when storms come it stands firm. But the foolish person builds on the sand and when the storms come there's nothing left. It's all washed away.

What is building your house on the sand? Well that's making the foundation of your life *anything* but Jesus, whether it's your family, or human approval, or power and status, or your job. *Anything* but Jesus as your foundation is like building on sand. And Jesus says when the storms come - that's suffering - when trials and troubles come, your house is going to fall because it's built on sand. But Jesus is the rock and if you make him the foundation of your life, you'll still be standing fast after the storm. Nice and simple.

But the reality is, most people I know, most *Christians* I know, don't really have their house completely on the sand or completely on the rock. It's kind of on both. And ordinarily, when life is going on okay, you don't feel like there's really anything wrong with you. You actually think, "I'm built on the rock," but what actually happens is in comes some real problem - a problem with health, a huge disappointment, a reversal, a loss of a relationship, something really bad - and you are tottering, your whole house is tottering. You're not standing fast.

The suffering shows you're fragile. Do you know why? Because you're divided in your loyalties. You're double-minded. And you have to learn to *look* for that in suffering, or there's no way to get through it, because a big part of the suffering is your house is too much on the sand. So basically, this is the Christian life: Every time suffering comes into your life and the sand part of your foundation is taken away and you're tottering, you say, "Oh no! There's more sand here than I thought."

And through prayer and Bible study and the counsel of fellow believers – thorough the wisdom of the Holy Spirit! - you basically pound your house a few more inches onto the rock, until it gets stable, and you feel fine...until the next suffering comes, and so more sand is pulled away.

And as time goes on, you're pushing, pushing, pushing, pushing your house more and more onto the rock. You never get completely there – *someday* we'll live in a place with no storms, but not yet. Do you know how to do that? Would you even think to do that, to see how divided your loyalty is? So that's *what* we face – trials - and *how* to face it – new perspective and new disciplines.

**Now lastly, third point: Who we face it with.** This is still not mechanical. It's not just a matter of get the right perspective and do the right disciplines. The *ultimate* thing you need in order to handle suffering so that it turns you to gold, so that instead of it making you bitter and cynical and *more* self-absorbed and *more* unable to have relationships with people because you're so cynical and jaded now...

See, suffering can make you bitter or better. It can make you *more* able to reach out and help people, or *less*. It can make you more unselfish, or it can make you more self-absorbed and just completely obsessed with your own problems. The way to make sure suffering actually makes you better and not worse - refines you to gold rather than just burns you up - is to do it with a person, not just with a discipline.

Now the last part of this passage, the last half of the passage, verses 13–18, uses an illustration – which I'm going to give you in 30-seconds - uses the metaphor of spiritual adultery, because it says, in **v. 13**, “*When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone...*” Do you know what that's saying?

So often, when suffering comes, it doesn't make you a better person. Oh, no. It makes you worse. It makes you more bitter, more vicious, more vengeful, more obsessed with yourself, more filled with self-pity. Has anybody seen the new movie, *Banshees of Inisherin*? Ooo boy! That might wind up in God at the Movies. It can make you much worse, and in some cases, drive you to do self-destructive things to just try to mitigate your pain. So sometimes we get into troubles, and we blame that on God and say, “I was overwhelmed by the suffering, and as result, look what happened,” or it's a way of saying, “God tempted me.”

“No, no, no, no, no,” says James. The difference between suffering that turns you to gold and suffering that turns you to dross has to do with what you do with your *desires*. Because then it says (**v.14-15**), “*...but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*”

Now the word “evil desires” there is one of the Greek words that is our friend in most cases, because we talk about it a lot. It’s the word *epithymia*, which means an inordinate desire, an epi-desire. This translation always translates it “evil desire”, but I’m afraid it’s a bit misleading. What it’s saying is if you love human approval more than God, if you love a person more than God, if you love power more than God, if you love money more than God, and suffering comes, your *inordinate desires* for those things leads to sin. It leads to bitterness. It leads to self-absorption.

And the illustration it uses is one of spiritual adultery. It says, “Your inordinate desires give birth to sin, and sin gives birth to death.” It’s using the illustration of adultery. If a woman puts herself in the arms of a lover and they unite, then the fruit of that union is born into the world through her body...children. You’ve seen Maury Povich. “You are NOT the father.”

So this is saying that when you get your *loves* out of order – on paper you’re married to Jesus, but what you’re really *passionate* about is that career, that status, that comfort – that’s inordinate desires; *Epithymia*. And when those things become a kind of false gods, when they’re more of an anchor than Jesus, you put yourself in their arms, and the fruit that is born into the world is sin - which is another way of

saying the anger, the bitterness, the jadedness, the cynicism, the self-absorption. All the ways in which suffering can make you worse, because the *true* lover of your soul...is not Jesus Christ. He is not the ultimate anchor; *that’s* the ultimate anchor.

And of course, the very last few verses are basically talking about that, that what we really want is to put ourselves into the arms of Jesus. And that will give us new birth and bring joy into our lives and health into our lives and perseverance and maturity, and so on. Now how can that happen? The remedy for spiritual adultery is **passionate love for Jesus**. How can you get that? Like this.

Let me close with a story. There’s a story in one of J.R.R. Tolkien’s old myths and legends – this is before *The Lord of the Rings*; it’s recorded in his *Silmarillion* about the First Age of Men. He writes about a great warrior named Húrin. Now, a little back story, Tolkien’s Middle-Earth was created by the God Eru, who creates some angelic beings who basically sing the world into creation. But one of the angels, Morgoth, is singing an ugly song – he thinks he’s better than the rest – and he gets kicked out and goes down to earth and starts to make trouble. Sound familiar?

Well, the races of earth – elves and men and dwarves – fight back against the dark presence of Morgoth, with varying degrees of success. He won't be finally destroyed until the return of the true king who will destroy the darkness for good and set everything right in the end – again, sound familiar? Tolkien would tell you he wasn't really making anything up from scratch.

But in one of the early battles with Morgoth, things go badly for the good guys. And Húrin and his friends take on the evil forces, and they have *lost* the battle. They are in retreat, but the monstrous forces of Morgoth are hot on their tail. And in order to buy time for his friends and allies to escape, Húrin and his brother and a small regiment plant themselves in a gap in the mountains and turn to face the enemy onslaught. “You'll have to get through us to get to them.” See that's steadfast love.

And one by one of course they died – including Húrin's brother - until the sun began to set, and as darkness approached there was only one left. I'll let Tolkien tell us the story as only he can...  
“Last of all Húrin stood alone. Then he cast aside his shield, and wielded an axe two-handed; and it is sung that the axe smoked in the black blood of the troll-guard of Gothmog until it withered, and each time that he slew he cried: 'Aure entuluva! Day shall come again!' Seventy times he uttered that cry...until at last he fell buried beneath them.”

He was remembered in the legends as “Húrin the Steadfast.” I saw a picture of a girl online with a Húrin tattoo. That's elvish: 'Aure entuluva! Day shall come again!' There's nothing so inspiring as steadfast love. That's a good story. But I have an even better story.

“Steadfast” is one translation of that Greek word that I love so much - this Greek word *hypomonē*. Again, *epithymia* means “hyper desire”, *hypomonē* means “hyper standing”. It is the word that is translated in our text as “perseverance” which James says is one of the key things you get from trials if you hold onto God during that suffering. It's a great word that is used all through the Bible, but it climaxes, in Hebrews chapter 12.

**Hebrews 12:2**, says, “*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him **endured** the cross...*” That's the word...persevering, enduring, hyperstanding. Why did Jesus endure the cross? *All* the weight of eternal justice for sin came down on him. *All* the punishment we deserve for everything we ever did came down on him. And as the enemy was raining down on Jesus on the cross, in the greatest act of love in the history of the world, he *stayed*. He stood fast. He didn't budge. And as a result, God can forgive us and receive us.

Now, here's what I want you to consider. When your life is getting dark, things are getting bad, I want you to stand fast out of love. There's the key. Not just by saying, "Well, I have to do this so I grow mature or something." That won't work. No. *Just* disciplines won't do it. You want to stand fast saying, "Out of love for the One who stood fast *for me*, I will stand fast *for him*."

Or, put it this way. No matter how dark it gets, here's what I want you to say. No matter how bad your life is getting, I want you to say, "Day shall come again!" Maybe get the tattoo! Because it will. Either the darkness will lift now, or eventually, it's going to lift because Jesus – the one true king - is going to make the whole world right. And you know why? The only reason why you can say, "Day shall come again!" and *know* it, is that years ago Jesus stood when the sun was going out, and he stood fast for you.

So you need to be so in love with Jesus who stood fast for you, that you will stand fast for him, and that *will make* you a person who stands fast - hyperstands - does not budge. What does that mean? You know it's actually pretty simple. It means that when you're suffering, go to church, pray, and serve other people. Don't turn to the right or the left. Just *stay*...obedient. *Stay*...loving other people. Just stay!

Don't turn away - in spite of the suffering - and it'll turn you into pure gold.

Let's pray...