

# James 1:12

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/jas/jas-1/james-112/>

*Believers who suffer well through trials will receive a future blessing from God. These blessings will far exceed any blessing we can gain from the world.*

In this passage, James interjects a beatitude, which is a form of poetry from the Hebrew literary tradition: *Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial.*

Just as Jesus offered a series of ‘blessed are those who...’ (see Matthew 5:1-11) to give understanding and hope to His listeners, so too James invokes the power of hope for any *who perseveres* beyond the momentary *trial*. James now pulls in his theme from the beginning of the chapter (James 1:2-4), which extolls the virtue of purposeful suffering, commanding believers to rejoice during difficult circumstances.

Where he began with suffering as an important part of becoming mature in the faith, James now mirrors the words of Jesus,

“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”  
(Matthew 5:11-12)

Where Jesus is addressing the suffering that comes from aligning one’s life with Him, James is focused on the broader idea of “various trials” (James 1:2) that come to us throughout life. However, both focus on the glory of a future reward that blesses the individual and rights all wrongs.

James describes this promised future blessing as a three-fold process which includes:

- Perseverance, which is our responsibility (James 1:3)
- Approval, which is God’s choice, and (James 1:12)
- Reward, which is based on God’s promise to us (James 1:12).

The sequence makes perfect sense practically and historically. Practically, we can see that reward comes at the end of an effort. Those who are rewarded must be qualified to receive the reward; they must be approved by an authority, a judge. In this case, what God promises to approve is *a man who perseveres under trial*. That is why the *man who perseveres under trial* is *blessed*. He is *blessed* because he can expect to receive the approval of God, and with that approval, a great reward. In this case the great reward is the *Crown of Life*.

The *crown of life* is likely not the kind of crown or diadem a king might wear, but rather a victor’s wreath that is given at the Bema, the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 5:10). The Greek word translated *crown* is “stephanos.” It is the same word used in 1 Corinthians 9:25,

where Paul puts forth the example of an Olympic athlete receiving a crown or wreath for winning a contest.

An athlete becomes a heralded hero by enduring training and competition, being verified and approved as the victor, and then receiving the winner's crown. The believers in Corinth would be familiar with this metaphor, since the Isthmian games were held in Corinth in off years to the Olympic Games. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul desires to endure in faith, and buffet his body in order to qualify and be approved to receive a *crown* rewarded to him by God:

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath (‘stephanos’), but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”

(1 Corinthians 9:24–27)

By this illustration, Paul indicates that the crown received by the approved believer has great value because of the person who is giving the recognition. In the ancient world, anyone could have wound a garland of leaves for themselves. The real meaning of the wreath/crown was not in the garland. Rather it was in having their accomplishments recognized by the authority, in the presence of witnesses.

Similarly, the crown of life represents the glory, blessing, and elevation of the approved believer forever in the presence of the Lord. The crown itself is promised to those who love Him, since it is love that stands as the great motive for all noble actions on the part of Christians (1 Corinthians 2:9; 2 Corinthians 5:14). James is relentless in his letter concerning the importance of action, which likely is expressed as an echo of his Lord's words, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

That “life” is given as a reward can be confusing, since “life” is also a gift. The Greek word translated “life” here is “zoe” which indicates a quality of life. It is the same word used when describing the new birth given to each believer who is born again:

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life (‘zoe’).”

(John 3:14-15)

In this passage from John, Jesus explains to a Jewish leader how to be spiritually born again. It requires the same faith required of the children of Israel to be delivered from death by the bite of venomous snakes. Just as they had to believe God enough to look upon the bronze snake, hoping to be delivered, so must any believer in Jesus look upon Him on the cross, hoping to be delivered from eternal death from the deadly venom of sin. This is life (“zoe”) that is given as a gift.

Then, having been born into life (“zoe”), we have the opportunity to gain the greatest experience of life (“zoe”), through a walk of faith. If we choose to walk in faith, we can gain the great rewards of our good choices.

This parallels physical life. Physical birth is a gift. No one chooses their parents, the era into which they are born, or the physical characteristics they inherit. All those things are gifted to us upon our birth, and none are earned. However, the experience of life is greatly affected by the attitude/perspective we adopt, as well as the actions we take. We can wreck our lives through bad choices, or redeem them through good choices. Nothing we do during our life affects the realities of our physical birth. However, our actions have great bearing on who we become.

The gift of life is unchanged by our actions during our lives. We are physically still who we were born to be. We can’t make a choice to grow a foot in height, for example. Similarly, being born again spiritually is a gift that can neither be earned nor lost. However, our experience of life will be substantially impacted by our decisions regarding who or what to trust, what perspective to adopt, and what actions to take. In the same way, our spiritual choices determine the rewards of our walk of faith, without affecting the reality of our new spiritual birth in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

*Life* (“zoe”) is both a gift as well as a reward. Eternal *life* is given freely, as a gift of grace (John 3:14-15; Ephesians 2:8-9). Eternal *life* is also given as a reward for faithful service (Romans 2:6-7). James promises his Jewish brethren who have believed that they will *receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him*. To rejoice in difficulty, set it aside and walk in the endurance of faith, requires believing that what *the Lord has promised* is real, and true. Paul states this of the amazing reward for loving God, and keeping His commands:

“but just as it is written,  
‘THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD,  
AND *which* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN,  
ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.’”  
(1 Corinthians 2:9)

To love God is to keep His commands. James sets forth here a powerful sequence of decisions believers can make to gain the greatest benefit from life. It begins with faith, choosing to believe God’s ways are for our best, without doubting. This allows us to choose a perspective that all circumstances of life are somewhat neutral; they should be viewed mainly as various assortments of opportunities to mature our faith. That means we can rejoice in any trial, any circumstance, because it is a great opportunity. James will soon lead us to understand that the great benefit of having a perspective that is true is that it will lead us to take actions that are constructive.

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>12</sup> Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him.**