

The Crown Of Life Is The Christian's Goal.

Text: James 1:2-12

Suggested Hymns:
355, 321, 347, 292, 206

- 1) So He Practises Unwavering Faith
- 2) Considers Both Times Of Adversity And Prosperity As Bringing Him Nearer To His Goal

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is James 1:2-12, ² *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*

⁵ *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

⁹ *Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, ¹⁰ but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. ¹¹ For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.*

¹² *Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Happy is the person who has a fixed goal in life for which to strive, and who does not drift aimlessly around, tossed to and fro.

A young person knowing what profession or calling to prepare for can select appropriate studies, and can gather valuable information and experiences from

various sources. Above all, he knows what he is living and striving for, and he feels he has a purpose in life.

But so far we have not gone beyond the temporal. Our Lord asks in Matthew 16:26, *For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?* The price of the whole world will not ransom a single soul. This means that the saving of the soul must be the supreme and only purpose of a person's existence.

It should be at the centre of our interests. Toward it all our actions and activities should turn. *“One thing I do,”* says the apostle, *“forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*¹

Our text fitly closes with the same thought, *The Crown of Life is the Christian's Goal.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. To Attain The Crown Of Life The Christian Practises Unwavering Faith

The apostle is addressing children of God when he says *“my brethren.”* That means us, and we have seen reflected in the mirror of the Law the truth that we *“daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment”* in the sight of God, but we are also daily assured of the glad tidings of Jesus, for He saves us from our sins.

And seeing that our Saviour first loved us, we also love Him and try to be like Him and finally to see Him as He is. This is the great ultimate purpose of our existence and around which all of our interests of life centre.

We are told in our text that we are to *count it all joy when you fall into various trials,* ³ *knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.* We are subjected to various trials for the testing of our faith. Testing, proving and exercising our faith will strengthen it, and this will in turn help us in overcoming obstacles and to remain on that straight path which will take us to our goal.

A faith which is not exercised will, like an unused limb of the body, sink into complacency and become sluggish and may even waste away. So we can see that trials are an act of God's mercy to exercise our faith to place all our trust in Him.

Note that the means which God uses are not to the liking of our flesh. If they were, there would be no strengthening of the inner man in them, for the natural man always follows the lines of least resistance and is always going downhill. Such a path does not strengthen character and may prove disastrous.

To strengthen our muscles, we may be told to face the storm and waves and not to shirk regular and strenuous exercise, even if we don't like it. We read in Hebrews 12:11 that *no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

When *“God tested Abraham,”*² this certainly ran counter to his natural desires. At times a test in doctrines are given to us.³

“Lead us not into temptation” we pray, and yet various temptations may befall us. Taking the word in its narrow sense, the Christian pilgrim on his journey from early childhood to possibly extreme old age will have observed how the different ages meet with temptations peculiar to that time of life and the surroundings common to it.

The child, the teenager, the mature man or woman, the aged, are all attacked by the Wicked One's fiery darts, each in the part weakest or most exposed.

This word temptations is also taken in the broader sense of trials.⁴ These may be caused by the world, hostile to the Cross, or by the extreme zeal of religious persecutors. These comprise the cross which we as followers of Christ should bear after Him.⁵ This is particularly faith-strengthening, for it brings out as nothing else, the conviction that we are on the right road to the crown of life when we step in the footprints of our Saviour, who also was reviled because He bore witness to the truth.

We know there are trials also of another nature, such as sicknesses, financial reverses, disappointments, and the changes in circumstances of life in general. Let us group them all under the heading “various trials.” To the unconverted it may seem strange that we are told to count these trials as *“all joy.”*

All the visitations God sends us should be a source of joy. Why? Because everything, even adversity, strengthens our faith, and brings us nearer our goal, or it may even indirectly lead to the salvation of others. This must bring joy to the heart of the Christian.

The hymnist writes, *Nearer, my God, to Thee, even though it be a cross that raiseth me!* Paul rejoiced and praised God *“that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel.”*⁶

However, we may also feel downcast at times. This is acceptable because the child of God is not a stone, he feels the Lord’s hand when it is heavy upon him. Peter writes to those who *though now for a little while, if need be, have been grieved by various trials that they are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*⁷

The Saviour wept at the grave of Lazarus, so did the mourners, but still their sorrow was turned into joy. Christians have the peace of God in their hearts and the evidence of their salvation assured to them already in this life.

This evidence itself is a source of joy bestowed by the Holy Spirit, a fruit of the living faith within them, causing them to rise out of trials and temptations as victors and, like the apostles, to sing praises even when in prison or in the face of death.

Paul’s life was not an unhappy one by any means, even though he had to endure all manner of persecutions and hardships. How often he assures us in his epistles of his rejoicing in the Lord, of his thanking and praising God! We can understand this; for work, fatigue, suffering, when prompted by love, does not cause unhappiness, but joy, and that of a higher nature than that produced by worldly or carnal efforts.

How happy a Christian’s life must be when viewed as a whole! He has many days of sunshine, enjoying God’s many blessings in things temporal and spiritual, basking in the esteem and love of fellow-Christians, and perhaps that of children and grand children.

And as to the days when the sun is hid, the days of *“various trials,”* he will find such comfort in the Word of God read and heard and sealed by the Sacraments as to *“count it all joy,”* since it brings his life’s goal nearer.

The immediate fruit of this testing of the faith is patience, or endurance. Yes, living faith is the sole core and cause of all Christian virtues, for *“whatever is not from faith is sin.”*⁸ *“Without faith it is impossible to please God.”*⁹ Such a faith embraces all the assurances of the Gospel, centred, as they are, in Christ. Such a faith may cause trials and visitations, sent by God to be patiently borne, not reluctantly, but willingly, and even joyfully.

St. Paul gives us the same line of thought, being inspired by the Holy Spirit, saying in Romans 5:3-4, *we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, character; and character, hope.* All this *“because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”*

The patience of our text does not designate an indifferent, inactive endurance of trials, as having to put up with the inevitable, but rather a willing, even joyful activity for the exercise of faith in the interests of Christ and fellow-beings.

Our text continues ⁴ *But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.* True patience means submission. *Thy will be done, not mine.* Only by not injecting our own way and will, can we in the end count it all joy and say, *“He has done all things well.”*¹⁰ This is a quiet, silent submission and is devoid of all murmuring.

God wants us to be *“perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”* You are to be most liberally, perfectly, bountifully, supplied at God’s table with all that you could possibly need for your soul’s wants and desires. The Holy Trinity, with all the gifts and blessings the three Persons can supply, wishes to come into your heart and dwell there, as we read in John 14:23, *“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.* You would then be *“lacking nothing”*

But we may lack wisdom. Our text says, ⁵ *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.* We need constant guidance from above. Indeed, we all stand in need of that. And we should pray for it.

The hymnist writes, *“Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah.”*¹¹ Wisdom and enlightenment from above is needed to see the various trials in their true light and to fully recognise our duties.¹²

Yes, we should ask of God, for there is only one God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. To have a letter reach its destination, it is of greatest importance that it be addressed correctly. Address your prayers to the God of the Bible, not vaguely to *“the Architect of the Universe”* or to some *“Father Above,”* ignoring Christ.

But the true God, our loving Father in Christ Jesus, will give to all people liberally without respect of persons. Even the necessities of life He supplies to

us “*richly and daily*,” as Luther phrases it, and spiritually this holds true in an intensified sense.

How blessed we are as members of the Lutheran Church! For God in His mercy has preserved to us the whole Bible as He gave it to His prophets and apostles to be studied, preached, and applied. In and through this He will, if asked, give heavenly wisdom for our various spiritual needs and our temporal guidance. He will do this freely, without upbraiding, although we richly deserve the latter because of our ingrained sluggishness and ingratitude. It shall be given to each Christian without regard to personal merits or what one deserves.

However, the apostle adds a “but.” “⁶ *But let him ask in faith, with no doubting.*” Doubt is tempting God. A person once said, “*Yes, I pray to God; for if it does no good, it cannot do any harm.*” Is that the way even an earthly father wishes to be approached? Certainly not!

The very essence of prayer is faith, — of which prayer is the fruit, — is implicit trust, the firm unshaken belief that “*He is our true Father and we are His true children, so that we may with all boldness and confidence ask Him.*”¹³

The sacred writer makes this plain to us when he continues, *for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.*” The person who is at discord with himself, the person who is driven to and fro by doubts of God’s promises, or by inclinations to tempt God, or by dissatisfaction with God’s rulings,— such a person has lost his moorings.

We see none of that in the men of God who prayed. For example Solomon,¹⁴ Abraham,¹⁵ and Jacob.¹⁶ A doubter cannot hope to receive anything from the Lord. Our text says ⁷ *For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;* ⁸ *he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

The element of hypocrisy enters here. He is double-tongued, speaking to God while his heart is elsewhere.¹⁷ If our prayers are not answered, we should searchingly examine our heart and remove lurking doubts and that double-mindedness to which we by nature are prone. We read in James 5:15 that *the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*

So let us keep our eye on the prize, the crown of life, and beware of any half-heartedness, or of wavering between two opinions.¹⁸ It would cause us to slide backwards and to lose ground instead of gaining.

2. To Attain The Crown Of Life

The Christian Considers Both Times Of Adversity And Prosperity As Bringing Him Nearer To His Goal.

But to gain the crown of life, we must apply Christianity to the everyday affairs of life. A Sunday Christian who is not also a Monday Christian comes under the charge of being double-minded and unstable in all his ways.

Therefore the Christian pilgrim has both times of adversity and prosperity, which bring him nearer to his goal. The child of God often meets with reverses in things material.

How can the *lowly* in society possibly take pride in their *high* position? In Luke 6:20–22 Jesus called believers who are poor, hungry, weeping, and hated “*blessed*,” and He promised them the kingdom, satisfaction, laughter, and great reward in heaven.

The point is not that people are saved through poverty or their own pain. The point is that people who have few earthly treasures and who have suffered a lot are less likely to view life on earth as paradise, and more likely to be interested in the promises of the Gospel.

Do we not belong to the highest nobility in having Christ for our Brother? And since we are children of God, and heirs and joint heirs with Christ, we should be glad if we are called to suffer with Him.¹⁹ Indeed, we have ample reason for thus glorying; for through Christ we are “*a chosen generation, a royal priesthood.*”²⁰

They say that, if you are in a deep well, you can see the stars above even in daytime. Let us use the deep well of adversity as a telescope to see the stars in the firmament of God’s heaven and the crown of life beckoning us.

By way of contrast, how fleeting are all riches and things temporal, even man’s life! We read in our text,¹⁰ *but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away.* ¹¹ *For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.*

What, after all, do we really own in this life? In times of economic recessions people have learned that possessions, bonds, stocks, bank accounts, etc., may simply “*fade away.*” And to man himself God said: “*For dust you*

are, And to dust you shall return.” Indeed, as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.²¹

The transitory nature of all things we possess and the mortality of our body should make us lowly, causing us to become the more conscious of our sinfulness and helplessness, but saying with the psalmist, *I will lift up my eyes to the hills -- From whence comes my help?* ² *My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.* The crown of life will then appear all the more radiant to us.

We are now ready to look at the final words of our text, ¹² *Blessed is the man who endures temptation.*²² This blessedness is deeper and higher and more enduring than temporal happiness of any kind or nature. It implies the assurance of the forgiveness of sins, that peace which the world cannot give, and is an earnest longing of the bliss of heaven.

The temptations and trials in themselves do not procure or merit for us the crown of life; but enduring them in Christian fortitude, carrying the cross after Christ, brings us nearer to our goal and strengthens our faith. He hears the voice of the Good Shepherd.²³ And if our Father lays a heavy load on your shoulders as His child, it shows His greater love even though we cannot understand it at the present time. It demonstrates your ability through faith to bear it. And *“if we endure, we shall also reign with Him.”*²⁴ Endure means remaining steadfast under trial.

The crown of life is eternal life itself.²⁵ True, in a sense we already have eternal life while in the flesh, for as we read in John 3:36, ³⁶ *“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life.”* And the believer at death will see Jesus as He is, but as St. Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:8, *there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

This means that *“the crown of righteousness”* will be given to us *“on that day,”* in the presence of all the heavenly hosts. That will be the consummation of all the heavenly bliss.

So in summary you have been reminded of your purpose in life. You know what you are living for, working for, suffering for, and rejoicing for. It is a noble, exalted purpose, for you are privileged to prove your love to Jesus, who first loved you; you are privileged to bring the light of the Gospel to your fellow-

men and to alleviate their sufferings and to find that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

We read in 1 Corinthians 2:9, *“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”*

Although we pass through trials here and are lowly, we *“consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”*⁶

Let us thank our dear Saviour for having not only fulfilled the Law for us and taken away its curse, for having not only suffered all the penalties of our sin on the cross, for having not only vanquished death and the grave by victoriously rising from the grave, but also for having promised us the crown of life and given us a noble purpose to live and to suffer for! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ *Philippians 3:13-14*

² *Genesis 22:1*

³ *Deut. 13:1-3*

⁴ *Luke 22: 28; Acts 20:19*

⁵ *Matt. 16:24*

⁶ *Philippians 1:12*

⁷ *1 Peter 1:5-6*

⁸ *Romans 14:23*

⁹ *Hebrews 11:6*

¹⁰ *Mark 7:37*

¹¹ *Hymn 347*

¹² *See Eph. 1:17-19*

¹³ *See Mark 11:24*

¹⁴ *1 Kings 3:9-12*

¹⁵ *Gen. 18:23-32*

¹⁶ *Gen. 32:9-12, 24-29*

¹⁷ *Matt. 15:8*

¹⁸ *1 Kings 18*

¹⁹ *Romans 8:15*

²⁰ *1 Peter 2:9*

²¹ *See Isa 40:6; 1 Pet. 1:24*

²² *Compare Job 5:17; Prov. 3:12*

²³ *John 10*

²⁴ *2 Timothy 2:12*

²⁵ *1 John 2:25*

²⁶ *Romans 8:18*