**Genesis 22:1-18 (ESV)**

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." [2] He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." [3] So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. [4] On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. [5] Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." [6] And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. [7] And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" [8] Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together. [9] When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. [10] Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. [11] But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." [12] He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." [13] And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. [14] So Abraham called the name of that place, "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided." [15] And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven [16] and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, [17] I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, [18] and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

**Mark 1:9-15 (ESV)**

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. [10] And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. [11] And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” [12] The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. [13] And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him. [14] Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, [15] and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

**James 1:12-18 (ESV)**

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast 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. [13] Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. [14] But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. [15] Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. [16] Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. [17] Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. [18] Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creation.

**“Trials Pass, While Grace Abounds”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The first Sunday in Lent always drops us into the reality of life. There are plenty of trials and temptations in this world. For those competing in the 2018 Winter Olympics, their trials come with having to endure qualification tests and make a final run good enough to win gold. Their temptations to despair come from crashes on the ski slopes, wipes out on the ice, or a slip that sends them to the ground. Trials bring forth utter shock to those who win, while those that lose are tempted to ask, “What was all these years of practice for?”

The first Sunday in Lent always drops us into an even deeper reality about life. There are trials and temptations that go to the very heart of being Christian. James was the brother of Jesus and wrote the first letter to the New Testament church. His opening words set the tone saying, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness” (1:2-3). Now everybody in some way talks about troubles in life from health, money, relationships, you name it. Just as few talk about their temptations fearing what people will think, but we all have them. James provides the answer that is good for all times. Since Jesus passed God’s test resisting the Devil, we can turn to him no matter the trials or temptations.

1. **Trials turn to strengthen any who love Jesus.**
2. God uses testing in life and puts it to good use.

* James tells us the purpose, “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast 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.”
* Nothing worthwhile comes easy and so to increase endurance in Christians God brings all kinds of trials.
* This follows in the way of Christ who after His baptism was driven deliberately by the Spirit into the wilderness.
* Rather than drive you away by suffering, the goal of God promises to sustain any with faith that draws us closer to Jesus.

1. The Father’s love sent His Son to endure all things.

* Forty days in the wilderness is only a glimpse of the Satanic attack Christ faced that would finally end at the cross.
* God did this to prove there was no easy path or cheat sheet to our salvation, simply the perfect obedience of Jesus.
* Success is not to escape suffering, but to love how Jesus sustains us to trust Him for even now He shares in our troubles.
* Whenever trials trip us up we can turn to the One who wore the crown of thorns for the crown of life is your blessing from Him.

1. **Temptations turn any inward to have no love for God.**
2. If God uses trials to strengthen Christians, then temptations come to do just the opposite.

* Rather than to be steadfast, it is when we let evil consume us and at the same time blame God.
* James says, “…each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”
* The Devil and world are the external motivators, but when falling into temptation, the only person to blame at last is me.
* Luther warns, If you try to help yourself by your own thoughts and counsel, you will only make the matter worse and give the devil more space” (LC 110).

1. Jesus was put in the worst temptations, because He would not turn inward at any time.

* The devil tried to bring Jesus the easy answer in the wilderness that would make Him deny the way of the cross.
* Yet, while feeling every temptation, even to come down from the cross, never once did He give over to it.
* He was without sin so that where we fail only to have guilt and shame with temptation, Jesus would succeed to suffer and die for us.
* This means Satan and the world bring temptations, but God will even use them to strengthen faith in His Son.

1. **The Word of truth is what turns with love to us.**
2. Rather than a thing in creation, the ultimate good and perfect gift from above is Jesus.

* He does not change whether or not everything else changes because the Father has sent His Son for our salvation.
* God’s gift is that Jesus keeps giving so that His forgiveness has the last say and not our foolish failures with sin.
* Rather than being our will as the source of strengthen James says, “Of God’s own will he brought us forth by the word of truth.”
* Baptism burst down the walls that kept us from God and exchanged death for life in Christ.

1. Whether trials or temptations, in this wilderness of life you are the first fruits redeemed by Christ.

* Since Jesus went through the cross, we have what we need from Him who has risen from the dead.
* His Word is life able to restore the broken and direct us in all truth against evil.
* Whatever the trials, Christ cleared out the path by His Cross so a crown of life is ours against a world of death and sadness.
* When temptations consume us, Christ brings sympathy and is present at the Lord’s Supper with His kingdom for the weary.

The trials and temptations for Christians are far better than the Olympics. Jesus made the perfect offering by His cross that has crushed every opposition. We can turn to him no matter the trials or temptations. Our trials are never outside of His triumph by the cross. Our temptations never ignored by His love. Since grace endures from God, we endure in Christ and the crown of life is what He brings. Amen. Now the peace of God that passes all understanding be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.