

James: Temptation (1:12-18)

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Everybody at some time or another has faced temptation. Everybody who has ever lived. Throughout all of history, no matter what culture, what nationality, what race, what gender, has faced temptation. I could ask you this morning, as a matter of fact I will ask you this morning, how have you been tempted recently? What is the thing that seeks to pull you towards something that you shouldn't do, something that you shouldn't think, a place that you shouldn't be? How have you been tempted? How have you done with the temptation? Everyone has been tempted. Did you know even Jesus was tempted? Did you know that? Jesus himself was tempted. It is a mark of humanity. I believe the Bible tells us that Jesus was tempted because the Bible intended to prove that Jesus, while fully God, was also fully human. In order to be human he had to face temptation. The reality is everybody is tempted, but not everybody survives the temptation. Everybody is tempted, but not everybody makes it. Some people fall along the way in their temptation.

Now, before we get into this topic, I want to point out something really quick. We are going to take a look at a word, the word for temptation in the Bible. I want you guys to go to the book of James, the 1st Chapter and notice something. Above verse 2, at least in my Bible, I have a heading that says trials and temptations. Remember a few weeks back we looked at the first few verses, "consider it pure joy my brothers and sisters when you face trials." That word there is peirasmos. It means a trial, an experiment, a test or enticement. Here is the thing, if you look in verse 12, it says "blessed are those that survive under trial." It is the same word. Tests, experiments, enticement. Verse 13 when it says, "when tempted" it is the same word. Peirasmos, when tempted, when it says "God is not tempting me" same word. All through this section this same word is used. I think the point is that along the way we receive all kinds of test, all kinds of trials, all kinds of challenges. Some of those tests and some of those challenges are enticements towards evil. The Bible says that even though some don't make it, some obviously do. Some obviously persevere. The Bible says, they stand the test. There is kind a great imagery here that the writer is using, I mean in the 1st Century they didn't have paper money, they had coins. Those coins were valuable because they were made out of valuable metals. Some people would take those medals and they would shave them a little bit. They would shave all of these shavings from a little bit off each of the coins, not enough so that it would make the coin invaluable, but enough so that they would gather valuable shavings, gold, silver, whatever it was, and maybe create an additional coin or use it for some other kind of trade. It was a dishonest thing to do. From time to time the government would come by to these different shopkeepers and people, and they would take a test of their coins. They would weigh them and if those coins were not shaved, if they were whole, they would put a stamp on that shopkeeper, not a stamp, they would certify that shopkeeper and that would let everybody know that that shopkeeper stood the test. The Greek word is dokimos. He was trustworthy. That he passed the test. That you could do business with that person. That he was accepted.

That is the word here. He is saying some people don't make it, but some people are dokimos. Some people pass the test. I might ask you, are you passing the test when it comes to temptation? Are you accepted? Are you persevering? Maybe this is a challenge for you.

I think it was in the early church, I think that is why James is writing this. He is writing to a group of really that is really having some challenges and some trials. He wants to give them some information I believe that will help them get through it. That is why I believe for us we need to look at this passage, because the more we understand we understand temptation, the more we understand about these tests, about these trials, I believe the better able we will be able to handle those temptations. The more we know about it, the better we will do.

Verse 13, so what does this say? "When tempted", that's it we should just stop there. Not if tempted, when tempted. If you think about that, that changes the whole thing doesn't it. You can expect it. Maybe later today, tomorrow, this week, next week. "When tempted, no one should say God is tempting me. For God cannot be tempted, nor can He tempt anyone." What is this all about? It's a easy trap to fall into, to somehow try and shift the blame from your own temptation from you to God. Who was the first one to do this, anybody know? Adam. After Adam ate of the fruit what did he say to God? "It was the woman that YOU gave me." Do you see the shift there? He was blaming God for his own temptation. This is rationalization, and it is easy to do. To say God made me this way, that is why I do these things. God if I made more money, if you gave me more money I wouldn't have to cheat on my taxes. God, if I had a wife, I wouldn't have to look at pornography. God, if I hadn't been through so much, if you hadn't put me through so much as a child I wouldn't drink so much. You can fill it in with whatever rationalization you might face, but the reality is, the writer here is saying, don't blame for God for your temptation, because God doesn't tempt anybody. Why? He can't be tempted, He is not familiar with temptation. Why? God cannot sin. So any enticement to God is useless. It is not a temptation because He cannot be tempted, because He does not sin.

Now here is the question, does God test us? Yes or no? That is biblical, God tests us. Do you remember the story of Abraham? When God said to Abraham I want you to take your son and I want you to sacrifice him. That was a test of faith. Here is the difference between temptation and a test. Temptation's desire is to entice us to evil. God's tests is His desire to grow and broaden our faith. God never wants to tempt us to evil. God never wants to lead us to sin. That is not His goal. There are several examples in the Bible of God testing His children in order to expand their faith and bring them closer to Him. It is kind of interesting thing, a little side note here. Let's get deep...let's get theological for a second...Have you ever thought about this? Okay, God doesn't tempt us because He himself cannot be tempted. Where does temptation come from? Where did it originate at? Where did sin come from? Do you know that centuries upon centuries theologians have been trying to figure out where did sin come from? I mean, if we can agree that God created everything, do you agree with that? The Bible says in the book of Genesis there were was nothing. God created everything. Did God create sin? If so, how could a perfect God actually create sin?

Where did sin come from? Some people think that God created sin just so that He could redeem us. I have an idea, I want to throw it out there and you can see what you think. God created us with free will. He gave every one of us the opportunity to either accept God or reject God. That is what free will is if you really want to boil it down, your free will and my free will is the ability to say Yes, I will follow you God, or say no, I will reject you God. That is what it is. I

believe that since rejecting God is a sin, sin is a nature by product of free will. It is created when we exercise our own right to reject God.

So, who creates sin? We do. Every time we choose our own path and not God's we create sin. It's natural, it happens. God didn't create it. So how much worse is it when we mess up, when we choose to follow our enticements. We fall into temptation and then turn around and try to blame God for own temptation. All God did was give us the beautiful gift of free will. I think the key to handling this kind of temptation is found in one word and it ties into what I just said, it is the word responsibility. Everybody say "responsibility." Responsibility, that is not a word that we like in our culture these days, I think. Responsibility, look at verse 14, "but each of you is tempted when you are dragged away by your own evil desire and enticed." The Greek phrase is *ileus epithelial*. It means individual lust. That is what the old translations would say, the individual lusts, your personal lust. Now, I know why the translators here, now, updated that word from lust do desire, it is because in our culture the word lust only has sexual connotations. However, that is not what lust always meant in the Bible. It wasn't always strictly sexual. Lust is this~ a desire or an intense craving for what is forbidden. That is what is lust is. Now sometimes that is sexual, in our culture that has become completely sexual. You can have a desire or an intense craving for what is forbidden that is not sexual as well. The writer here is using this great visual image when he says, "each of you is tempted when you are dragged away by your own evil desire and enticed."

Sort of like this, it's like when you are fishing. How many people here like to go fishing? So if you are fishing for a particular fish, let's see here, if you are fishing for a bass what kind of lure do you use? Worms, okay. I know Mike knows. I have seen him catch a bass that is really big. Bass like worms. Which is weird....have you ever thought why fish eat worms? There aren't worms in the water, but they like worms...Anyway, I always wondered that. What if you are fishing for marlin? Anybody know what you use if you are fishing for marlin? Worms? No, I don't think so. Something else. What if you are trying to catch a shark? What if you aren't in the water, what if you are on land. What if you are trying to catch a bear? You are going to use what? Honey, I don't know...The point is, each individual animal has something that is specific that entices it. Worms will not draw a bear, honey will probably not draw a shark. That is kind of the idea here, he is saying 'listen, you will each have your own individual thing that is your weakness. That is your enticement.' What you should gather here is that it is yours, not somebody else's responsibility, it is your responsibility. So whose desire is dragging you away? Yours. Essentially, who is batting your hook. You are when you are dragged away by your own private desire, or if you want to use their translation, lust.

I want to expose you guys to an important idea regarding the difference between desire and lust. We use lust in the bigger picture, not just strictly sexual. This desire for something that is forbidden. There is nothing wrong with desire. You have good desires, you have healthy desires. Those were given to you by God. It is only when those desires are for something that you can't have, that it becomes lust. For example, sex, sex is good. God created sex. In the proper context that desire is healthy and good. Outside that proper context that is lust. Why? Because it is for something that you cannot have. If you are not married and you are having sex, you are engaging in a sinful desire. It is for something that is forbidden. Inside the context of marriage that is a good desire.

How about hunger? Hunger is a good desire. You are given that to keep you alive. What if you hunger for something that is forbidden? Maybe, for example, too much of something. That is a sin that we never talk about in church. We never talk about the sin of gluttony. It is a real one, especially in our culture. We always have an abundance of food.

What about our drive to achieve? Our drive to succeed. That is not a bad thing in and of itself. God has given us that. What if that drive is for something that is forbidden? Power, fame, money, greed. What did we look at the passage last week? Hoarding money. That was the definition of rich, hoarding money. That is a desire for something that is forbidden.

Now, I want to put my own viewpoint on this here, because later James, it is a long book and he is going to come back around this, give us some handles on this, but I want to give you my own viewpoint now while we are talking about this. What is it that creates this desire that is forbidden? What is it that takes this natural desire that we have, this good desire that we have, all of them, I have only mentioned a couple but there are a lot. What takes this natural good desire and then creates this want for something that we can't have? For something that is forbidden. What is it that makes that happen in us? I think it is discontent. Discontent creates a tremendous potential for lust. To have what you cannot have. The feeling that you are missing something. The feeling that you deserve something. That is what creates this evil desire for things and helps us set our own trap.

So what happens if we are dragged away? What happens if we are enticed? Let's look at verse 15, "then after desire has conceived it gives birth to sin, and sin when it is full grown gives birth to death." There is strong imagery again here, we know that James likes strong imagery, he is painting pictures. You remember earlier he talked about the waves going back and forth. He talked about the plant shooting up out of the ground and that hot wind scorching it and killing it. Now he is talking about a life cycle. This is something that everybody would be familiar with then and now. Conception, birth, growth and death something that you and I have experienced. I think the key is he wants to show us something about what I call the cycle of sin. The cycle of sin. That temptation itself is not sin, that is an important thing to recognize as well. Being tempted is not sin. Succumbing to the temptation that is sin, that is the conception part. What does that does it begins to breed inside of us. Then it is born, then it grows, and eventually sin leads to death. So how do we stop it?

If we go back to the beginning of this passage, verse 12, "blessed are those that persevere under trial, because when they have stood the test they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those that love Him." How do we persevere? If it is discontent that takes are natural desire and turns it into lust, what is the opposite of discontent? Contentment. So, maybe we should say breaking the cycle of sin has to do with stopping it before conception. Allowing those desire that are built into you, that are healthy, not allowing those to turn into lust. I believe that is found in contentment. If you are happy with what you have then you don't want what you can't have. Think of it this way, have you ever gone out to your favorite restaurant and had a nice full meal? Then you drive by your other favorite restaurant, do you feel like stopping? No, you just ate. You are satisfied. What if every area in our life we could be like that, we could be content in all things. If we can change our desire from lust to contentment we can break the cycle of sin.

Maybe this is what Paul was talking about in Philippians 4:13, this is a very famous verse, it says, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." He is really talking about being contented. If you looked at that whole passage that is what he is talking about. He is saying he is know what it is like to have a lot, he knows what it is like to have nothing. In all things, no matter what he has, he can do it through Christ. What if we said that? No matter what I have, I am happy with it. Why? Because I understand who gave it to me. It is tough in our culture though, all you have to do is turn on the T.V. and every single commercial that comes on tells you that you deserve everything. You should have more money. You should have more reputation. You should be famous. You should have more sex. You should eat whatever you want. You can drink whatever you want. You can buy whatever electronic gadgets that you want. Every commercial, basically, to get you to buy their product has to first convince you that you don't have it, but you need it. It is weird being a Christian in a culture where you are a consumer from the moment that you open your eyes, to the moment you close them at night. You are a consumer. That in itself is not wrong. It is only when that feeds a desire that we have that is based in discontent, that yes I should have all those things. Yes, I want all of those things. Do you know what happens when most people get all of those things? They are just as unhappy as they were when they started. It doesn't fix discontent. Discontent doesn't fix content, being content happens when you understand who you are in God's eyes.

That last verse, verse 16, "don't be deceived my dear brothers and sisters, every good and perfect gift is from above. Coming down from the Father of light, who does not change like shifting shadows." Our solution is to realize that God gives us what we need. God is what makes us content. I am going to get real practical for a moment, I want to share three scriptures with you guys, because maybe you are here this morning and some of the stuff that we are talking about as far as sin and temptation is concerned is sort of philosophical or academic. Maybe you are here this morning and you are really dealing with a particular temptation, a particular sin. It's got a hold on you. It has been a thing that you have been challenged to shake.

There are some scriptures that I want to share with you that maybe you can jot down, or you can remember that you can turn to in difficult times. The first one that we are going to go to in our Bible's, the other two I will put up on the screen. The book of 1 Corinthians 10 "no temptation has overtaken you, except what is common to us all, (what does that mean? everybody, whatever temptation you are facing, somebody else has faced it, nothing new), and God is faithful, He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it." We know that God doesn't tempt us, that temptation that we face, it comes from the inside, and it also comes from the devil. James talks about that in the 4th chapter.

That temptation that we face, God allows it, but the Bible also gives you a promise. He doesn't give you more of a temptation that you can deal with. The Bible also says that He will give you a way out. Every time you are tempted, know that there is a way out. This is a great verse to know and to memorize.

Also, Hebrews 2:18, we talked about this for a second, "Jesus himself was tempted, he was tested." Why was He tested? The Bible says, "He himself suffered when He was tempted so that He is able to help those that are being tempted." Every time you pray, because you are facing a temptation, know this, Jesus faced that temptation. He knows what it is like to be

tempted. You are not talking to a person that doesn't know what it is like to be tempted sexually, to be tempted with food, to be tempted with fame. To be tempted with power. You know when Satan tempted Jesus he tempted Him in three areas; hunger, security and fame. What did Jesus do? He turned to the scripture each time when He was tempted and quoted the scripture. That is why scripture is so powerful.

The last one, maybe you haven't stood the test. Maybe you have fallen to temptation. 1 John 1:9 is a promise that God gives us, "if we confess our sins He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins, and purify us from all unrighteousness." In a second we are going to pray, and I want to give you an opportunity to confess directly to God some of those challenges that you are having. Maybe you are here this morning and you have been discontent in a lot of ways, and that has lead to some temptation. Wanting something that is forbidden. Maybe you have blamed somebody else for your temptation, a mother, a father, an ex-spouse, a friend, maybe even God. Maybe you are facing some great temptation now. Maybe you know of a great temptation coming your way and it has you scared. We can pray about that too. My prayer is that you will stand the test. That you will be, as the Bible says "dokimos". That you will be accepted with flying colors. Let's pray together and ask God for the strength we need in this area of our lives.