



## 2. Trials and Temptations (James 1:13-18)

*There is the story of an enthusiastic but somewhat unscrupulous salesman who was waiting to see the purchasing agent of an engineering firm. The salesman was there to submit his company's bid, or price quote, for a particular job. He couldn't help but notice, however, that a competitor's bid was on the purchasing agent's desk. Unfortunately, the actual figure was covered by a can of juice. The temptation to see the amount quoted became too much, so the salesman lifted the can. His heart sank as he watched thousands of ball bearings pour from the bottomless can and scatter across the floor.*

Lead me not into temptation! I realise that it's quite a while since I last preached on a Sunday morning. You'll remember that I started a series we were going to do on the letter of James. The book opens with a most remarkable statement in verse 2 of chapter 1 *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.*

What a remarkable statement: how can you be joyful when you suffer trials and temptations? We found that it is through both the blessed times *and* the testing times in life that we grow as believers. If we haven't faced trials and temptations, then we haven't had the opportunity to find the presence and faithfulness of God which meeting the problems of life can bring us. Do you want to mature as a Christian? Then trials and temptations come as part of the territory!

Only context gives us meaning and we need to bear that in mind as we look at the passage this morning.

*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;*

The passage this morning starts with a promise which we looked at last time. We are called to persevere under trial – the actual wording is better in the AV:

*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.*

James is very careful with how he uses words here as we shall see. If we are being asked to endure under temptation, then we need to understand what it is and where it comes from. If you want a cure, then it's important to know the cause.

### ◆ What is temptation?

James always uses the Greek *peirasmos* for temptation. It can mean trial or test but the sense that is consistently used in the NT is best summed up from the dictionary:

*The act of tempting; enticement to evil by arguments, by flattery, or by the offer of some real or apparent good.*

For a believer, temptation draws someone away from God. We often see it as coming from outside: from other people, from things we see, from things we hear, from substances we take. In fact, almost anything in our environment. However, as James quite rightly points out, there's a second, more important angle to temptation. That's your openness to it. *Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire* Temptation is only temptation if it will draw you astray.

What may be a temptation that will destroy you may not affect me and vice versa. What you may

easily succumb to, I may be immune from and vice versa. In other words, temptation can be a very personal thing.

For example a person who enjoys a glass of wine from time to time stands little chance of sliding down the slippery pole to alcoholism, but for a recovering alcoholic, a glass of wine at any time probably spells wreckage in his life. But I do know of temperate people who have developed drink problems. I also know former alcoholics who are Christians for whom drink is not a problem – they are not even tempted to have one when everyone else is drinking around them; it just isn't a problem.

James is quite emphatic here that temptation does not come from God Himself. *13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.* Whatever may be tempting you be sure of one thing: it isn't God – He doesn't discourage people from believing!!

James uses vocabulary carefully. He uses *peirasmos* to denote temptation. It can mean test or trial and some translations use this but some translations consistently use temptation to avoid confusion. The NRSV is one such and translates verse 12 like this *Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him (NRSV).*

The reason they do it is because there is a strong distinction in James that God NEVER tempts – that, is entices people to fall away (*peirasmos*) but He does test people and James uses another word – *dokime* – which means a test or a trial that is intended to prove the value or integrity of something. That is the word used in verse 12 for test.

But how often do Christians blame God for their own folly? How often have you blamed God when things go wrong? But God does allow us to be tempted. He does allow us to live in an environment of temptation. That's because we have to live like everybody else on the planet and as we shall see, temptation is common to all men. He does allow us to be exposed to it. He allowed the devil to tempt Job. The Holy Spirit drove Jesus into the desert to be tempted by satan. Why? We found out last time that in facing temptation, we grow and mature as believers as we understand the reliance we have on God. If we are prepared to walk with Him closely, temptation would not be a problem to us. We are encouraged to ask God not to lead us into temptation – the principle being that we should be prepared to learn without God exposing us to it. The problem is usually that we don't.

However, in allowing us to be tempted, God never plans that we fall. The decision to succumb to temptation is ours and ours alone. Turn to 1 Corinthians 10: *12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. 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 stand up under it.*

The Corinthians were an arrogant lot. They thought that they were super-spiritual but of course weren't. Paul warns them that they will be tempted like everyone else. Being "mature" does not exempt you from it. Maturity comes by persevering through temptation. Like James, Paul says that God allows us to be tempted – but always provides the way out – the emergency exit! It's a daft pilot (and a dead one!) that when he realises his aircraft is plunging to earth does not use his ejector seat!

Are you under temptation this morning. Are you having problems resisting it? Don't sit there and say "I'm only human – I'll just have to suffer it". Ask God to show you where the ejector seat lever is and get out straight away!! Maybe you're not a Christian. Temptation – something that draws you away from God – is common to everyone as we just read. You have that ejector seat too. You can eject from that temptation too and find Jesus.

#### ◆ What happens if we yield to temptation?

"It doesn't matter if I enjoy a bit of what I fancy. I don't hurt anyone else". "Looking at that naughty TV program is fun. It won't hurt will it?" Having that drink or that fag to calm my nerves won't hurt". "It doesn't matter if I never forgive so-and-so. They have the problem, not me". "It was only a white lie. I needed to do it". "It was just a flutter". "It was just a fling. It wasn't meant to hurt anybody". "It's just a friendship. It's platonic". "Everybody else does it". "What's wrong with aspirations – everybody needs them". "Let social services look after them." "I don't want to get involved – I keep myself to myself". "Why help the poor – they should help themselves".

*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.*

Yielding to temptation? We may not think it will hurt but James compares it to a growing child. You don't notice a child when it's first conceived – it's microscopic. But one thing leads to another. It may not be sin as it stands – but that is well what it may give birth to and the wages of sin is death.

Do you see temptation in your life this morning? Maybe it was one or more of the things that are above. Maybe it does no harm now but you know where it can lead. Pull that ejector seat lever that God has given you and get out before that temptation leads to sin.

◆ What is the cure to temptation?

In a sense, we have already answered the question. We have the way out. Let's see what James adds to all this: *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.*

Let's go back to verse 12 too *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.*

The cure is to remind us that God wants us to use our experiences of life and temptation to grow in Him and prove our faith. When we pull that ejector seat lever, we get to understand more of the ways of God. He doesn't tempt us – quite the reverse, He proves Himself and the integrity of our faith in Him. He gives to us of Himself – His good gifts coming down from above as James says. *18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created.* We are the people of God, and we are special to Him. Let's start acting and being what God has made us this morning.

Maybe you are suffering temptation. Maybe you have yielded to it. Maybe it has led you into things you know dishonour God and are leading you away from Him..

As we come around this table this morning, take the opportunity to come before Him and repent of these things and find forgiveness afresh.

Maybe you see the temptation before you. Find that lever and pull it and know God's way of escape, because when you do, you will grow in Him by doing so.

God wants us to mature and grow in our faith. Let's commit ourselves afresh to Him this morning.



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