

James 4:7

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[0:00] This is a series on overcoming sin and temptation.! Anything goes to the throne of heaven.

If we're to overcome sin and temptation, first, we must want to do it. Where there's a will, there's a way. If we want to sin, we'll find a way, no matter how many strategies that we come up with to avoid or flee from it.

So we looked up to the very throne of heaven. When people in the Bible were given a glimpse, the glory, the majesty, how high and lifted up the Lord is, they didn't need anyone to lecture them about their sin.

They saw their own sin immediately, and they wanted it gone. In beholding God's glory, sinners come to see their sin and come to lament it.

Then last Sunday, we looked inside. We think, we act, we speak, we live from our desires, out of our loves.

[1:40] A life set against sin must be then set toward God. The key to love for God is realizing that it's not something that I drum up in myself, as if my strength and my quality of love for God were the thing.

It's not up to me to drum up loving feelings all the time. We love, the scriptures say, because he first loved us. And so we looked up, and we looked in.

And this week, we look down, down very, very far to the very pit of hell. Now, this is not the turn or burn sermon.

This is a sermon about our enemy, the devil. So let me remind you, you are being lied to. Let's go to God's word.

Today, we'll be focusing on James chapter 4, verse 7, which reads, Submit yourselves, therefore, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

[2:53] Let's pray. Our great God and Father, will you, in these moments, honor your name by the work you do in our hearts.

May we see more clearly. Thank you for this word of wisdom. Help us to walk in it, to walk in your ways.

We ask this in Christ's name, who has already overcome all the world, to whom we belong, and whom we worship.

Amen. Resist the devil. What does that mean, and how do we do it? First, perhaps, some clarifications are in order, especially for a church like ours that doesn't talk much about the devil.

We talk about spiritual forces of darkness when the passage in front of us does, and that's not most passages. So first, there really, truly is a devil.

[4:04] He is not a concept or an idea or something figurative. The Bible is clear. There is truly a fallen angel who has made himself God's enemy and hates the church of Jesus Christ, and he is powerful, and he is wise.

We're about to consider his wisdom in a moment. But he is not God's equal. He is God's creation. He is subject to the Lord, and the Lord will one day judge him with a word. And contrary to the cartoon depictions, Satan does not rule hell.

It is not his domain. Sometimes we see it's set up as if he is the manager of hell, and he doles out tortures to people.

No. The scriptures are clear. The lake of fire will be his prison and his judgment forever. The righteous wrath of God rules hell, not our enemy.

[5:13] And last, perhaps, the devil did not make you do it. You and I are responsible for our own sins. They are no one else's fault.

They are not the devil's fault. But you'll see in a moment that he wants to make it easy, tempting for you to sin against God and others. The devil did not make you do it, but he wants to help.

Those are some clarifications at the outset. So let's return to that idea, that passage in James 4, 7. Submit yourselves, therefore, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Why did we pick this verse today? It's because of this. James here ties together the concept of obedience to God, the opposite of sin and temptation.

And he ties that to resisting the devil. And that's worth our consideration. We see here that the devil is opposed to submitting ourselves to God, obedience towards God.

[6:24] If you belong to Christ, he knows that he can no longer keep you from heaven. In John chapter 10, Jesus himself said, My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My father who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the father's hand.

I and the father are one. So he knows that he cannot keep you from heaven. He cannot take you from the Lord's hand. But if he can, he would like to help you, lead a life, to keep you, sorry, to keep you from leading a life of obedience towards the Lord, to make you ineffective for the kingdom, to tarnish the name of the Lord, to ask what can the church do for me, maybe, Josh, right?

And that is his goal, is to make us ineffective, unfruitful, a disgrace to the Lord in our sin.

But beyond that, James doesn't really tell us how it's done. Like if you read the surrounding context in James chapter 4, he leaves it there.

[7:43] He doesn't tell us, do this, do that, in order to resist the devil. Why is that? James, the book of James, is wisdom literature.

That is its genre. Along with the books of Proverbs, and Job, and Ecclesiastes, it is a book which shapes our understanding of the world around us, and it pierces the veil between what is seen and unseen, and teaches us to seek wisdom.

The book of James begins with an encouragement to seek wisdom. And so he expects us to wisely search the scriptures to know our enemy, and how to resist him.

The kind of resistance we put up depends on the threat at hand. Right now, Ukraine is resisting a Russian occupation with military force.

That makes sense. Karanat resists abortion through advocacy, education, practical support for mothers who are in difficult circumstances. Politicians will urge you to resist their opposition by campaign contributions, by getting out the vote.

[8:59] and you might try to resist an extra serving of dessert. Pick your strategy. You know, grit your teeth. I don't know. But, right, the type of resistance must meet the threat.

The attack dictates the response. Don't show up to the Russian occupation of Ukraine with a bid to get out the vote. That's not the right response. That's not the right resistance.

And similarly, don't resist extra calories with military force. wrong application. Wrong resistance. So when James tells us to resist the devil, we need to know what kind of attack that is.

And when he doesn't explain it much more to us, he must expect that we already know from somewhere else what kind of threat we're dealing with. Thankfully, the Lord has told us what kind of attack we're under.

Christ himself told us in John chapter 8. Actually, he didn't tell us. He was telling the Pharisees who were liars and hypocrites. He said, you are of your father, the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.

[10:15] He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character for he is a liar and the father of lies.

You're being lied to. The devil is a murderer and a liar and in fact, he accomplishes his murder by lies and soon, we will even see that his violence in this world is designed primarily not to just make us uncomfortable but to get us to believe other lies and that's why I opened today saying, you're being lied to.

Lies are our enemy's weapon and he is very, very good at wielding them. So look today at the way the devil lies to us so that we can resist him and submit ourselves to God and overcome sin and

temptation to the glory and honor of God.

first, we might ask ourselves how does he tell these lies? How does he communicate them to us? There are passages in scripture and we're about to look at them where he speaks audibly to individuals but that is not most of our experience.

In fact, part of his lies is staying hidden. When Jesus told the Pharisees in John chapter 8 that their will was to do their father's desire, the father of lies, none of them would have heard a voice.

[12:06] In fact, they thought very much that they were doing God's will and that's part of the lie. So how does he tell his lies? How do you and I interact with his lies?

The Bible tells us that he is 2 Corinthians chapter 4 Jason, these aren't, don't worry about this, yeah, he is the God of this world or John chapter 12, the ruler of this world or Ephesians chapter 2, the prince of the power of the air.

His power is found in this world and he has influence over even the air we breathe, so to speak. It seems to me that that means he lies to us most when to individuals he fosters circumstances in the world around us where we are offered those temptations that appeal most especially to me.

And the lie there is this is good, you will enjoy this. More broadly, he works the cultural soil, the air we breathe, so to speak, in ways that make wrong seem right, sin seem good, unrighteousness seem to be holiness.

When we celebrate sin all on our own, what he's doing is he's pulling out the roadblocks for our own sinful lies when he does that.

[13:42] And to the church he lies as well. in particular, our brothers and sisters in places where they are experiencing persecution are being led by that persecution to, they're being led to, the enemy is trying to get them to believe Christ doesn't love you.

You will not win. He will not win. This isn't worth it. And so we resist the devil, as James instructs us, by seeing who and what he is, a liar, and identifying those lies and dismantling them, robbing them of their power, and in so doing, overcoming the obstacles to submitting ourselves to God.

The most explicit passage in the entire Bible about spiritual warfare looks nothing like the popular conception, looks nothing like Hollywood, looks nothing like the Exorcist movie.

The clearest depiction, the clearest instruction about spiritual warfare in all the Bible is in 2 Corinthians chapter 10. The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

We destroy arguments, and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

[15:23] Spiritual warfare warfare is not about incantations and rituals like in the movies. We destroy arguments. We dismantle the enemy's truest, subtlest tool, his lies.

And he has so many lies. And to explain the allure, let me, of course, direct your attention to the Disney Corporation.

Not because they are the devil, but because there are two kinds of Disney villains. And we need to know what kind of villain we are dealing with.

I grew up during what's called Disney's Renaissance era of animation in the 90s. After years of languishing in a kind of post-war funk, in the 90s, Disney leapt back into the mainstream with mega hits like The Little Mermaid and Aladdin and The Lion King and the like.

There is something of a formula to those movies, but let me zero in on one thing, the villain. These were some awesome villains. Ursula and Jafar were terrifying, in their greed, and in their power.

[16:40] And Scar was just perfectly brutal and sarcastic, just awesome. These were the best villains. And each of them had a lie they were telling, right?

They deceived someone into giving up too much or believing the wrong thing or playing for the wrong side by accident. But here's the thing. the devil's nothing like those villains.

Just by looking at them, you know what they are. When you see the hero buy into their lies, you're screaming inside, no, can't you see it?

It's a lie. That guy's totally evil. Look at him. This is exactly what they want you to do. You're playing into their hand. The devil has been around for a very long time and he has grown wise.

Far wiser than you or I. He is not the cartoon villain. Scripture is clear that he doesn't look like that Disney villain that would drive us right into the arms of Christ.

[17:52] Look at him. Oh my goodness. Let's run to safety. The rest of Hollywood presents the powers of darkness as if their great goal was to give us jump scares.

He comes offering us goodness, however we would view that. He comes offering us blessing, however we would count it.

He comes offering us life, however we want it. because in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 we're taught that Satan disguises himself not as a black-maned lion, but as an angel of light.

When the enemy lies to you, it won't look like a lie to you. you won't recognize it as some cackling horrible witch over a bubbling cauldron.

It will look like truth to you, to me, it will look like truth. Because he's not a terrible liar, he's an excellent liar, the father of lies.

[19:14] It is only the fool who thinks he can easily see through the devil's schemes. let us not be fools. He is far smarter than you or me.

He is subtle, and he offers what looks like light. That's the whole point. No one purposefully drinks poison, so he disguises it as a delicacy.

There are a handful of times where he directly tells lies in Scripture, and we'll take a brief look at them. The first one comes, the opening pages, Genesis chapter 3.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field. The Lord God had made, he said to the woman, did God actually say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?

We're doing three of these passages, I can't fully expound all of them. if you've been in church a while, I expect you've heard a sermon on this one. So let me remind you.

[20:26] Where are you prone to doubt God? Where are you susceptible in your own heart, because of what would seem nice to you, to embrace subtle twisting of God's word?

Because it's exactly what's on display here. He's taking what God said, twisting it, don't eat that tree, becomes don't eat any tree as if God is a bully, and painting God as the bully and you as the victim.

A second lie. Comes in the next verses, Genesis chapter 3, verse 4. The serpent said to the woman, you will not surely die, for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

Actually, two lies embedded there. Do you see them? The first is when the enemy presents it as if the cost, the consequence is very small.

Do we live in a culture that would tell us that the consequences of sin are very small? I believe we do. And cultures only exist because of what seems reasonable to all of us.

[22:10] There's a second lie. Not only is the cost small, but the reward is very, very big. Now, is he right in saying that the reward was very, very big?

No. Not at all. None of that really happened, or at least in a good way. I wonder if that is your experience, your own personal experience.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. everyone here has sinned. When you have walked in sinful ways, you did it because you wanted to.

That's what we've been talking about the last two weeks. You wanted to because you thought there was an upside. did it pan out? Does it pan out?

Or is it, like verses four and five, a lie? What have you found it to be?

[23:11] The great Puritan Thomas Brooks wrote a book called Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices. It is like a humongous manual of all the ways that Satan can lie to us and many, many responses, remedies that we can foster in our own souls.

I am working through it, outlining it. It's hundreds of pages long. I'm trying to break it down into an outline form, and I hope to get you a six-page bulleted list of all the things this week.

Don't count on me, but that's my goal. the very first device of Satan that he purports to us has to do with this.

And that device is to present the bait and hide the hook, to present the golden cup and hide the poison, to present the sweet, the pleasure and the profit that may flow in upon the soul by yielding to sin and by hiding from the soul, the wrath and misery that will certainly follow the committing of sin.

By this device, he took our first parents, saying to them, your eyes shall be opened and you shall be as gods. Here is the bait, the sweet, the pleasure, the prophet.

[24:46] Oh, but he hides the hook, the shame, the wrath, and the loss that would certainly follow. Oh, that we would have eyes to see this when temptation is dangled before us.

A third lie. in Matthew chapter 3, Christ began his public ministry by being baptized by John.

At the conclusion of that baptism, he comes out of the water and behold, a voice from heaven said, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.

The very next thing that happens, chapter 4, Jesus was led up by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

He's undoing in the wilderness what happened in the garden, by the way. And after fasting 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry. and the tempter came and said to him, if you are the son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.

[26:22] You catch that connection? This is my beloved son. If you are the son of God. God God we sang a song today before the throne of God above, which mentions this particular tactic of the devil, which is causing God's people to doubt who they are and what they are in Christ.

When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, sin, what can we do? Do we despair? Upward I look and see him there who made an end of all my sin.

Those are three things that we see directly in Scripture, three ways that the devil lies to us. So it is up to us to identify those kinds of lies and more as Thomas Brooks did.

And how we are susceptible to them in our own lives so that we may resist. I guess we'll start with ourselves individually and work our way out broader and broader.

In James chapter 4, just before he says resist the devil, in verse 7, in verse 4 he says, you adulterous people, do not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?

[28:04] Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. His goal by his lies is to make you friend to the world without you even knowing it.

God will know it. Why don't we know it? Because it looks like smooth sailing. It looks like getting along. It looks like fitting in.

It looks like success and it feels right. Opposition is the thing that feels wrong. we have a phrase in evangelicalism we call it besetting sins.

Those sins that are very hard for you to kick. You come back to again and again. Mine are different from yours. Are different from yours.

Are different from you. Right? there are probably some commonalities between us but each of us has a particular weakness to particular things. How do these lies the devil tells, how do they play in to your walking in sin?

[29:26] Because every time that we engage in sin it's because we're walking in a lie. Are there excuses that you make or that others would make for you that make it easier that smooth the way to sin?

Will you see that for what it is a lie from hell itself? knowing that robs it of its power I hope.

What lie would you like to believe about your sin? Especially the lie that would call it something other than sin. That too is a lie.

do you run into anything in your life that seems custom made to reinforce it or tempt you into it?

Our enemy is smart. He would love, he doesn't make you sin, but he would love to help. And that's different for everyone. Because what motivates you, what tempts you, and what motivates me tempts me.

[30:56] Your brothers and sisters in Christ and everyone around you is different. We are different. You might be driven by financial success, so the liar will dangle that before your eyes. Someone else might be driven by pleasure, so they will find themselves confronted with hedonistic

temptations.

Or I might be driven by respect, so that might be what's held in front of me. Which sins do you wish you could do? What would seemingly bring you the most pleasure?

Seriously, call that to mind right now. And what obedience seems hardest to you? Call that to mind as well.

Do you have them? how is it that you see the world around you reinforcing both of those?

It's the work of the enemy. Don't think for a moment that he's not involved and he's not attentive even to you, desiring to knock you out of the way, to make you ineffective for the kingdom.

[32:07] it's our own hearts. But scripture, as we pointed out earlier, says that he is the prince of the power of the air, the god of this world even.

Stepping back from us as individuals, we live in a broader society. He loves to foster lies there, platforming those who have already bought into lies, prospering those who luxuriate in sin, stifling those who promote righteousness, so that the very plausibility structures of our world would bend us away from Christ and into more and more sin as a society.

Again, he wants to make us friends with the world, so he makes it look like success. And success is tied to that which we hold highest, right?

What does our society hold in high regard? Things like innovation and independence and achievement, which those aren't bad things at all.

They can be good things. They can also be used against us. Independence is probably the easiest of those to see how the enemy twists it.

[33:36] The most prominent example of that must be the abortion industry in our culture this day and age. It is all about independence, independence of sexuality, independence of body, independence from consequence, independence of choice, independence of basic sanity and morality.

The advocacy for the marketing for it is all about independence and personal choice and financial freedom. Or another killer lie.

Last month, a gunman killed 10 people in a grocery store in Buffalo, New York. Purportedly, he was motivated by a conspiracy theory called The Great Replacement.

One news article explained it this way, the theory falsely argues that global elites are orchestrating demographic changes via immigration in order to consolidate power and replace white populations with multicultural societies.

First, it's a lie that that is a thing that is happening. Second, it's a lie that racial diversity is a problem. And third, there's a believed lie right there that even if those were true, that this would be the answer to that.

[35:09] But here's the thing. Those lies, Planned Parenthood, the Great Replacement, those are the Disney villains that we were talking about earlier.

These are the obvious monsters. They're so overtly evil, we might easily point at them, say, see, we found the lies, and call it a day.

All while missing the actual subtle lies that the enemy tells and the traps that he sets. because few in this room would even begin to think that personal autonomy extends to murdering babies for personal convenience.

That is the absurd cartoon villain. And the wise person knows that there are likely other more cleverly concealed traps lying in wait.

Harder to discover, it is only the fool who thinks he can easily see through the devil's lies. Now, I might see very clearly through other people's lies, because I'm not tempted by that.

[36:26] Same for you, right? It's easy to see when someone else is totally taken in by something, which then reassures me of my wisdom and blinds me to the other lies that I believe.

Right? It's easy to point at absurd evils, overt evils. I can point at it and smugly call it a day while I believe a whole catalog of other cultural lies that stymie my walk with Christ.

But, speaking of abortion, here's something that probably hits closer to home in churches like ours. The poisoned apple that the devil might offer you and I culturally is the fight against abortion.

We see a political party that offers to fight that battle, which, great, like, engage in the fight. But, suddenly, we are tempted, either by our own foolishness, or by the enemy's cleverly designed traps, to believe that, as that party goes, so goes the church.

To believe that our fate rests on their power, because we are so invested in that. fight. And then we begin to look for strong men, regardless of what makes them strong, to lead that fight.

[38:15] And we slowly find ourselves becoming political-first Christians. But our hopes are not in political parties, or the leaders of them.

the fate of the church doesn't depend on, for one second, on the fate of the GOP. The fate of the church rests on the shoulders of the one who conquered death itself.

the one who ascended into heaven, the one who reigns forever, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, who has said, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail upon it.

we've considered the lies individually that we might believe, the lies culturally we might believe.

Our enemy also lies to the church in a way. When he brings suffering, when he brings persecution, it makes us doubt, doesn't it?

[39:47] The lie inherent in suffering and in persecution is, you're not winning. Christ doesn't love you.

He has forgotten you. It's not worth it. That is the story of the book of Job, is it not?

Satan trying to make Job doubt and curse God to turn from God by bringing him into a terrible circumstance.

That's the lie. Don't buy it. Soon, you will draw your last breath and be healthy and prosperous with Christ forever.

Forever. In 1 Peter chapter 5, Peter says almost exactly what James says in James chapter 4 about resisting the devil and submitting ourselves to God.

[41:00] He also connects it to suffering. He says be sober minded, be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Resist him. Firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

Do not believe the lie. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. Amen. It is a lie when suffering seems long.

After you have suffered a little while, the length of our days is but a breath, friends, and eternity is long. I love how he ties that to the gospel, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

This is what happens for all who have called on Christ, repented of their sins, and believed in him. This is your future. Last, he lies about that very thing, the gospel.

[42:44] God is to God to God to read! We can be very subtly tempted to read James 4, verse 7 in an anti-gospel way.

God God God God God God God God When we come to believe that that first part of the verse, submit yourself to God, is what everything depends on.

As if that is the way into that blessing, as if that is the standard by which we get there. But that is to misunderstand the gospel altogether.

The devil would have you believe it. He would love to have you believe it. That's what the Pharisees were. But James already assumes that his hearers will have followed Abraham's example two chapters earlier.

James 2, verse 23. He says that the scriptures was fulfilled that says Abraham believed God. and it was counted to him as a righteousness and he was called a friend of God.

[44:07] The great lie, the greatest lie that we could believe is the lie that we could and must earn our place with God because God and God and God God and God!

!!!! He looked to God and God every time someone saw him saw a vision of him saw him veiled his glory terrified them and they knew there was nothing that they could do to earn a place before him and they lamented their sin against so great a God there is nothing we could do but Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness comes from the book of Genesis that's

what James is talking about that is the great truth upon which all of this stands upon which we must stand and live our lives that Christ came to offer us redemption and reconciliation and that by trusting in him he offers us all things as

Peter said that he the God of grace will call you to his eternal glory in Christ that he himself will restore confirm strengthen and establish you friends if we look if we look if we look back to the gospel again and again and again and again we will see his goodness and the enemy can't paint him as the villain can't paint us as the victim because he is the great God of grace who loves and we are the great beneficiary!

of that love let's go to him in prayer Lord it is a great grace that you prepare your people that you offer us that you give us wisdom from heaven against our adversary thank you for the gift of the scriptures Lord help us to see through the enemy's lies the way that he would tempt us into sin sin that we are ourselves responsible for and that Christ has made himself responsible for extinguishing on his cross and to him be all praise now and forever amen