

The Trial of Faith and Temptation to Sin

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[0:00] James chapter 1 and at verse 12. And so on.

I want to return to looking at this first chapter in the letter of James. And we have noticed that the first part of this letter, James, is dealing with how we need to learn spiritual wholeness and health and well-being in the best sense of the terms.

That is that we have a walking with the Lord Jesus, which is in commune with him and walking to learn from him and to thereby grow up in faith.

And we saw from verse 2 to verse 4, the way in which spiritual maturity comes by remaining steadfast in our trials. And we notice the ways in which we all have our different trials, that God gives trials to us in order to build us up on the faith.

And we grow up as we remain steadfast in these trials. And we saw from verse 5 down to verse number 8, the way in which faith responds to our trials.

[1:46] And that is that we respond in prayer and we seek the wisdom that comes from God alone. And we notice that the wisdom that comes from God is a wisdom that enables us to serve God.

It enables us to live the right kind of life. It enables us to make right judgments. And it even enables us to govern our own lives and for the church to govern itself.

Praying for wisdom in order to associate with our trials and to learn from them. And at verse number 12, we see the way in which the people are once more encouraged in their trials and encourage that if they remain steadfast, then they will receive the crown of life.

And from verse 12 to verse 13, James changes his focus. And he does so by moving from trials to think of temptation.

And in verse 13 down to verse number 15, this evening, we want to look at what James has to say and to think of the trial of faith and temptation to sin.

[2:58] And we might be saying, why should we focus on sin? And perhaps there are two simple reasons for that. Because sin is something that we have to deal with ourselves.

And secondly, our sin is what God does deal with. And the more we understand what sin means and the more we understand why God deals with us in the way that he does, then that helps us on our journey to spiritual or Christian maturity.

And so we have the trial of faith and the temptation to sin. Well, I notice first of all, that there is a pastoral concern. And the pastoral concern, we have brought to our attention in that verse 13, let no one say when he is tempted, I am being tempted by God.

He introduces the idea of temptation. The word translated temptation here is from the same word group as the word translated testing earlier.

And there is that kind of double meaning in the terms. And James is now focusing on the second interpretation of the term. That is temptation. When things cross our path and things work in our experience, that that draws us away from temptation, which is the design to destroy our faith, to lead us into sin, and therefore lead us into separation from God.

[4 : 37] And when we think of temptation in that way, it reminds us of the importance of understanding something about the way in which temptation works in our lives. Its goal is, its purpose is to sever us from God and for us to lose the assurance of our faith. The pastoral concern here is that there are those who are blaming God for their temptation. Let no one say when he is tempted, I am being tempted by God. Now perhaps we may say, surely we don't do that. But the reality is that we do that more often than we think. In this letter here, there are those who are facing poverty. There are those who are rich. There are challenges associated with poverty and with riches. We may think of financial difficulty, causing us to question God's providence. We're blaming God for bringing us into financial difficulty.

[5 : 49] When we are facing personal illness, we begin to question the goodness of God and even the love of God. When we see, as we saw in Psalm 73, the wicked prospering and the people of God suffering, we may question the justice of God and blame God. Why is God allowing this to happen? In so many parts of life, we blame God for the situations that we have arrived in. When we suffer personal bereavement, and we blame God for dealing with us so sorely, we question the love of God. And tonight, if we have faith, all of us at one time or another, if we are honest with ourselves, we'll have blamed God, questioned God for what he is doing. And at the very beginning of the Bible, we see that blame culture emerging in the very first sin, where Adam blames God for giving a wife, Eve, who led him into the transgression.

[7 : 07] And that blame culture follows our own experience and our relation with God time after time. And one of the writers commenting on this makes the point that so often, when we sin, we blame God in order to relieve our own personal guilt. Instead of going to God with our sin and confessing our sin, if we can find some way of blaming God in the midst of our sin, then it tends to ease our guilt. A pastoral concern. Do you think that's a concern that includes your own life, your own relationship with God? Does this speak into your heart as it speaks into my heart this evening, forcing us to think of a response to our sin, of a response to situations where we actually blame God? And James is very quick to make it clear that because of God's character that cannot happen. And in God's activity that will never happen.

[8 : 25] For God cannot be tempted with evil. He is immune to that sense of being tempted himself. It just cannot happen because of the God that he is in all of his perfection and in all of his holiness. He cannot be tempted by sin. It simply does not happen. Sin is apparent to him. And because of his relationship with his people, neither is he engaged in tempting them. And of course, that's, that leaves us with a mystery. A mystery that does not lead us to blame God, but it does lead us to think about the mystery of our providence. Where providence takes us to different places. and in these very places that we face temptation. And the God who is the God of our providence still cannot be blamed for our temptation. The pastoral concern. Important for us to, to consider temptation and to be on our guard and to always ensure that temptation does not ever have its source in the reality of God.

[9 : 55] It simply cannot happen in that way. The pastoral concern. Secondly, then we see that there's a process. If that's not the source of our temptation, what is the source?

The process. We see in a version number 14, but each person is tempted when he is lured and deticed by his own desire. Our personal desire.

The reality of it is the source of our temptation. And that, and the desire, the way in which James speaks of it and the way in which the New Testament speaks of it, it's something that speaks deep into our experience.

It's the longing that we have and the impulses of our hearts towards certain things. The desire that we have in our hearts towards satisfaction.

And that desire in our hearts is something that is a power which draws us to this object in which we will have satisfaction. and such is the desire that we suffer pain and we feel a pain if we cannot have the satisfaction that we can have by embracing the object.

[11 : 17] It is something that's powerful within us, deeply rooted in our being. It is the tendency to choose the things that are all about ourselves and not about God.

Indeed, it is the tendency to choose the very things that God has prohibited. Temptation from our desire.

We read Peter in 1 Peter 2 speaking about the way in which we are to abstain from the passions of the flesh. It's like a powerful energy that builds up inside of us that leads us to desire the things that will satisfy the flesh and that will separate us from God.

And while the New Testament speaks of that desire, we understand the diversity of individual experience.

we understand tonight that the things that are a powerful temptation to you because of your disposition might not cause me even to look at these very things.

[12 : 43] And all of us tonight are made in such a way in the diversity of our disposition as God has made us that there we find ourselves drawn to one thing and not drawn to another thing.

tonight we may well be here and in the sacred of our hearts tempted by the things that are attractive to ourselves and others tempted by things that are attractive to them and that would be unattractive to you.

and whilst we understand that we all have the same sinful heart we understand the diversity of experience your attractions won't be mine and your attractions won't be those of the person next to you.

and that's why in circumstances circumstances in temptation are tailored to suit your personal disposition and it's it's wonderful and mysterious and awesome in so many ways the way in which the devil works and the way in which we find ourselves in the very circumstances that are tailored to our individual passions and to our individual desires.

Our temptations arise from the reality of the sinful disposition of our sinful hearts the power of our passions and because of that powerful passion of our hearts the process is explained to us here it's if there are fishermen here I'm sure there are explained to us a process here which highlights how temptation works but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed there are two things going on there is there is the enticement and there is the attachment and because of of our sinful disposition we see first of all that we are lured we're drawn away something attractive is presented to us that the fisherman will bait his hook or the fisherman will use a particular kind of fly he will do that in order to attract and to bring the fish out of its hiding place and to bring it and for it to be drawn and attracted to the very thing that's on that hook there is that enticement and it is an enticement that is powerful in the sense that we must have it it's delicious bait and we must have it and we think of how that works and we think of how it works in our personal experience and that process through which the devil will keep presenting the same thing to our minds in order to draw us away and there are two graphs that we can think of and the more the devil persists in seeking to draw us away the more our resistance will diminish and as our resistance diminish the more the bait becomes attractive until we reach the point where we're attached and that's what what James is saying here lured and enticed there is the sense of being dragged away that's what the word means that's what the fisherman does let me get my fish on the hook and no matter how much it struggles it's pulling my line in and do it professionally understanding what's on the hook in order to ensure that the fish is landed and that's how temptation works once we're enticed once we see it as the must-have thing then we grasp it and we're caught and we're carried away and carried away not like the struggling fish but carried away because we have now come to the point where we are willing to embrace the very thing that

[17:57] God prohibits and the very thing that in the first place we knew would affect our relationship with God and would bring about some kind of severance in that relationship there is that process the process described by one of the writers in this way there's the personal struggle with evil desire it's not usually one of confrontation with the devil but rather a confrontation with their own worst enemy namely our very selves that's where temptation works the pain of temptation is a self inflicted attack it's our fault it comes from the reality of who we are and this this is the sense of being dragged away our own desires are like a marauding beast that would soon consume us the process do we tonight understand how the bible describes temptation that leads us to sin can we allow the bible to give us that background and to give to us the image into which we can fit our experience and realise even now or tonight or tomorrow that's temptation and I'm attracted to it and I have to be careful that the hook of temptation that I don't bite it and take the bait

I need to appreciate what's happening around me in the realm of my faith and in the realm of my relationship with God this is the biggest threat and the biggest threat as the writer said it's not the devil himself the biggest threat and danger is your sinful heart and mine the process and thirdly there is a product then decide when it has conceived gives birth to sin and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death he changes the metaphor from the fishing metaphor and uses the metaphor of conception and of birth and as soon as I'm attached to the temptation then sin has been conceived it's hidden it's like the conception of the child in the mother's womb it's hidden but something new a new person has been created and it's now in my Christian experience because of the way in which this process has led me to embrace the temptation because of that something new has taken place in my relationship with God there is the beginning of the very thing that harms my relationship with God the conception and once the conception happens and we understand that naturally as conception happens it happens where there is a loving embrace where there is a relationship where there is a bond and that's what happens with sin as I embrace it there's a bond there's a relationship and my attention and my desires and my heart is given over to that sin sin is conceived and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death the child conceived will be born into the visible world at the appropriate time and there is that process that James describes here that the same thing happens with my sin it's conceived in my heart and then it will become visible in the first place in my relationship with God it brings forth death

I begin to realize now that the very thing that attracted me that I embraced with all of my heart has affected the relationship where my heart should be exclusively it's affected my devotion to my savior and it's brought about a change in that relationship and of course it doesn't bring that relationship to an end but there is a difference between the status of that relationship and the experience and the enjoyment of that relationship and as soon as conceived it brings forth death in the sense that in my experience I lose every sense of spiritual well-being I lose every sense of the presence of God with me and I'm alert immediately to the fact that sin has affected my relationship with God think of

David and Bathsheba David when other kings were at war his guard was down David saw Bathsheba David desired Bathsheba David acted and brought Bathsheba to himself and David committed adultery there was that process through which because his guard was down he embraced what God was forbidding him and he took someone else's wife and read of David's experience in Psalm 32 he had lost his strength his relationship with God was turned upside down Bathsheba was there Uriah was to be dealt with the problems mounted more and more all because he embraced the temptation he endured the pain his heart his experience was like the drought of summer he had lost every sense of living with

God and living for God that's the death that it brings about and that's the death it brings about for you and for me and tonight it may be the case that in someone's heart something has gone wrong and someone's heart tonight may be like David's heart and maybe feeling the pain of that disruption in your relationship with the Lord Jesus and your sense of experiencing his love and grace has gone it's evaporated your sin has broken has taken that away your sin has brought your heart to be like a desert where there is no water and where there's no sense of the goodness of God and tonight as we close we remind ourselves of the importance of being on our guard

[26:17] Paul prays for the Philippians in chapter 4 that the peace of God would guard your hearts and minds we depend and trust in God through prayer and the wisdom that comes through prayer we depend on God for him to guard our hearts and minds there may be situations where we can guard each other in certain circumstances and we are Job in Job chapter 31 I made a covenant with my eyes we need to ensure that we stop looking at the things that we know lead us into temptation but Jesus of course reminds us as he reminded the disciples that it is what comes from the heart that's what defiles a person even we may shut our eyes and not look at anything but it doesn't take away the reality of the power of our lusts and of our passion that work away daily in our experience as Paul himself discovered and as we do discover ourselves we guard our hearts and it's worth quoting as we close the words of

Ralph Waldo Emerson who was a 19th century philosopher when he said this sow a thought and you reap an action sow an action and you reap a habit sow a habit and you reap a character sow a character and you reap a destiny what we sow we shall reap says Paul to the Galatians let's ensure tonight and always that we are sowing to the spirit of God and living a life guarded by God himself trusting in him and ensuring that as we realise that the power of our own sinful hearts are need to be under guard against anything and everything that will seek to disrupt and destroy our relationship with God may God bless his word to us so we're now going to conclude by singing Psalm 103 in Psalm