

Temptation

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Preacher: Luca Sueri

[0 : 00] Good evening, everyone, and thank you, Peter and Beth, for reading and praying. As Peter said, my name is Luca, if we've not met before, and we're looking at the second section of James tonight together.

I wonder if you've ever heard of the deep sea anglerfish. It's a very ugly, very rare fish that lives only in deep, dark waters.

You can Google it at home or pretend to be on your Bible app and we won't notice. It's called an anglerfish because it literally goes fishing, and it goes fishing with a bait.

It has a sort of fishing pole protruding from its head, and at the end of it, it has glowing bacteria. And this fishing pole is called a lure because they use it to lure their prey in.

And the fish prey is so intrigued by the glowing light that it's all it sees. I will not pay any attention to the big fish behind the light ready to eat it.

[1 : 10] That light is all it sees. It forgets about everything else, and then it gets closer and closer until it's too late, and it gets swallowed by the anglerfish.

James says that's us and temptation. Last week, we read about trials, how the opportunities that God gives us to become more perseverant, and ultimately to strengthen our faith.

Today, we've read about temptation and how temptation leads to death. And what's interesting is that in the original Greek, the same word is used for temptation and trials.

And yet, James couldn't make it any clearer that they are very different things, opposites, in fact. And that's why our translations use two different words.

And the main difference is the outcome of the two. Trials lead to the crown of life. Temptation leads to death. So let's dive in and see what James tells us about temptation.

[2 : 21] And we're going to split the passage into two sections. We'll look at deadly desires from within in the first few verses, 13 to 15, and saving truth from above in verses 16 to 18.

Deadly desires from within and saving truth from above. The Bible is very clear on the fact that God tests us.

Abraham in Genesis 22 is an example. God asks him to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, on whom God's personal promise to Abraham of countless descendants entirely depended.

And John tells us in his gospel, in chapter 6, verse 5, that Jesus tests Peter when he asks him where he thinks they could possibly buy enough bread for the 5,000 people who gathered to listen to Jesus.

And so as James said a few verses before these, the testing of our faith produces perseverance, and perseverance makes us mature and complete until we receive the crown of life.

[3 : 32] And Archie told us all about it last week. But now James warns us against thinking that since God can allow trials, then he's also responsible if we sin when we fail to resist temptation.

So he says in verse 13, when tempted, no one should say God is tempting me. For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.

And so he then gives us a very helpful description of the difference between the two. And so while the aim of trials is to strengthen our faith, temptation on the other hand is there literally just to make us fail.

Its whole aim is to get us to sin. And see the steps in this process that James describes in verses 14 and 15.

Steps of a process that unfortunately we all know too well from our own everyday personal experience with sin. It all starts with desires.

[4 : 39] But notice how it's evil desires that drag us away. Because there is such a thing as good desires. We all desire to eat, maybe to have a romantic relationship, to be able to afford caring for

ourselves and for our families.

But all of these desires can turn into evil desires. When desiring food becomes gluttony, when desiring a romantic relationship turns into adultery, or desiring to earn money turns into greed. And it's these evil desires that drag us away, that lure us in and get us swallowed by the anglerfish. And also the process does not stop there.

James uses another very powerful image, conception and birth. And so once desire has conceived, once that line into evil desire has been crossed, then it generates sin.

And sin can grow. If we're unrepentant, we can let sin fester. We can let it roam free inside of us and let it grow and grow and grow.

[5 : 50] And then when it is fully grown, he says sin gives birth to death. Giving birth to death. What a paradox. If we don't believe in Christ, unfortunately the Bible is really clear.

If we're not a Christian, we are headed for eternal death. But James is warning us Christians in verse 15 about the deadly consequences that unrepentant sin can have in our lives too.

He comes back time and time again in this book to the importance of actions that reflect our faith.

And so yes, a gospel-believing Christian can let sin grow over time by not taking it to God in repentance and not asking the Spirit for help to keep fighting it.

It will lead us astray. It will make us wander away from the truth with terrible consequences for us and those around us. Just because we're saved, we don't get a free pass to let sin grow in us.

And James will say in chapter 5 that if we help a brother or sister turn from the error of their way, we will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins. So do we see how different temptation is from trials?

[7 : 13] It's aimed at making evil desires have the better of us. It's aimed at making us just give up and sin. And so for this reason, temptation doesn't and cannot come from God is what James says in verse 13.

God does not tempt it and God is not tempted. And I wonder if you're thinking like I did the first time I read the passage that actually God was indeed tempted in the person of Jesus when he was in the desert.

We can read about it in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 4. And he was tempted in the sense that Satan tempted him. Jesus was exposed to temptation and he had desires because he was fully human.

But he was also fully God. And so his desires could not go beyond that. God wouldn't let himself be enticed by sinful desires like we do, which is what temptation is about.

And so just as God cannot be tempted, he also would never do that to us, tempt us so that we sin.

Matthew 7 says that as a father, he'd never give us a stone if we ask for bread or a snake, if we ask for a fish, let alone lure us into sin.

[8 : 34] The evil desires, says James, come from within us. They're down to our sinful nature, to our condition of broken humans, separated from God, since sin entered the world in Genesis.

So if we were to think about how we could apply this to our own lives, I think one very direct application from all of this is, of course, let's not attribute to God any temptations.

If we ever think, why would God make me sin in this or that way? He just didn't. The trials that we endure and that strengthen our faith are trials that we endure because we are trying to live a Christian life.

But sins are our own doing. They're our own choice. And the challenges that we face for having fallen into sin, they have nothing to do with God.

What we're called to do is draw near to God, to resist temptation when it comes our way. And secondly, as another application for us, let's not play with fire.

[9 : 45] We must not underestimate the danger of evil desires and sin. We have to learn to recognize sin in its early stages by being in communion with God, by dwelling in his word and letting the spirit convict us of sin.

James gives us in these verses a very stark reminder that sin is serious business. It doesn't matter how many years I've been a Christian for, how many generations my family has been going to church for, we are all vulnerable to sin.

And don't we know it all too well, unfortunately, how easy it is to underestimate sin, how comfortable sometimes it can feel to play with it, to let that desire grow rather than run to God and get rid of it there and then.

And so can I invite us all to have a serious think about what sins we maybe are being too relaxed about? Do we tend to join in during banter at work that we know brings anything but glory to God because it's just for a laugh so we can make an exception?

Maybe sometimes we even make up excuses that we're doing it just to mingle, to integrate, so that we'll have opportunities to evangelize. Do we let jealousy shape some of our comments on that other family member and it's fine because it's family after all?

[11 : 11] Or is it sexual sins that we will not confront because we just get too much pleasure out of them? I think we can all imagine we all know how all of this can grow over time and have deadly consequences.

So James tells us sin is not something that we get to feel and be violent about. Something that we know is bad but we can let a bit of it in because we will know when to stop.

No, he says sin is here to kill. And so as Christians we have no excuse to dwell on it. We must run away from it. We must run straight to God.

And that's for us to do. Helped by the Spirit. God doesn't, will not tempt us but we must turn away from sin and turn to him.

So let's not attribute temptation to God and let's take sin seriously and not play with fire. Let's move on to verses 16 to 18 now.

[12 : 14] We've talked about deadly desires from within but thankfully James does not stop at this bleak picture because verses 16 to 18 tell us that there is a saving truth coming to the rescue from above.

He opens verse 16 with don't be deceived. He must have reasons to believe that these Christians are being deceived. There's some sort of deception going on and maybe they got things mixed up or maybe they're exposed to the teachings of someone who did or maybe he's just worried that they'll misunderstand the whole relation between God's trials and Satan's temptations.

So after explaining what does not come from above he tells us now what does come from God and that's every good and perfect gift.

Every good and perfect gift comes from above. And he goes on to give us a spectacular description of our gift dispensing God and he does that in just a handful of words in verse 17.

The father of the heavenly lights who does not change like shifting shadows. What else could come from such a God other than every good and perfect gift?

[13 : 36] I find that there's nothing like a good reminder that our God is the creator of the universe the father of the heavenly lights to give us perspective when we're lost in the chaos of our everyday struggles.

Maybe you climb up a hill and look around you maybe you just watch the grass on your lawn grow out of just rain and sunlight or maybe you watch a David Attenborough documentary and remember that if God was able to make all of this happen he must be a powerful a creative a good God the father of the heavenly lights who doesn't change like shifting shadows and maybe even better than a David Attenborough documentary when it comes to a sound description of God would be the Bible itself which is why we read Psalm 145 it describes that same God that James is talking about here verse 9 of the psalm says a Lord who is good to all that's why every good and perfect gift comes from him in verse 12 the psalmist says a Lord whose kingdom is covered in glorious splendor because he's the father of the heavenly light he created everything that we see and in verse 13 the psalm says a Lord whose kingdom is everlasting because he doesn't change like shifting shadows and I'd encourage you to read the whole psalm again maybe in your own time maybe to start the week tomorrow it's a really uplifting praise of

God for who he is as a good a loving a sovereign and eternal father and so just like the psalmist James wants us to realize that all of this continuous shifting this instability that is so intrinsically part of our nature as fallen human beings this constant changing and often for the worse if we're honest that we live day in day out this is in no way a trait of our God so while we're dragged away by our desires that then give birth to sin and lead to death God remains unmoved he's the father of the whole creation and he's been in his splendid kingdom since the beginning and while we're shifting or slipping into sin he stays there like a rock and what's key in all of it is in verse 18 is that he's not just sitting on the clouds looking down on us and scoffing at our incapability to resist temptation he offers us salvation he gives us birth through the word of truth he says and here's that same image of given birth that we had in verse 15 but this isn't the birth of death this is our second birth as saved children of

God just like Jesus had explained to Nicodemus in John chapter 3 he gives us birth through the word of truth and what's the word of truth it's the gospel it's a message that Jesus God's only son died on the cross for our sins and this word of truth this message of salvation it has such a radical effect on us that it's like we're born again out with the old in with the new and how could it be otherwise when accepting the word of truth completely subverts the whole of eternity for us we go from eternal death after this earthly life to eternal life there's a beautiful word in verse 18 that I missed the first couple of times that I read the passage and it's chose it says that God chose to save us we have to realize that there's nothing random about God's work in our lives there's God who doesn't change like shifting shadows didn't just get fed up with our pleas for help one day and then reluctantly decided to offer us a way out of our misery no he chose to give us birth through the word of truth or in other words to save us from eternal death and give us eternal life instead so let me encourage us all to think about a very practical application again for all of us to yeah to ponder on off the back of these verses and especially off the back of

James's exhortation to not be deceived in verse 16 as I prepared for this I thought in what ways might I be deceived in 21st century Edinburgh when it comes to these truths that James is reminding us of that every good and perfect gift comes from God and there are so many ways of thinking so many philosophies all around us that try to undermine the character of God and to be honest some might not be that different from what was out there 2000 years ago a society may be trying to convince us that the God of the gospel is only one of the many gods that are out there or that God doesn't even exist and everything that comes our way is the result of chance or perhaps not that things happen by chance but as a direct result of our actions because we are the makers of our own fate or maybe we're told that the

[19:22] God of the Bible has to be a mean God not the source of every good thing because he allows us to suffer and so like the people that James writes to we have to be careful not to be deceived perhaps not many of us would recognize any of these statements these philosophies as actively dangerous for us personally nothing that we would ever easily accept as a truth but we certainly don't want to make the mistake of letting our guards down as Christians we would probably not go around saying that we believe that we are the makers of our own fate that everything that happens to us is thanks to us but is that what our actions and our everyday conversation show as we live have to live in an individualistic capitalistic society and so I think the question for us is where do we go to get our understanding of who God is do we go to the word of truth as James calls it the gospel or do we let what the world around us thinks of God slowly but surely get into our heads and in turn then inform our actions and our words how much do we actually protect our minds and hearts from the current world thinking do we do that by running to the only source of truth the word of God by regularly sitting with it and listening to

God speak to our hearts through it and I know from personal experience I imagine many of you would be able to relate that there can often be a dangerous imbalance between how much time I spend with the word of God whether it's by reading it by myself listening to sermons praying reading Christian books compared to how much time I spend letting what the world thinks creep into my heart and mind and it does show in subtle ways in how we conduct ourselves in how we speak and how we think maybe in how we manage our time and money so as a Christian where do I get my understanding of who God is is it the latest Netflix series that I've been watching is it the celebrity that I follow on Instagram is it politics or sport commentators whatever you're exposed to even family or friends and I'm not saying we'd be repeating verbatim what any of these people say about God but unless I am in communion with him through his word and nothing will raise a red flag in my mind as I'm exposed to lies about him and they will start creeping in and then if any of us are not quite sure where we sit what we think about God and the gospel or maybe we think we're sure it's not for us it's certainly not the truth then

I'll ask you why are you basing that on is it what anyone out there has to say about it are you letting God introduce yourself himself to you so that you can make an informed decision and yes there are difficult parts but you might be surprised how direct and simple the main message of salvation actually is and then yes there will be questions and in which case please do come to us him anyone in the leadership team anyone you know from church anyone in your family who could sit with you and help you and wrestle with God's message so as we conclude tonight and as we prepare our hearts for communion in a few minutes let's take what the word of God teaches us through James in this passage our condition of broken sinners is serious and the responsibility for our sins is ours

we cannot look for scapegoats and God will certainly not be one if God tests us it's for our benefit if we sin it's because we don't let the spirit work in us and we let ourselves get dragged away by our own desires but it's not God who put the angler fish there and when we are attracted by the angler fish when we see that lure dangling in front of our eyes and we can't see anything else what we can't do what we must do is just turn around and swim swim into the arms of our creator because he is there offering salvation the creator of the whole universe he chose to save us despite our sinful condition Romans 5 8 reads that God shows his love for us and that while we were still sinners Christ died for us and he died to give us birth and it's his death that we're going to be remembering prayerfully in a moment so let's rejoice and be thankful in the knowledge that the same word of God that so clearly shows us how unworthy we are just as clearly invites us to accept the salvation that's being offered to us by the God who dispenses every good and perfect gift let's pray father we praise you as the creator of the whole universe father father you are a rock you don't change you the same that you always were and we thank you for your perfect gift of salvation we ask you to forgive us for all the things that we attribute to you father when we're not in communion with you when we're not basing our thoughts and words on what the word teaches us about you and we ask for forgiveness for every single time that we're so ready to just jump into sin and we thank you father for that word of truth for the gospel for that sacrifice that has given us eternal life and so father we ask you we ask your spirit help in resisting temptation in being aware of sin father and we ask you to help us as brothers and sisters father as a congregation also point each other to you and look out for each other when we're struggling so father thank you for the good news in your bible thank you in your word thank you for the good news in this passage that you are our savior father you've chosen to save us we cannot thank you enough for this father amen you