

Faith Works – Faith & Temptation

June 5, 2016 - Pastor Randy Eliason

Several years ago I sold a vehicle to a young man. On the day I was to receive the agreed upon payment price and transfer ownership of the car to the buyer he called me and asked me to write on the bill of sale a price that was much lower than what he would pay me. By doing so I would save him money on the amount he had to pay in sales tax. Since this was a cash transaction there would be no paper trail the IRS could follow to demonstrate an attempt to evade taxes. When I informed him that I wasn't comfortable doing this he attempted to persuade me by offering to pass on to me some of his savings by adding to the previously agreed upon price. I told him I couldn't do this because I had an obligation before God to be truthful. He didn't press me any further, but by his response it was clear that my ethical standards based as they were on my commitment to Christ did not resonate with him. He demonstrated respect for my convictions, but he clearly did not understand them. When I met him to deliver the vehicle God gave me a word to help him understand the practical ethical implications of his request. I said to him, "If I would cheat the government, why wouldn't I cheat you?" He was counting on me to cheat the government, never considering that I might be equally inclined to cheat him. To engage in business with dishonest people, expecting their dishonesty to work only to your advantage but never to your disadvantage, is a foolish presumption.

There were actually two temptations that I faced in this situation. The obvious one was the temptation to cheat for financial gain with a 0% chance of getting caught. The second, less obvious temptation, was to compromise my principles in order to not be perceived as weird.

Last week we looked at James 1:1-8 and 5:11-17 and learned how our faith should influence our response to trials. My title was "faith under pressure." We learned that when we respond to the pressure of trials with faith in God as both sovereign and good, we are positioned to persevere and we are empowered to endure. There is an opportunity for us to grow in faith and mature spiritually when we trust God through our trials and troubles.

Today's message is a continuation of this subject of faith under pressure.

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In 1:13-18 James shifts his focus to our response to a particular types of trials – those we call temptations. James writes,

“And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, “God is tempting me.” God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death. So don’t be misled, my dear brothers and sisters. Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow. He chose to give birth to us by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his prized possession.”

What do James words teach us about temptation and the vital role our faith plays in overcoming temptation?

I. What is Temptation?

The word translated “trials” earlier in chapter one is the same root word our English translations translate with the words “tempted”, “tempt”, “tempting”, and “temptation”. Trials and temptations are closely related to one another.

Temptations are a particular type of trial. James original audience consisted of Christians who were suffering persecution and economic hardship as a result. In 1:2 James wrote about “various” kinds of trials. In chapter 5 James describes some of these trials as sufferings that need to be endured. In vs. 13-18 James speaks about the trial of being tempted. He describes temptation as an enticement to gratify desires in a manner that is displeasing to God. James is referring to the pressure placed upon us, by our own internal passions and desires, to act unethically or immorally.

Trials and temptations are similar in that they are both create pressure on our lives, providing us with the opportunity to grow and glorify God, but also presenting us with the occasion to sin.

Trials are pressures that need to be *embraced* and *endured*. David went to the battle and *ran* to Goliath. Jesus *went* to Jerusalem to face his death.

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Temptations are pressures that we need to *avoid, resist* and *flee*.

Joseph is a great example of someone who experienced trials and temptation. Joseph experienced the trial of being sold as a slave. When he came to Potiphar's house he could have allowed the pressure of this trial to become an occasion to become bitter and angry. The evidence that he didn't is in the fact that he proved to be Potiphar's most dependable and trusted slave. He *endured* the trial by *embracing* his responsibilities.

Joseph also experienced the temptation of being seduced by Potiphar's wife. In this case he didn't decide to hang around with her in order to strengthen his resolve. He *resisted!* He *ran!* Joseph *embraced* and *endured* the hardship of his responsibilities, but he *resisted* and *ran* from the enticement to sin.

II How Should People of Faith Respond to Temptation?

A. Expect Temptation. "*And remember, when you are being tempted...*"

Last week we learned that trials are a part of life and we need to expect them. Temptation is also a part of life.

In James 1:13, James writes, "*when you are being tempted*". The expectation of a life free from the experience of temptation is an *unrealistic* expectation. The strongest man, the wisest man, and the godliest man in the bible all fell into sexual temptation. Unless you are stronger than Samson, wiser than Solomon, and godlier than David you are vulnerable to temptation. Let him who thinks he stands beware, lest he fall.

Just like with trials, recognizing that temptations are a part of life will help you prepare for them. Did you ever have one of those dreaded "pop quizzes" in school. Very few students like tests, but if you are going to take one it is better to know ahead of time, is it not? Teachers notify students that they will have "pop quizzes" or unscheduled tests in order to keep them studying on a consistent basis so they are ready whenever the test may come.

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B. Take Responsibility for your Desires and your Sin

"...do not say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions..."

James is addressing a very common problem among us. Blame-shifting!

The fact that James does not mention the devil as the source of temptation, does not mean he is denying that reality. In chapter 4 he mentions the need to resist the Devil. There are several places in the NT that clearly reveal the Devil as the tempter. But James wants his readers to face the fact that they own responsibility for their sin. Even if the Devil does tempt us, he is only working with the desires that already exist in our heart and the thoughts that we have allowed our mind to entertain. James is correcting those who are trying to blame God for their sin. He is addressing those who excuse their wrong by thinking or saying, "It's not my fault, God made me this way."

The worst example ever of blame shifting is found in Exodus 32. While Moses was receiving the law on Mt Sinai, the Israelites became impatient and they pressured Aaron to make them an idol. When Moses came down and saw what Aaron had done he was furious. Aaron's response is one of the great all-time justifications of sin.

"Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord burn; you know the people yourself, that they are prone to evil. 23 For they said to me, 'Make a god for us who will go before us; for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' 24 I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off.' So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf."

Notice Aaron's attempts at blame-shifting. He begins by blaming other people – "...you know the people yourself, that they are prone to evil". When that doesn't work he blames Moses – "for this Moses... we do not know what has become of him.' Then finally,

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he blames fate, which in a subtle sense is blaming God. –“ *I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf*”.

We will never overcome temptation if we lie to ourselves about the condition of our heart and conduct of our hands. Faith means facing the truth.

C. Run from Temptation – It’s End is Destruction!

2 Timothy 2:22

Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace...

Let’s go back to Joseph. Joseph’s response to Potiphar’s wife was, “How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?”. Joseph’s faith enabled him to view what most men would have seen as a wonderful experience as what it really was – a great evil.

Our faith enables us to see sin for what it really is. Not what it appears.

When James described falling victim to temptation with the phrase “being carried away and enticed by ones own evil desire” he was using a fishing metaphor.

Fishermen use lures or bait to catch fish. They disguise the hook with something that appears good to the fish. I recently heard in the news that the pastor of the church my parents were married at in Manhattan was arrested for stealing from the church offerings. I guarantee you that he would have never given in to the temptation if he could have forseen the results.

James wrote, “*These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death*”. Here is a diagram of the dangerous progressive manner by which sinful passions and desires, when cultivated or nurtured lead to death.

Sow a thought

Reap an action

Sow an action

Reap a habit

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Sow a habit
Reap a fate

D. Focus on God's Abundant Provision

In Genesis 3:1-4 we read about the lies Satan used to entice Eve to disobey God. One of those lies was communicated in the form of a rhetorical *question*. *He said, Did God really tell you you can't eat from any tree of the garden?* This was not an inquiry into the facts of God's conversation with Adam and Eve. It is a rhetorical question used to smuggle in the idea that God was one who denies us rather than provides for us. The power of criticism to influence us to think negatively about another is amazing. And this is just what Satan did. Even though Eve countered with a correction saying, "We can eat from the fruit of the trees of the garden, but from the fruit of the tree in the middle we can't eat, the question served the purpose of focusing Eve's attention on the *ONE EXCEPTION rather than on the ABUNDANT PROVISION!* If God has not given it to me, then it is not good for me...at least not at this time! That is why James went on to write, "*So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters. Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow.*" Don't let the Devil tell you God has denied you good things. He is not the one who denies good things, but the one who provides all things good. If it isn't from God... it is not good! If it is from God, it is very good.