

James: Faith Under Attack

James 1:12-15 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. (13) Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. (14) But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. (15) Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

We’re continuing in our studies in the book of James.

In our first message, we looked at the topic of Faith Through The Storm.

James gave us some very practical advice on how to approach life when we’re going through tough times.

In this message, entitled Faith Under Attack, we are taking a look at another aspect of life that affects us all: Temptation.

All of us experience temptation.

Temptation is not a sin; even Jesus Himself was tempted by the devil.

What determines our success in life is how we deal with temptation, and James has some very important lessons for us.

1. There is a reward for overcomers

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Everyone loves a reward.

ILLUS – A couple of boys were in the news because they were fishing in a local creek and pulled out a bag containing \$100,000. They did the right thing and took it to the police. The police said that it was probably stolen property, but if it wasn’t claimed within the legal timeframe, then the boys would be able to keep it. I bet those boys are hoping that no one claims that money.

God promises a reward for a particular kind of person.

It’s the person who endures temptation who gets the reward.

The word “endure” means to persevere, stand firm, hold your ground¹.

ILLUS – Remember the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego? The king made a golden image which everyone was to worship, but these three men held their ground under pressure. Even when threatened with being thrown into a fiery furnace, they didn’t flinch.

That’s the kind of thing this word is talking about.

It’s describing the person who stands their ground when they are being tempted.

It talks about that person being “approved”.

That word means to be tested and found to be genuine².

ILLUS – Imagine that you’re at a checkout at a supermarket. The checkout operator says, “That will be \$42 thank you.” You give her \$50, she gives you the change, and you walk away. But you’ve only taken a few steps when you realise that she gave you change for \$100 instead of \$50. What will you do? Because the devil will be right there tempting you: “It’s okay. Don’t worry about it. Their loss is your gain. It’s a big

company, so they can afford it. They won't even notice it." Or if you're a Christian, he might say, "It's the blessing of the Lord. It's okay to keep it as long as you tithe on it."

But your decision determines whether you are tested and found to be genuine or not.

Who are you when nobody is looking?

It's the genuine person who receives the reward.

So what is the reward?

James says that it's the crown of life.

In fact, Jesus' purpose in coming here was to bring us life.

John 10:10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

How do we get this abundant life that Jesus wants us to have?

It's the reward of those who are tested in the fires of temptation and found to be the genuine article.

If you look at the original language of the New Testament, which is Greek, then you discover that they didn't use a separate word for test and tempt, even though we have separate words in English.

But if you think about it, it kind of makes sense; it's like two opposite sides of the same coin.

Every temptation is in itself a test.

And every test brings its own temptations; after all, the devil will not let that opportunity go by without trying to take advantage.

2. God wants us to pass the test

ILLUS – When I was a kid, I went to school just like everyone else. And throughout the year, the teachers set tests for us. But they wanted us to pass the tests. I don't think any of the teachers was hoping for their students to fail. Unless, of course, you were one of those obnoxious kids that made their life a misery.

Teachers want you to pass their tests.

God is the same; He wants us to pass the tests of life.

He has no desire for us to fail.

He wants us to pass so that our character is refined.

And just as refined silver is purer, a refined character is stronger, because the weaknesses have been removed.

But whereas God wants us to pass the test, we have an enemy – the devil – who wants us to fail the temptation.

He wants us to give in.

Let me go back to that verse I mentioned before in John 10:10, because it gives us Jesus' Mission Statement and the devil's Mission Statement.

John 10:10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

What's Jesus' Mission Statement? To bring abundant life.

What's the devil's Mission Statement? To steal, kill and destroy.

It's pretty clear isn't it?

When you give in to temptation, you allow the devil to fulfil his Mission Statement.

When you resist temptation, and you pass the test, you allow Jesus to fulfil His Mission Statement.

3. It's easy to make excuses

James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

Do you understand what James is getting at here?

In essence, James is describing a person who is blaming God for their sin.

The reasoning goes something like this: Hey, don't blame me. It's not my fault that I'm like this. God made me like this. If He didn't want me to tell lies, He shouldn't have given me a dishonest nature.

This reflects a Jewish understanding of evil.

When God created Adam and Eve, He made them good; in fact, He created them "very good". (Gen 1:31)

Then when they sinned and rebelled against God, evil became a part of their nature.

So, when they reproduced, instead of passing on the image of God that He gave them, they also passed on the evil that was in their nature.

The evil part came in as a result of their sin, but the Jews believed that God created man with both good and evil.

The problem with that belief is that it makes God responsible for our evil actions.

This tendency to blame others for our failings began in the Garden of Eden.

ILLUS – God told Adam and Eve that they could eat any of the fruit in the garden except for the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But the devil took on the form of a serpent, Eve surrendered to his temptation and ate the fruit. Then she gave the fruit to Adam and he ate too. Now here's where it starts to get interesting. Suddenly Adam and Eve knew that they were naked and they were ashamed and hid themselves. God asked Adam, "How did you know that you were naked?" And guess what Adam did? He blamed someone else. He said, "The woman You gave me, she gave me the fruit to eat."

Adam blamed two people – God and Eve.

He was saying, "Okay, I admit that I ate the fruit. But it wasn't really my fault. The woman you gave to be with me gave it to me. If you hadn't put that woman here, I would never have sinned. So really it's Your fault."

God let that slide – temporarily – and He turned His attention to Eve.

He asked her, "What have you done?"

And guess what? She had pretty much the same response as Adam; she looked around for someone else to blame.

And she said something like, "It wasn't my fault. It was the serpent."

As they say: Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the serpent, and the serpent didn't have a leg to stand on.

This is where the blame game began.

Ever since the Garden of Eden, people have been looking around for someone else to blame for their shortcomings.

And we've invented a few more people to blame since Adam and Eve.

They couldn't blame their parents or their teachers or the police because they didn't have parents or teachers or police.

But they sure knew how to blame God or to say, "The devil made me do it."

4. Temptation targets the soul

James 1:14-15 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

The soul has three faculties: The mind, the will, and the emotions.

Temptation targets these.

First of all, there's the emotions.

James says, "Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires".

The devil tailors his temptations to match our own natural desires.

There are some things I believe I could never be tempted in, because I have no interest in them or they are repulsive to me.

The devil's not going to try to catch me out there.

He's going to study the things that I like, because if I am tempted, it is because I am drawn by my own desires.

Temptation also targets the mind.

James uses the word "enticed".

That's a word that relates to fishing, and it means to bait a hook³.

ILLUS – So imagine this: You go fishing one day, and you're trying to save a bit of money, so you decide to drop a hook over the side of the boat with no bait on it. And a fish comes up to the hook, takes a look at it and says, "Hey! You think I'm stupid? I can see that's just a hook."

That's why you don't go fishing without bait.

ILLUS – So here's what you do. You thread onto your hook a nice, big, fat, juicy worm. And the fish comes along and says, "Yum! I love nice, big, fat, juicy worms." And all his friends say, "Don't do it! There's a hook inside the worm." And the fish say, "Nah, there's no hook in there. You guys are all just over-cautious. And even if there is a hook in there, it can't be all that bad."

This is the way temptation works; it deceives the mind.

What's the purpose of the bait?

There are two purposes.

The first one is to hide the hook.

That's how the devil operates; he hides the real nature of the temptation.

ILLUS – For instance, think of a drug addict. They are spending everything they can get so that they can buy their next "fix". Their life is a misery, a living hell. They no longer get any pleasure out of their drugs because it's now an uncontrollable obsession.

Do you think that if that person could have looked ahead in time, and seen their condition as an addict, they would have ever taken that first puff?

Of course they wouldn't; but the devil successfully hid the hook so that the real danger would remain unseen.

ILLUS – Here's another example. A man has had a series of affairs, his marriage has broken up, his kids hate him, his finances are a mess, and he's lost everything that was important to him.

Do you think that if that man could have looked ahead in time, and seen the ultimate mess his life would be in, he would have ever given in to those first impulses to be unfaithful?

The devil successfully hid the hook so that the real danger would remain unseen.

So the first purpose of the bait is to hid the hook.

The second purpose is to make the hook look attractive.

What's the appeal of illicit sex? Or drugs? Or lying? Or stealing?

It's the promise of some kind of pleasure that makes it look attractive.

This is the same as it was in the Garden of Eden.

The devil's temptation to Eve was basically this: If you do as I say, you'll enjoy being like God.

It's the promise of some kind of pleasure, a benefit, whether physical or psychological.

When temptation targets the mind, we could sum this up in one word: Deception.

The goal is to deceive the mind.

It's a bit like the person who says, "If I close my eyes you can't see me."

You might think, "That's stupid. Who would ever say that?"

People think like that all the time.

They are tempted, and they think, "Nobody will ever know. If I just do this once, God won't even notice. He's too busy running an entire universe to care about what I'm doing."

So that's the emotions and the mind; next is the will.

James 1:14-15 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

The will becomes involved "when desire has conceived".

This is the point where you actually act upon the temptation.

I've taken some time to explain this process, but don't think that it takes forever to happen.

Temptation can turn into sin all in a very brief moment of time.

If temptation manages to deceive the mind, engage the emotions, and activate the will, then the result is sin.

But God has a better plan.

1 Cor 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Nothing will come your way that you can't handle.

And if you resist, the devil will flee from you. (James 4:7)

And once you have come through successfully, you will receive the crown of life.

¹ Brown, Colin (Ed.) *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* Vol 2 p 764

² Brown, Colin (Ed.) *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* Vol 3 p 808

³ Wiersbe, Warren W. *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament* Vol 2 p 342