

The Roots of Sin (James 1:12-16)

The year was 2010, and my son Elijah was turning ten years old. He loved all things science, went on frequent visits to the Newark Science Museum, and was eager to go stare at the night sky as I told tales of how the ship launched that morning would arrive at Pluto when he was in high school. So for his party that year, we hired a birthday party scientist - yes, that's a thing - a scientist who would come and perform as he led the kids through hands-on experiments in physics and chemistry. It would be amazing! It would be unforgettable!

Unfortunately, on the day of the party, it would also be a day that the scientist caught some sort of bug and completely fell off the radar. No call, no warning. There's my son in his lab coat, beakers in hand, enjoying fun with his friends and casting looks out the window because there's no scientist to be found.

I've done more than a few DIY science experiments in school, so I rushed out and gathered together ingredients. Before you knew it, there were hands elbow deep in bowls full of cornstarch and food dye while I riffed on about pressure resistance and fluid viscosity.

For the big show-stopper, a dozen or so kids gathered in the backyard, ringed around 5 or 6 two-liter bottles. There I am, sagely describing an impending chemical reaction that is soon to occur between two seemingly inert and stable substances. Eyes peered in closely as we dropped in six full packets of Mentos. Jaws dropped open as geysers erupted a full nine feet into the air. The gasps and cheers quickly changed into squeals and laughter as a couple of the

bottles tipped over sideways from the velocity, jetting soda foam around everywhere and splashing on a fair number of the bystanders.

I would wager that to this day, every single one of those children can tell you what happens when you drop Mentos into a bottle of Diet Dr. Pepper.

In today's passage, the apostle James is continuing his message to the brothers and sisters who find themselves in new towns, new countries, new environments. In this section, James wants us to grasp important truths regarding temptation. He wants us to understand how indulging temptation provides an energy that rapidly and uncontrollably expands sin far beyond its container and splatters everything around it.

Toward this end, the Apostle makes four points to help us fight temptation, frame out its nature and understand the powerful allure and results. Let's look at them together, you'll find them on the right side of your bulletin so read them along with me as we find James first telling us:

1) The way to endure temptation is Christ-focused love (v12)

Next, in verses 13 and 14, James grounds us in reality by showing how:

2) Temptation is 'common,' 'mundane' - and targets your weak points!

Then he moves on to the particulars in verses 14 and 15 as we learn thirdly:

3) Desire combined with action gives birth to sin

and then James concludes this passage in verse 16 with a show-stopping warning of how:

4) Temptation has the power to actively lead you astray

Let's get to our first of the four points, how:

1) The way to endure temptation is Christ-focused love

Note how James started off with this point, as if he's giving the solution to the problem before he outlines the threat. This is in contrast to how James addressed gaining Godly wisdom and guidance earlier in the chapter. It struck me that this carries some importance for it to be featured up front - and for that reason, it's worth our attention. Let's read verse 12 again - it says:

(read v12)

Enduring temptation is how we are tested, 'a-proved'
and those who are proven receive the crown of life,
which the Lord gives - not because (or not 'only' because) they are "approved"
but more importantly, because they are "those who love Him."

Not 'those whom He loves' - though Christ does certainly love us. Note, the promise and the crown and the approval and the endurance are coming to - once again - coming to "those who love Him."

Pay close attention here, because James is giving us the teacher's manual before we have to take the pop quiz!

Do you want the answers in advance? How to defend against temptation?

It's simple - love Him!

That brings up a couple of questions, such as:

Why should we love the Lord? Okay, fair question. Let's get some answers.

The scriptures tell us plainly:

"Oh, love the Lord, all you His saints!

For the LORD preserves the faithful..." Psalm 31:23

Or how about Psalm 97:

“You who love the LORD - hate evil!

He preserves the souls of His saints,

He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked.” (Ps 97:10)

So if that’s the ‘why’ - what about the ‘How?’

Isn’t that always our question? What must we do?

How about Psalm 116:

“I love the LORD, because He has heard

my voice and my supplications.” (Ps 116:1)

Does the Lord hear your voice?

How about making supplication?

Are we bending that knee, bowing that heart, breaking our stiff neck?

Right there we’ve been given a way we can love the LORD in a practical, daily manner.

How about the words of our LORD Himself:

“If you love Me, keep My commandments.” (John 14:15)

“And this is My commandment:

that you love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:12)

Do you think we can handle that?

Loving and caring for our brothers and sisters?

James brings these thoughts to our attention not just because these are worthy methods for living Godly in Christ Jesus, but also because they have a preserving effect when we face - especially - temptation.

This brings up our first point of application this morning.

It's a bit profound and worth remembering - so make a note of how

(application #1)

A life filled with Christ gives ground to nothing else.

Eyes set on the Lord aren't likely to cast aside to gaze on the froth and fluff of the world.

Legs bent in worship aren't running after sin.

Mouths whispering prayers don't whisper about much else.

The joyful fulfillment we can have every day is sufficient to dissuade us from any foolish distractions. This is why James takes this moment from the outset to remind us how:

A life filled with Christ gives ground to nothing else.

Now that we have the answers to our upcoming pop quiz, James starts to get down to some really rudimentary truths about what we're dealing with. We're talking temptation! In a real way, we're to look at it scientifically - analyze it! Where does it come from? What's its nature? How does it operate? What's its optimum growth medium?

James identifies it for us in our second point on your outline, have a look as we discover that :

2) Temptation is common - mundane! - and targets your weak points

Let's read verses 13 and 14 again.

(read verses 13 and 14)

It's not uncommon for us to imagine ourselves as warriors in some epic battle between forces of good and evil. We read passages such as 2 kings 6 where the servant is shown:

" horses and chariots of fire around Elisha." (2 Ki 6:17)

We read mighty acts of the apostles, we hear of all sorts of moves of God and we find it easy to imagine that it's all about.... Me!

This can be an inroad for a very subtle temptation - that of pride.

Scriptures encourage the right mindset in us - Christ Himself says:

“If anyone desires to be first,

he shall be last of all - and servant of all.” (Mark 9:35)

Our attitude should be that of the “unprofitable servants” of Luke 17:10 - we’ve done that which we were commanded, and we did that little bit poorly.

If we think too highly of ourselves, we’re focusing on the wrong place - and that’s what James is warning. A mighty army arrayed at the walls may be repelled - you see them coming from far off and can prepare. But the spy at the side gate can still bring down the castle.

God is not devising some epic temptation for you to fend aside, as Sir Galahad on a charging steed. James is telling us our threat is a much more common variety. By reminding us that it’s not God who’s dropping temptation-bombs on us, James encourages us to firmly plant our feet on the ground so we’re not knocked on our backsides.

Next, however, we receive a surprising warning about the nature of temptation.

It’s not in full opposition, standing at the gates like that army of knights. It’s not blowing horns and calling you out to the field to wrestle to the death in glorious combat. Two words in verse 14 unlock this understanding for us - let’s read it again:

(read v14)

Our first word is “tempted,” (*periazō*) and Strong’s gives the definition as simply this -
listen closely now -

“ ... to try whether a thing can be done.”

There’s temptation, right there.

“To try whether a thing can be done.”

Can I do this?

Can I cheat on that exam?

Can I fudge that number on this expense report?

Can I drive away from that fender bender?

Can I eat that apple?

‘To try whether a thing can be done.’

The possibility ... well, the possibility is always there!

But temptation’s first draw is when one allows one’s self to consider whether you yourself *can*
do it. Whether you can ‘get away’ with it.

Isaiah 29 takes it right to the heart of the matter:

“Woe to those who seek to hide deep their counsel far from the LORD!

And their works are in the dark -

They say: ‘Who sees us?’

and, ‘Who knows us?’

Surely, you have things turned around.” (Is 29:15-16)

That then is James’ first warning on the nature of temptation - how it’s common and insidious! But then he gives us that next word - “desires.”

That means ‘a strong longing.’ It’s what you really, really want.

Jesus used that word - did you know? He used it in Luke 22:15:

“With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”

Do you perceive the one-two punch that James warns of here?

We can be blind to the fact that we’re being “enticed” - that we’re being called to consider doing something. And that something is going to be a thing which we greatly desire.

Isn’t that always the way?

David saw Bathsheba bathing on the rooftop and what happened?

He desired her.

He saw he could ‘get away’ with it.

James here is cautioning us most strongly to be on guard against that very same, very old, very powerful sin -

- to break the law of God because we think we're unwatched and we'll enjoy the benefit.

What's our application? What's our lesson here? Well, simply put it's this -

(Application 2)

Earthly temptations feed - and breed! - on worldly perceptions.

By worldly, I don't mean the ways of the world or the thoughts of the world, but the everyday life we live in this world. The things we need and the things we want can draw our eyes away from heavenly things. We need to re-focus!

Hide Ephesians 2 v4-6 in your heart -it's meant for us in these moments.

It's meant to remind us of who we were once were - and what we now are!

"But God, who is rich in mercy,

because of His great love with which He loved us,

even when we were dead in trespasses

made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved!)

and raised us up - together! -

and made us sit - together! -

in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.“

When we know that Christ is our provision, when we're satisfied that we are children of God, we won't be seeking to get 'more,' we won't feel we 'deserve' something we haven't received. The true Christian knows we have received something which we did not deserve! That truth, brothers and sisters, is the first great defense against temptation. If we're heavenly-minded, then the things of the world will (dare I say it) “grow strangely dim.” Remembering our state in Christ causes temptations to shrivel and fall away because:

Earthly temptations feed on worldly perceptions

Now that James has made us aware of the more common ways that temptation can approach us, he goes on to caution of the volatile reaction that awaits - you'll see it on your outline, it's our third point today as we see that:

3) Desire combined with action gives birth to sin

Like Mentos and Diet Dr Pepper, like a baking soda volcano at the science fair, the inevitable and certain consequence of applying action to desire is the explosive, uncontrollable birth of sin. Even thinking on it can be enough to bring down your defenses - let's take a moment and go back to the garden of Eden. Before Eve ever bit the apple, before she gave it to her husband, the true cracks in the foundation occurred long before the action was committed. Let me read from Genesis 3:

(read Gen 3: 1-6. Emphasize v6)

The woman “saw” - that word isn’t just related to vision. It’s about understanding.

Comprehension. Eve “considered.” She “regarded.”

She **thought** about it.

What then did Eve see? Why, of course, things that she wanted! As James just warned in our last point, temptation targets our desires - and so it is here. What did Eve see?

She saw ‘ a tree **desirable** to make one wise...”

We all know how quickly that episode spun out of control, don’t we?

In the same fashion that we may think “none shall see” and “none shall know,” we are also tempted to say to ourselves: “I can keep a handle on it. I got this under control.” When it starts to spill over the edges - as it always will - what then?

A Christian should see the loving hand of the Father arranging events to rebuke and chastise. When our schemes come apart, we should take that opportunity to stop and realize how God is moving to correct our path! But - if we’re stubborn, if we harden our hearts, God may well allow us to run with enough rope to hang ourselves. God promises to do what’s best for the glory of His Name and the good of those who are called, but that doesn’t mean it’s always going to be sunshine and rainbows - especially when a saint goes slipping!

King David is a fine example. A nation’s leader about to get caught out in adultery!

First David tries to get the husband to cover it, then entices the man to drunkenness - and still fails in his efforts. Finally, he plots the Uriah's death, taking others along to the grave with him - and don't miss how serial murder is brushed aside as collateral damage. At last, David he thinks he's covered his tracks.

But sin isn't done - oh, no, brother, it's hardly gotten its footing yet. What does verse 15 tell us? Sin must be fully grown!

In King David's case, it grew into a rebellion and civil war with his own son, Absalom. Who was Absalom's chief advisor? Why, none other than Bathsheba's grandfather, Ahithophel.

One temptation, combined with action, splashed and splattered its way throughout the royal palace and the nation of Israel. Sin! It consumed one of David's best and most honorable field men. Sin caused the king's military commander to lose the integrity and faith of his men by sending them off to die in a fruitless battle. Sin! It caused David's son Absalom to seek his father's throne. Sin caused David's best counselor to defect, leaving David flailing and directionless as he faced wars within and without. Sin took the beloved son of the King and left him hanging by his hair in a tree with three spears thrust through his heart.

Years and years of blood and war and death. And why?

*"... from the roof, (David) **saw** ... a woman bathing."* (2 Sam 11:3)

Do you see? Considering sin *is* sinning!

James pulls no punches as he warns us all:

"...Sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."

So how then do we take heed of James' words? How do we respond to this warning? Just as our first application encouraged a Christ-filled life, we now take a similar approach with our third point of application, and it's this:

A mind filled with Christ won't give way to temptation.

The Apostle Peter concurs - listen to what he says,

"Gird up the loins of your mind!

Be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you

at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

as obedient children,

not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance,

but, as He who calls you is holy,

you also be holy in all your conduct..." (1 Peter 1:13-15)

Focus your mind on Christ - focus on the grace we have been given, thinking on the soon revelation of the Lord, recalling to mind our former conduct, and notice there that phrase in the middle - did you catch it? -

"...as obedient children..."

... placed there to remind us that we are the children of our Father.

As Pastor Pat showed us just last week, we should seek to imitate him in holiness.

What do we think of? How do we start? Make a note of Philippians 4:8:

*"whatever things are true,
whatever things are noble,
whatever things are just,
whatever things are pure,
whatever things are lovely,
whatever things are of good report,
if there is any virtue,
if there is anything praiseworthy -
meditate on **these things**."*

Let me illustrate with a story.

A young man falls in love with a young lady - and she with him.

He wakes every morning and looks forward to that time when he will be in her company once again.

She sends notes and messages during his day that cheer his heart.

The tasks of the day speed by and they think of ways they can please one another, express love for each other, and plan for a future. Being with one another is the most important thing in their world. They have eyes for no other.

In a similar way, when we look - when we regard, and 'consider' - those great gifts of love and mercy which the Lord has given us, our love towards God is renewed in return. This is a love which inoculates and enervates us. This is why

A mind filled with Christ won't give way to temptation.

This brings us to a quick and final warning in our passage in verse 16, look on your bulletin as we see that:

4) James warns we can be led astray

We'll want to take a fast but important look at this verse, so follow along with me as I read it once again:

(read v16)

This word, “deceived” - here’s the important part -

this is a verb that means “to lead away from a path.”

And this verb is in the passive tense, which means it happens **to** you.

In this one parting shot, James tells of our peril.

Recognize that there are agents and agencies that are actively seeking to pull you off the path - from without and from within.

To say “Do not be deceived” seems to say

“use your mind to consider something slowly and wisely, so you don’t make a bad decision.”

But James is shouting!

“Don’t let anything lure you off the path!!”

“Keep your heart with all diligence!” (Prov 4:23)

The Reverend Ralph Wardlaw had this to say in 1869 about it - you’ll find it on the right side of your bulletin in blue, he says and I quote:

“Let us be assured, that

the most effectual way to exclude the temptations of the enemy without,

is to watch the spirit and movements of the enemy within.

It is better for us to be jealous (meaning wary and watchful) of ourselves

than to be jealous even of the great Tempter. ”

(end quote)

This is not a unique or uncommon idea, but rather instead we find this all throughout the New Testament:

'take heed no one deceives you' (Mt 24:4),

'Do not be deceived - neither fornicators or idolators (etc) will inherit the kingdom of God' (1 Cor 6:9-10)

"Evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." (2 Tim 3:13)

Many more such passages reiterate and reinforce just how great a concern it was for Christ and the Apostles - a concern that we take care regarding anything that would lead us astray.

As a final point, let me ask you this question -

are you on the path?

Is your life filled with Christ?

Are your thoughts dwelling on Him? Or have you been led astray?

Led astray by temptation, led astray by anger, led astray by envy?

Are you flailing about under the circumstance of your sins?

Are you frantically plastering over the cracks in your facade?

I quote again from Reverend Wardlaw:

*“Ponder seriously the certain consequences of unrepented and unforgiven sin:
and - by immediate recourse to the Cross,
and to the blood there shed for the remission of sins -
shun the fearful end which otherwise awaits you!”*

Give up your fight and confess your sins to Christ.

Receive forgiveness which Christ purchased for you, for this very moment.

A renewed heart and mind await you - come to the Cross!

(prayer)