

Have We Trials and Temptations

Sermon 3 in the James Series

James 1:12-15

Intro:

Last week we looked at verses 2-12.

We didn't deal with them exhaustively, for their themes will come up again.

We saw the nature of God contrasted with the nature of the natural man.

- Man is changeable and fickle.
- Man is tossed to and fro.
- Man is often double-minded and unstable.

God is just the opposite

- God is simple – he does not change.
- He works all things according to His purpose (which often remains a mystery to us – so we accept it by faith).
- God is not unstable or double-minded.

We are exhorted to believe God and trust in Him fully.

Ask Him for wisdom, and believe that He has given it IN HIS WORD and will give it through a variety of His providential dealings.

We then saw the contrast between rich and poor.

The poor brother
The lowly brother
HE has reason TO REJOICE.

He is a child of the King.
He may be despised by the world – but he is loved by his heavenly father.
His best things are STILL TO COME.

What about the rich.

The rich lost man has it as good as he ever will have it for all eternity.

The rich Christian man has no reason to be proud.
He will be like to poor man in his death.
Whatever he has accumulated will be given to others.

We come into this world naked – and we leave the same way.
Whatever material possessions we gain during our 80-90 years is not going to eternity with us.

James is not telling us that God loves His poor children more than His richer children.

What he is doing is warning us against the specific trials that so easily befall us in whichever camp we are in.

The poor are tempted to discouragement – and despair. He needs to be ENCOURAGED!

The rich brothers are tempted to pride – He needs to be reminded to be HUMBLE.

There is more that could be said about rich and poor – and more that James WILL say regarding that issue – but that is his main point in chapter 1.

Now we come to verse 12 – which we began to open up last week.

This is a transitional verse.

It ties together the thoughts of 2-11 and then leads us into verses 13-18.

I. The Difference between Trials and Temptations – 12-13a

A. Trials and Temptations are forms of the same word

The word “trial” in v. 12 – and “trials” in v. 2 are the noun form.
The verb form of the same word rendered “tempted” is found in 4times in verses 13 and 14.

Context is key – are we talking about trials and testings or are we talking about temptations to sin?

They are forms of the same word, but it is proper, in English to use trials, tests and temptations – as these words have different connotations – and context dictates that we distinguish.

Good Theology dictates that we distinguish between them.

B. It is not a sin to be tempted.

Our Lord was tempted (same word as the verb form) in the wilderness.

However, mark this.

With every trial or every testing – there is the OPPORTUNITY for us to sin.

It is vital that we face trials properly – or fall into temptation – which brings the progression James mentions in verses 14-15.

C. Trials and Testings come from, but not Temptation 13a

God tests us – but He never leads us to sin.
It is a great wickedness to blame God for our sin.

III. Abraham

Was the Lord trying to cause Abraham to sin when he told him to offer Isaac on the altar?

Heb. 11:17 – uses this same word -- *pie-ra-zo*
“When *he was tried*, offered up Isaac”

God was TESTING his faith.
This is common OT language.

Satan is called the Great Tempter.
And often we are told Israel TEMPTED GOD!

III. Israel -- Judges 2:16-22

So we see the reason that Israel was not able to completely drive out the Caananites.

They were a TEST for Israel – and we know – more often than not – Israel failed the test as they broke covenant faithfulness – and turned to idolatry.

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II. The Crown of Life -- 12b

No one has ever been able to make a nice, tidy and neat outline out of the Book of James – and I don't expect to be the first. It's not even important that we do so, so let's backtrack to verse 12.

We say CROWN and we think of a king's crown of gold.

James readers would have thought of the garland presented to the winning athletes at Olympic-style games.

THE OLYMPICS as we know them were banned by the Roman government at this time.

But they still had athletic competitions – and Paul alludes to this same terminology – as does John in Rev. 2:10 to the persecuted church in **Smyrna**.

*¹⁰ Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, **that you may be tested**, and you will have tribulation ten days. **Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.***

And to the church in **Philadelphia**

*¹⁰ Because **you have kept My command to persevere**, I also will keep you **from the hour of trial** which shall come upon the whole world, to **test those who dwell on the earth.** ¹¹ Behold I am coming quickly! **Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.***

Paul talks about this same “crown”.

1 Cor. 9:24-25 -- *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable **crown**, but we for an imperishable **crown**.*

2 Timothy 2:5 -- *And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not **crowned** unless he competes according to the rules.*

2 Timothy 4:8 -- *Finally, there is laid up for me the **crown** of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

Put simply, the crown of life is the REWARD we receive from God for our perseverance in this life.

AND WE MUST PERSEVERE.

BUT – our perseverance does not depend on us.

James 1:18

He is the AUTHOR of our salvation.

He accomplished it through the means of HIS WORD.

And He is the one who produces FRUIT in us.

And every Christian is a fruit-bearer.

No fruit – then the tree has not been planted by God.

III. Don't be surprised When Trials Come -- 1 Peter 4:12-19

A. A Mark of a Christian, is the Fact HE DOES Face Trials.

We are strangers here –

We are pilgrims here –

We are aliens here –

That's a predominate theme in Peter – and echoes James description of his hearers being “in the Dispersion”.

One day, everything we see will be gone – and God will make for Himself a New Heaven and a New Earth – out of the stuff that already exists – but purified with fire.

You and I ought not be surprised that WE are being purified in the fire of “trials”.

And this is not exactly the doctrine of “Chastisement”.

Hebrews 12 teaches us that sinning Christians – that are true Christians – will ALWAYS be chastised by their Father in Heaven.

But, Peter is talking about trials that come upon us – not for anything we have done wrong – but simply because we belong to God.

Don't think it strange.

Don't be surprised.

Trials are a part of the Christian experience.

Because of the natural ANTIPATHY the world has toward God. He calls it “partaking of Christ's Sufferings”.

Christ told us not to think it strange – because if they hated him – they will also hate you. Did they hate Christ? How did they treat Him? Should we expect anything different?

B. Trials bring their own Blessing v. 13-14

1. Sharing in Christ's suffering means we will share in His glory – v. 13.

It is a word of comfort to persecuted Christians.

Do you feel the persecution?
Do you feel the animosity?
Do you know the reality of the trial?

Rest assured – as real as those things are – so shall be the glory that is yet to be revealed for those who are loved by God.

And the promise is not ONLY for the future.

There is a present reality and blessing for those who are persecuted.

2. You are blessed – v. 14

-- the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.
In the OT it was represented by the shekinah glory.
In the NT it is represented by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Peter brings BOTH these ideas together for the New Covenant believer.

C. Receiving the Natural Recompense that comes from Sin is not “a Trial” -- v. 15

There is a law of sowing and reaping.
Reaping the natural consequences our actions does not qualify as a trial.

Peter mentions 4 particular categories

Peter may be using actual accusations made against his readers.

Murderer – we know the early Romans accused the Christians of cannibalism – eating flesh and drinking blood – because they observed the Lord's Supper.

Thief – because the Christian community did share with one another, and none of them were lacking, even in the lowest classes among them, it would be easy to accuse them of theft.

Evil-Doer – Christians often had to meet in secret, and we know that all kinds of rumors were spread about them. Nero, later, even blamed the Christians for starting the fires in Rome – and history tells us that Christians were often blamed for plagues, and famines, etc.

Meddler (busybody) – Again, it is speculation, but also human nature – which is evil and sinful – and does not change from society to society or from age to age.

“You Christians just want to CONTROL people.”

The only reason you are against abortion is because you want to control women’s bodies!

The reason you are against pre-marital sex, is because you want to make sure nobody is having a good time.

And the list goes on and on and on.

You’ve heard the charges.

And they are not new.

It is very possible that this is exactly what Peter was talking about.

IV. The Source of Temptations 13b-15

A. God’s Nature contrasted with Man’s Nature 13b

Trials come to us from the hand of God.

Generally, trials come to us from without.

They are circumstances brought on by others.

They are the regular changeable circumstances of normal life.

They come to us in the forms of sickness or pain.

They come to us by way of heartache.

As a general rule, trials are something we ENDURE, because they are not changeable in our own power.

James brings in GOOD THEOLOGY to combat a practical objection.

God is NOT does not have to fight temptation inwardly.
God has NO compulsion toward evil.
God does not tempt Christians so that we will commit evil.

To blame God for your sin is blasphemy.
It is to charge God with evil.
It is to say that God is not good or really God at all!

The theological reason James gives for not allowing us to BLAME GOD for evil is – given in v. 13b – and we need to hold tenaciously to that truth, lest we become HYPER-CALVINISTS in the wrong way.

God is not the author (creator) of sin in the universe.
God is not the author of OUR sin.

B. The Natural Progression of Sinful “Desire” – v. 14-15

Desire is not always a negative word.
It is a neutral word – and again context dictates its meaning.

In this case, “desire” is VERY negative.
The imagery James uses is powerful.
We are dragged away and enticed by our sinful desires.

This is a very pastoral passage.
James is warning his hearers against something that is all too true.

James is talking about that horrible inclination that you and I still FEEL at times – when we WANT to sin.

1. Conception
2. Birth
3. Full growth
4. Death

There is something inside of us that allows “conception”.
We are not God.
We are not Christ.

But, inside of us, there is still that “desire” that can be good, but can also go so wrong.

If we did not have this, perfection would be possible.
One day, we WILL NOT have this, and we will be perfect.

Our responsibility is to nip sin in the bud at its first sign.

Temptation itself is not a sin.
Temptation is OUTSIDE of ourselves.
But if we feed on “desire” it becomes CONCEIVED.

Martin Luther commenting on this idea said, *“You cannot keep birds from flying over your head but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair”.*

That is good, practical advice.

We often want to blame THE SOURCE of TEMPTATION instead of the real culprit – ourselves.

We need to stop temptations power at the conception level, if we don’t, we will give birth to it.

If we give birth to it – it will become full grown.

The obvious outcome of sin is death.

Not eternal death – for the true Christian.
All of our sins have been paid for by Jesus Christ the Lord.
But – we must never think of sin lightly.

MEDIATION UPON THE CROSS OF CHRIST should be enough for us to remember the price that was paid for our sin.