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**dePolluting Creation**

***“What Temptations May Come”***

**James 1:12-18**

**- Delivered at DHBC on February 22, 2015**

**Introduction**

 He had just buried his beloved father. And within one month, “oh most wicked speed” his mother had married again to his uncle; his father’s brother. In the depths of his mourning, however, he is visited by the ghost of his father, who reveals to him that his uncle – the man who now shares his mother’s bed – had poured a lethal poison into his ear while he slept and murdered him. “O cursed spite!” says Hamlet, “that ever I was born to set it right.” I mean, seriously, Shakespeare makes Jerry Springer look like a Sunday School pageant. But if you know the story, Hamlet doesn’t trust his senses and worries that this ghost of his father may have actually been an evil spirit sent to deceive him. So he hatches a plot to discover the truth, and avenge his father. And in the midst of this great trial he’s going through, Hamlet speaks those famous words, “*To be, or not to be: that is the question. Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them?”* and then he adds, *“To die: to sleep; to sleep: perchance to dream; ay, there’s the rub. For in that sleep of death what dreams may come.”*

 Now, although it’s highly likely that Shakespeare and James, the brother of Jesus, lived at different periods in history; I think if James were to have read Shakespeare’s play – in light of our passage today - he might have rewritten part of Hamlet’s speech, and had him say instead, “*To sin, or not to sin: that is the question.”* And then added, “*For in the depths of the trials of life, what temptations may come!”*

 Now maybe you’ve never been through a trial as epic as Hamlet’s, or maybe you’re going through a trial worse than Hamlet’s at this very moment. But I think all of us would agree that – big or small – trials are almost always the context in which we experience temptations to sin. Hamlet was consumed in the context of this trial, with the temptation to get revenge. For you or I:

* In the context of a bad marriage we may be tempted to walk away and find a “better” spouse.
* Or in the context of a good job, we may be tempted to act unethically in order to climb further up the corporate ladder.
* In the context of a fulfilling dating relationship, we may be tempted to give ourselves in ways that violate our conscience in order to keep that relationship together
* And in the context of church life, we may be tempted to water down, or avoid talking about controversial truths we hold from Scripture, in order to not appear irrelevant or bigoted.

 In our passage this morning, James – writing to exiled Christians scattered among the nations – James wants to help his readers (then and now) to view the various trials they experience rightly. But more than that, he wants to warn us all against the danger of seeking to blame others for our own sinful responses to those trials. And James is going to argue here is that **for the Christian in particular, when we go through trials, one of the first people we can try to blame for our sinful reactions, is God.** You may find that hard to believe, but I assure you / some of us in here know we’ve already done that this morning. Some of us are even doing that right now.

Now maybe – if you’ve been here for the last few weeks – you’re asking yourself, “I thought we were doing a series on Genesis 3!?!” And you’re not wrong. But just like Barton has been saying, we want to really dig into Genesis 3 and go deep into what it has to teach us. All we’re doing this morning, is just jumping off from what Barton preached on the last two weeks about the archetypal sin; the prototypical sin of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, and looking at one of the ways it manifests itself in our lives from another biblical author’s perspective.

But I’ll say this much: although I have no way to prove this, I am convinced that when James wrote this first chapter of his letter, he absolutely had Genesis 3, and the fall of mankind, in mind as he wrote. And as we go through our passage today I think you’ll see it too.

So very simply, as we think about the various trials we face in life and how we respond to them, I want us to look at just three things from our passage this morning: **The context for temptation, the true source of temptation, and our only Hope in temptation.** (x2)

So turn back with me to James chapter one in your bibles and let’s get after this together.

Now before we dig into James, here’s what I need you to do: grab a connect card or an offering envelope in front of you, and stick it in Genesis 3 which on pg. 2 of the pew bible. We’re going to be flipping back there a few times this morning and I really want you to see with me how closely related the two are.

So now, let’s turn to James again and begin by looking, first of all, at,

1. **The context for temptation**

Now I’ve already said, as we began here this morning, that the context in which we most often experience temptation, is within the various trials we face in life. And I hope you also saw from some of the examples I gave, that – broadly speaking - a trial could be *either* something difficult that we need to endure, *or* it could also be something good that we want to maintain/hold on to.

But before James even deals with temptation at all, he want to – first of all -disavow us/free us of the mistake that we can often make, in imagining that the trials we face, and the temptation to sin, are one and the same thing; that there’s no difference between the two. And James wants all who read his letter to see that the trials we face in life are not the thing *causing* us to sin – they’re not! They are merely the *context* in which we experience temptations to sin.// And understanding that can make all the difference for us when we face the trials of life.

So look at vs. 12 with me. James begins here by saying **(READ vs. 12)**. So, from that verse we can see two things:

1. God’s blessing rests on those who persevere under trial – we see that right at the beginning of vs. 12.
2. God has a purpose He wants to achieve in us by giving us the opportunity to persevere.

And if you’re in any doubt of that, you only need to look at the verses just above our passage. Look at what James writes in vs. 2-4 **(READ vs. 2-4).** So James is saying that this perseverance in trials – which he says receives the blessing of God - is something that is actually developed by the testing of our faith that we experience in trials.

Now maybe you’d say, “No thanks God! I’m all good here. Nope! Don’t feel the need to give me any opportunities to grow thank you very much!” But just think about that: how foolish of us to, in one breath, ask God to grow us into maturity and more and more into the image of Christ. And in the next breath, refuse the very means by which He would accomplish that growth.

 That’s like saying you want to have amazing cardiovascular strength but don’t want to experience any of the difficulty of exercise. Or that you want to have this great, thriving marriage; but you don’t; want to invest any of the time and effort it takes to pursue your spouse and build the kind of foundation that a thriving marriage is actually built on.

Whether you’re a Christian or not here this morning, you already know this principle to be true: anything that’s worth achieving in life requires struggle and sacrifice of some kind and to some degree. The question we need to ask ourselves is: Why would we think it would be any different in our Spiritual life?

So trials of life, then, are not meant to be seen an excuse for sinning or the cause of our sin. Rather, they are opportunities from God to grow in our faith and develop this perseverance that brings God’s blessing.

And here’s the first place, now, where I want you to turn back to Genesis 3. Look at vs. 1 with me. Remember here is where the serpent questions Eve about the tree in the middle of the garden – the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – and God’s prohibition from eating its fruit, which is actually back in Genesis 2:16-17. Now Barton already said last week that God’s prohibition had *nothing* to do with the fruit being magical or even poisonous, and *everything* to do with obedience to His commands. What I want to suggest to you is that God’s prohibition to not eat from this tree in the middle of the garden was, in fact, a trial, in the very same sense as James is talking about in our passage this morning; a trial – given by God – that was meant to grow Adam and Eve’s spiritual maturity as they persevered in obedience to God’s commands.

All through Scripture we see this idea of God’s desire to grow His children from Spiritual infancy to full maturity. It’s commonly said by many commentators that, while Adam and Eve were physically mature, they were likely not yet emotionally/experientially mature; they were basically like Tom Hanks in the movie “Big.” So this trial in the garden then, was never meant to cause Adam and Eve to sin, but to be one of the means by which God would mature them spiritually over time.

**Application**

So the point for us today, then, is this: for the Christian, we are not to see the trials we face in life either as punishment from God, or as negative experiences to be avoided at all costs. Trials are not punishment for sin b/c Jesus already took that punishment for us on the cross. And trials are not something to be avoided b/c it is the very means by which God intends to conform us more and more into the image of Christ.

If you’ve ever seen *Evan Almighty* – which is basically the Noah movie where Noah *isn’t* a sociopath trying to murder everyone on board the ark – the character of God (masterfully portrayed by Morgan Freeman) says to Evan’s wife, “If someone asks God to make them more patient, do you think God just zaps them with patience, or do you think He gives them opportunities to become more patient?” // I think that is *exactly* how God wants us to view the trials that come into our lives. And, yeah – sure - we’d *all* like spiritual growth to be like the Matrix films where you can just “plug in” and we just instantaneously know Kung Fu or how to understand Jonathan Edwards. But even apart from the teaching of Scripture, I think we all know that isn’t how growth works. So trials are, in a very real sense, God’s perfect answers to our unsuspecting prayers.

But, look at me. None of that is to say, in *any* way, that many of the trials we go through in life don’t either feel overwhelming, or, are not carried out by evil people whose intent is also absolutely to accomplish evil.

Struggling through years of intense relational conflict with my wife did not feel awesome. Having my hope crushed again and again by unsuccessful attempts to get hired by the FD, felt purposeless many times as my family and I went through it. The beheading of 21 Coptic Christians by ISIS soldiers was an evil act carried out by evil men.

 But the testimony of someone like Joseph alone, who was left for dead and then sold into slavery by his own brothers; who suffered for years under persecution and imprisonment before he saw any light at the end of the tunnel; he should be sufficient proof that even the wicked actions of evil people *do not* take place outside of the providence and sovereignty of God. And that is really the *only* way Joseph could say to his brothers, “Yeah, you absolutely meant evil towards me in what you did. But God also absolutely meant what you did, to accomplish His own good purposes.”

Well, after showing us God’s good purpose in trials, it’s only now that James seeks to address the subject of these temptations that come in the midst of trials. And the key thing that James wants us to understand here about those temptations, is where they actually come from. So it’s here that we’ll look at,

1. **The true source of temptation**

I love the way James begins this whole discussion on temptation to sin in the midst of trials. He begins with an assumption; an assumption that temptations to sin and trials – even though they *are* distinct from one another – they also go together like Brittany Spears and AutoTune. Look at vs. 13 with me. James writes **(READ vs. 13).**  I love that. Not, “*If* temptations happen to come as you’re going through some trial,” No, no, no. *WHEN* they come. WHEN. He doesn’t even present another option.

But right after telling us that these temptations will surely come in trials, the very next thing out of James’ mouth is, “Don’t be trying to blame God for that part.” Look again at vs. 13. He says **(READ vs. 13).**

So James lays out two reasons why we can’t put the blame for our temptations to sin on God:

1. God cannot be tempted by evil. So he’s saying that God in His holy, moral perfection does not, Himself, sin. And he’s also saying that God, in His omniscient, all-knowing character isn’t tricked/fooled in any way by the deceitful nature of sin. So all of this is to say that, first of all, we can’t blame God for our temptations to sin b/c sin is not even a place that God operates out of.
2. God does not tempt anyone. Now when James uses this word “tempt” he always means “tempted to sin.” So the next reason James lays out for why we can’t blame God for our temptations to sin, is that “temptation” (specifically in James’ sense of temptation to sin) is completely contrary to the way God operates. Beyond that, it would also be going completely against God’s good purposes for the trials, which James just laboured to show us.

So James wants to quickly remove the option of blaming God from even being on the menu of choices; he’s saying, “When you seek to understand why it is that we’re tempted to sin in the midst of trials, sorry, but God a’in’t one of the choices bro.”

 But maybe something you’re asking yourself is: Why would James assume we would try to blame God in the first place? Where’s he getting that from? Good question. Go back to Genesis 3 and the archetypal sin of Adam end Eve to see why.

Look at vs. 9 in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve have sinned and God calls out Adam as the representative head of all mankind and says, “Where are you?” Now look at vs. 10. Adam says, **(READ vs. 10-12).** Look closely at that: “The woman **YOU** gave me God. I’m not responsible for my sin, You are! You see, Adam rightly recognizes that the trial is from God – the command not to eat from the tree came directly from Him. But then, Adam makes the fatal mistake of assuming that the temptation to sin has come also from God.

And being the original, prototypical sin, this inclination to blame God has also now been reproduced billions and billions of times since. This is why James is working so hard to help us see that the trials that we go through have a good purpose. And while they may be the *context* in which we experience temptation to sin, we cannot blame either the trial itself, or God, for *causing* us to sin.

Well, ok. If it’s not God and it’s not the trial, then who *is* to blame?

Imagine you take your family out to visit a dairy farm. And being a farm, you lay out very clear instructions, to your kids in particular, to watch where they step. But one minute after you all get into the car later on and begin driving away, your nose quickly gives away the truth that someone wasn’t listening to your pre-farm talk. Then imagine you begin freaking out on your kids and your wife. “C’mon guys! I specifically told you before we got out of the car to be careful where you were stepping! And you’re checking everyone’s shoes to discover the culprit. And when everyone’s shoes are cleared, you start checking the floor mats and car seats. Only to finally discover, after 10 minutes of dumping a Niagra Falls of blame on your family, that *you* are actually the one to blame; your shoes are the poopy ones.

Is the farm to blame for your stink-foot surprise? Should you berate the farmer for not cleaning up after his animals? Or is the farm not merely the context in which you made that error; and the blame is 100% yours?

In vs. 14 of our passage, James now gives us a rare, behind the scenes look at what the true source of our temptation to sin is; and according to James, when the spinning bottle stops it points directly at us. Look at vs. 14 with me. James writes **(READ vs. 14-15).**

Now there’s a lot going on there, but let me try to walk you through this quickly. James says, first of all, in vs. 14 that this is how, “each one” is tempted. Do you know what this actually means in the Greek? It means each one. Everybody. It means you are not the one exception to what James is about to unpack for us.

Next James takes us through this sad progression of events. Look again at **vs. 14.** He says our temptation to sin begins when we are dragged away and enticed by our own evil desire. So the source/ground zero of our temptation to sin is us; it’s our own evil desire. James continues on in **vs. 15** now – look with me there. James tells us that there is appoint when desire conceives and gives birth to a sin-child. Then he says, when that sin child grows up, it also conceives and gives birth to death.

Now this is powerful imagery that James is using to communicate this progression from evil desire to sin to death. It’s interesting: almost every commentator I read on this passage described what James says here in vs. 14 about the way our evil desire entices us and drags us away, as a fishing metaphor; like the way a worm/fly draws out the fish, but conceals the deadly hook inside. You know what the big problem with that is? I am not aware of a single instance where fishing has led to conception of a child. I’m not even sure how that would work out. Instead, I think Tim Keller is right here in seeking dragged away and enticed as sexual imagery; as seduction. I think that makes even more sense when you learn that the word “desire” in the NT is often used to describe fleshly, sexual passions. It also makes way more sense when we start talking about things like conception resulting.

Now this is not to say in any way that James is referring solely to sexual sin here - he isn’t. But the Spirit of God who made us, and inspired James to write these words *knows* that – post puberty – every one of us *gets* what a powerfully motivating force sexual desire is. I mean, isn’t this why we see advertisers using sexual imagery to sell everything from movies to music to hair shampoo. The point James is trying to make is that the temptation to sin is powerful; that it’s pervasive; and that it touches at the very core of how God made us.

And what I want us to do for a minute, is to take this progression that James lays out in vs. 14-15, and set it like an overlay/template over top of Genesis 3. To use Eve’s prototypical temptation in the garden as a case study to see what this looks like.

So turn to back to Genesis 3 again, and look with me at **vs. 6.** Satan has just presented Eve with a proposition, viz. that he has her best interests in mind more than God does, and that she can gain something that God is withholding from her by disobeying the command not to eat the fruit. Now look at what vs. 6 says **(READ vs. 6).**

Now, using James’ progression here, what is it that causes Eve to disobey God and eat the fruit? Is it the prohibition not to eat the fruit? Is it Satan? NO! The Scriptures say that it was Eve’s own desire that seduces her and drags her away from obeying God’s good command. Look again at vs. 6. Eve *saw* that the fruit was good for food and *pleasing to the eye.* That it was *desirable* for gaining wisdom. This is all the same type of seductive language that James is using in our passage. And when Eve’s desire meets with Satan’s doubt-casting proposition, she surrenders herself to her desire at the level of sexual intimacy, and sin is conceived in her heart. We see after this that sin now spreads like wildfire and begins to produce all kinds of children. Adam and Eve run from God and hide themselves. They blame God and each other for their sin. And the apostle Paul tells in Romans 5 that through the sin of Adam and Eve, death entered into the world and spread to all mankind.// Sin had now conceived and given birth to death. Do you see how perfectly James’ progression in our passage lines up with Eve’s temptation in Genesis 3? Just like blaming God, the prototypical pattern has been repeating itself ever since.

**APPLICATION**

So here’s what this means for us today.

1. It needs to be said that temptation to sin, is not sin. In the same way that conception does not take place apart from egg meeting sperm, so sin is not conceived apart from surrendering to our evil desires in the context of the trials we face.
2. Not only does James remove God from the menu of people we can blame, he also removes Satan. There is not one mention of Satan or demons forcing us to sin in James 1, and neither does Genesis 3 tells us that Satan forced Adam and Eve to disobey God. In other words we can’t – with any integrity – ever say “The devil made me do it.” Satan doesn’t make us do anything – he doesn’t have that kind of power. He merely presents us with a variety of options and we willingly choose them ourselves.
3. Remember that the point of trials in our life is to grow us to be more spiritually mature. Is there anyone in here that’s been able to perform with 100% accuracy every task they embark on? No, many times the *way* we learn and grow is by failing and then learning from our mistakes. And if we aren’t willing to take the responsibility for our failings, we will continue to miss out on the benefit that could’ve been gained from the trial.

We’ve seen now that trials are merely the ***context***, and not the cause, of our temptation. And we’ve also seen, that the ***source*** of our temptation is no one but ourselves. The last thing I want us to see is,

1. **Our only Hope in temptation**

Look with me at what James writes in vs. 16 and 17. He says **(READ vs. 16-17)** What are the things that you can really rely on in life? The kind of things that give you stability, no matter what, b/c you can count on *that thing* being there? Maybe it’s a person in your life; maybe it’s an ability that you have or a landmark that you use to navigate by.

In the context of all that James has been saying about trials and temptations, James now want to offer comfort to his readers. He does that, first of all by reminding us that our Father in heaven, the Creator of all things (including the heavenly lights of the sun, moon and stars) is the One Thing/Person who we can truly always rely on as we face those times. We can count on Him to always have our good in mind. We can also count on Him to always be consistently good; so that He’s not supporting us through trials at one time and then the next time saying, “Sorry dude; you’re on your own for this one.” And, look at me, I know sometimes it absolutely feels like He does that. But James’ reminder to us here is not to be deceived – as Adam and Eve were - into thinking that God has changed His disposition towards us. Jesus tells us in Matt. 7:11, “*If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him?”* So the unchangeable character of our Father in heaven is the first place we can find hope in our temptations.

Along with that, James expands on that hope in vs. 18. Look at it with me. He writes, **(READ vs. 18)** So what James is saying is that a part of God’s unchangeable disposition towards us – and the very best of His good and perfect gifts – is to give us new birth through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. “Word of truth” here I see referring to Jesus for two reasons:

1. John 1 tells us that the “Word”/the logos was God; and that this same Word became flesh and dwelt among us. It’s a direct reference to Jesus. And Jesus Himself, in John 14:6, tells us that He came – not to simply *tell* us true things – but that He Himself *was* the Truth.
2. And the apostle Paul tells us in Romans 5 that it is through Jesus obedience to die in our place, that the sin and resulting death that was given birth by Adam and Eve’s disobedience, is redeemed and exchanged for grace; and the result is now life.

It’s a very different picture of birth than the one James gave just two verses ago. The first birth resulted in death; this second birth results in life; for it is brought about by the Giver of all good gifts. And James says the Father brings about that birth through the work of Jesus on our behalf. So, surprise surprise: the Sunday school answer fits this question as well. Jesus is our only hope in temptation.

**Conclusion**

 Now maybe you’re sensing it already. But in the same way that eating McDonalds food gives us an initial feeling of pleasure, but then shortly after leaves us with almost no nutritional value whatsoever (and probably an ache in your gut as well). Just saying, “Jesus is our only hope in temptation” feels and sounds pretty good to us at first. But if we don’t take a minute here to say *how* He is our only hope, then the answer quickly equally void of any spiritual nutrition.

There are innumerable ways that Jesus is our one Hope in temptation, but here are a few that I trust will be helpful:

1. **Jesus is present:** Jesus made many promises to His disciples – and all who would follow Him after them – about His continued presence with us through whatever trials and temptations may come. He said in Matt. 28:20 “I am with you always, even to the very end of the age.” He says in John 14:18 “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” John 12:26 “Where I am, my servant will also be.” And in being present by His Spirit, Jesus promises to be our Protector, our Comforter, and the One who reminds us of His truth. That is one of the ways Jesus is our hope in temptation.
2. **Jesus is sympathetic:** Heb. 4:15 tells us of Jesus, “For we do not have a high Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” This means Jesus understands - first hand - what it feels like to be tempted and how strong the pull is towards sin. That means He’s able to empathize and help us in our own times of temptation.
3. **Jesus is victorious:** The last part of that same verse in Hebrews 4 tells us that, although Jesus was tempted in every way - as we are - that He was also “without sin.” The reason that makes Jesus our only Hope in temptation is that Jesus is the only One who was able to do what Adam and Eve (and everyone since them) could **not** do! And God’s word tells us that the same power that Jesus had to overcome temptation and be victorious, is now available to us when we put our faith in Jesus.
4. **Jesus is beautiful:** If you’ve been at DHBC for any length of time, you’ve heard somebody up here talk about a famous sermon by Thomas Chalmers called “The expulsive power of a superior affection.” Chalmers’ premise in that sermon is that only way to overcome the affections of the heart for one thing, is present the heart with an object of superior beauty. That superior object then “expels” the former object, and takes its place. Like if you’ve always loved Grunge metal, and then someone introduces you to Jimmy Hendrix. Or if you’ve always loved Country music, and then someone introduces you to … pretty much any other genre of music. The message of the bible is that when you truly see Jesus – in all His humble, serving, grace-filled, self-sacrificing beauty – that *no* temptation to *any* earthly thing //could ever compare.

Now maybe you’re here this morning and you’re a Christian; and you’re pretty much in agreement with everything I’ve said. That’s awesome and I’m glad God has revealed to you just how beautiful Jesus is.

But all that being said, my caution to you is to going to be to always remember that the emphasis in the sentence, “Jesus is our only Hope in temptation” is on the Name Jesus. *Jesus* was your only hope before you knew Him, and He is *still* your only Hope in temptation today. It’s very easy to forget where your Hope really lies once you’ve seen some victory over temptation; to start thinking that *you* are actually the one overcoming temptation in your own strength. To start being all, “Nah Jesus. It’s cool. I don’t need your help. I got this one.”

And one of the easiest ways to tell that you’ve started making that fatal switch in your thinking, is in looking at the way you relate to other people who are struggling. Christians have earned a bad rep for themselves over the years as being one of the only communities that shoot their own wounded. And if you’re attitude to other people who are struggling with temptation is one of moral superiority and impatience, instead of compassion and empathy; there’s a strong likelihood that you have forgotten who your only Hope in temptation *actually* is.

Or, maybe you’re here today and you don’t know Jesus in a personal way. Maybe you’re just checking this deal out and a lot of this is sounding pretty crazy to you. One thing I would ask you to consider is this: We all know suffering and trials come into *all* of our lives; that’s just a given. And we all understand what it means to be tempted in different ways within those trials of life, even if you wouldn’t call it “temptation to sin”. In other words – Christian or not – this experience of suffering, trials and temptations in life is common to us all.

But for many people, the trials of life are simply something that must be endured; and if any purpose is seen at all in the trials of life, it often appears to be mostly about, just, **survival**. Just “live to fight another day”; “try not to get jacked-over the same way you did last time” and “Whatever doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.” And there’s a sense in which that’s right; that that is a *part* of what it means to go through trials and overcome temptation.

But what if I told you that you could find purpose in your struggles, that was not about just surviving, but thriving? What if it were possible to find the strength to overcome the temptations that keep interrupting your life again and again and that make you feel powerless? What if I told you that there was a treasure you could have that was of such value and beauty, that it made that relationship, or that car, that vacation or that dream home, look like the stuff that even the Value Village tosses out into the trash bins? Would you be interested to hear a bit more?

That purpose can be found in Jesus alone. That strength can be found in Jesus alone. That treasure that outshines all the others by far //is Jesus and none other. I’d love to talk with you more about how you can know this Jesus; Who brings purpose to our trials and strength to our weaknesses. Come find me, or one of the other pastors afterwards; we’d love to talk with you.

Pray.