

## James 1:12-15 Victory Over Sin and Temptation

People of God, Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week where Christ's journey to resurrection glory travelled through the dark valley of the shadow of death. Our Lord described this journey when he said in our Gospel lesson this morning, *"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."*

Indeed, Jesus did fall into the earth and die. And His death bore much fruit in the world. And You are that fruit. But our Lord's death does not yield a Genetically Modified crop that is seedless. He died to bear fruit that would itself bear fruit, that the whole world would be filled with His glory.

But just as Christ did not bear fruit without suffering and death, neither will you, People of God. Like Jesus you are called to remain steadfast under trial, persevere in faithfulness, resist temptation, and you too will receive the crown of life, as James 1:12 says.

### **TRIAL vs. TEMPTATION**

But James quickly moves from the promise of the crown life to telling us about how sin and temptation prevent us from receiving that crown.

The first thing that is important for us to know is this: that a trial is different than a temptation. The difference between a trial and a temptation is found in the motivation and intention of the Tester.

God tests you in order to show that your faith is genuine. The refiner places the gold in the furnace to purify it and remove the

dross. And so trials are designed by God to reveal in your life that when push comes to shove you will choose to walk in the ways of the Lord.

God's trials are designed by a loving Father whose purpose is to strengthen and purify your faith. He has no intention of making you fail the test. God has no desire to see you destroyed. God does not want to see you shipwreck your faith. God wants what is good for you. He wants you to grow up into maturity. But, as a good Father, he knows that no amount of growth will happen without some trials along the way. Thus the trial is designed for your good.

The Devil, however, he is the Tempter. He does not test you to help you grow. The Devil tempts you in order to destroy you. The Devil plays upon your sin nature, exposes your weakness, deceives you, blinds your mind and does everything in His power to get you to sin and die.

We see this distinction in the Garden of Eden. God gave Adam the command to guard the Garden, and he also gave him the command to not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God of course allowed the Serpent into the Garden in order to allow the testing of Adam to take place. But God's desire and intention was to prove Adam through suffering. God wanted to test Adam's mettle in combat with the Serpent, till he defeated him, thus guarding the Garden and his wife. In this way he would win the crown of life.

But when the Serpent came, his intentions were completely different than God's. The Serpent's intention was to destroy Adam and his posterity. So the Serpent, being craftier than every

other beast of the field, attacked the man through his wife. He deceived the woman, thus achieving his goal of destroying Man, and acquiring dominion of the whole world for himself.

Thus we see the difference between a Trial and a Temptation. God's trial is designed to lead to life, glory, and immortality. While temptation leads to death.

What might this look like in your own life? God's desire is for you to become more like Jesus. Jesus is the Truth. So God will orchestrate trials in your life where you have opportunity to tell the truth, and prove yourself to be trustworthy. Like Christ.

But in that trial, the Devil will work against you in order to get you to tell lies. He tries getting you to think that by telling this lie you are preserving your reputation, or protecting your future investment, or making life easier for yourself. This lie will produce something good in your life. But this leads to death.

God may put people in your life who slander you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely. God designed the test so that you would be more like Jesus and pray for your enemies, and to not retaliate in kind. But the Devil tempts you to unrighteous anger, which explodes in cursing and yelling, and which brings forth death.

God might test your faithfulness to your spouse by allowing a situation where a person who is not your spouse is giving you unsolicited attention. God's desire in that trial is for you to show your faithfulness to your spouse. But the Devil desires to tempt you to destroy your marriage and break apart your family, and go after the other person.

You could be on your phone and an inappropriate ad pops up. God's intention is for you is to scroll right on by and not to entertain lustful thoughts. But the Devil's desire is to flood your mind with images, and play upon your lusts and passions, and get you to sin and destroy your soul.

Or, your husband makes a decision that affects the family. The test is designed by God to help your husband take initiative and responsibility, and it is likewise designed to help the wife become more submissive and supportive.

But the temptation is to incite the wife to rule over her husband, to question his decision-making ability, think of fifty hypothetical reasons why this decision is going to be bad, and so you undermine his authority, you question his leadership, and bring forth strife in your marriage.

You see, trials of various sorts are bound to come, whether you want them to or not. But God gives you these trials so that you might prove your love for Him and live. God wants you to trust and obey and so bear fruit of life and glory in the world. The Devil just wants you to be faithless and sin in order to destroy you.

## **I AM BEING TEMPTED BY GOD**

But since God is sovereign over all things and orchestrates various trials for you, we must be aware of our own sinful response to these trials. And so James says, <sup>13</sup>*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.*

James has to make the point, that God does not tempt anyone. It is our fallen human nature to not take responsibility for our actions, and to instead blame God. When God asked Adam what he had done after eating the Forbidden Fruit, Adam was quick to blame his wife and God, rather than take responsibility. *“It was the woman YOU gave me”* he said.

Do not accuse God of evil, for bringing you a trial. And do not blame God because you failed the test. God is not evil for trying to help you become like His Son Jesus. There is nothing in God that is evil or desires evil, and so there is nothing in God that desires to do evil to you.

The reason you failed the test and succumbed to the temptation is because of your own inward desires.

As James says in v. 14 – *“<sup>14</sup> But each one is tempted when he is drawn away (literally, lured away – it is a fishing metaphor) by his own desires and enticed.”*

You see People of God, there is nothing in God that desires evil, and so he does not tempt you in order to destroy you. But there is something evil in you. Your own natural affections have been corrupted by sin, and so you now desire evil. And so when the trial comes from God, you turn into a temptation because there is something in you that is inclined toward and attracted to sin. And so you are lured by the deceitfulness of your sinful affections.

Instead of praying through the trial, you find opportunity to vent your anger and yell. Instead of scrolling on by that image, you take a few extra seconds to satisfy the lust of the eyes. The

forbidden woman, the forbidden man, that is the bait. But your heart is deceived and easily lured away to go after the bait because there is something in you that wants to be satisfied. You are deceived and lured and enticed by your own desires. Therefore you need to rule over your desires, and not give in to them.

## SINFUL DESIRES

James says that *desire, when it has conceived gives birth to sin and sin when fully grown, or mature, brings forth death*. These new Christians James wrote to coveted power, and so they were lured and enticed to acquire power through murder. Hence sin brings forth death.

Thus the Lord said to Cain, *“Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.”* Cain did not rule over his sinful desires, and that too, when fully grown resulted in murder.

We must understand that our own sinful desires are always going to be there. But the more you give those desires the attention they crave, the more you satisfy them, the stronger those desires become.

It's like the story of the two dogs. One dog is in the light, and one dog is in the darkness. Which dog is going to be stronger? The one you feed more. If you are easily lured away and enticed by sin of whatever kind, and constantly deceived into thinking that giving into that sin will produce something good in our life, then the solution to that problem is to starve that desire and to feed your desire for Christ more.

How does one do that? By looking to Jesus. Jesus was victorious in his trials and received the crown of life because he resisted the allure of sin. He was victorious because he was guided by His love

for God. As James says, *The crown of life is promised to all those who love God.* But Christ's love for God included in it His love for you.

## LOVING GOD

It was fundamentally a battle of loves that helped Jesus endure the temptation in the Garden. It was love that helped Him endure such hostility against Himself and not become fainthearted. It was love which made Him cling to the cross and not come down. It was love that helped Him patiently endure the scoffing of His enemies and not call down legions of angels. It was love that made Him choose joyful obedience in suffering and death, rather than disobedience in fleeing the trial of the cross.

Our Lord sweated great drops of blood as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, beseeching God, *"If it were possible let this cup pass from me. Yet, not my will, but thy will be done."* God did not remove the cup of suffering. Jesus had to drink the whole cup of suffering God prepared for Him, down to the dregs, in order to be glorified.

So Jesus Christ resisted sin to the point of shedding His blood, and chose God's will for Him because His love for God, His love for You, and His love for the world guided His every thought and action.

Love for you, to see you in glory with Him and the Father was his overriding and all-consuming desire that enabled Him to look beyond the suffering of sin to the glory that was to be His afterwards. For in this God is most chiefly glorified.

Thus Jesus said in our Gospel lesson, “*Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour?’ But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.*” Christ’s overriding desire above all things was the glory of God, especially over His own physical desire to not die. But if dying glorifies God, then that is what he came to do.

So establish in your hearts and minds now, People of God, before the trial or temptation comes – “What do I desire above all else?” Do you desire above all things to glorify God? Do you desire to be with Jesus in glory forever? If so, you will be able to withstand sins temptations when they come. You will not seek to be saved from the hour of trial. You will gladly endure suffering in obedience, which promises glory and the crown of life, rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a moment, which will only result in your own spiritual death, and enslavement.

Strengthen your desire for Christ by constantly thinking of Jesus and what he has done for you. Imagine the glory that awaits you in Heaven. Catechize yourself to hate sin so much that you develop an involuntary gag reflex in response to sin. And let that desire for Christ, and hatred for sin guide your response to sin’s temptations.

Our Lord Jesus did this for us, and he thus taught us the way to abide in Him. He resisted temptation to take the easy route to glory, and resisted it even to the point of shedding His blood. And he was able to do this because he fixed His heart and His mind on the objects of His love, and not on the objects of temptation. He loved God with all His mind, and so thought of

God's goodness, and love, and glory, and that strengthened Him to resist the temptations of the Devil.

So as you fall into trials of various kinds, People of God, be mindful of your own heart's desire to choose easy sin which deceives you with promises of life and pleasure, but once conceived, only ever gives birth to death.

Develop a hatred and disgust for sin, and cultivate a love for Jesus. When you are lured and enticed by your own sinful desires, do not focus on satisfying them. You will be lured to your own death when think on sin. There is always a hook attached that lure, with a barb that won't let you get away.

Don't take the bait. Take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Think constantly of Jesus' love for you, and do not entertain for one second the sin which so easily ensnares.

And one helpful way to remember his love for you is to remember the words spoken at the end of the baptismal liturgy.

"For you, little child, Jesus Christ has come, for you he has fought, for you he has suffered. For you he entered the shadow of Gethsemane and the horror of Calvary. For you he uttered the cry, "It is finished!" For you he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, and there he intercedes — for you, little child, even though you do not know it. But in this way the word of the Gospel becomes true. "We love him, because he first loved us."

This is how we have victory over sin and temptation, and remain steadfast under trial and receive the crown of life. May Christ our Lord so grant us this victory, and bring us at last to His glory and love. Amen.