

MONDAY 22 August 2022 "Temptation from God?" (James 1:13-18)

Good Monday morning to you my 'Walking with Jesus' friends,

I wonder today what the biggest temptation will be that you and I will face? Will slick marketing cause you to seriously consider an unnecessary purchase? Will difficult circumstances tempt you to take matters into your own hands and maybe do something radical or illegal? We all face a wide range of temptations every day, and as we're sitting with James, while he's writing his letter to Jewish Jesus followers across the Roman empire about the year 48ad, James is led of the Holy Spirit to address this issue head on. His words might be really helpful to us today, so let's watch as James writes.

"When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil nor does God tempt anyone, but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own desire and enticed." (James 1:13) This was a big deal for Jewish Christians in the first century. *They were continually feeling the effects of injustice, persecution, prejudice and the temptation was always in the back of their minds to lash out in retaliation against those who made life so difficult for them.* Oh, they understood the temptations of the dark kingdom to all types of sin, but this temptation to fight back, to retaliate, to unleash violent anger... could it be that temptation was a God given urge?

James is clear isn't he, my friends? *As followers of Jesus the Holy Spirit living within us has many responsibilities in helping us live God honoring lives.* Jesus had told His disciples when gathered for their last meal before He went to the cross that ***"The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you, My peace I give you...do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid... If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated Me first. If you belonged to this world it would love you as its own. But you do not belong to this world for I have chosen you out of this world."*** (John 14:26,27 & 15:18,19)

James made it clear, didn't he, that temptation to do anything less than God honoring is helpless and futile until it finds some deep desire inside of us with which it connects and then begins to draw us to thoughts or attitudes which then entice us to make wrong choices we will regret? Did you get that? Do you find it true in your life my friends, even when you don't want to do wrong things? Do you see the formula, the process of the drift into danger? The Holy Spirit led James to write very clearly that this dangerous drift is NOT in any way part of God's influence in our lives. In fact, quite the opposite, for James continued: ***"Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death."*** (James 1:15)

Now that my friends is clear, convicting and serious, isn't it? The imagery James uses is very real to us for we all understand conception, birth, growing and death.

I wonder if you see that this path from temptation to death is a step-by-step series of choices, not a sudden crisis. Temptation finds fertile ground in my heart, and it ferments there until an idea for action is conceived, and then, as that idea is nurtured by selfish desire a plan is developed and soon a choice for action and finally action is taken, which because it is something ungodly is sin.

But do you see my friends that this process can be stopped at any point along the way? Have you felt the warning of the Holy Spirit when this deadly process is fermenting in your heart? And if you did not turn away and stop the process but you continued all the way to sin, did you then sense the Holy Spirit of God change His work from WARNING you to CONVICTING you and drawing you to repentance and to turning back to God? Do you see this is a work of deep love from Jesus in your life and mine, making every effort to both give us full freedom but also to help us not follow a path to rebellion against God?

Now look at James' next statement: ***"Don't be deceived my brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father...who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of Truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all He created."*** (James 1:16-18) Do you hear the powerful truth statements in this my friends? That which is perfect and God honoring comes from God our heavenly Father, as He pours out upon us what He knows we need for living life as He has designed it, for His glory. The Jewish Christians reading James' letter would have remembered how God kept their ancestors alive in the desert with a daily Manna delivery falling from heaven and miraculous water provision, sometimes even pouring out of solid rock. They lived day to day by God's faithful provision!

They also would have remembered Malachi, their last Old Testament prophet, calling their ancestors back from their spiritual drift, assuring them that God never changes. Malachi wrote this: ***"I the LORD do not change. Return to Me and I will return to you says the LORD God Almighty."*** (Mal. 3:6,7) For the first century Jewish Christians to whom James was writing, it was always very encouraging when they could link truths about God in their time with such truths about God from their history. Can you and I do that my friends? And do we find great encouragement when God's truths from Biblical history are seen very clearly in our life situations today?

What difference does it make in 2022 for you and I to experience this powerful truth that God never changes? How important to you is it that God is always faithful to His Word, His Promises, His Character, His Purposes and His Plans and His People?

Some years after James wrote his letter another letter was written to these Jewish Christians and we're not exactly sure who the author is, but if you'll look at Hebrews 13:8 it appears the author was reinforcing what James has written: ***"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever."*** Oh, my friends I hope that encourages you today with assurance that God never changes, and He fully understands your situation no matter where you live or how complex life is for you right now!

Can you celebrate this from Psalm 117 as a true reflection of your heart today: ***"Praise the LORD, all you nations, extol Him all you peoples. For great is God's love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Give thanks to the LORD for He is good and His love endures forever."*** (Ps. 117:1-118:1)

Did you also see James' reference to our new birth in Jesus Christ? This is the 'born again' that Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about (John 3) and it happens in us when we trust the TRUTH of God. The truth that Jesus is God the Son and therefore His death on the cross is sufficient to pay the full price for God's forgiveness of my sin and yours and anyone who repents. *As new creations in Christ then, James wanted us to understand we are the first of all that God will redeem and restore one day when all things are made new, and the horrible effects of sin and the fall are finally wiped away from our world.* (Rev. 21)

That's what James was talking about when he wrote: ***"Don't be deceived my brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father...who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of Truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all He created."*** (James 1:16-18) Oh my friends can you hear the smile on James' face as he writes, and can you see the joy in the faces of those first century Jewish Christians as they receive this wonderful assurance of God the Father watching over them and providing for them and especially God's delight in them as His people rooted in His truth. If you've trusted Jesus as your Savior, these words are for you and me today my friends. Celebrate God's faithfulness and His delight in YOU! And here's a song to help you do that...

Today's Scripture is James 1:13-18.