



DON'T KID YOURSELF: TEMPTATION AND OBEDIENCE JAMES 1:13-27

Open to James. Remember, James is talking to folks who are having a rough go. They're suffering trials and in vs 3 we learn that these trials are actually serving as a test of their faith (God testing his people is not unusual - Abraham, Solomon, Israel). But James wants to make it very clear that in testing us, God is never tempting us. "13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one." In testing us, God is placing us in a certain set of circumstances—they may be difficult or even extremely comfortable. Testing is external. But temptation is internal and it happens when, in whatever circumstances I'm in, my desires are drawn to that which is displeasing to God.

14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. So, notice here that temptation is desire inside of me that lures and entices me to take a step towards unrighteousness which leads to sin and death. Temptation is a me problem—a heart problem—a problem with my desires. That's why we sing, "Prone to wander Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love".

A few take-aways here that are important. My sin is never caused by my circumstances (i.e. long day, kids, Coronavirus). People and situations do not determine my behavior, they give what's already in my heart an opportunity to come out. They give me an opportunity to succeed or fail. My sin is never caused by my test. Also, we should note that there is no mention of Satan or demons here. Example of folks who blamed sin on "spiritual warfare". "Devil is ruining my marriage."

Have to heed James warning here: 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Yes, spiritual warfare is a reality, and we're even told to resist the devil in James 4, but folks if there was no longer a devil in the world tomorrow, there would still be to use James language filthiness and rampant wickedness in you.. And as much as we'd like to think that our sin is ultimately caused by something outside of us, it's caused by disordered desires inside of us. We're not called to speculate about the demonic world's relationship to your sin. We're called to put our sin to death. And thankfully God helps us do that, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." (1 Cor. 10:13) God provides the escape and a way to endure temptation without succumbing—demonic or not. So don't be deceived into thinking that your sin and temptation is product of circumstances or Satan and certainly not the work of God—it's us. James draws a hard contrast here...

"17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." I love this imagery here. This is the only time in the Bible God is called the "Father of Lights" and this is a reference to his creating and ordering and sustaining the sun and moon and stars. And yet James says that unlike the stars that are constantly moving and shifting—God never ever changes. This is an attribute of God that theologians refer to as his immutability. It means that God in his nature never changes. Think about this: If he did, it would only be for the worst. It would mean that he wasn't all good previously. Or all knowing. God isn't mean in the OT and loving in

the NT. This is why Hebrews said of Jesus is the same yesterday today and forever and that's why he's the only thing the only person you can build your life on! I'm terrible at construction. The most stable, steadfast people are the ones that build their lives on something that doesn't move—not circumstances, not kids, but God.

An unchanging God who gives us good gifts and no better gift than the one James describes in vs 18—the gift of new birth, “18 Of his own will he brought us forth—this is the language of birth, of parenting—by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” So he brings us forth—he produces new spiritual life and how does he do it, through the Word. And it's the only way he does it. Every single person who has trusted Christ first heard the Word. It was a book or a sermon or a movie. And something happened—a moment or period of time—your will changed. And yet when we come to James we see that there was a will behind your will that brought you forth.

Don't miss this “Of his own will he brought us forth” my salvation is ultimately not the result of my will, but God's gracious will. Great one sentence explanation of why I'm a believer: Because God of his own will brought me forth. To be a Christian is to be someone who was brought forth by someone else's will. “You didn't want will heaven without us.” He could, have but he didn't. The only reason I'll be in heaven is not ultimately because of my will, but because of God's, showing me my sin, producing repentance and faith and leading me safely home. We're brought forth by the sovereign will of God through the Word, and when we are we're called to act and live in a way that is consistent with our new nature. And for the rest of the passage, James is going to offer a variety of exhortations to those who've been brought to life—about how they should live and what their lives should look like:

“19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

Lit. “Hurry up and listen” This is such a timely word for us, because our culture is the exact opposite. We are not quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. We are quick to anger, quick to speak and slow to hear. We see something online about Coronavirus it makes us mad, we post our hot take on it, and then think it through more when we're done. I feel therefore I post. And it's not to advance the righteousness of God—James says anger doesn't do that. The reason we're so quick to get angry and express it is because it feels good. It's therapeutic to take our anger and just let it out. Whether it's verbal or whether you're posting about it. You're gonna give the world a piece of your mind. And the Bible says that's foolish, (Prov 29:11) “A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.” (Prov. 16:32) “Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.”

It is not an overstatement to say that the way you communicate—the things you say—your words—reveal whether or not your faith is genuine. You peak ahead to vs. 26 that's exactly what James says, “If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.” Js. 1:26 This language of bridle (horse headgear) is the language of control and management. The words—the speaking— of those who have been brought to life are controlled, informed, rational, screened. If you don't have control of your words, you demonstrate the worthlessness of your religion. “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” Mt. 12:36-37. It terrifies me to think that in the end, many people's social media accounts will serve as evidence that their religion was worthless. As your pastor I'm pleading with you heed this warning. Be quick to hear. Slow to speak. “We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak.” Are you a good careful listener? Those who've been brought to life listen hard and speak slow. Does your life demonstrate that? In marriage. At work. People who've been given new life listen hard and speak slow, why?

Because they desire righteousness. And as those who desire righteousness they distance themselves from that speech and anything else that would dishonor God, 21 “Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness...not just anger and hasty speaking but all sin—anything that doesn’t conform to the righteousness of Christ. Notice the strong language James uses here. Put away filthiness and rampant wickedness. When tend to think he’s talking to someone else—like murderers and prostitutes and drug dealers—no friends he’s talking about our sin that we’re called to put away. We have such a tendency to minimize it. No one’s perfect, it was just a careless word. We need to call it what it is. There is wickedness in my heart—evil—if you could see everything in my heart I wouldn’t have any friends...so we’re called to put this off...

...and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” We receive the Word which has the power to save us—“save” here meaning not just initial salvation from sin’s penalty but continual freedom over sin’s power. The Word does that. That’s why we preach the Word here—when the Word speaks God speaks. And our job is to receive it. What does that mean? In what may be the most famous passage in the book of James, he gives an answer starting in vs 22...

“22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. 25 But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

So, we have two types of people here: people who are deceived and people who are blessed. And the difference between these two people—the deceived and the blessed—is not that one hears the word and the other doesn’t but that they both hear the word *and only one actually does it.* Whether or not you’re deceived isn’t seen in whether you come and hear the word at church but whether or not you do it when you leave. And the reason James uses the word deceived here is because it is easy to give ourselves spiritual credit for things that we know intellectually. Take sharing the Gospel. We can do a sermon on that, memorizes verses like the Great Commission Acts 1:8, we can do a seminar about apologetics and evangelism, we can break into groups and practice, gives books out, we can pray about it—we can do all of those things and if we don’t actually share the Gospel with unbelievers—we’ve just deceived ourselves. We know about it but we’ve haven’t been about it.

Just thinking in our own context, last year we spend the better part of a year on making disciples—sharing the Gospel—evangelism in your networks. When it comes to making disciples we have heard and heard and heard but have we done? If you’re being brutally honest with yourself, after a year of hearing make disciples, how much different does your life look when it comes to sharing the Gospel with unbelievers? Some of us have truly changed and not simply heard the Word but done it. Others heard the call again and again and said this just isn’t for me.

Again I don’t say this to make anyone feel shame, but to simply warn you as a pastor that there is real danger of hearing without doing and if you hear and hear and do don’t, you’re heart becomes hardened to it and James says you’re deceived. This is strong language—being deceived means I’m not the person I think I am. My self-perception is wrong because I’ve given myself credit morally and spiritually for what I only know intellectually.

James gives us a picture he says that person who hears but doesn’t do is like a guy who looks into a mirror and then forgets what he looks like. In this analogy the mirror is the word—both the Old Testament and its fulfillment in NT in light of Christ’s work and the Gospel—you look intently into it. You see your sin

you see what Christ has called you to—you even have a moment where you consider man this is really an area I could grow—and then I give the benediction you go to lunch and that’s it. You heard, you learned, you have new knowledge, new information, but no new behavior no new conviction. God please don’t let it be us. A people who hear but don’t do.

Don’t let us come Sunday in and Sunday out and learn that every person is created in the image of God, and has intrinsic value, that God shows no partiality, that Christ has redeemed people from all nations, and races, and languages, and that Ps. 82:3-4 “Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. 4 Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked. Isa. 1:17 “learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression...” Prov. 31:8-9, “Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. 9 Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.” If we can hear all those things—hear that God has made all people in his image, hear that he has redeemed people from all races, hear the call to judge righteously and maintain the cause of the oppressed and open our mouths for those who can’t speak—if we can hear all that and it doesn’t translate to opening our mouth and condemning what happened to George Floyd—we are deceived.

If we see a man’s life taken by police brutality and say “Yea, it’s wrong, but if I spoke out against it, it might seem like I’m endorsing a political narrative that I’m against. My conservative friends might think I’m a closet liberal if I condemned that as unjust murder” we’re deceived. And if you can’t call wicked what God calls wicked especially on account of a conflicting political allegiance you are spiritually compromised. You’re heard the Word but you haven’t done it. And I understand—I even thought, “Man what if I say this,” but in light of this text, “What does it say if I don’t?” You’re a hearer of the word, but you’ve failed to be a doer...And I don’t want that for you. I want blessing...

I want you to be like the second man, “the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.” The second man looks into God’s word—and sees everything he isn’t and everything he should be even when it’s hard and unpopular and difficult and uncomfortable and he perseveres. He doesn’t just walk away with new knowledge but new conviction—new resolve. He’s not a hearer who forgets he’s a doer who acts he—she—leaves this room—this livestream in responsive obedience to the word—God honors him by letting him experience the blessing of obedience. This is what it means to receive the Word and this is an inescapable characteristic of true faith.

James gives a final exhortation about our words which we’ve already discussed and we’ll discuss further in an entire sermon three weeks from now in chapter 3, but he ends with this statement that characterizes true religion. 27 “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” I’ll close with two reflections on this statement.

(1) The lives of true Christians will be characterized by caring for the vulnerable. Here James mentions orphans and widows. These are two examples of a specific kind of people that the Bible commands us to care for—the uniquely vulnerable. Saw this in our do justice love mercy series. Orphans, widows, immigrants, poor people. Again, don’t miss how straight forward James is here. We have a tendency to soften the language as if James doesn’t really mean what he’s saying—he says this marks true religion. If our Christianity is not characterized by caring for the vulnerable—it means it’s not true Christianity. A Christianity that is devoid of any care of orphan, widow, poor, immigrant according to James is false Christianity. There is not a way to follow Jesus and punt on this. Caring for the least of these isn’t for Christians who have a big heart it’s for all true Christians. Does your life look like this? The lives of true Christians are marked by care for the vulnerable...

(2) Care for the vulnerable is not the core of true Christianity. Saw a meme about this. “Don’t need the church”. It would be a huge mistake to think that James is giving a holistic summary of Christianity—James is describing necessary expressions of genuine faith. There’s much more to say—after all he doesn’t mention Christ—nothing about the cross, grace, repentance, eternal life. You take his command to care for the weak and keep yourself unstained from the world and you’re not careful, you could read this and get the idea that true Christianity is helping the vulnerable and trying hard not sin. There are a lot of people who think that.

But friends nothing could be further from the truth. Necessary as it is for Christians, caring for the vulnerable isn’t something you have to be a Christian to do. The reality is that there will be scores of good moral people who cared for orphans and widows who will spend eternity apart from Christ—whole buch of them in Matt. 7. And if you place your hope for eternal life in pursuing pure conduct and loving your neighbor you will be with them. Helping the vulnerable is a necessary non-optional expression of genuine faith but is not the core of the Gospel or the center of Christianity.

Why? Because the center of Christianity isn’t the vulnerable, it’s Christ. And the hope of Christianity isn’t that Jesus has come to improve everyone’s earthly circumstances but eternal circumstances. Not to make bad people good but to make dead people alive. To redeem them and save them from their sin. And that doesn’t happen through trying harder or doing better. There’s no amount of moral improvement or acts of kindness we could render that would somehow get our foot into God’s grace.

And that’s why this is such a welcome sigh of relief at the end of a sermon like this. We’ve been called to be doers of the word but our hope doesn’t ultimately lie what we do, but in what’s been done for us. You read James and you hear Do Do Do, and the gospel says that when you don’t, someone else has. And if you don’t get this, you will be crushed by the book of James. Our hope is not that we can perfectly live it out, it’s that someone else did. This is why we praise Jesus. We’re not doers of the word so God will save be saved, we do the Word because we’re compelled by the grace that saved us when we could never do enough. We’re not saved by trying—we’re saved by trusting.