

St Botolph's Church Sunday 22 November 2015. James 1:1-end

Father, may these spoken words be faithful to your written word and lead us to the living Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

The book of James provides us with a practical approach to living out our faith. James doesn't spend a lot of time discussing doctrine, though the book is full of doctrinal concepts. Instead, James concisely proclaims how believers are to respond to various people and situations and in doing so truly demonstrate a superior faith.

Reading the book of James provides us with an opportunity to measure ourselves not on the scale used by the world or even the church. It allows us to measure ourselves based on God's ways. James touches on so many areas of our walk with God. He deals with temptations and hard times. He spends a great deal of time talking about the tongue and how we talk. He speaks of the need to put our faith into action. He deals with the issues of fighting over position within the church. He lays it on the line. He hits the target dead center.

Today we are going to focus on verses 12 to 18 where James deals with temptation and its consequences. The Greek word translated "temptation" in this passage is *peirasmos* which means trial or testing directed towards an end; the end is that when we are tested, we should emerge stronger and purer from the testing. External trials produce opportunities for growth and development in the Christian life. True faith is most often displayed by its reaction to trouble.

In verse twelve, we encounter Old Testament language as James begins to discuss the blessings of those who have stood the test. The Greek word *dokimos* used here for testing has the meaning to be tested and found true and is often used of coins, metals, etc. We've all seen films and cartoons where a person bites a coin to see if it is real or not. Once it is proved that it is real, it would be considered *dokimos*. So a person who is *dokimos* is like metal that is cleansed of all alloys. Character weaknesses are eradicated; they emerge pure and strong.

The believer who passes this test receives a crown of life. The word that is used here for crown is more like a badge or a trophy in modern usage. However, in New Testament times, a winning athlete or someone else being honored for great achievement would literally wear a wreath made from laurel. The crown the Christian receives is a new kind of living which is life in all its fullness; through Jesus Christ we have entered into life in more abundance. James says that if we Christians meet the testings of life in the unwavering faithfulness which Christ can give, life

becomes infinitely more splendid than it ever was before.

So what does James say about the source of this temptation? When temptation assails us and we reach the point of yielding, we often look for a scapegoat. When no one else can be blamed we may even accuse God. But James says in verse 13, no matter what the circumstances, temptation is never from God. The human tendency to blame another is as old as the human race. It began in the Garden of Eden where Adam tried to pass the buck by saying, "It's the woman's fault!" Eve said, "No, it was the serpent!" Adam ultimately blamed God, "You gave me the woman!"

James warns that our personal responsibility cannot be evaded. God may put us to the test, but He will never lead us into sin. He declares that God is a holy God and therefore since he cannot and will not sin he is clearly above temptation. Since he is above temptation it naturally follows that he would not be responsible for his children being drawn into sin. It is completely against his holy nature. In other words, it is absurd for people to blame God when they fall into sin.

It is interesting to note that James does not mention Satan's role in temptation, either. We are specifically told that we fall into sin because of our own sinful desires; God has given us free will. Sin is a choice. We choose whether we will become involved in it or not. We choose to sin or to avoid sin. No one has the power to make us sin. If we sin it is because of our own wrong choices. Moral and spiritual failure come from within, not from without. But what is the result of sin?

James says in verse 15 that death is the ultimate result of sin; but what is the meaning of death here? It obviously cannot mean physical death or we would all be corpses. It can't mean spiritual death, because that contradicts the biblical doctrine of our security to eternal life in Christ. It must mean something like the death of an illusion. We think, "if I could just land that job, or that money, or that car then I would live happily ever after." It's an illusion. Instead of positive results, a negative lifestyle is always the payoff.

When we yield to sin, our dreams die and we end up with worthless tokens, or worse. So James warns in verse 16, "Do not err." Don't believe a lie. This warning points in both directions. Looking back to verse 15 it says "don't be deceived about the source and consequences of sin." Looking forward to verse 17 it says, "don't be deceived about the character of God." It is used here as an introduction to an essential doctrine. God's intention is to bring righteous living into our life. In verse 17 James tells us that God's gifts are "good and perfect," useful, and appropriate to the needs of those who receive them. God cannot possibly be the author of sin when

he is so generous! And his gifts just keep coming! The tense of the word, “cometh down,” indicates an unending succession of gifts.

The source of this abundance is “the Father of lights.” He created the heavenly bodies that “declare his glory.” Yet the sun, according to our perception, rises and sets and changes in relation to the equator with changing days and seasons. The moon drifts through its monthly cycle, and the shadow varies throughout the day. But God is unchanging. He is more wonderful than his great gifts. His promises never vary through the changes and chances of our circumstances. Though temptations attack, we may waver greatly, but as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10 verse 13 “...God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” This promise is the anchor of our faith! So, far from originating temptation, God is actually the initiator of salvation. “He chose to give us birth ...” Sin brought death, but God was unwilling that we should perish. He offers new birth.

James wants us to come away with the understanding that God is not some sort of split personality. God is not the “force” described in the Star Wars films, with both a good and dark side. He is completely Holy. God’s holiness caused God to choose to give us life (as opposed to death and destruction) through His Word. God acts to build the believer rather than to tear the believer down. God’s purpose in saving us is to draw us away from sin. A Holy and Righteous God will never lead us into sin because he knows of its destructive power. His goal is to build us up and bring us towards holiness. To do otherwise would be a gross violation of his own character and nature.

So as we go out into the week ahead, let us remember that we are responsible for our own choices; we can choose to go our own way or we can choose God’s way. In all the detail of our lives how will we choose to live, will we choose to live in God’s strength or will we choose to live in our own strength; will we choose life over death and destruction?

In Jesus Name. Amen.