

JAMES 4 – Don't Blame God!
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We are in a teaching series on the book of James called Wisdom for Everyday Life. Today I'm preaching a sermon on Wisdom about Temptation called Don't Blame God! Our text is James 1:12-18. Verse 12 says:

God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation, because when they pass the test, afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him.

1- Temptation must be endured

James says, Blessed are those who endure temptation, not those who are never tempted or who find temptation easy to conquer. Temptation is one of the various trials James said we all face.

The word endure in the original Greek is hupomeno. It's a compound word – hupo means under and meno means abide. So, endure – hupomeno – means to remain under, to bear bravely. To persevere and not give up. And James says:

2- Enduring temptation will be rewarded

I want to make it perfectly clear up front that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus – not by our works. However – that does not mean that works are not important. Ephesians 2:8-10 says:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Your works don't save you – but after you are saved – there should be good works. There is a work that God created you to do.

What I want you to understand today is this: Our belief leads to salvation – our behavior leads to rewards. Our faith determines our eternal destination – our behavior determines our eternal rewards. Salvation is a result of God's work for us. Rewards are a result of our work for God!

James says that when we endure temptation, we will be approved by God. We will have passed the test and we will be rewarded for it.

The Bible lists 5 crowns that God gives as rewards.
 1 Corinthians 9:25 mentions THE IMPERISHABLE CROWN.

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 mentions THE CROWN OF REJOICING or the SOUL WINNERS CROWN.

2 Timothy 4:7-8 mentions THE CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

1 Peter 5:1-4 mentions THE CROWN OF GLORY.

And then James 1:12 mentions the crown of life, which is given to those who love Jesus so much that they persevere no matter what. They don't give up – they don't give in.

Even when life gets bad - they keep believing that God is good!
 Even when people get hateful - they keep believing that God is love!
 Even when they are treated wrong – they keep believing God is right!
 Even when they are tempted – they stay in faith and obedience!
 Even when they are overlooked – they keep believing God sees and God will reward! Those who keep on keeping on will receive the crown of life.
 That should encourage you to persevere!!

3- Temptation is not from God.

James 1:13 says:

And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, "God is tempting me." God can never be tempted to by evil, and He never tempts anyone else.

I remember counseling a couple after the man had an affair. In our session, he blamed God for allowing him to be tempted. But James clearly shows us that we should never blame God for temptation because God cannot be tempted and God will not tempt any person to sin.

God cannot be tempted to sin and He will not tempt you to sin! And, in fact, not all temptation is from the devil. Yes, Satan is the tempter, but James says that sometimes we are tempted by our own lustful desires that lead us astray.

And notice the progression in James 1:14-15

Temptation comes from our own desires, which lures us away and traps us. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is full-grown, it gives birth to death.

4- Giving in to temptation results in sin and death

In left unchecked, our lustful desires will give birth to sin and sin will grow in us until it kills us. You can see this most clearly in addiction. What starts as one puff, one drink, one hit – can grow to an addiction which is defined as a life-threatening relationship with a substance, experience or person. And what people thought was giving them life eventually kills them! The Bible clearly says that God does not cause people to do evil.

God is not the tempter. God is not the author of evil. There is an evil one who tempts us to sin, but it is not God.

When people give in to temptation and sin – it's their own decision and it results in death. When we give into sin it sets into motion consequences in our lives that we have brought upon ourselves. Let's not blame God. Everything bad that happens is a result of sin – either our own or someone else's or the fact that original sin has affected our entire planet and this world is not as God created it to be.

When God created the world, it was all good. But sin has affected everything in our fallen world. That was man's fault, not God's. Yet, who do we tend to blame for bad things? God.

James attacks this common misbelief in James 1:16-17.

So don't be deceived, my brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

5- Don't Blame a Good God for Bad Things that Happen

James warns us to avoid the common deception that God is not good. He points out that every good thing in our lives comes from God. Psalm 52:1 says:

The goodness of God endures continually.

We must come to the place of realizing that God is good all the time. No matter what circumstances we are currently in, He does not change! So don't be deceived: God is always good! He is so good that He works all things together for our good. He is so good that even what the enemy means to harm us – God turns to good! So don't buy the deception that God is not good, but instead have faith in a good God who never changes.

We choose to believe He is good, even when bad things happen. We choose to trust in His ways, even when we don't understand.

of the greatest things you can count on is that God is good and that never changes! That is because God is immutable. That's a fancy word meaning God cannot change.

Malachi 3:6 says: *I the Lord do not change.* God cannot change because change implies you are getting better or worse, and God can do neither. He is perfect and you cannot improve on perfection. God is so immutable – so unchangeable - that James said even His shadow doesn't turn. Now think about that for a minute.

If I stood outside in the same spot all day long and never moved – my shadow would constantly move. In the early morning when the sun was coming up, I would cast a long shadow to the west. As the day progressed my shadow would shorten until the sun was directly overhead and my shadow directly underneath. As the sun went down in the west, my shadow would grow longer toward the east. Even if I did not move all day long – my shadow would constantly change.

Our God is so awesomely immutable – so unchangeable – that even His shadow does not vary or turn. God never changes. Why is this important to us? Because we need to be able to count on God and if there was the slightest possibility He could change, we would not know what to expect.

James warns us not to fall into that deception, but have faith in a God who never changes. Remember, Jesus is the exact representation of God. He showed us who God really is. And one of the greatest things He showed us is that God is good all the time! Acts 10:38 says:

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

What did Jesus do? He went around doing good.

- He did not go around doing bad – He did good to people.
- He did not go around hurting people – He healed them!
- He did not go around withholding from people – He gave to them!
- He did not go around killing people – He went around raising them from the dead!
- He did not go around causing bad things to happen to people – He went around fixing the problems sin and Satan caused.

He is always the same! What He was millions of ages ago, He is today. What He is today, He will be millions of ages from now.

We may be sure that whatever changes happen in our lives, whatever struggles we may face, whatever victories we may gain... God is the same, yesterday, today and forever!!

6- Temptation is common to all people.

Many people think they have some kind of special temptation that no one else experiences. Nonsense. The enemy will lie to you and try to get you to think that you're worse than everyone else or tempted with things that no one can understand. Untrue!! 1 Corinthians 10:13 says:

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

You have no temptation that is not common to the rest of us. It may take different forms in each of us, but it's really the same. We all have the same 3 temptations. We find them in 1 John 2:16.

For all that is in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — is not of the Father but is of the world.

Every single temptation that any has ever faced or will ever face is in one of these 3 categories.

The lust of the flesh is a craving for physical gratification. That includes every temptation that appeals to our flesh. Everything from drugs to donuts!

The lust of the eyes is a greedy longing for everything we see. You can lust after a person or a car or a certain position in life.

The pride of life is an inflated ego that puts faith in itself rather than God. And it wants all the glory for self – rather than for God or other people.

Every temptation boils down to one of these 3 things. By the way – notice that the Bible says that God provides a way of escape.

...but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

The way of escape is not always an escape *from* temptation! When the text says you will have the power to bear temptation, it means to bear from underneath – to bear up under it – not out from under it! You will never get to the place where you are beyond temptation. The way of escape that God makes is the power to bear temptation. And you must know that God will always make a way of escape. Either to get out of the temptation or to endure the temptation. That's up to His sovereign will. But He always has a way of escape.

That's why James pronounces blessings on those who endure temptation without giving in to it. And by the way – this is important:

7- Temptation is not sin.

Many people get under condemnation because they are tempted to sin. But if you ask them if they gave in to the temptation, they say NO. Well, if you did not give in to the temptation, you did not sin. The fact that James says, Blessed is the man who endures temptation shows that temptation is not sin. Don't feel guilty because you are tempted. The Amplified Version of Hebrews 4:15 says:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin.

Jesus was tempted in every way we are – yet He did not sin. Since He did not sin, temptation cannot be sin!

So, stop feeling condemned because of temptation. Instead, do what the next verse says:

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Being tempted is a time of need when we need help! At those times we should run boldly to the throne of grace to find mercy and grace to keep us from sinning! James says that the crown of life is given to those who love God.

This describes the correct motive for resisting temptation. Our motive must be love for God. The passion of sinful temptation can only be overcome by a greater passion – a passion for relationship with God and a passion to glorify and honor God with your life.

Some people try to resist temptation with the fear of man or the fear of being found out or the fear of punishment. But the key to overcoming temptation is loving your God more than you love your sin.

That brings us to the last verse we are studying today - James 1:18.

He chose to give birth to us through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created.

James continues the theme of the generous goodness of God by linking it with the gift of new birth for believers. James said that God chose to give us new birth so that we could become new creations in Christ. James understood that the gift of salvation was given by God, and not earned by the work or obedience of man. It was His choice to love us and save us by His grace and mercy.

And how did He give us this new life? By the word of truth. As 1 Peter 1:23 says:

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

No one is saved without hearing the truth of God's word – the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross!

In the previous verses James told us what the lust of man brings forth: sin and death. Here he tells us what the will of our good God brings: salvation to us. And God saved us that we might be the firstfruits of His creatures. The figure is taken from the requirement of the Jewish law that the first-born of people and cattle, and the first growth of fruits and grain should be consecrated to the Lord and given to God.

James is saying that Christians, like first-fruits, should be consecrated to God. It's like the tithe is called a firstfruit in the Bible – it is consecrated because it belongs to God.

In the Old Testament, the firstfruits that were given to God not only had to be the first, but the best of the crop. That meant firstfruits have a place of special honor. So, James is saying that God chose to save us by His word so that we should receive the greatest honor of all the things that He has created. In fact, the Amplified Version translates it like this:

And it was of His own [free] will that He gave us birth [as sons] by [His] Word of Truth, so that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures [a sample of what He created to be consecrated to Himself].

The New Living Translation says that God chose us so that we, out of all creation, became His prized possession.

Hallelujah!

This is good news!

God chose us!

God saved us by His word of truth!

God gave us a special place of honor in all His creation! 1 Peter 2:9-10 says:

You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

That is who you are in Christ!

You are chosen! You are royalty! You are righteous!

You are one of God's special people.

And you have the distinct privilege of proclaiming the praises of God!

Can you stand to your feet and do what you are called to do – proclaim the praises of God! Praise Him because:

We once were not a people – now we are the people of God!

We once did not have mercy – now we have mercy!

We once were lost – now we are saved!

We once were blind – now we see!

We once had nothing to praise about – now we praise God in all things at all times because of His goodness and mercy to us!

So, when we are tempted, we will praise God instead of blaming God!

We will endure instead of giving in or giving up!

We love God too much to choose sin over Him.

So, praise Him for the crown of life He promised to them that love Him!!