

## **Introduction**

I am not known as a fisherman, but I am aware that among the options of baits available for fishing, the variety includes live and artificial. Perhaps the most basic among the live options are worms, crickets, and minnows. For trout up in mountain streams there is corn. Then there are gobs of options when it comes to artificial lures. But one thing all fishing lures have in common is a hook. Some have one, and some have many. But they all have at least one hook. Because the objective in fishing is to catch a fish. If you are going to use a pole and reel in a fish, you have got to have a hook to snag it with. The other factor is attractiveness. Will you get the attention of the fish so it will take a bite? I do not know if James was a fisherman, but Nazareth was only about 14 miles from the Sea of Galilee where fishing was a major way of life. Clearly he had some knowledge because he used fishing terms when he came to speak about temptation. That is what we are going to be considering this morning.

[Read Text and Pray]

While in the midst of trial, temptation can become especially acute. Trials themselves often involve the temptation to do what Job's wife suggested he do: "curse God and die." So in the context of discussing trials in which God puts us to the test, James moves to speak to the issue of the character of God. If God can put us to the test, can we say that God is truly good? Can we be sure that he really desires what is good for us—especially if trials are an occasion of temptation? What must we think of God as we think about trials?

James has two answers to these questions. First, he demonstrates that God may put us to the test but he will never tempt us to sin. Second, He explains that God is unchanging and gives only what is good and perfect. In between each of these answers, James warns us not to be deceived. These are extremely important matters, and an accurate understanding of the character of God is at stake. We need to be careful here. So I am going to devote an entire sermon to each of these two points.

This morning we are going to explore what James says about the relationship of God to the human experience of temptation. His message when it comes to the temptation to sin is this: Don't blame God! Don't blame God for your temptation. Rather see where temptation actually comes from. Understand how it works and what are its effects when it results in sin.

Human beings love to play the blame game. It is rooted in pride. By nature we are deceived to think highly of ourselves. We are not the reason. We are not to blame. It really is someone's else's fault. Truth be told, each of us knows we are better than everybody else. So if there is a stumble, if there is a fall, if there is an unwanted outcome, someone else really is to blame. Such a mindset is inherent to the human corruption that characterizes us from the moment of the Fall. In the garden God confronted Adam in regard to his disobedience. He asked, "Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man's first two words were, "The woman." He said, "The woman whom YOU GAVE TO BE WITH ME, she gave me fruit of the tree and I ate." The Lord turned then to the woman and spoke: "What is this you have done?" Her first two words were, "The serpent." She said, "The serpent deceived me and I ate."

Human beings have followed the example of Adam and Eve down through the ages. We have to blame somebody. It is someone else's fault. "I can't help it," we say. Ultimately, we reason like Adam and say it is God's fault.

James says, "not so fast my friend." Do not be deceived. Do not blame God for your temptation to sin. That is the main point of James 1:13-15. "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God.'" At issue here is the matter of temptation to sin, to break God's law. God's commands test our faith. Will we obey? But temptation is the draw away from God to disobey him, to do what is wrong, disobedient, disloyal, immoral, iniquitous, and evil. Temptation is the lure to eat the forbidden fruit or to refuse to work and keep the garden, to refuse to do what God commands.

Temptation is common to man. We cannot escape being tempted. But where does the temptation come from? One thing of which to be sure is it does not come from God. "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God.'" Do NOT BLAME GOD FOR YOUR TEMPTATION TO SIN. And there are two reasons. First, do not blame God because of who he is. Second, do not blame God because of who you are. That is where we are going this morning.

First, do not blame God because of . . .

### **I. Who God Is.**

A. Who is God? He is the creator. He is the only eternal being. He is the spring from which all things come forth. Since everything else has a maker, we want to ask, "Well, then, who made God?" The Bible answers, "God is not made. He is immortal." Isaiah 40:28 asks, "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the EVERLASTING God, the Creator of the ends of the earth." He is without beginning. Everything else that exists has its being and origin because God gives it. However, He is unmade. He simply is. And he is holy, holy, holy. He is set apart. He transcends what he has made. He depends on no one and no thing for anything. But He is also set apart from sin. He is set apart from evil, from darkness and wrong. Righteousness, justice, and truth are the foundation of his throne. He does no wrong nor does he want to do wrong. The prophet Habakkuk tells us that God's eyes are too pure to approve of evil and CANNOT be favorable to wickedness.

The Bible as a whole reflects what James declares here. God cannot be tempted with evil. In his holiness, God is like teflon to sin. No enticement to evil can stick. It cannot get a hold. Evil has no lure for God. It is repulsive not enticing. Think of that food you dislike. If that was all there was to eat, you could lose that weight in a hurry because it has no appeal to you. That is sin to God. He hates sin and wickedness. Everything that is unclean is unattractive to God. It has no appeal to him whatsoever. He is un-temptable. Hebrews 7:26 says of Jesus, he is "holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens." As a human he was tempted. He was enticed. The lure was set before him, but it had no effect. In all respects he was tempted as we are, yet without sin. His delight was to do the will of the Father. Undaunted therefore, he went to the cross. Its shame and its pain could not sway Christ away from obedience to the Father. God cannot be tempted with evil. He does not have the taste or the stomach for it. He has the taste and the stomach for righteousness and purity. These are essential aspects of who God is.

B. And because of who God is, he will tempt no one. He will not entice anyone to sin. He has no pleasure in sin, and He has no pleasure in anyone sinning. He has no pleasure even in the punishment of sinners. Ezekiel 33:11 is a quote from the Lord, "As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." The

allowance of sin is certainly a part of the sovereign plan and decree of God. However, it is not a reality that appeals to him.

How unlike all other gods. There is actually no other god besides the Lord, but in our corruption humans have exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and animals. And part of the exchange is sin. The gods made by human minds are made in the image of those minds. Mythological gods, for example, have great and supernatural power, but they do not possess holiness. They are tempted by evil and commit evil against one another and against their human counterparts. They entice humans to immorality of every kind. The one true God is not like that at all. He is pure and clean and with him is no approval of wickedness, no desire for it in himself, and no desire for it in his creatures. On the contrary, what God wants from his people is that they be like him. He wants his people to be holy. Peter exhorts us, "Do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct." So God does not tempt.

What then of Jesus' instruction about prayer and temptation? Did Jesus not teach us to pray and ask the Lord to "lead us not into temptation"? Certainly, he did. And yet he did not prescribe praying that God would not tempt us, only that he would not lead us into temptation, that he would deliver us from circumstances in which temptation might lead us to sin. This teaching corresponds to 1 Corinthians 10:13. "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he WILL NOT LET you to be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide a way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." God does not tempt. God does allow temptations. But God does not allow temptations that are greater than our ability in Christ to withstand. He leads us not into temptations that are guaranteed to make us sin.

Temptation is all around; we cannot avoid temptation in this world. Asking God not to lead us into temptation but to deliver us from evil seeks for him to do exactly what he has promised he will do—provide a way of escape so that we can endure it. He does not tempt but he is Lord over our temptation. Praise God for that!

C. God is glorious. He is worthy of our praise! He is perfect, pure, holy, good, true, just, righteous, and flawless. Praise him for his moral perfection. Seek to be holy in all your conduct as he himself is holy. And flee to him in time of temptation. He is the only one who can deliver you from evil. So when you are being tempted to sin, do not blame God . . . because of who he is. But secondly, do not blame God because of . . .

## **II. Who You Are.**

A. Don't blame God for your temptation. Rather, blame yourself. James says, "each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire." In teaching us not to blame God for our temptations, he gets to the heart of the question, "from where do temptations come or from where does our vulnerability to temptations come?" It comes from within ourselves—our own desires.

1. Our problems start with what we want. We have longings within. As a result of the fall, human beings have been cut off from spiritual life by nature. We do not seek for God. We make substitute gods in our own image. We do no good. We speak evil. We harm others and destroy peace. We reject the truth. We are deceived. Jeremiah 17 says that "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick; who can understand it?" The death in which we live out the corruption of our hearts flows out of sinful desire. Of those now converted, Paul says we "lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind."

Christ came to free us from this condition. We were imprisoned to our corrupt desires. But Christ came into our prison to set prisoners free. By his death he paid our debt. And by his resurrection, those who believe in him are raised with him to walk in newness of life. Sinners, still in that prison this morning, you can be set free! God in Christ provides forgiveness and new life. You must repent of your sin and turn to Christ to trust in and follow him. It is by grace alone, but you can be saved from God's wrath and be brought into his family. Turn to him today!

When a person turns to Christ, he or she becomes a new creature in Christ. New things come; the old is passed away. There is a new heart with godly desires. However, until we are finally changed completely, there remains within us the flesh. And out of this flesh comes sinful desires. Here is where the blame lies for our temptations.

Now, we might ask, "what about the devil?" Is he not a roaring lion seeking someone to devour? Does he not desire to sift us as wheat? Is he not called the tempter (Matthew 4:3)? And did he not tempt Jesus himself? The answer is though Satan is the tempter, we would not have a taste for sin without inward desires for it. And once we have come to Christ, we are set free from the power of Satan over us. He CANNOT MAKE US sin. In Christ, believers die to sin and are made alive to God. We are no longer enslaved. So why do we still sin? Because we still have fleshly desires which wage war with the Spirit. So temptation is not God's fault. It is our own. It starts with our desire. When Adam and Eve sinned, it was not because the devil showed up. It was because they became convinced by the devil's argument that the fruit God had forbidden was desirable. And our vulnerability to temptation at the core is our own because of sinful desires.

B. So now that we have the blame game settled, James is very helpful and practical. Our understanding of the process of temptation is important for being able to endure it. Understanding the process of temptation is part of how God will help us bear up under it. Understanding the process directs us to the way of escape. So let's examine the process and then we will consider the way of escape.

1. The process of temptation consists of several steps. It presupposes sinful desires. Step number one is allurements. "Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire." Human desires lure and entice. Desire is a fleshly hunger to experience, to possess, to acquire, and to achieve. James says these desires lure and entice. The language here is from the realm of fishing and trapping. And when you and I go fishing, we want a lure that will attract the attention of a fish. We want to interest the fish and we want to connect with something inside that fish that will compel the fish to bite. James is saying that thing is already in us. Step one is always in place. Opportunities and incitements from without only occasion the satisfaction of desires we already possess.

2. Step number two is encounter. James moves out of the realm of fishing and into the realm of birthing. He speaks of conception. For conception to happen there must be a meeting of desire with opportunity. It is when the inward desire encounters an opportunity for fulfillment. A hungry fish sees a lure. An angry person sees the offender. A lusting eye beholds its attraction. A covetous heart sees an advertisement. A thief encounters the item of his search. Encounter is when the desire meets up with opportunity for fulfillment.

3. Step number three is decision. It grows out of number two. Decision is a time of wrestling. Deception is the opponent. The opportunity looks so appealing. It promises satisfaction. It promises delight and enjoyment and happiness. For the Christ-follower here the Spirit says, "No!"

Perhaps scriptures are brought to mind which warn of the danger and the need to take the way out that God has provided. A decision will inevitably be made.

4. Step four is disobedience. Lust has conceived and uninterrupted, it gives birth to sin. Sin is the act of disobedience against the holy law of God. The harsh word was spoken. Anger at God for the inconvenience was manifest. Awareness of erotica became a full on stare. The item was taken. Pride was satisfied. The evil thought was embraced. The opportunity for good was forsaken. Sin happened.

5. Step five is death. The outcome of sin is always death. It is death of some sort and usually death of many sorts. Adam and Eve were told when they sinned they would die. They continued to be alive physically but they were dead. They were dead relationally with each other. Their shame involved death to their innocence. And most critically, the God with whom they would walk in the cool of the day was now seen as an adversary. Sin is enmity with God. You become his enemy and in his holiness he is yours. Sin kills. It destroys. It brings forth death. Ultimately it brings forth eternal death, eternal separation from God, and eternal punishment for those who are not in Christ. But even for those who are there is a death of fellowship with the Lord.

B. What James tells us about the process of temptation warns us of its danger and to turn back. It is as the Lord said through Ezekiel, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die?" By pointing us to the sad outcome of temptation and sin, James implicitly indicates that the process should be stopped at whatever stage we are at so as to prevent the final outcome of death. The scriptures in fact prescribe for us a remedy at each stage in the process. It is best not to progress along in the process, but at whatever step you are at, take the way out before it is too late. Let's consider the way out at each step. Here are the nuts and bolts of everyday living as a follower of Jesus Christ.

1. At the step of alluring desire from within, what must Christ's followers do? We acknowledge like Paul that we know that nothing good dwells in me, that is in my flesh. So we make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires (Romans 13:14). It means taking steps to prohibit your flesh from exposure to occasions of enticement from the outside, as much as it depends on you. Avoid certain settings. Avoid certain situations and activities which are likely to involve enticement.

This first step in the process of temptation is a step all about being proactive. Not only should we avoid making provision for the flesh, we should strengthen our resistance. We mainly strengthen ourselves by maintaining a close walk with the Lord and a hearty appetite for his word. We take every thought captive by meditating deeply, richly, and consistently upon the word of God. We need meditation and memorization. We need not only Psalm 119:9 and 11 but also verse 10. Verse 9 says, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word." Verse 11 says, "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." But verse 10 is equally crucial: "With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments." Seek the Lord. Walk with the Lord cultivate a heart which delights in his word. Put on the whole armor in order that you may be able to stand in the evil day.

But the evil day will come.

2. Step two is the step of encounter. Try to avoid them, but instances of encounter will happen every single day. You face a lure on the outside which bears witness with the alluring desire on the

inside. What do you do? Several things. First, run! If you can. 2 Timothy 2:22 says, "Flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart." Run away from sin and run to God's people for help and strength.

Accountability is an important factor in fleeing from sin. Second, pray! Always pray! Matthew 26:41 says, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation." Third, resist. Call upon scripture that counteracts the temptation. Resist with the word as Jesus did as he reasoned against the wiles of the devil.

3. Step three is the step of decision. You must decide to sin or not to sin. If you have progressed to this point, it is the last moment before you give yourself over. Watch for deception. You have been wrestling but not winning to this point. It is because you minimize the sad outcome of sin and you rationalize that it is not that bad. You deserve some revenge or some fun or some pleasure or some freedom. You are but dust after all. All these lies come flooding in. Think of the devil. Think of the fall. Think of the consequences. Listen to the Lord. Listen to his word. Run! Pray! Resist!

4. Step four is the step of disobedience. You have sinned. It is too late. But not really. It is too late to undo the sin but it is not too late to keep one sin from becoming more sin. What should you do? Stop!!! Turn back from further sin. Run! Pray! Resist! Call on other believers! But turn back now!

5. Step five is the step of death. There is nothing you can do about it. Death follows sin. It crushes the heart. It takes vitality and life. But there remains something you should do. Confess. Repent and confess. David knew this reality. In Psalm 32, he said, "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity . . . For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin." Sin kills, but God forgives! He cleanses from all unrighteousness those who will draw near and confess their sin. He removes our transgressions as far as east is from west. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up our wounds.

## **Conclusion**

So don't blame God for your sins. Take ownership of them, where they come from and how they come about. God does not want you to sin. He wants you to be holy. And he does not want you to give in to temptation but to turn back. He has provided the way of escape. So take it! But when you don't—and such instances should be decreasing in your life—remember he is faithful, and he forgives and cleanses from all unrighteousness.

It is all because Jesus died. He was tested in all ways as we are and yet without sin. We have a priest who is able to sympathize with our weakness. So then let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.