

No One to Blame but Yourself



James 1:9-15

The message Kory brought last week is going to serve as the introduction to our verses this morning. You and I are supposed to rejoice when God tests our faith. God brings trials in our lives that test our faith to reveal whether our faith is genuine or not, whether it is saving faith or not. Please remember this; you can't trust a faith that's not been tested. God knows whether your faith is real or not, and He wants you to know what He knows; therefore, He brings trials into your life. The testing of your faith produces steadfastness, and steadfastness ultimately brings you to a place of Christian maturity where you lack nothing that you need to be, who God wants you to be, and to do what God wants you to do. When you get in that situation and you just don't know, and you need some wisdom, just ask God in faith. He will give you the wisdom you need. Listen to what James writes in verse 9-15.

Scripture

"Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits. Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. 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. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."

I want to make sure we're on the same page this morning as we read the book of James. Some people struggle when they read this book because it appears like James changes subjects often. Because James is kind of like a book of wisdom to the early Church who were scattered throughout the Roman Empire, some Bible scholars have compared the book of James to the book of Proverbs, for example, where there are just a few verses about this topic, and a few about that topic, and then a few about this topic, and they are not related at all. Some people believe that now James is switching subjects from trials to talk about rich people and poor people. I do not believe that. I want to make sure you understand that my message this morning is coming from this angle that James is still talking about trials; he's still talking about testing your faith. Honestly, he probably doesn't end this subject until we get to the 18th verse of chapter 1. With that in mind, let's follow this. What are we supposed to do when we get tested? We're supposed to rejoice.

If I can be honest with you, when I was in school, I loved tests. I discovered I was one of the few students in my class who actually loved test. Most of the kids at school didn't like it when a teacher gave a test. I

never understood that...well, I did. The reason students didn't like tests were because they hadn't done their homework. They hadn't read the assignment. They hadn't studied as they should have studied. I'm not bragging, but if you listened in class, read the assignment, studied up on the topic, you loved test day because test day was the day you got to reveal to your teacher that you knew the material they had taught, and that they were an awesome teacher. I gloried, I rejoiced, I was happy when they announced test day. I want to tell you what I loved better than test day. I know you're going to think I'm weird, and I probably am, but what I loved better than test day was the day later when you went back to class and the teacher walked by your desk and put your test paper on your desk and it said 100, or 99, or 98, or 97. Wow! Can I be honest with you? See, I rejoiced in taking test in school, but I took a little pride when I got the result of my test back.

Do you hear that? James is going to switch from telling us to rejoice to telling us to boast. The word, boast, here literally means to take pride in. He tells us if you're poor, if you're in humble circumstances, and you're part of the Church, you need to take pride in your exaltation. If you're rich, you need to take pride in your humbling. I want you to listen to this. Here's what I believe this is teaching. It's teaching that when it comes to the Church, trials, the testing of our saving faith, proving that it's genuine has actually lifted some of us out of our circumstances out there in the world because we were raised on the other side of the tracks, but when we came into the body of Christ, we're not poor anymore. As James is going to tell us in chapter 2, we are rich in faith and we are heirs of the kingdom of God. See, if I'm a poor person and my faith gets tested, and I get the result of my score back, it exalts me. So when I come in here and rub shoulders with you, I'm on equal footing with you. I'm a brother in Christ just like you are. I'm going to take pride in, not what I do, but what Christ did for me. That saving faith is what causes me to react the way I react when my faith gets tested. I'm going to take pride in this fact in 1 Corinthians 1:26-27 where Paul says consider your calling. That means at the point of your calling, brothers, not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many of you were powerful, and not many of you were of noble birth. Just look around. Most of us weren't wise when it

comes to the world, most of us weren't the powerful people in the community, and most of us weren't born into noble families when we were introduced to the gospel. But God chose what is foolish (it's talking about us) in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. Did you hear this? Now hold it; this says not to boast. If we read the rest of this passage, it's going to basically tell us that our salvation wasn't anything we did on our own, but it's been accomplished in Christ, and Christ is our salvation; therefore, when we boast, we don't boast in the flesh; we boast in Christ. So when you face a test and you get exalted, you boast; you take pride, not in you, but in what God has done for you in Christ.

Now, James is going to talk about the other people in the Church, and it's not many. See, the Church had fled Jerusalem and they are now scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Many of them lost their businesses, their farms, and their homes. It didn't affect everyone equally. Circumstances never affect everyone equally; you know that. While the Church was primarily poor, there were those who were rich. What were the rich supposed to do? The rich were supposed to take pride, too, in their test score. If you're a rich person who has come into the Church and your faith gets tested, you pass the test, and you realize you have genuine faith, you're to take pride when you get that score back, but you don't get exalted; you get humbled. Whoa! Can I be honest with you? If you're in this church and you're rich, you are fortunate that you're in the church. Most rich people don't make it. As a matter of fact, the New Testament is going to teach through Jesus Himself that it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich person to enter heaven. That's not good odds. As a matter of fact, when Jesus gave that parable about the rich man who died and went to hell, and the poor man who died and woke up in Abraham's bosom, the context of that was to the Pharisees because the Pharisees were lovers of money.

See, there are some of you that out there, you're on the other side of the county. You are self-sufficient. You've never known what it means to be

poor or what it means to have a need. You check the stock market every day. Most of us don't, but you do. You don't have need. But when you walked into this place, this body, to salvation in Christ, God didn't exalt you; God humbled you. For the first time in your life, you had to admit that you couldn't save yourself. You couldn't bring yourself into a right relationship with God. There was nothing you could do to make yourself right with God. You had to do what the rest of us did, and that is to repent of being a sinner. If you're rich, you take pride, and God humbled you. Out there, you may be exalted, but in here, you're just like the rest of us. That's because God set His covenant love upon you, and in here, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. What God wants us to be rich in is faith. What God wants us to be heirs of is the Kingdom of God.

In verse 12, James is going to give this blessing to the many who gets tried, and remains steadfast. This word, steadfast, persevere, endure, is the picture of the ancient weight-lifter who had reached down, grabbed the weight, and for it to be a lift, he had to lift it up, bring it to his shoulders, raise it over his head, lock his arms and legs, and he had to hold the weight, not moving, before he could release it. When God brings trials into your life to test your faith, it produces in you this ability to remain under that trial, get stronger, and become more mature. You're blessed because it reveals you love God. It's the only reason you do that. It's the only reason you remain under. You have saving faith, you're a new person in Christ, and one day when your life has been tested to completion, you're going to receive the crown of life. I don't think this is a special crown that you're going to wear. It's going to be different from another crown in heaven. This is talking about you receiving eternal life, not because you earned it, but because you put your faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ knowing that faith saves you and because you can trust that faith to get you to heaven, you can trust it to get you through trials. Listen to me. If your faith doesn't get you through a trial, I wouldn't trust it to get me to heaven.

Now, there's a negative side to this. Kory shared last week how the word, test, can also be translated temptation. In verse 13, James isn't starting a new subject. As a matter of fact, we could read verse 12 this way: blessed

is the man who is tempted and stands up under the trials because the man who stands up under temptation, just like trial, will receive the crown of life. James wants to make sure we understand there are some events or circumstances that will happen that God has brought into your life to grow you up and to reveal you have saving faith. He knows you have saving faith, or He knows if you don't have saving faith and He is trying to get your attention through trials. James wants you to know there is a negative side to this. Sometimes the situations you go through don't bring eternal life to you; they bring death to you. When that happens, James wants to make sure you understand that you can't blame God. As a matter of fact, that sums up the title to this sermon. You can't blame anyone but yourself. When you get tempted, there's only one person you have to blame, and that is you. Because the early Church had such a view of the sovereignty of God, they believed God micromanages everything in the universe. James is saying I want you to believe in the sovereignty of God, I want you to believe that God brings trials in your life and here is the purpose of those trials, but when it comes to temptation, don't ever blame God. God doesn't tempt people. Do you know why God doesn't tempt people? It's because it's not in His nature. God's nature cannot be tempted with evil. The way this phrase is constructed, it literally means God is inexperienced with evil. God doesn't personally have dealings with evil. Why? Because He is holy, holy, holy. God is a God of grace, a God of love, a God of mercy, but He is also a God of wrath. Wrath is His holy hatred of sin. He hates sin! He hates evil. Because nothing in His nature can be tempted with evil and sin, He would never use that to tempt you. So when you get in a situation where you're tempted, just know it is not of God. God didn't cause you to be tempted.

But you know that since the beginning of humanity, we've had this tendency to want to blame God for our circumstances. In Genesis chapter 3, God holds Adam accountable for eating the fruit and bringing sin and death into the world. When He comes walking in the cool of the day, Adam is in the bushes. God says, 'Adam, where are you?' Adam says, 'I'm over here in the bushes!' 'What are you doing in the bushes?' 'I'm hiding.' 'Why are you hiding? Did you eat of the tree you weren't supposed to eat of?' 'Yes, I did.' That's not what he said. Do you remember what he said? You

ladies are not going to find this surprising. He says, 'That woman!' I mean, there's only one woman! Eve. It sounds like he's blaming her. No, do you know who he's blaming? 'That woman who *You* gave me told me to take and eat, and I just obeyed her. I did what she wanted me to do! I was trying to be a good husband!' Adam blamed God! What he is really saying is, God, I was doing fine all by myself. I was tending the land. I was taking care of the house. I was going about all my hobbies. Then, one day I woke up and there she was! If You hadn't brought her into my world...doesn't that sound just like a man? See, we find this strange that we can't say God tempted us, because who would believe that. Well, in some form or fashion, we all believe God controls our circumstances. So if we were tempted in that circumstance, then ultimately, it's God's fault that we were tempted. No...no...no. Notice James doesn't say if you are tempted; he says when you are tempted. Just as you're going to be tried, you're going to be tempted.

Let me share some things I've experienced after being your pastor for almost thirty-eight years. I think some of us who believe we are Christians believe that when we get tempted, for some reason, the temptation we face is different. Because we're failing, we're the only one who's ever been tempted to this degree. I'm seeing that more and more. Again, it's an excuse. It is you not accepting what is true. Here is what is true. If you're a Christian and you get tempted, the temptation you're facing is common temptation and you're not the only one who has ever been through what you've been through. Thousands, hundreds of thousand, millions have been tempted like you've been tempted. Do you want a verse? 1 Corinthians 10:12. This chapter is talking about how the things that happened in the Old Testament and written down so we can use as an example. It says, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." When you face a trial, the negative side of that trial could be a temptation, so even when you're passing the test and being exalted, you had better beware. You better be on guard. You could still fall, even as a believer. Look at the next verse, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man." Do you want to argue with Scripture? No. Temptation, all forms of temptation, is common and they happen to numerous other people. Look what God does in temptation, "God is

faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability..." I want you to see this. Even though God doesn't tempt you, God is still sovereign over your life so that He will never let you be tempted beyond what you have the ability to handle. Does that make sense? As a matter of fact, in your temptation, God makes a way of escape. Think about putting this with asking for wisdom. If we need to ask for wisdom in a trial, we sure need to ask for wisdom in a temptation! God wants to show us the way of escape.

Let's look at the next verse in James. Verse 14 says, "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire." It's not Satan. It's not your wife. It's not your kids. It's not your circumstances. When you're tempted, it's nobody's fault but yours. That temptation is not coming to you from without; it's coming from within. See, the nature of God is holy, holy, holy. You and I are not holy, holy, holy. We are not sinners anymore; we are saints of God, but we're saints who still live in a human body that has an unredeemed flesh. That unredeemed flesh has a mind of its own. It's hostile to God. It wants to do its own thing. Surely by now, you know your unredeemed flesh. That's where your temptation comes. Here is when temptation comes to you, your flesh manifesting itself in desire, evil desire, and wrong desire. For example: taking thirst, taking hunger, taking the need of sex, taking the need of work, taking the need of recreation, or taking the need of rest, and then exercising those in an unholy way. That's what your desire is. Your desire lures and entices you to sin. So, it is coming from within you; it's not coming from outside you. Does that make sense?

Now, I love this because I love how picturesque the Bible is. This word, lure, and this word, entice, are right out of Field and Stream magazine in the biblical world. It's a word that was used out of the world of hunting and the world of fishing. We've got some guys in our church who fish, and when they go fishing, they don't just take a rod and reel, and a hook, throw it in the water, and make casts. Do you know what those guys do? They are really unethical. Yeah...they take these things called lures and they put them on the line and cast a lure in the midst of where a fish is minded his own business! The fish has a hunger pang, and when he sees that lure that looks like something he would like to eat, he bites. Whoa! It

bites back. This second word means to bait a trap. Have you ever noticed that the things fishermen fish with in the box are called lures, but if it's the Styrofoam container, we call it bait? You put a lure on a line, or you bait a hook. Get this picture. A fish minding his own business takes the bait, bites the lure, and the moment he realizes he's got it, he takes off with it. He runs and runs as long as the fisherman will let him run. Eventually, the fisherman stops him. Then, he runs as far as he can run the other way. Then, he runs as far as he can run another way, the fisherman reeling him in all the time, but there comes a point somewhere in that battle where the fish knows he's fighting for his life. With everything he's got within him, he fights to get off that hook because though he doesn't know it, if he doesn't get off that hook, he could end up in a frying pan. He could be filleted!

That's what your desire does to you. It lures you, baits you. Oh, we never see the naked hook of alcoholism. We never see the naked hook of adultery. We never see the naked hook of greed. We never see the naked hook of homosexuality. We always get the lure; we always get the bait. Do you know why it's so easy for you to be tempted? It's because your flesh is tempting you! The unredeemed part of you knows you and lures you, and baits the hook because it does not want to be submissive to God. When I was growing, I struggled with some of my friends because their unredeemed flesh made them want to drink Bud Light or Busch, and Michelob, heading to the mountains and grabbing all the gusto they could grab, and wanting this little dog to ride around with you in your car because if you had him and drank the beer he drank, you would get all the girls. I never understood that. I never understood on the night one of my friends under the influence of alcohol had his girlfriend break up with him, and he pulled out a baseball bat out of his Trans-Am and beat up his new Trans-Am! I had another friend who broke both wrists because he tried to fight the corner of McDonald's restaurant, under the influence of alcohol. I thought they were crazy. I couldn't understand it. The reason I couldn't understand it was because I never drank in school. I never had a drink of alcohol in my life. It was not because I was a Christian; it's because my unredeemed flesh has no desire for alcohol, so I can't brag about not drinking. That's why you'll never hear me brag about it because it's just not in me to drink. Therefore, alcohol has never been an allurements, it's never

been a bait, but it's a bait to some of you. I could go down through the list. For some of you, it's that desire of sex, that desire of prestige, that desire of popularity. It lures you; it entices you.

See, you not only need to know the nature of God, you need to know your nature. You need to know the nature of desire, because here is what it says, "Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death." We have this beautiful picture of a Christian who loves God, has saving faith, the trials come and come and come, and wow, he is standing on top, spiritually, of Mount La Conte. He understands God has designed his circumstances to make him strong so that he will be perfect and complete, so that he can fulfill what God wants him to do. Then we have this other picture of what temptation can do. James is trying to say there is a process. See, when you feel that allurements toward alcohol, drugs, premarital sex, adultery, greed, or cheat, I promise you this, it's not going to give you what you desire. It's not going to lead to life, so when you get tempted, prevent a conception. Stop it in its tracks! If you don't, if you entertain it, there will be a conception, and you better pray for a miscarriage. Please don't take this out of context; I'm talking about sin because James is using the analogy of conception and birth, but if there's not a natural miscarriage, you better abort it. You better kill it while it's still in the womb, because if you don't kill it in the womb, it's going to bring forth a baby of sin and it won't stay a baby; it's going to grow into a full grown adult! When it grows to adulthood, it's going to take your life! As a pastor, I can't even tell you how many people don't see what sin is doing to themselves, and they never kill it, never confess it, and never repent of it. James said it will eventually kill you, not just rob you of your physical life, but possibly robbing you of your spirit/soul because this is contrasted with the crown of life. The opposite of the crown of life is eternal death. Can I just warn you as a pastor? At the same time you don't realize what it's doing to you, you won't see what it's going to your spouse, your kids, your friends, and your church. Please, know God, know yourself, and know the evil desires that are within you. You may not face what I face, and I may not face what you face, but we all face temptation. Saving faith causes us to stand and remain standing, because we're going to kill sin before it kills us.