

Last week we began a sermon series on the New Testament letter called James. We learned last week that James was written to a group of Jewish Christians who were struggling with what it meant to remain Jewish and abide by the Jewish laws and also to follow Jesus.

The people that James wrote to were Jewish Christians living outside of Jerusalem and they were being persecuted for their faith. Tradition tells us that the writer of this letter was James, the brother of Jesus, who became an early church leader in Jerusalem after the death of Jesus.

Last week I shared that James jumps around a lot in his letter. We read from the end of chapter one but there was a paragraph earlier in the chapter that I decided that I wanted to back up and examine for today. The reason I wanted to read this portion of James' letter is because I hear people say often the phrase, "Well I guess God is tempting me to see how I respond." James has something to say to anyone who believes that God is in the temptation business.

Read James 1:12-16

Opening scene from "Rent A Kid" and found at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLReHXkXR_E

This opening scene may have reminded us of a scene in the Bible. This opening scene from the movie "Rent A Kid" reminds us of the opening scene in the Bible in terms of the first humans. In the Biblical scene, Adam and Eve are told that they can live in God's Garden and enjoy everything thing that is there.

Adam and Eve are given everything that they could possibly want and all of their needs are satisfied. But there is only one thing they are told by God to stay away from and that is fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. And like the scene we just watched, the temptation to have something that we can't have is just too big.

All of us face temptations in our lives. Some of us when we think about temptations think about those food temptations that we have that we are trying to stay away from. The temptations toward soft drinks and fatty foods that we know we should stay away from. Others of us face much more serious physical temptations. Those temptations of abuse of substances like alcohol and tobacco.

Some of us may be facing temptations which we know deep down if we give into those temptations it could have disastrous results. Those temptations to be unfaithful to one's partner or those temptations to be unfaithful to the friendship of another.

We recently read in worship the story of David and Bathsheba and David's temptation to have a relationship with a woman that was married to another man. We heard of the violence and manipulation that this very powerful King David was willing to instigate in order to cover over his giving into temptation.

I invite us to take some time and allow our minds to wander to those things that are our temptations. Those impulses and those desires that are like the mythical sirens calling us toward the rocks to destroy our ship. What are the temptations that we face in our lives? What are the temptations that are constantly pulling us toward them?

So are these temptations God's way of testing us to see if we are faithful to God? Is God in the temptation business? According to what we read from James, God is not in the temptation business. James says very clearly:

Repeat James 1:12-16

So James says that no one can say that they have been tempted by God. Because James says that God is not in the temptation business. James says that temptation is evil and evil is not God. Evil is that which is not God.

So when we are tempted we cannot, according to James, say that are temptations are coming from God. Temptation comes from our own desires. We cannot say that God is the source of our temptation. We must claim it as our own.

So since temptation comes from evil desires within us, what difference does this knowledge make? For one, I think it means that we must accept responsibility for our actions. We cannot say that our temptations are coming from God. Our temptations are from something inside of us. So our question becomes, what is going on inside of me and you in our relationships that is causing you and me to be tempted?

If we are facing temptations to do something that we know to be illegal and immoral and unethical, we have to examine why this temptation is being directed to us. Temptations are specific to each person. Temptations arise out of something within us.

What is it that we feel that we are missing? Who are we trying to impress? What is it that we are trying to achieve? Remember temptation is not from God. Temptation is from evil which has found a way inside of us.

The temptations that we each face are not random events. Temptations that we face are rooted in specifics in our lives. The temptations that we face are specific to us.

So as you think about the temptations that you face, we are invited to ask ourselves this question. What is going on inside of me that I am facing this specific temptation? James makes it very clear that God is not the source of our temptations. God is not tempting us to test us in some way. Temptations are not from God, according to James. Temptations are coming from evil that is specific to us.

So rather than putting temptations off on God by making comments like, "God is tempting me." Instead, we face temptations by asking, "what is going on in my life that is causing this temptation to occur in my life?"

In that opening video, the little girl was the one that faced the temptation to peak through that door. This scene is a dream that this little girl has. She has this dream because she has been adopted by a family but she is worried that she is going to blow it all for her and her brothers. The temptation of the hidden door is rooted in her fear of making a mistake and losing her adopted parents.

As we confront our temptation, we are invited by James to not blame God for these temptations. As we confront our temptations, we are invited to face up to the reality that this temptation is coming out of us. And if we realize that the source is within us then maybe we can stand our temptation down.

Because if we recognize that God is not the source of the temptation, then maybe we can turn to God to give us wisdom, and strength, and faith to stand up against the temptation that we are facing. God is not the source of the temptation. But God is the strength and wisdom to help us face our temptation down. AMEN.

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-Given: September 20, 2015 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)