**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 6-12-2022
Trials & Temptations**

I remember back in high school I went to the movies and saw a film called *What Lies Beneath*. I do not know if any of you have heard of it or perhaps saw it.

But by the end of that night I realized that that was not the best use of my time. It was not good for my soul. *What Lies Beneath* was a horror movie and to be honest it kind of freaked me out for a bit. I think I had nightmares. It was just very creepy and dark.

Thankfully, I am not still losing sleep over it. In fact, today I normally sleep like a rock, which Kara can certainly attest to.

Since watching that movie back in the 90’s, I don’t know if I’ve seen another horror movie. Today I find myself very cautious about what I allow my eyes to watch, because I know that it will impact my soul.

Perhaps you can identify with me. Maybe you’ve watched something that has made you feel freaked out or perhaps feel dirty in some way?

And this certainly goes beyond movies. We may wonder, why did I read that book or magazine? Why did I go to that party? Why did I consume that substance or so much of that substance? Or why did I say that so rashly?

Certainly, we have all done some things that looking back we can say, “well, that wasn’t the best use of my time.”

The reality, friends, is that we live in a fallen and broken world. And this is nothing new, really. It has been falling since humanity first gave in to temptation back in the Garden of Eden.

Truly, there is nothing new under the sun. Just different expressions of the same temptations.

As we continue James’ inspired letter to the early church, we are reminded that even God’s people are not immune to trials and temptations. Remember, James wrote his letter to believers.

So let these inspired words of James speak to use now as we hear from this sacred text.

Let us turn now to James 1:12-15.

**12Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.**

**13When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. 15Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.**

James’ words remind us that to go through trials and tests and temptations is not the same thing as committing sin.

We must remember that Jesus, who was and is fully God, came and dwelt among us as a human being. Jesus knew what it was to be tempted. We can read about in the gospels how Jesus was tempted by Satan after He had gone on a 40-day fast in the wilderness in preparation for the beginning of His ministry.

Jesus never sinned and yet He was tempted. In fact, we are told in the book of Hebrews that Jesus was tempted in every way, but never sinned.

So just because Christians are tempted does not mean that they did anything wrong. Sometimes temptations pursue us, just as trials often come uninvited.

But with that being said, the question we are posed with today is **what are Christians to do when trials and temptations come?**

James instructs the believers to persevere and to not point fingers at others, especially God.

When we think about how Jesus responded to trials and temptations, we remember how He kept His heart and mind focused on Father in Heaven and on the inspired words of Scripture. He quoted Scripture in those times of temptation. He went to His Father in prayer. He chose to submit to the Father, rather than to focus on living selfishly and giving into to this or that temptation.

James knew that the Christians whom he was writing to would go through trials and temptations simply because they are Christians. Living for Jesus in a broken world is not easy. There is a shirt that I recently saw advertised which says **“Following Jesus is better. Not easy.”**

The believers receiving James’ letter were living in towns where Christians were the vast minority. At times these Christians would face persecution because it was illegal to be a Christian at that time in the Roman Empire. They would certainly be tempted to downplay their faith in order to protect themselves or make life easier in some way.

How were they to respond when going through these trials? James tells them that they are to persevere. They were to keep on keeping on.

In other words, they needed to keep their eyes on Jesus and their hearts dwelling on God’s Word.

But not only this, James instructs the early church to not blame God when they are tempted. You know how it is always easier to blame someone else when people are going through challenges? But instead of blaming God, James instructs the church to look at themselves. He wants them to ask themselves, “are there evil desires” that are leading me into temptation?

James understands that, generally speaking, people open themselves up to temptation when they are feeding selfish desires. Whether it is a desire for power or for pleasure or control in some way.

Sanctification is the process of putting off our former sinful mindset and allowing our minds to be renewed to think more and more like Christ.

James knew that even though Christians have been saved from their sins and made new in Jesus, these Christians would still be learning to put off the old nature and to put on the new nature that Jesus gave them.

And the simple truth is the more that Christians need to grow in their sanctification, the more likely that they will be enticed by various temptations.

So friends, as we consider this passage and its relevance for our lives today, what are the big takeaways?

**First, when trials and temptations come, please do not blame God**. Our triune God is fully good and He does not tempt anyone into sin.

Don’t look for scapegoats to blame, especially God. God is fully good.

Yes, we live in a fallen and broken world. And yes, sometimes we played no part in bringing the temptations our way.

But instead of blaming, this leads to the second important thing, which is:

**Second, when we go through trials and temptations, we are to persevere through them with the help of God**. Just as Jesus looked to His Father and to the Scriptures, we must find strength in God and His Word.

Jesus promised to be with us always and that most definitely includes when we are going through trials and temptations. So let us turn to Him for His help. The Bible says that He is our ever-present help in time of need.

**And third, we are to be intentional in growing in our sanctification each day.** There are many means of grace that the Lord gives us, from prayer to reading and meditating on Scripture to worship to being in a small group to participating in Holy Communion regularly to remembering your baptism and many other examples as well.

The more that we grow in our sanctification, friends, the more that we are being transformed to act and think like Jesus. And as this happens, it will become harder for us to be enticed into sin.

For example, we will realize that it is not only a waste of time, but it is damaging to the soul to put garbage into it, such as movies like *What Lies Beneath*.

Forgive my language, but consuming crud will open ourselves up to being tempted to do cruddy things and to think cruddy thoughts. We live in a culture where there is a lot of crud that is easily available to consume. From things on television and the internet to movies to certain books and magazines.

If we choose to put garbage in, even as Christians, it is pretty easy for garbage to come out.

We must be on our guard about what we set before our eyes and our minds.

James teaches that for those that persevere through there challenges and stay in love with God, the Lord will reward them with a crown of life. This speaks to God honoring His people that chose to stay strong in their walk with Jesus even when things got difficult.

This is not a matter of our salvation. Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. But the Lord has very high callings for all of us. And a big part of that is that we are all called to be salt and light in this world. This world is struggling and confused. We are part of God’s answer to the world as we point people to Jesus and live as His faithful witnesses.

And putting into practice what James teaches us today is a huge part of us living as effective witnesses for Christ in this world.

So let us make a commitment today to trust our Triune God through our trials and temptations, to never blame Him for them and to keep growing in Jesus each and every day.

Let us pray…

Resources:

[www.BibleGateway.com](http://www.BibleGateway.com)

<https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/Hebrews%204%3A15>

The Snip Life – youtube channel (quote about Life is better with Jesus. Not easy).

The Letter of James Second Edition (The Pillar New Testament Commentary)– Douglas J. Moo