**Growing Taller Through Testing**

We begin this morning a study of the book of James, that little letter in the back of your Bibles. James is a unique book in Bible. We have two letters from Peter. Doctor Luke gave us two histories: one of Jesus and one of the early church. We have four from John, and a whole host from Paul, but we have only this one letter from James .

Just who is this James? Because there are several James’s the New Testament. There was not just one, but two apostles named James. The most prominent was the son of Zebedee and the brother of John. Together, they were known as the sons of Thunder for their legendary tempers. The other was the son of Alpheus. The book of James likely wasn’t written by either of these guys. Little is known of James, the son of Alpheus, and church history doesn’t record him as the author of this little letter. The other James, was martyred early in the book of Acts by King Herod Agrippa I, so he wasn’t around to write this letter.

Church history tells us the author is James, the half-brother of Jesus. Mary did marry Joseph, and they had other children. There is no biblical reason to believe this idea of the perpetual virginity of Mary. There are several places in the gospels that speak of Jesus’ earthly family. Now many of us have had brothers or sisters, who thought they were perfect, but can you imagine if you had a brother that actually was?

We are told in John 7 that as late as the 3rd year of Jesus’ ministry, James rejected his half-brother. I mean, how would you feel if your brother claimed to be the Son of God? However, James later came to believe, probably after the resurrection, and he quickly rose to a position of leadership in the early church. By Acts 15, he is recognized as one of the most prominent leaders in the Jerusalem church.

James starts his letter off with this salutation, “*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.*” Twelve tribes is a reference to Jews. As you read the letter, it’s obvious he’s writing to believers. This letter was originally written to Jewish Christians who were scattered. That’s likely a reference to the great dispersion of Jewish believers that took place in Acts 8 when severe persecution broke out against the Jerusalem church. As their pastor and spiritual leader, James had great concern for his people. So he wrote this letter to these believers that were fleeing the whip of persecution and seeking to live out lives of faith in new and strange places.

Ever since James wrote his letter, followers of Christ who have found themselves in difficult and challenging circumstances have turned to James for guidance.

This little letter reflects the Galilean, blue-collar, carpenter roots of its author. It is short, simple, and easy to understand. It isn’t layered in complex theology, but it paints by numbers in bold, spiritual strokes. It’s filled with instructions. Do this. Don’t do that. Say this. Don’t say that. It’s a very practical book. It may very well be the most practical book in the Bible. If he wrote this letter today, he might have called it *Faith for Dummies*. It’s a faith instruction manual written by a guy with saw-dust under his nails about living the life of faith in difficult circumstances. James challenges us to live our faith from the inside out, to take our faith out of the box.

It can be hard to live our faith from the inside out, especially in difficult circumstances. The world tells us to keep our faith in a box. Our culture says that faith is a private matter. It’s a personal thing. Faith is something to be kept behind closed doors. The influencers and pundits tell us that our faith doesn’t belong in the work place, or the community, or our schools or the ballot box or anywhere in public. The world says, “Keep your faith in a box.”

But it’s not just the world that tells us to keep our faith inside. There is also church culture that wants us to keep our faith in a box. This is the polite person in the pew who says you don’t want to do anything too radical or extreme. They want their church as a nice social club, a place to go where they can get together with their friends and have some nice activities. It’s okay to put a biblical veneer on things. You can have a little faith flavoring, but don’t get so serious that in interferes and interrupts with what I want to do in life. For too many people, church is something on their social calendar, not a part of who they are.

James reminds us that true, saving faith is a faith that works. It is a faith that is lived from the inside out. Faith is seen in action. Faith isn’t just a private, personal thing that we keep to ourselves. It isn’t just something that we put into a little religious compartment of our lives. You have to take your faith out of the box. If you truly have faith on the inside, it WILL express itself on the outside.

James is writing to Jewish Christians that have been scattered throughout the Roman world. As they find themselves as strangers in a strange land, they find it hard to live out their faith. They are facing all kinds of trials. In the midst of these trials, their selfish desires are tempting them to seek an easier way to deal with these challenges. As a result some of them are starting to keep their faith in a box. In an unwelcoming world, the easiest thing is to keep your faith private. Many of them are asking the same questions we’ve all asked when we’ve hit a rough patch in life- Why does God allow difficulties in our lives? Why me? Why now? What am I supposed to do?

Some of them weren’t handling the challenges very well. Their trials tempted them to do the wrong thing, and when it didn’t work out, some of his readers were also tempted to do what we sometimes do- blame God. This is God’s fault. It’s his fault I messed up. He put me in this situation, and I couldn’t help it, and it’s His fault.

In the first part of chapter 1 which we will look at this morning, James gets straight to the point. There’s no small talk. He doesn’t tell a joke, or even a cute story. He dives right in to the subject of trials and temptations.

(Read James 1:2-18)

There is an old hymn called *What A Friend We Have In Jesus*. The second verse starts off this way, “Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.”

We tend to see trials and temptations as the same thing, or at least as very similar. But they are not the same thing. They often accompany each other; but they are not the same. They both test us, but they work in different ways. In our text, James discusses the purpose of trials in our life, and how they are different from temptations. When you are facing a difficulty in life, you need to know whether it is a trial or a temptation, because each requires a different response.

Unfortunately, the old King James translation has caused some confusion here. It takes two different words that James uses, one word in verses 2 & 12, and another in verse 13, and it translates them both as temptation. These words share a common root in the Greek, but they are different. Like the English words awesome and awful. Same root, but different meanings. Trials and temptations often present themselves in the same event, but they are different.

Take for example a student who has a final exam. 50% of the grade is riding on this test, and how she does in this class determines whether or not she qualifies for the program she wants to get into. As she studies the night before the final, she gets a text that tells her that a classmate was able to steal a copy of the test from the teacher’s desk. Is this a trial or a temptation? The exam is the test, the trial, cheating is the temptation. Trials and temptations often go together, but they are not the same thing. Trials lead to temptations, but they are not temptations.

Every Christians will deal with trials. Notice that James says in vs. 2, “***whenever*** *you face trials*.” He doesn’t say, “*If you face trials*,” but *whenever*. We all face trials. They come in many different shapes and sizes. He calls them trials of “*many kinds*.” The Greek word used here is actually quite vivid. It means that our trials are many colored or multifaceted. Trials come in all shapes and sizes. In verses 9 -11 he talks about how Christians in poverty face one kind of trial, and yet the wealthy believer has trials of their own.

Some of you are dealing with trials right now: medical tests, surgeries and treatments, the loss of loved ones, searching for jobs and trying to pay bills, fighting to save a marriage, and others. There is one thing I can say about everyone here this morning- you’ve either just come out of a trial, you’re in the middle of a trial, or you’re heading into a trial.

Right out of the gate James tells us that we will face trials, and we will face trials of all different sorts. Great, I feel better now. Maybe James didn’t have the spiritual gift of encouragement. He’s like the doctor that gives you the bad news straight. Not only that, he tells us that we should consider it pure joy whenever we face these trials. Here are these Christians facing tough circumstances as they flee persecution and they have all these questions, James’ response is, “Don’t be surprised. This is to be expected, and not only that, it’s a good thing.

Why is this good news? Why should trials give me joy? James has a lot to teach us about trials and temptations in this passage. I want to share with you three differences between trials and temptations we learn from this text that hopefully will give you a better perspective of the challenges you face in life. You will be better equipped to better deal with those challenges, no matter what shape or size they come in.

**I. Different Sources**

First of all trials and temptations have different sources. They come from different places. Trials originate externally. They are based in our circumstances. Temptations are internal. They originate from our own desires within.

In verses 9-11 James uses as an example the brother in humble circumstances compared to the one who is rich. They each have trials that are unique to their situation, but they’re based in their external circumstances. Trials refers to the different kinds of challenges you face in life. It could be a diagnosis from a doctor, it could be the loss of a job, or a rebellious child, or a natural disaster. Trials come from the circumstances in which you find yourself.

However, in verses 14, James makes very clear the source of temptation, “*each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed*.” Where does temptation originate? Right in our own hearts. We like to blame others for our temptation. It’s her fault. She led me on. It’s his fault. He made me mad. He shouldn’t have said that. It’s the ice cream’s fault. It was so creamy and delicious. It’s God’s fault. He made me this way. We blame Satan. The devil made me do it.

Just like Adam and Eve. Adam blamed Eve and he blamed God, “*It was the woman that you put here. She gave me the fruit*.” Eve blamed Satan, “*It was the snake. He tricked me*.” But it really started with her own desire. “*When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.*”

A trial might lead to temptation, but the temptation doesn’t originate in your external circumstance, but in your own evil desire. That’s our problem. That’s why we need Jesus to give us a new heart. Only when Jesus deals with our heart, can we overcome the problem of sin.

**II. Different Goals**

Not only do trials and temptations have different sources, but they have entirely different goals in mind. They have different destinations in mind. They want to accomplish two very different things in your life. The goal of God allowing you to face trials is fully developed life. Spiritual maturity and eternal life. The goal of temptation, ultimately, is death. Trials are for your betterment. Temptation is for your failure. Trials are to make you stronger. Temptation is to make you weaker.

James makes it clear that though God allows trials into our life for the purpose of growing us, He is not the author of temptation. Look at verse 13, “*When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone*.” James is telling us something very important about the nature of God here. God is perfect and pure in every way. He has no sin in himself, and he does not lead us to sin. Until we see sin as a problem that dwells within our own lives, we will never confront it. It’s not God’s fault. It’s not some other person’s fault. The evil lies within, our own sinful nature.

Two very different processes are at work in trials and temptation. Look at verses 2-4 where James describes the process of trials. “*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,**whenever you face trials of many kinds,****3****because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.****4****Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything*.” Did you see the process there: trials – testing of your faith – perseverance – maturity. Verse 12 then gives us the ultimate goal, “*Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him*.” Trials lead to life.

Verses 14 and 15 describe a completely different process at work in temptation, “*each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.****15****Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death*.” So the process of temptation is this: desire – dragged away – Sin – Death. You can take any sin and draw a line from where it starts to where it fully takes over and consumes someone’s life, it leads to death. It doesn’t matter if it’s lust or anger or greed or jealousy. When it is full-blown, it leads to death, not just spiritual death, but physical death- a nasty disease, murder, suicide, or a life just wasted away.

Dealing with trials and temptation may both present difficult challenges, but they are very different processes at work, and they will lead you to two very different places. They have different goals because God and Satan have two very different purposes in your life.

Do you want to know another difference? Consider this a free bonus point this morning. No extra charge. You will like one, but you won’t like the other. One is painful, the other is pleasurable. This is an easy way to tell a temptation from a trial. A temptation will seem pleasant at first. A trial never does. You won’t like the end results of temptation but the first part of the trip sure is fun. On the other hand, you will enjoy the fruits of growing through a trial, but the first part of the trip stinks. James says to consider it pure joy. It doesn’t feel joyful at first, but we can embrace trials in our lives, because we understand the joy it will ultimately bring.

**III. Different Responses**

So, trials and temptations have different sources, different goals in our lives, and one final difference is that they require different responses. Different responses. The way we should respond to a trial is very different from the way we should respond to temptation.

James specifically deals with our response to trials. In verse 2, he tells us that trials test our faith, and that the testing of our faith develops perseverance. Some translations say patience. The word used here is the idea of endurance. Constancy. Bearing up under a load. William Barclay defines it as, “having the quality to stand, facing the storm.” We respond to trials by standing up under pressure, Growing our roots deeper, becoming stronger.

Trees that face frequent storms grow stronger root systems and more protective top growth. A tree that never deals with strong winds can easily snap when it does face a storm. This is why God allows storms into our lives. Listen to this piece of poetry called *Good Timber* by Douglas Malloch.

The tree that never had to fight  
For sun and sky and air and light,  
But stood out in the open plain  
And always got its share of rain,  
Never became a forest king  
But lived and died a scrubby thing.

Good timber does not grow with ease:  
The stronger wind, the stronger trees;  
The further sky, the greater length;  
The more the storm, the more the strength.  
By sun and cold, by rain and snow,  
In trees and men good timbers grow.

Where thickest lies the forest growth,  
We find the patriarchs of both.  
And they hold counsel with the stars  
Whose broken branches show the scars  
Of many winds and much of strife.  
This is the common law of life.

We don’t respond to trials by compromising our faith, or by keeping our faith in a box. We don’t respond to trials by giving into various temptations that may present themselves in the midst of the storm. We don’t respond by running away and giving up. We respond by remaining steadfast and deepening our dependence on God.

Now James doesn’t deal with our response to temptation in our text. His main focus is trials, but I think I would be remiss not to cover this. If our response to trials is to persevere, to stand up under pressure, what do you suppose our response to temptation should be?

Run. Get Away. Get far away as fast as possible. We are never called to patiently endure temptation. We are not commanded to see how long we can stand up under the pressure of temptation. 1 Cor. 6:18 says, “*flee from sexual immorality*.” 1 Cor. 10:14, “*Flee from idolatry*.” In 1 Timothy 6:11 Paul tells the young minister to flee from greed and the love of money. 2 Tim. 2:22, “*Flee the evil desires of youth*.”   
 The reason we fall to temptation so much is that we let it snuggle up real close to us and see how long we can stand there. We convince ourselves that we can keep our hand in the cookie jar and not get a cookie. I’ll tell you what will happen if you stand there with your hand in the cookie jar. You will eat a cookie. You’ve got to get your hand out of the cookie jar, move away from the counter, get out of the kitchen, go to another room and do something else. That’s how you deal with temptation.

***Conclusion***

So as we take our faith out of the box this morning, what is it we need to take out of the box? (Pull out running shoe.) Perseverance. When I think of perseverance, I think of a marathon runner. He has put his body through numerous trials and he has stood the test. The Bible uses this very picture. Hebrews 12:1, “*And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us*.”

You might be thinking, “Great, that’s a lot easier said than done. It’s not easy just to do perseverance.” No, it isn’t. That’s why James says this, “*If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who give generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him*.” Perseverance requires wisdom. We usually think it requires strength, but before that, it requires wisdom. The wisdom to recognize the trial for what it is. The wisdom to understand that God has a greater purpose. The wisdom to seek the maturity and life it will lead to. The wisdom to embrace the trial with a godly joy, and the wisdom to know how to respond.

Some of you need to ask for wisdom this morning. Some of you need to flee from something this morning.