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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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Kill Temptation Before It Kills You

James 1:13-18

In Greek mythology, there were creatures called “sirens,” ... half-bird, half-woman, they lived near rocky shoals and cliffs of islands and had the deadly skill of singing so alluringly that they could entice sailors to draw ever nearer to hear them and so dash themselves and their ships on the rocks.

In Homer’s *Odyssey*, the hero Odysseus wants to hear the intoxicating Siren song without steering his ship toward the rocks or destroying his crew... so he has his crew lash him firmly to the mast and stop their own ears with wax, and in this way he navigates safely past the dangerously enticing Sirens.

The intoxicating pull toward shipwreck is an illustration from myth and legend of an actual danger we face every day – the danger of temptation. We walk every single day in a path surrounded by Siren songs which are seeking to lure us from the path of righteousness into the rocks of sin. And while the world and the devil do stand outside of our souls and sing to us, the greatest danger comes from the enemy within... our own sinful lusts.

It is human nature for us to blame our sins on someone else... to escape taking responsibility and look for a scapegoat or a fall-guy. This is obviously so unjust and corrupt and weak on our part... but the worst of all is when we choose to blame GOD for our own sins... as though somehow he’s to blame!

Adam tried to do this right away in the Garden of Eden:

Genesis 3:12 *The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."*

We are world class excuse makers for our own corruptions... like a thief blaming his poverty for his stealing. Or a serial rapist blaming his abusive father for his life of crime. This is all bad enough... but when we blame God, it is horrifying.

The Book of Proverbs makes this tendency even clearer...

Proverbs 19:3 A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the LORD.

We are constantly surrounded by forces that pull on our bodies... the force of gravity constantly pulling us down; the force of moving objects that smash into us and deflect us from our course; the force of atmospheric pressure, constantly pressing on our eardrums. But the force of temptation pulling us toward evil and death is the most significant force we Christians have to overcome in order to make our way to heaven. It is like a powerful MAGNETIC PULL on us that lures us to our deaths.

As we come to James 1:13-18, James helps us to understand the true origin of all our temptations, and it is not coming from the pure heart of God

In this passage, God wants us to TAKE RESPONSIBILITY for our own temptations and to kill them... before they kill us.

He does this by teaching us the true nature of evil, of our own sin natures, of the power of indwelling lusts, the pure nature of God and his wonderful gifts to us that can save our souls.

I. God Never Tempts Us

James 1:13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone

A. Tested vs. Tempted

1. James is using the same Greek word he earlier used when speaking about trials... *peirasmos*

James 1:2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds

2. Testing/trials prove the genuineness of one's faith; it also develops it and strengthens it
3. But temptations are something else altogether... a temptation is a magnetic attraction toward evil... being pulled toward something God has forbidden in his word

This is the FORCE of temptation... like the seductress in Proverbs 7:

Proverbs 7:13-23 She took hold of him and kissed him and with a brazen face she said: ¹⁴ "I have fellowship offerings at home; today I fulfilled my vows. ¹⁵ So I came out to meet you; I looked for you and have found you! ¹⁶ I have covered my bed with colored linens from Egypt. ¹⁷ I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. ¹⁸ Come, let's drink deep of love till morning; let's enjoy ourselves with love! ¹⁹ My husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey. ²⁰ He took his purse filled with money and will not be home till full moon." ²¹ With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk. ²² All at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a snare ²³ till an arrow pierces his liver, like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it will cost him his life.

4. This is something God will NEVER DO... God is no seducer!

B. Don't EVER Say GOD IS TEMPTING ME!

1. God definitely TESTS us... tests our faith to show us its genuineness and to strengthen it
2. But he NEVER pulls us, lures us, attracts us to something his very soul HATES with a perfect hatred
3. As though God were the Siren, the seducer, alluring us, singing to us, beckoning us, deceiving us, pulling us so that we cannot resist

C. The Perfect Purity of God

James 1:13 "God cannot be tempted by evil..."

1. The basic nature of evil is as far from the perfect purity of Almighty God as we could possibly imagine

2. "As far as the east is from the West..."
3. Think of the wideness of the universe, 47 billion light years across... absolutely inconceivable distance
4. God is farther from evil than that

Habakkuk 1:13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.

1 John 1:5 God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

There is not the tiniest particle of evil inside the nature of God; unlike us who are deeply divided... deeply ripped apart in two different directions at all times by good and evil...

God is nothing like that at all

5. The "soul" of God

Isaiah 1:14 Your appointed feasts my soul hates.

The "soul" of God is the deepest inner recesses of his heart, his true nature; the "soul" of God HATES EVIL...

D. The Holiness of God

Isaiah 6:1-3 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

1. God is perfectly separated from all evil; it is the essence of the saving work he does in us to make us truly holy as he is holy

1 Peter 1:14-16 As obedient children, do not conform to the LUSTS you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

E. God Never Tempts Anyone

James 1:13 “God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he himself tempt anyone.”

1. Evil has no allure for God... it does not pull on his heartstrings; he is never attracted to it, but only hates it all the time
2. Therefore, he certainly doesn't sing Siren songs to our souls to pull us from the paths of holiness that he himself laid down
3. He doesn't orchestrate circumstances which will destroy our souls
4. You may ask... “Why then does Jesus command us to pray...

Matthew 6:13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Well, this prayer only aligns our wandering souls with what God is saying here about himself... God never tempts us, but we often foolishly tempt ourselves by wandering from the path; the Lord's Prayer makes us much more aware of the danger of temptations and of Satan's schemes

F. God ALLOWS Satan to Tempt Us... But He Governs It Carefully

1 Corinthians 10:13 And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

II. The True Origin of Temptation: Our Lusts

James 1:14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

A. Our Temptations Come from Our Own Lusts (Evil Desires)

1. God created our hearts to have normal desires and passions; he made us to be like him, a passionate being
 - a. We desire **food**, and that is normal... but the FLESH twists a desire for food and makes it gluttony or food addiction

Ecclesiastes 6:7 All man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied.

- b. We desire **sleep** and that is normal... but the FLESH twists a desire for sleep and makes it become the life of the SLUGGARD

Prov. 26:14 As a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed.

- c. It is normal for people to desire **sexual love** in the context of covenant marriage... but the FLESH pushes this normal drive into all manners of sexual immorality
2. Sin has corrupted the human heart and twisted its normal drives and desires and turned them into LUSTS
 3. Every Christian deals with this enemy within

Romans 7:15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

Romans 7:17-25 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-- this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ²¹ So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God-- through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin

This SIN NATURE... "sin living in me" is the bane of our existence and the source of all our temptations

James uses two words to describe how our own lusts tempt us toward sin... "dragged away" and "enticed"

B. **Enticed** by Lust

1. This pictures lust as A BAITED HOOK
2. There is a lure, a bait, an enticement... usually some form of PLEASURE
3. This is the MAGNETISM or GRAVITATIONAL PULL of a temptation... it attracts the eye, then pulls on the heart
4. You begin to ponder the bait, play with it in your mind... you are listening to the alluring SIREN SONG and your heart is turning toward it

C. **Dragged Away** by Lust

1. The other term is much more forceful... as though the lust has seized control and now comes to dominate the heart
2. Sticking with the fishing analogy, the bait has turned the fish toward it, the fish is nibbling at it... then the fisherman jerks the line violently and HOOKS THE FISH... the hook is stuck in its mouth
3. Lust is now dominating, and the body's actions are following
4. The fish is being dragged through the water

Sometimes people who confess to committing adultery speak of the moment they couldn't control themselves... it was like a "runaway freight train" they say

D. These Lusts WAGE WAR on Your Soul (1 Peter 2:12)

III. The True Destination of Temptation: Death

James 1:15-16 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. ¹⁶ Don't be deceived, my dear brothers.

A. Lusts Get Stronger the More You Indulge Them

B. Like the Process of Childbirth and Child Development

1. James says desire conceives and gives birth to sin, then speaks of sin becoming “full-grown”
2. The word could be translated “completed” or “fully developed”
3. Sin is often personified as if it had intentions, a plan and purpose
4. And sin means to KILL you spiritually

John Owen: Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you!

C. The Deceitfulness of Sin

James 1:16 “Don’t be deceived, dear brothers.”

1. Sin LIES to us... it promises us pleasure, but is secretly poisoning us; Sin DECEIVES us... it promises us life, but it is lying in wait to assassinate our souls

Hebrews 3:13 encourage one another daily... so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

John Owen: Sin not only wants to be constantly acting, but if let alone will bring forth **great, cursed, scandalous, soul-destroying sins**... it always pushes to the utmost

BUT... sin lies about the final destination!!

Like the lies the Nazis told the Jews and their other victims to keep them quiet and herd them onto the trains that carried them to the death camps... they were told at the train stations they were being moved to “relocation camps” in the East, that they should carefully label their luggage and it would be transported separately... but in a haunting scene from **Schindler’s List**, as soon as the trains departed with the victims, the luggage was collected and brought into a warehouse where the contents were dumped out and sorted for valuables. The victims on those trains never saw their luggage again... but the calming lies told by the guards at the train depot kept them quiet until they boarded the death trains.

So it is with sin... it lies to us and hides from us the final destination!
ETERNAL DEATH

2. The **hardening** process of sin is how it is working death into our souls
 - a. A soft heart is yielded, willing, loving, obedient to the still small voice, the quiet leading of the Holy Spirit
 - b. When the heart is being hardened by lusts, it is less and less sensitive to God's leading, less and less attracted to prayer and Bible reading and Christian fellowship, and obedience, and service, and evangelism

D. The Final Destination of Such a Life is Hell

1. **If we are enslaved by sin, we are not truly born again**
2. **DO NOT BE DECEIVED!** James warns three times about deception

James 1:16 Don't be deceived, my dear brothers.

James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

James 1:26 If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

3. Jesus links the battle with sexual lust to the ultimate destination of hell

Matthew 5:28-30 I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

4. This is the "second death"... the Lake of Fire

The Bible does not shrink back from warning us about where lust and sin lead... this is exactly why we need Jesus Christ, the Savior... his blood alone atones for the sins we have already committed, and his Spirit alone can keep us from sailing our ship over toward the Siren song and making shipwreck of our souls

Part of the way the Spirit does this is by warnings like this! The elect heed the warnings... those on the highway to destruction DO NOT!

IV. God's Good and Perfect Gifts

James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

A. God is Not an Alluring Siren... Singing Us Over to Our Destruction

1. God gives good gifts and perfect gifts; He is lavishly generous...

ESV John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

B. God's Perfect Nature

1. God is called the "father of the heavenly lights"
2. This refers to the sun, moon, and stars that God made in creation
3. The sun gives the earth limitless light, heat, and energy
 - a. The sun is a picture of God's inexhaustible generosity
 - b. The sun never grows weary of doing its essential task for planet earth
 - c. It is no closer to running out of fuel now than it was 1000 years ago; NASA estimates the sun can burn for another 5 billion years at its present rate of nuclear reaction!!
 - d. In the same way, God never grows weary of providing for our needs

- e. So far from alluring us toward evil and sin, God is pouring goodness on our heads day after day
- f. So also the Moon is a picture of God's lesser glories... a paler, gentler light... beautiful in its own way
- g. And the stars give us a sense of God's infinite bounty... pinpricks of heavenly light that show the limitless nature of outer space

Isaiah 40:26 Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

James 1 calls God the Father of the heavenly lights... by his great power, they continue to exist... to burn and shine their lights for us to see

This is the nature of God – limitless love:

Ephesians 3:17-19 And I pray that you may grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

1. God's IMMUTABILITY

- a. God "does not change like the shifting shadows"
- b. He is immutable... unchanging
- c. He cannot get better and he will never get worse

Malachi 3:6 "I the LORD do not change."

God's love is eternal... not dependent on our performance:

Jeremiah 31:3 "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.

B. What Are God's Good Gifts?

James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

1. “Good gifts” = common grace blessings enjoyed by all people
2. Food, clothing, shelter, sunshine, rain, crops, talents, possessions, health, family, friends, a stable government, success in life, physical strength, intelligence, skills... the arts, music, literature, sports, natural beauty like the National Parks—the Grand Canyon, Acadia National Park
3. God gives these gifts to everyone as he wills, whether they acknowledge him or not

Matthew 5:45 He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

4. But they don't thank him for them!!
5. We Christians can give thanks to God for all these common grace blessings!

C. What Is God's Perfect Gift? Salvation through Faith in Christ!!

James 1:18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

1. This is the doctrine of God's election... he **CHOSE** to give us birth
2. This is the doctrine of God's sovereign regeneration... he chose to **GIVE US BIRTH**... as he said to Nicodemus

John 3:3 Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." {BORN BY THE SPIRIT}

3. This is doctrine of the Word of God as the power of salvation
 - a. “through the Word of truth”
 - b. The centerpiece is the truth about Jesus Christ

John 14:6 "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

4. This is the doctrine of us as FIRSTFRUITS...
 - a. Firstfruits = the best, the top, the cream
 - b. The pinnacle of God's creation—the salvation of the redeemed

Isaiah 43:6-7 Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth-- ⁷ everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

5. We are a NEW CREATION by the power of God's word

V. Applications

A. Come to Christ

1. Have you been born again?... Has God given you birth through the Word of Truth, the gospel of Christ?

Christians:

B. Beware of the Danger of Temptation!

1. Be ready to fight for the health of your souls
2. Expect the world to put out a siren song alluring you to shipwreck every day; this magnetic pull can only be resisted by fighting the good fight of faith
3. Put on your spiritual armor and FIGHT by the Spirit... Know that the Holy Spirit is here to help us... to lead us into battle with our lusts and to kill them, every one of them
4. See through the deception of lust... it promises satisfaction, but it is like giving saltwater to a man adrift in a rowboat... temporarily he can slake his thirst, but in a very short time, his insides are being destroyed and he is out of his mind
5. So it is with those who drink in their lusts... on the internet for sexual pleasure; or at the mall or online Amazon Prime for your lusts to possess materials...
6. True life comes from the Father of the Heavenly Lights!!