

James - The Blame Game

Sign Title: The Blame Game

April 10, 2011

Good morning Faith Church. This morning we continue our studies in the book of James. We have come to an important message in this series. The first three messages were about the trials of life. We learned God allows trials into our life to bring us to spiritual maturity, something Peter describes as worth more than gold. While many of us can't figure out why our life became so tough when we came to Jesus, James tells us it is because God loves us that he allows trials in our lives. Trials are God's chosen instrument to bring us to spiritual maturity. God loves us too much to leave us in spiritual pampers. He will grow us up and he will use trials to accomplish that growth.

The title for the first portion of our studies in James is "Trials and Temptations." We have talked about *trials* for the last three weeks, but we haven't spoken a word about *temptation*. Today, that will change. Before we jump in, I want to teach you the relationship between trials and temptations. The Greek word used by James for *trials* is almost identical to the Greek word used in James for *temptation*. One is in the noun form, the other is in the verb form.

What does this tell us? *A trial is what I experience on the outside of my life, temptation to sin is what I experience on the inside while I am going through a trial.* Some temptations come from Satan, some come from our heart and others come from the world. While trials are not the only source of our temptations, the temptation that James talks about are those that come from our trials.

For example, if you are in a financial trial, the temptation to sin might be the overwhelming desire to keep the extra \$20 the self check-out machine gave you by mistake at Wal-Mart. You may even want to justify it in your mind as God's provision for your needs! Another temptation in a financial trial is to doubt God's goodness and love toward us in those times. This is similar to the temptation to doubt God's goodness that Job faced when he went through his trials.

We can see how temptations on the inside arise out of our trials. Which one is more significant? The trial or the temptation? Let me answer that question this way.

If you are going through a trial, and as your pastor, I asked how I could pray for you, I am sure you would ask me to pray that God would take away circumstances that created the trial. Doesn't that seem to be obvious? For example, if you are in a financial trial because you don't have a job, I am sure you would ask me to pray that God would provide a job, because that would take the trial away.

If you are in a relational trial, because you are struggling in your marriage. I am sure you would ask me to pray that your spouse would see things your way. That would make the trial go away.

If you are in a trial at work, because your co-worker is completely irritating, I am sure you would ask me to pray they would begin to act normal. According to James, that is not the most important thing to pray for! The great danger in a trial is not the wrong being done *to me*, but is the wrong that could be done *by me*.

The great danger is not the trial but falling to the temptation that accompanies the trial. Let's look at our text and I will explain what that means.

James 1:13-18

These are some very important verses so rather than jam them all into one message, I am breaking them into two messages. We will only cover verse 13 and 14 this morning, but they go together as a unit.

Every trial offers one of two paths.

Earlier in James, we learned trials are tests allowed into our lives by God for the purpose of spiritual maturity. We are to embrace our trials as allowed by the good hand of God. They are the anvil upon which God bends the steel of our heart to shape us into the character of Christ. Persevering through a trial leads us on the path of spiritual maturity.

Trials ➡ Testing ➡ Steadfastness ➡ Completeness + Maturity

In this passage, James tells us not everyone will follow that path. There is another option. When we face a trial on the outside of our life, we will also face temptation from that trial on the inside of our life. If we give in to our temptations, it will lead us down a different path. A path that will not end in spiritual maturity, but sin and death.

Trials ➡ Temptation ➡ Sin ➡ Death

So when we face the trials of life picture two different paths in front of you. One leads to life, the other leads to death. Giving in to temptation will lead us down the path of destruction and death, which is not a pretty picture!



What is this telling us? My choices in a trial matter! The choices I make in my trials can either mature me or destroy me! I say this because I love you. It hurts to watch many of you go through trials, but what makes me sick to my stomach is watching you give in to the temptations from that trial! Single people, you don't like the trial of living alone so you give in to the temptation and move in with someone of the opposite sex. God was maturing you in the trial as you bore up under it but now you are heading for sin and death. Teenagers, you are under a lot of sexual pressure. Everybody's doing it, so you figure you should also. You are in a trial to maintain your purity and God is maturing your faith through it but when you give in to the temptation you head down the path of sin and death and that is the real tragedy, not your singleness. Your choices matter!

Playing the Blame Game is a dead end road.

This week was Cindy's birthday. We celebrated it as family because everyone loves mom. As you might suspect, after what I told you last week about flowers, I was sure to give her roses on her birthday. Yes, they were not on discount when I bought them! Around 9:00 in the evening of her birthday, I

learned there was something she wanted for her birthday I didn't buy, it was chocolate cake! Shortly after 9:00 in the evening on Wednesday night we drove to Wal-Mart to buy a cake. Like most of you, I love chocolate cake, but I don't like to eat it before going to bed. It gives me a nasty sugar buzz when I am trying to sleep. But because it was Cindy's birthday, we came home from Wal-Mart with a cake. We cut it in pieces and I



began trying to resist. Twenty minutes prior, my resistance was rock solid, but as I watched the rest of my family dig in, my commitment wavered. I gave in and ate a piece of chocolate cake. Immediately after eating it, I felt bad because I broke my promise to myself. You know what I did in my mind to make myself feel better? I blamed Cindy! It's not my fault for eating the cake. She is the one who insisted on buying it at 9:00 in the evening. I gave her beautiful roses and a card, if she hadn't insisted on cake, I wouldn't have eaten it!

What was I doing? I was trying to make myself feel better by blaming Cindy for my own choices. This is called the Blame Game and we all play it. People who are poor sometimes steal and they say it is not their fault for stealing, minimum wage is not enough to live on. Alcoholics are masters at the Blame Game. They claim they wouldn't drink so much if work wasn't so stressful. They wouldn't drink so much if their home life had more excitement in it. They wouldn't drink if their friends didn't drink. It is everybody else's fault they drink, not their own.

Maybe you don't drink, but you struggle with anger. A husband yells at his wife and then says, "The only reason I yell at you is because you make me so mad. It is your fault I yell." Sometimes it is our language. "I wouldn't swear so much if life didn't have so many problems." My foul language is not my fault, it is all the problems in life that make me speak this way. I see the blame game all the time in divorces. "I wouldn't be asking for a divorce if she would just treat me better, it is her fault I am filing." We are masters at blame shifting. As soon as we sin, it is everybody's fault but our own.

This isn't a new thing. The Blame Game has been happening from the beginning with Adam and Eve. *The Blame Game is the original sinful response to sin.* Look what happens as soon as Adam and Eve sin.

The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Genesis 3:12 (ESV)

Who did Adam blame for his sin? Eve. It's always the wife's fault guys. There is an old proverb that says, "When Adam was away, Eve went astray." Nice proverb, unfortunately, it is not true. Where was Adam when Eve grabbed the forbidden fruit? Right there! What did Adam do when his wife offered him forbidden fruit (or should I say 9:00 pm chocolate cake?) He gave in, but he played the Blame Game and said it was his wife's fault.

Eve didn't fare much better. She also played the Blame Game.

Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." Genesis 3:13 (ESV)

Eve blames the serpent. I have a question for you. Did the serpent put Eve in a Jujitsu submission hold and force her to eat the forbidden fruit? Of course not! Eve ate the fruit on her own. It was her fault, not the serpents.

We ultimately blame God our sin.

When we play the Blame Game, we ultimately blame God for our sin. Think this through. When we say it is not our fault we have a short temper because God made us that way, we say God is responsible for our outbursts of anger. When we say we wouldn't steal if we weren't in such a tough financial position, we say it is God's fault for not providing our needs. Every time we sin and blame shift it to somebody or something else, we ultimately blame God for our sin. It is God's fault for giving me that wife. It is God's fault for letting me grow up in that home. It is God's fault for giving me a short fuse. It is God's fault for giving me such strong hormones that I can not control myself when faced with temptation. Every time we play the *Blame Game* we ultimately say God is responsible for our sin.

The first thing we need to know is that God is NEVER at fault for our sin. He is NEVER behind anything that draws us to sin.

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God,"... James 1:13 (ESV)

God never tempts us to fall to sin. So we need to stop blaming other people, other things and ultimately we need to stop blaming God for the sinful choices we make in our life. James is adamant about this.

God can not be tempted, therefore, he can not tempt.

...for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. James 1:13 (ESV)

In this verse, there is a unique word in the Greek and it occurs only once in the Bible. When it says *God cannot be tempted with evil*, in the Greek, it literally says God is *untemptable*. There is no possibility of God even being remotely enticed toward sin. Because God can not be tempted, the possibility of tempting us to sin is completely out of the picture for God's nature. The Bible says God is "Holy, Holy, Holy." There is nothing with more absolute purity and separation from sin and temptation than God.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 1 John 1:5 (ESV)

Jesus Christ is the same way.

For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. Hebrews 7:26 (ESV)

Since the character of God is always good, this means his purposes for us are good. God is NEVER behind any temptations we face. God allow us to face trials but they are always crafted to build our faith, they are never intended to lead us to sin.

What about times when it looks like God is behind temptation?

Some of you who are biblically adept can think of times in the Bible where it appears God is behind temptations to sin. Let's look at some of these and see what we can learn.

Didn't God incite David to number Israel?

Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go, number Israel and Judah." 2 Samuel 24:1 (ESV)

If you remember the story, it appears God was behind this temptation of David to conduct a census of Israel so David would boast in the numerical strength of Israel as his safety and security instead of trusting in God who created the numerical strength. Was God behind this temptation toward pride that David gave fell into?

There is a parallel passage in 1 Chronicles which tells the same story from a slightly different angle.

Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel. 1 Chronicles 21:1 (ESV)

So God was not behind this temptation, Satan was. Satan was the one tempting David to sin. From God's perspective, it was an opportunity for David to glorify God, from Satan's perspective, it was an opportunity for David to reject his trust in God.

What about Job?

This is similar to the story of Job. God allowed Satan to bring trials and adversity into Job's life. Satan was trying to use the trials Job faced on the outside of his life to tempt Job to sin by cursing and rejecting God on the inside of his life. The good news is Job passed the test. He didn't fall to the temptation of that trial.

What about Jesus' temptation in the wilderness?

We see the same thing with the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Matthew 4:1 (ESV)

The word for tempt here is the same word we have in James. The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to go through a trial. No food for forty days and nights is a trial, I can barely go forty minutes without food. While God's intent was for the trial of hunger and isolation in the wilderness to be a trial that would lead the humanity of Christ to spiritual maturity, from Satan's perspective, it was a chance to tempt Jesus in hopes that he would sin under the pressure of the trial. As we know, Jesus passed with flying colors.

My sin is my fault.

**But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.
James 1:14 (ESV)**

Who is responsible for my sin? I am!

James describes this in fishing terms. For those of you from *Pure Fishing*, this is your verse. The terms *lured* and *enticed* are fishing language. It is the wiggling of the rubber frog across the surface of the water and enticing the fish to put the bait in his mouth. Who puts the hook in the fishes mouth? The fish puts the hook in his own mouth. You can't force him to put the hook in his mouth, all you can do is try to entice him to bite it. Once he does, it is too late and he is dragged away. So the honest truth is the one ultimately responsible for catching the big fish is not the fisherman, but the fish himself. He chose to put the hook in his own mouth.



It is the same way with sin. Don't blame Satan or anyone else for our sinful choices, all Satan and his demons can do is drag their lures across the

surface of the water but it is our own lust that drives us to bite Satan's bait. The problem is not with the temptation on the outside but with our own lusts on the inside. That is why we sin. We can play the Blame Game all we want but it just isn't true, we are the ones who choose to sin. Nobody forces us to do it. Until we admit that our sin is always our problem things will never change in our life.

Will I ever face temptation that is too strong to resist?

Some of you are wondering if there is a time when the trials we face are too difficult for us to resist and we must collapse under the temptation we face. According to the Bible, that will never happen.

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)

Here is the same word for *trials* and *temptations* from James. God promises to not let us face a trial that is beyond our ability to handle. God filters the temptations we face so every one of them is not stronger than our ability to resist. So God promises that the issue with beating the temptations we face is never our *ability* to resist the temptation but our *desire* to resist the temptation.

Why do I fall to the temptations I face?

I want to give you two reasons, one is practical and the other is intellectual but both are essential.

I stroke my lusts.

Let's go back to how temptation works. Satan could not make Eve bite the forbidden fruit. We can not make a fish bite the lure. Satan can not make us sin. All Satan can do is appeal to the lusts within us. The longer the lust is

appealed, the harder it is to resist. The longer the fish is watching the bait, the more he wants to bite it. The longer we stroke our lusts during times of temptation, the harder it becomes to NOT give in. At any time does Satan force us to sin? No! All he can do is stand on the side lines and appeal to our lusts. So if we want to avoid temptation, the best thing to do is stop stroking the lustful desires in our mind the moment we begin to entertain those thoughts. The more we entice our sinful desires, the more difficult it will be to resist those sinful desires.

My source of significance is determining the course of my actions.

My source of significance will determine the course of my actions. What is your source of significance in life? Last week, we talked about money and we learned what is more important than having money or lacking money is who we are in Christ. That is the source of significance in our lives. We are who we are in Christ. Truth be told, we let money give us a false sense of significance. When we do, we will fall to financial temptations every time because the source of our significance will determine the course of our life.

I have talked with young Christian women who end up dating and marrying men who do not have Christ as their treasure. Why do young women do that? Because their sense of significance is wrapped up in marriage more than who they are in Christ. It is more important for them to be married to somebody than to be married to nobody and just have Jesus. The source determines the course.

There are Christian business men who know they should be home with their wife and children but night after night they work late and take calls from clients around the clock. Many times the reason is their significance in life is their career more than Christ. The source determines the course.

There are plenty of students who no longer attend church because they are too busy with studies and sports to make study and worship of God a priority. The source of significance in their life is their academics or their varsity sport, not Jesus. Their source determines their course every time.

Next week we will look at sin in slow motion as learn how sin works in our life and how to stop it every step of the way. But this morning we learned where temptation begins. It always begins in us. It is never somebody else's fault. God doesn't trip us up, we stroke our own lustful desires until we lose our desire to resist sin and then we bite the bait.

Before we leave, let me take a few minutes to summarize what we learned.

Steps of Action

My choices matter! - Whenever we go through a trial, there are two paths we can take. Bearing up under the trial will lead us to spiritual maturity. But as we go through the trial, temptation to sin will rise in our hearts. If we take that path, it will lead to sin and death. My choices in a trial matter.

Repent of blame shifting. - This week, try to catch yourself blame shifting. It is the original sinful response to sin. Repent of it. Take this seriously. Until we own our sin, we can never change our sin.

Trust God's character. - I talk to people every week going through trials and they find it hard to trust God's character. They wonder if God can do anything good out of the trial they are in. They feel life is out of control. Trust me, God has not lost control. It is just *from our limited perspective* we can't see how God desires to do spiritual good and bring glory to his name through our trial. We have to *trust* God's character. *Our trials are allowed into our life to bring God glory, to mature our faith and to gain us an eternal reward.* That is a promise of God in which we can trust. God never tempts us to sin.

Resist the lusts of the flesh. - Our own sinful lusts will always tempt us during a trial. Satan will tempt us during a trial. Remember, Satan can not fish with a spear, he can only lure us to bite the bait. When someone says, "The devil made me do it, the truth is they made themselves do it because they stroked their lusts to the point they desired sin more than anything else. Resist the temptations to sin and resist them early when they are easiest to avoid. Remember, the most important thing someone can pray about for you in a trial is not the removal of the trial, it is not falling to the temptation to sin we face in the trial.

Satisfy my soul with Jesus. - When it comes to resisting the lusts of the flesh, it never works to just say resist sinful pleasures. The only way to win the battle is to replace the lusts of the flesh with a greater pleasure. That greatest pleasure is the experience of God's love for us through Christ. He forgives us completely. He loves us undeservedly. His plans for us are always good. His love for us is unchanging. The most fulfilling and satisfying relationship we can

ever have is with Jesus.



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