

## Written: James 1:12-15 “God Working Through Trials and Temptations”

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent

Sunday, February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024

### Text: James 1:12-15

<sup>12</sup> Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. <sup>13</sup> Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. <sup>14</sup> But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. <sup>15</sup> Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

### Exegetical Statement

Trials and times of temptation are going to come to all who live in this sinful broken world. But blessed is the believer who, by the work of the Spirit in repentant faith, remains steadfast in that faith throughout the trials, calamities, and afflictions, looking to God alone to see them through. Those who remain in that repentant faith relationship by returning His love despite the suffering in their life know they have waiting for them the victory prize of eternal life. But we are to know that while the LORD allows and sometimes brings trials upon us for our good, He is not the source of temptation. God cannot be tempted to sin (breaking His own law and will) and will never tempt anyone, especially those He loves and calls to be His own, to sin. The source is our sinful nature where our passionate longings that stand opposed to God’s will give birth to sinful thoughts, words, and deeds. Left to ourselves these would draw us away from our Lord like bait in a trap to serve our desires instead of serving Him. But He is the source of all good and gracious gifts, especially the gift that is Jesus Christ. The faith we receive in our baptism means that God will never change in His love for us and desire that we love Him with the same kind of love. He resolved to save us from the beginning and did all that was necessary so we could live now as His special redeemed and set apart children, in a repentant faith relationship with Him that leads all the way to eternal life to come.

### Focus Statement:

The Lord is always in control. He protects us from some trials, and those He allows He uses for the good of strengthening faith. He is not punishing us. Instead, He punished His only Son who took our sin and our place of suffering to declare us to be forgiven and restored to His family despite our continued sinning. We receive this not because we are worthy but as His undeserved gift of grace. Through our baptism He gives to us His Spirit who works through the means of grace to keep us in repentant faith that sees the awfulness of our sin, then sees and believes Jesus Christ is the antidote to our eternal death. His Spirit given in baptism works through the means of grace to keep us steadfast in that repentant faith no matter what trials or temptations befall us.

### Function Statement:

#### Why it’s important to know:

We can see trials as evidence of God not in control, or His punishing us. We can see temptation as coming from Him in order to weed out the undesirables from His kingdom. And as we continue to struggle with sin we can be tempted to believe the devil’s lie that forgiveness has run out.

#### What the hearer should do as a result:

Live out a life of repentant faith by making use of the means of grace in which the Spirit draws us close to our Savior and keeps us in a repentant faith relationship no matter what befalls us in this world.

### Subject Sentence: Both trials and temptations are used in repentance.

## **Introduction: Testing and Tempting Prospective Employees**

Hiller's Markets was a union organized grocery store. As a manager I saw certain pluses in this. But it also meant that once a new employee had been there long enough and had become a member of the union, if they were a total screw up, it was hard to get rid of them. So, we managers had 30 days to figure out if the person we hired was someone worth keeping or not. During those first 30 days they were on probation, and we could let them go simply on the grounds that they "were not working out". We didn't have to supply evidence or reason. On the other hand, if they were working out, and since we'd invested time and energy in training them, it was worth our while to keep them instead of making those 30 days a revolving door of new employees.

So, how could we figure out who was worth keeping? Well, certainly by watching them perform, especially under pressure. We would schedule them to work the busiest hours on the weekends. If possible, we would arrange it, by closing down other cashiers, that they had to wait on certain problem customers, the idea being to see how well they kept their cool. We would make sure they worked closing shifts on holidays if any came up during their probationary time, to see if they would call in. We would keep them working overtime and watch how they reacted. We would call them to come in on their day off to see how they reacted. In other words, we would test them in various ways to see what they were made of.

One of the biggest things we needed to know, especially if they were cashiers, was if they were honest. We would make them count their tills at the end of every shift and check it with what the register itself said they should have. I know managers at other stores would devise underhanded ways to catch dishonest employees, like having family members come in and see if they could talk the cashier into not charging them for items, or leaving money out on the counter when they counted their tills, or even leaving the safe unlocked, with a security camera on them the whole time. In other words, provide temptation for them to steal. I never engaged in that, nor did any of the other managers I worked with to my knowledge. But I heard that some at the other Hillers Stores did.

Did you ever feel like God is doing the same kind of thing with You? Did you ever feel like He's testing you to see if you are worthy of being in His kingdom? Have you ever felt like He's tempting you, or allowing you to be tempted so that He has grounds to remove you from His kingdom, His family? Let's take a look at these two things: testing and temptation, to see where God's hand is in each of them.

## **How God Tests Us**

What are we talking about when we say times of testing? These are situations and events that are thrust upon us that we are not expecting. Sometimes they are the consequences of our own sinful actions brought to bear upon us. Other times they are caused by the sinful selfish actions of others. Still others come with no connection to us at all. They are things and times when we are struggling, experiencing physical or emotional pain, things that try our patience. Sometimes they involve a loss of something or someone important.

Does God ever test us? Yes. That's pretty obvious when we look at our Old Testament Lesson about Abraham being told travel to Mt. Moriah and sacrifice his only son on the altar to God. Now, keep in mind, while Abraham had to face this, you and I will never be called to do the same.

How should we see God's hand in them? Not knowing the mind and will of GOD beyond what has been revealed in Scripture its best to see times of trials as things He allows to happen to us at this particular time and place. God is in control of everything that happens in your life. Any of the bad things that happen to you He could prevent. Perhaps countless numbers of things have been prevented by Him in the past. But on this particular day, according to His own judgment, He knows you need to face it now. Think about a car accident. How many times in the past has the Lord, through His angels, protected you on icy snow covered roads, or from impatient and careless drivers that pull out in front of you. But on this particular day, He allows an accident to happen. Or how about acts of nature like tornados, lightening strikes, or fire; these things have never hit you, but one day you become the victim. Or a diagnosis of illness like COVID, or cancer; you are healthy, but then these things befall you. Even the death of a loved one could be seen as a time of testing.

They are called times of testing because they reveal how we react to difficulties and stressful things. When difficult times come do you turn toward God or away from Him? Now it's not like God is trying to figure this out Himself. Our God knows all things. He knows you better than you know yourself. He knows what will happen tomorrow and the next day. The ones that don't know how you will handle these tough times are you and those around you.

God uses times of testing to show us how strong our faith, and what ways it may be lacking. He uses them not just to reveal, but to strengthen. When hard times come, especially those things that are clearly beyond our ability to handle, or change, or remove, they are used to turn us toward Him. It's an unfortunate reality in the human experience that when times are good, we tend to set Jesus aside and put Him on the shelf. We get busy enjoying our blessings and basking in the glory of our hard work, forgetting that all good and gracious gifts come from God. Left to ourselves we can be tempted to fall away from Him, stop going to Church or studying His word, as there are just too many other blessings and gifts to be enjoyed. He allows these hard things to happen to stop us in our tracks. They make us realize we can't handle life on our own. He calls us to turn back to Him. And when we do we find that His loving arms have been reaching out toward us all along.

Faith is like a muscle. When it gets worked and stretched it grows. When we are forced to rely on the promises of God that we can't see, taste, touch or smell; when we have to trust that He is really there and caring for us, even when it doesn't look like it, faith grows. It is especially true when we look back and see the amazing ways He responds and answers our heartfelt faithful cries for help. He uses times of trial and affliction to draw you ever closer in a faith relationship with Him.

### **Does God Tempt Us?**

**James 1:13** Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

So, how about temptation? How should we see God's hand involved here? We are given a pretty clear answer in our Epistle Lesson. While God, who is in control of all things, can and certainly does protect us and guide us away from certain times and places of temptation, when we are tempted it is never by His hand at work.

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

What is the source of our temptation? It's the passionate longings and desires of our sinful nature. It's that part of us that wants what it wants when it wants it. And by itself it always wants what is opposed to God's will and plan for our lives. God designed our life to be one of love for Him first, and others second. And that is absolutely foreign to the desires of our sinful nature. Want to see how true that is? Think about God's call to love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you. If they are hungry, feed them. If they need clothes, give them as you are able. That makes no sense to us. Maybe I might help out a good friend, but an enemy? They are my enemies for goodness' sake!

Even when it comes to our friends, we want to take care of ourselves first, and then consider what might be good for them. Furthermore, think about your relationship with God. All we have is a gift from Him. He calls us, as steward managers of His gracious gifts of our time, talents, and treasures, to give back to Him first, and what remains we can use for ourselves. How hard is that to live out? When it comes to His gift of time, how often do we see it as “my time”. If after I’ve done all I want to do, if there is any time left, I’ll help God or my neighbor out. How often do we give what’s left at the end of the month instead of setting aside His portion first and then live off the rest? What our sinful nature desires is always opposed to what God commands us to do.

**James 1:15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.**

These sinful selfish desires are reflected when they flow out in the form of our thoughts, which give birth to our sinful selfish words and actions. God is the One who tells us the best way to live our life, which is in love and service to Him and others. If we listened and followed what He tells us life would certainly be better for us and those around us. But instead, we tell Him no. And when we repeatedly turn away and tell Him no without turning back in repentance, the result is separating from Him now, in this life. And if nothing changes, that separation will last for eternity in hell. But that is not what God desires for you and for me.

### **God’s Gracious Gift to Defeat Temptation.**

**James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change**

Our God is the God who loves to give good and gracious gifts. He gives them unconditionally, with no strings attached, to those do not deserve them and could never earn them. He gives them to people like you and me. And His greatest gift is His Only Son, who came down from above to be our Savior and our Victor.

We see Him take our place and our Baptism in the Jordan. We see the Spirit descend upon Him and the Father proclaim Him to be His beloved Son, and that everything He thinks, says, and does pleases the Father. Then the Spirit casts Him out into the wilderness. And there Jesus takes you place and mine suffering temptation from the tempter of all tempters. Satan. Even with His body weakened with 40 days without food, Jesus wins our victory over temptation time and again. No matter what is presented to Him, He continues to put His Father and His will first. And in doing so He shows His love for you and me by allowing Himself to thus be tempted so He can be our victor in the war against sin and the devil.

And He gives that victory to you and I in our baptism. In your baptism the heavens were torn open as the Holy Spirit descended down upon you in the water and Words spoken in the name of the Triune God. And your sins, all those times you fail to fight off but instead succumb to temptation, all the times you please your sinful nature, all of them were washed off you and on to Jesus. And He took them to the cross and died to forgive them. All of them. Your sins of yesterday, today, and tomorrow all washed away. All forgiven.

## **God's Presence During Temptation and Testing**

What is God doing when we are being tempted? His Spirit is impressing upon your mind and your heart His word, His law, which tells us how we are to live in a way that puts Him first place and others second. His Spirit is there to point out to you and I when we fail to do so. He does this not to crush us, but to call us back to Himself. He doesn't just say "You sinned", but His Spirit impresses upon us how awful it is that we would turn away and disobey the God who graciously gives us life and supplies all that is needed to keep it going. And when He's made us to see how terrible our sins are, He turns us to see how wonderful is the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. He is there to turn you back; to keep turning you back to Him.

That love, that sent Jesus to the cross, is poured into your heart and mine in baptism. And it's that love, and our faith in Jesus as our loving and forgiving Savior, that gives us the power to confess our sins and hold fast to His promise of forgiveness. It is the power to turn us away repeatedly from a life lived to please myself, and begin every day, every moment, a life lived in service to my Lord and Savior who has done everything necessary for me to have life with Him now and eternal life to come.

Where is the Holy Spirit during your times of testing? He is right there with you working to strengthen your faith, repeating His promise that He is always with you and protecting you. And when your faith falters, He will carry you through whatever it is that is besieging you. He is there at work through the means of grace providing you with a strength you do not have on your own and preventing you from falling away in despair. He is there controlling how long the time of testing lasts so that they serve His purpose of building faith instead of destroying it.

## **Conclusion**

At Hillers we were always looking to see who wasn't worthy of being employed there; who didn't or couldn't make the cut. Not so in Jesus' kingdom. He chose you when you were not worthy. He makes you worthy by the gracious gifts He gives to you in baptism. He never wants to get rid of you, but instead He wants you to go through life by His side, living out a life of repentant faith. He keeps this repentant faith alive working through times of testing to make it stronger. He works through times of temptation to show you the wonder of His love and forgiveness. He does this so you might know in a greater way the love that He has for you which is beyond any other love you will ever experience. It's His gift to you in this life, and it will be yours in the eternity to come. Amen.