

The World According to Jim
"Don't Blame God When the %\$#@ Hits the Fan"
James 1:13-18

Introduction

- Several years ago my seminary professor D.A. Carson preached a message to a church in Arkansas. In his sermon he told the true story of two men. The first, George, was a gifted pastor and speaker. Early in his ministry he took a church in England and saw many people come to the Lord and the church grew. But he was caught in an adulterous affair with a member of the congregation, resigned, and disappeared. Some time later Carson met George while attending seminary in Toronto, Canada. Carson graduated and took a church in California while George graduated and stayed to pastor in Ontario. Time passed and Carson heard the church back in Ontario was growing and people were being converted. Carson eventually moved from California to England. Unaware of George's past, a few years later Carson heard through the grapevine that George, while pastoring the church in Canada, had been caught in an adulterous affair with a member of the church. George resigned and disappeared again.
- Fast forward a few more years. This time Dr. Carson, now teaching at the Free Church seminary in Chicago, was asked to intervene and help a struggling church near the seminary. They had hired a guy. A gifted pastor. People were coming to the Lord. The church was growing. But the pastor had an affair with someone in the church. Turns out it was George. Someone tracked George down in Ohio and asked him what went wrong. I'm paraphrasing now but the man's reply went something like this. "I fell because God's a liar. God says *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. 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.* That's what 1 Corinthians 10:13 says. I couldn't stand up under the test so God's a liar."
- The second man was also English. His name was Norman. In the 1930's he became president of Christian Union in England—a student ministry kind of like Intervarsity. He went on to marry a woman named Pat and they became missionaries in Egypt. After World War 2 they moved back to England where Norman taught Islamic studies at a University. He was eventually knighted by the Queen. He was known as a remarkable Christian layman. In 1972 Carson met Sir Norman and Lady Pat and learned what most people didn't know about their lives. They had three children. The first became a doctor and went to serve on the mission field in the Belgian Congo. She was gang raped. She left the mission field and went home to recover. During her recovery she traveled to California to pursue more medical training in preparation for heading back to the mission field. While in California she tripped, fell down the stairs, knocked herself out, and drowned in her own saliva. Their second child also died in equally tragic circumstances. The third child, a son, was apparently brilliant. He went to Oxford but never graduated. He died of a brain tumor at the age of twenty-one. In their later years Pat suffered from Alzheimer's and Sir Norman cared for his wife. And Carson says, in all years he knew them he never heard a single bitter, angry, resentful word

from either of them.¹ And I'll ask you the same question that Dr. Carson asked his audience the morning he told that story. Do you want to be George or do you want to be Norman?

Transition

Trials and tests are inevitable. But let me make something very clear. [Slide #3]

Proposition

- **Don't blame God if you are tempted by your trial**
- Some of you have endured a whole lot of know you what. Many of you have stood up well. Others of you are facing an absolute onslaught of temptations because of the trial. Some of you have caved in. The trial has gotten the best of you. You've given in to the temptation. You've failed the test. You've allowed the test to make you bitter. To make you angry. To lose heart. To do what you thought you'd never do. To question God's goodness. Some of you have even fallen away from God. You've blamed God. "I've fallen away because of what God has done. It's God's fault."
- You know what? God is not your problem. Does God allow trials? You bet. Has He permitted the trials and tests you are facing right now or have faced in the past? Yes. He is sovereign. Does God test us in order to stretch our faith and move us to greater obedience? You bet. He tested Abraham in Genesis 22:1. *Some time later God tested Abraham.* Might he be testing you? Probably so. But when we face trials and tests there is a line in the sand that none of us should ever cross. God may allow the you know what to hit the fan. But don't blame God if you step in it. God is not your problem.

Transition

Look at James. [Slide #4] James 1:13-18 gives...

Organizational Sentence

- **Two explanations for why we should never blame God for our temptations**

Background

- Before the two explanations I need you to see something. Look at [verse 2](#) and [verse 13](#). The word used for trial in [verse 2](#). *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.* James repeats that exact same word in [verse 13](#). *When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me."* Trial, [verse 2](#). Tempt, [verse 13](#). Same word. The word is used interchangeably and can mean different things depending upon the context. In [verse 13](#) the meaning of the word shifts slightly. James' point is that "every trial, every external difficulty, carries with it a temptation, an inner enticement to sin."²
- The [New Jerusalem Bible](#) translates [verse 13](#) in a way that makes the connection between the trial and the tempt more clear. It says, "Never, when you are being put to the test, say, 'God is tempting me'; God cannot be tempted by evil, and he doesn't put anybody to the test."³ What this means, what James is saying is that if you are tempted to sin because of your trials in no way should you suggest that God is the cause of that temptation. God may allow the trial. He may bring the test. But the temptation to sin during the trial does not come from him. Financial struggles can tempt us to question God's provision—his ability to provide. The death of a loved one can tempt us to question God's goodness. But make no mistake.

¹ D.A. Carson from a message on James 1:1-18 at Bible Church of Little Rock, Sept. 9, 1999.

² Moo, p. 72.

³ New Jerusalem Bible, James 1:13.

God can't be tempted by evil. He is impervious to evil. And because God cannot sin, He does not "tempt" anyone because he cannot be "tempted."⁴ In the World According to Jim the responsibility for temptation and sin fall squarely on our shoulders.⁵ God is not the problem.

Transition

[Slide #5] The [first explanation](#) for why we should never blame God when we are tempted by our trials is because the temptation itself doesn't originate with God. It comes from within. *When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*

Main Points

- This past week I went fishing on the Mill Creek just north of Boaz on County E. I decided to fish a section of the river I had never fished before. After parking the Jeep I made my way down through the grass, slipped into the water, and began working my way upstream. Lo and behold a very nice pool of water. Trout water. Fishy looking water.
- I want you to imagine it with me. The upstream flow of water made its way into this L shaped pool. I was standing at the end of the pool, at the end if the letter L if you will, right where the water shallowed up again before starting another run downstream. Toward the middle of the pool, right where the two joints of the L met, the current pushed against the far bank. And right where the current met the wall of earth the long grass fell over onto the stream creating a canopy of cover. I knew there was a trout hiding there; lollygagging in his liquid bistro.
- I tied on my most productive fly, a Pass Lake Wet fly, tossed it upstream of the L joint and let the current drift it into the bank and under the canopy. As the fly disappeared under the grass I saw a flash. I set the hook and missed a nice fish. I knew this fish wanted that fly. So I waited a few minutes. Made the same cast. Twitched the fly right as it went under the grass and BAM. Nice brown trout.
- Do you know what James says? James says the explanation for why we should never blame God is because we act just like that trout. From within, not from God, but from within, our own desires entice us to temptation. Like a fish, our own desires entice us to be drawn out and take the bait. Look at the text. *But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.* When we are tempted during the test the problem is not God. Don't blame God. The problem is us. Instead of blaming God James says look in the mirror. Our evil desire is what transforms the trial from a spiritual opportunity into a pile of you know what that we step in.
- And once you bite, once the temptation has seized you, taken hold of you, the hook wreaks havoc. Sin is destructive. James gives an absolutely disturbing picture of the progression of sin in our lives. [Verse 15](#). *Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.* The mother is desire, the child conceived is sin and when it is full grown it gives birth to death.⁶ In the words of [Eugene Peterson](#), *We have*

⁴ Moo, p. 73.

⁵ Moo, p. 75.

⁶ D.A. Carson from a message on James 1:1-18 at Bible Church of Little Rock, Sept. 9, 1999.

*no one to blame but the leering, seducing flare-up of our own lust. Lust gets pregnant, and has a baby: sin! Sin grows up to adulthood, and becomes a real killer.*⁷ **Don't blame God if you are tempted by your trial.**

- Let me make something very clear. The experience of continual temptation throughout a trial doesn't necessarily mean that you are out of favor with God. Miriam and I have been talking with someone, almost daily, about an incredible trial. And the temptations accompanying this person's trial are beyond intense. They're satanic. They are fighting a war. 1 Peter 2:11 kind of battle. *Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.* But the experience of continual temptation doesn't mean you've failed the test. It means that you are human. As one commentator rightly diagnoses, "there is within us a deep well of dominating and alluring desires."⁸ The problem is not that God wants to see you stumble and fall. The problem is the depravity of our own hearts. Temptation is not sin. Giving in is. And the temptation part of the part of the trial doesn't come from God; it comes from us, from within. Don't blame God for the temptation.
- Let me say one other thing. Temptations all follow a discernable, recognizable, and therefore, beatable pattern—if you should choose to beat it with God's help. See, what you have to do is [Barney Fife](#) the temptation. You heard me right. Barney Fife it. "Nip it in the bud. Nip it, nip it, nip it." Instead as one comedian put it, "most of us spend the first six days of each week sowing wild oats, then we go to church on Sunday and pray for a crop failure."⁹ [Verse 15](#) suggests that desire must be planted and rooted and established in order for sin to come about. Don't allow those desires to take root. The moment you feed that desire and nurture it and play with the thought in your mind, you're toast. The moment the temptation begins, if you want to beat it, you've got to throw yourself at the mercy of God instead of throwing your weight behind your desire. That way the temptation will have no chance to conceive and give birth to sin.

Transition

And somehow through all of this we end up thinking God is against us; that he's the cause of all our troubles. That he's at fault if we stumble and fall. That's what James says. Look at the text. Look at [verse 16](#). *Don't be deceived, my dear brothers.* God's not your problem. Don't blame him. [[Slide #6](#)] Which brings us to the [second explanation](#) for why we shouldn't blame God. He's the giver of good gifts—not the giver of temptation. [Verses 16-18](#). *Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. 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. 18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.*

- God just doesn't give temptations to people. Instead, He gives good gifts and only good gifts. Every good gift comes from him. Look at what Jim says. *Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.* Do you not realize, even if you are God-hater, everything good you have in this life has come from Him? Matthew 5:45. *He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*

⁷ Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, James 1:15.

⁸ Motyer, p. 52.

⁹ Fred Allen, U.S. comedian (1894–1956)

- All this stuff about heavenly lights and shadows, that’s James’ way of using astronomical language to make his point about God the giver of good gifts. What’s the most stable thing we know and experience? Not the seasons. They change. How about the planets and stars? The sun always rises and sets. The moon is always there. Even without the aid of GPS, the stars, fixed in the sky, offer guidance and have for a millennia. And yet even those things, the most stable things we know of, are variable and shifting compared to God. “God does not change like the heavens do.”¹⁰ He *does not change like shifting shadows*. God does not cast a shadow. If your life is shadowed with temptations those aren’t from God. He only gives good gifts. He doesn’t have bad days. He doesn’t all of a sudden decide to throw a bunch of temptations your way. He can’t. He doesn’t move. He’s unchanging. Never, when you are being put to the test, say, ‘God is tempting me’; God cannot be tempted by evil, and he doesn’t tempt anyone. He always gives good gifts. So stop blaming him.
- Look at [verse 18](#). Verse 18 describes the ultimate good gift God has given. *He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created*. The ultimate proof of God’s goodness, of his giving good gifts, is the gift of new birth. Not physical birth. James is talking about spiritual birth. James says this spiritual birth comes about by the *word of truth*, the word about Jesus like Ephesians 1:13 says. *And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation*. James says that this gift of salvation through Jesus Christ is the ultimate proof that God has your best interest at heart. He’s not interested in your downfall. He could have written all of us off. Instead, he chose to offer this gift, new spiritual life an awakening of our hearts to him, because he is the giver of good gifts.
- So let me ask you, every gift has a giver and a receiver. God has given this gift. Have you received it? It’s awfully hard to receive something from someone you think is your enemy. He’s not your enemy. Stop blaming him and receive what he freely offers.

Conclusion

- Ethan and Micah you didn’t hear this. When I was a kid, a group of us got together at Will Heron’s house to set off some firecrackers. At first we would set them on the ground, light them, step back and cover our ears. We became braver. Or more stupid. I’m not sure which. Somehow things evolved into this game where we would light the firecracker in our hand, hold on to it as long as we could, then throw it before it blew up.
- Things were going great; we were having a blast until I lit one with a short fuse. I reached back to throw it; while the firecracker was still in my hand and right next to my ear, it went off. I burned my index finger and thumb pretty bad. My right ear was ringing for days.
- Like temptations, firecrackers are harmless until lit. And yet some of you continue to light them. And some of things you’re lighting aren’t little ladyfingers. You’re lighting the real deal—the M80s. And they continue to go off in your hand. Your fully lit temptations are blowing your life to bits and somehow you think God’s to blame? He’s not at fault. Don’t blame Him for what you light. Oh, how good and sweet and carefree our lives would be if we would just let him diffuse things for us. Deliverance will come. Don’t give in to the temptation. Don’t give up. *I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. 6 My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning.*

¹⁰ Moo, p. 79.