

Tempted or Tried – James 1:12

Temptation #1

By the time Thomas Edison died at the age of 84, he had over 1,000 patents registered in Washington, D.C. with hundreds others registered in the United Kingdom, France and Germany. We owe much to this man who revolutionized the way we live our lives. As we worship here this morning, the lights that allow us to see, the microphone that allows us to hear, the CD music that we enjoyed before the service started, and the songs and sermon notes that we view on the screen behind me all were originally created by this ingenious and hard working inventor. But it was more than just his innovative mind that made Thomas Edison so successful.

An evening snapshot of the inventor when he was 67 years old illustrates one of the foundational pillars of Edison's influence. His laboratory had caught fire and was now burning out of control with its creator standing by watching helplessly. It's easy to imagine how this could happen with all of the chemicals that Edison housed inside his laboratory. His goal was to have some of every kind of material in his laboratory. A newspaper article printed in 1887 listed many of Edison's laboratory ingredients which in part included over 8,000 different kinds of chemicals, every kind of screw made, every size of needle, every kind of cord and wire, the hair of humans, horses, hogs, cows, rabbits, goats, minx, and camels, every texture of silk, and various kinds of hoofs, shark's teeth, deer horns, tortoise shells, ostrich feathers, peacock's tails, and the list goes on endlessly. And now it was all going up in flames in this uncontrollable fire. And worst of all, in his laboratory was all of the documentation of every experiment that he had performed throughout his life. 67 years of work was going up in smoke. This laboratory that covered 2 complete city blocks was exploding with flames shooting out its roof.

Edison's 24 year old son, Charles, rushed to the scene of the fire and immediately thought of his father and his life's work. He began to look in a semi state of panic through the crowd that had gathered hoping to find his father – who knew how this man would respond to such a catastrophe in life? Imagine Charles' surprise when he found his father, Thomas, standing serenely with the glow of the fire illuminating his smiling face. As Charles ran up to his side, Thomas is reported as saying, "Charles, go find your mother. She will never be able to see anything like this again as long as she lives."

The next day, as the embers were still smoldering, Mina Edison and Charles noticed that they hadn't seen Thomas around for several hours. Their immediate thought was that the reality of his loss had now sunk in and he might have plunged into depression. So they both began a frantic search for him. Imagine their surprise when they found Thomas holed away in one of the spare rooms of the house with a large piece of

paper laid out on a table before him. He was already working on the plans for a new laboratory. That laboratory that he designed from scratch would become the prototype of all modern scientific laboratories.

One of the foundational pillars of Thomas Edison's success was the positive attitude that he continually maintained. Now a positive attitude by itself will not insure success. Edison also had a brilliant, creative mind. But frankly, there have been many other inventors who have had brilliant, creative minds who never achieved success because they became so discouraged and disheartened by their failed experiments that they gave up and quit. But not Thomas Edison. His attitude was indomitable. He looked at failed experiments as stepping stones to success. When he once admitted to a reporter that he had tried an estimated 2,000 failed experiments on the incandescent light bulb but was still working hopefully on it and the reporter asked in amazement, "don't you get discouraged with all of those failed experiments?", Edison cheerfully responded, "no, I now know 2,000 ways that won't work." It was this positive spirit in the face of trials and adversity along with his creative genius that allowed Thomas Edison to make such a revolutionary impact upon each of our lives.

A person's attitude, especially during times of adversity, is most important. Very often, a proper attitude can make the difference between victory and defeat. Now a positive attitude doesn't guarantee victory by itself, but a despairing attitude will usually guarantee defeat. So it shouldn't surprise us that God has so much to say about our attitudes, especially during times of adversity. We just read the command that we are to "consider it to be pure joy whenever we face trials of every kind."

For the last half of our summer, we have planned to look at the subject of facing temptation. This is a most practical topic because it touches every single one of our lives. We all face temptation. There is no one who has ever walked on this earth who has not been tempted. Even Jesus Christ, the only sinless person who ever lived, was tempted. If God's enemy was so brazen that he would tempt the Son of God himself, how can we think that we could ever be immune from temptation? So we are planning to look at this subject together in the remaining weeks of summer. We plan to look at what temptation is. We plan to see the kinds of temptations that are most dangerous to us. And we plan to examine from the Scriptures the defenses God has given to us to protect us from falling to temptations. What is our defense against temptations that come to us from without? What is our defense against temptations that come to us from within? These are all questions that we plan to address these next Sundays.

But we need to begin by reminding ourselves that our attitude towards temptation is critically important.

Now it is more difficult than we might imagine to consider it joy when we face temptation. Temptation, by its very nature, seems to be a negative in our lives. We are commanded to flee from

temptation in the Bible. The prayer that Jesus taught to his disciples contained the request, *lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one*. So, on the surface, temptation doesn't seem to be something to be joyful about. Why would God through his servant James command us to consider it to be pure joy when we face trials, temptation?

Well, there are at least 2 reasons for having and maintaining this positive attitude towards temptation. First, God has promised to his children that he will never allow more temptation in their lives than they are able to bear. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth,

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. 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. (1 Cor. 10:13)

We can be confident that God will never give us more than we can bear by His grace. He will never push us beyond the breaking point. Now he doesn't promise that he won't bring us right to the edge, but he has promised that he won't put us into a position where we have no way of escape.

But James also emphasizes a 2nd reason. Temptation brings into our lives an opportunity for growth and maturity that we can't get in any other way. The weight lifter builds muscles as he tests his strength. When he lifts more and more weight, he is putting more and more pressure on his muscles. But it is through that process that he actually becomes stronger. So it is with temptation. Temptation tests our faith. As our faith is tested, there is the opportunity for growth and greater strength. That is the reason for James writing that the testing of our faith develops perseverance, maturity and completion.

You see, one of the reasons why we have such a negative view of temptation is that we often have a misconception of what temptation really is. Most people have so associated temptation with sin that they have come to believe that temptation in itself is sinful. This is not the case. In fact, both the Hebrew and Greek words that are normally translated *tempt* are also translated *test* or *try* or *prove* in the Bible.

The main Hebrew word that is translated *tempt* in our Bibles is *nassah*. It comes from the root that means to test. The main Greek word that is translated *tempt* in our Bibles is *peirasmos*. It also has the major meaning of testing or trying as well as tempting. These words are used of God testing people like Abraham (Gen. 22) as well as the Devil tempting people like Jesus (Matt. 4). Now our English translations usually translate *nassah* or *peirasmos* test when God is doing it and tempt when the Devil is doing it, but we have to realize that it is the very same word in the original language. We understand what the translators are trying to do – they are trying to distance God from any connection with sin or evil. And this is a good thing because James tells us that no one should say God is tempting me because God cannot be tempted by evil. It is never God's intent to try to trip up his children so that they will sin. But this also shows our confusion with regards

to what this matter of temptation really is. The simple fact is this. The words translated *trials* in James 1:2 and *tempting* in James 1:13,14 – they are both the very same word in the original language.

So what is temptation then? What is this testing of faith that we are to consider to be joy as we encounter it?

Temptation is any circumstance or thought or inner desire that brings us to a point of moral decision in life. A temptation can be situational. We can be placed in a circumstance where we are tempted to disobey God. Perhaps we are in a store or at work and something is laying out there right before us that we would like to have. We are tempted to take something off the shelf or off a desk that is not ours. A temptation can be thoughtful. We all think thoughts that are not in keeping with God's character. Perhaps somebody told a lie about us and we have a vengeful thought about them – this is what I could do to pay them back. Perhaps we are driving down the road and see a scantily clad person on a billboard and an impure thought comes into our mind. A temptation can be lustful. Without any outside influence, we can have inner desires arise within us that we know are not in keeping with God's plan for our lives. Perhaps it is a desire to go back through that buffet line again at the Fire Mountain Restaurant when we have already had a sufficient amount to eat. Perhaps it is an impure sexual thought that is generated from within us without any outside motivation. Whatever the source, temptation occurs when we are brought to a place of moral decision in our lives.

Now it is critically important that we realize that temptation in itself is not sinful. We have no control over many circumstances that happen in our lives. We have no control over what companies put on billboards. We often have no control over sudden inner desires that might spring up from our sinful natures. But what we do with the temptation is what is most important and we do have control over our response.

You see, one of the enemy's greatest tricks is to get us to confuse temptation with sin. If he can get us to do this, we are doomed. If he can get us to think that temptation itself is sin, we have no chance. Because we don't have control over most temptations that come our way. But God's enemy loves to bring temptation into our lives and then step back and accuse us. We are walking through a store and pass the magazine rack. Our eyes randomly fall on a magazine with a suggestive picture on the cover. The picture tempts us. It brings an impure thought into our mind. Then the enemy whispers in our ear – *you know, a good Christian would never have a thought like that*. If we confuse temptation with sin, he's got us. So we begin to feel guilty because we were tempted. We confess our feelings of guilt, but we don't get relief because we haven't sinned. We have just been tempted. So we continuously feel guilty for being tempted. We feel guilty for something that we don't have any control over.

We all need to realize that temptation in itself is not sin. Temptation just brings us to the point of making a moral decision. If we accept the temptation into our lives and act upon it, then we sin. But if we

reject the temptation and don't act upon it, our faith will grow and we will actually be stronger for having been tempted.

Now let me give you 2 illustrations to help us see this process more clearly from the Bible.

1. The first is the temptation of Jesus Christ. The Bible clearly indicates that both God's Spirit and the Devil were involved in his temptation.

MT 4:1 *Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.*

God allowed His Son to be tempted by the devil and the devil did the actual tempting. Now God's purpose was obviously completely different from the devil's. Satan wanted to entice Jesus to sin. He wanted for God's Son to fail in his mission. He knew that Jesus couldn't be the spotless Lamb of God needed to be the sin sacrifice for the human race if he sinned. So the devil's motivation in tempting the Lord Jesus Christ to turn the stone into bread to feed his own fleshly desire or jump from the pinnacle of the temple to presumptuously put his Father in a position where he had to rescue him or bow down in worship to receive all the kingdoms of the world was to get Jesus to disobey the will of the Father and sin. We understand this clearly. But what we sometimes forget is God's purpose in the temptation of His Son for the Spirit lead the Lord Jesus Christ out into the wilderness to be tempted. The author of Hebrews tells us that there were some lessons that Jesus learned through the suffering of his temptations that he couldn't have learned in any other way, namely Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered and he was made complete or mature through what he suffered. In other words, God the Father allowed and even directed his Son to go through the temptation process because He knew that Jesus Christ would personally benefit from it. So the author of Hebrews could later write of Jesus, *who for the joy set before him, endured the cross (Heb. 12:2)*. You see, the Lord Jesus Christ himself is an example of what James is speaking of here. Jesus was tempted in all points just as we are yet without sin. He was and remains the spotless Lamb of God, totally without any sin so temptation in itself cannot be sinful because Jesus was tempted. But both God and the Devil were active in Christ's temptation. God allowed it to happen and even directed it to happen because He knew that His Son's decision to obey Him and follow His will would bring growth and maturity into Christ's life. The Devil tempted Jesus trying to get him to sin. Because the Lord Jesus Christ understood temptation he faced it with joy because he knew the blessings that would come through his obedience to the will of the Father.

So it is in each of our lives. We will all face temptations. We cannot avoid temptations. We have no control over many temptations that come into our lives. But we can face them with joy knowing that God will never allow us to be tempted more than we can bear by His grace, and that as we make the right choices in the temptation process, we will be stronger and more blessed because we were tempted.

2. But you might be saying, I can't really identify with the example of the Lord Jesus Christ because he was the perfect and sinless Son of God and I have this inner sinful nature that I continually battle with. Well, let me give you another clear example from Scripture – one that we can all identify with.

Job was a person like us. He had a family, he maintained a house, he owned property. God was proud of Job because of Job's integrity and character. But Satan wanted to discredit Job and hinder his relationship with God. So Satan asked for permission from God to bring some horrendous temptations into Job's life in order to lure him into cursing his creator. God allowed Satan to do this because He knew the ultimate blessing that would come to Job through his obedience. So Satan took all that Job possessed in one day – his sheep, his camels, his cattle, his donkeys, his house, even his children. You think you've had bad days? Imagine having a day like Job had. Satan's motivation was to tempt Job to curse God. So Job was brought to the point of a moral decision. His temptations were situational. There were circumstances that came into Job's life that were totally beyond his control. How would Job respond? Job maintained his integrity. Job did not curse God.

JOB 1:20 At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship²¹ and said:

"Naked I came from my mother's womb,
and naked I will depart.

The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away;
may the name of the LORD be praised."

JOB 1:22 In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

The end result of Job's temptation was growth and blessing. One of the beautiful studies in the book of Job is to see the growth and maturity in this man's life through the temptations that he suffered. Job's speeches become longer and more insightful whereas his friend's speeches become shorter and more confused. In the last chapter, God restores to Job double of everything that he had before. Job's character and maturity had now grown to the place where he could handle twice the blessing of God.

Now this same process takes place in our lives every day. When we are faced with temptation, whether that temptation come in the form of a situation that we find ourselves in or a thought that comes into our mind or an inner desire that we feel, we then come to the place where we must make a moral decision. The temptation itself is not sin. The temptation just brings us to a decision point that could lead to sin if we make the wrong choice. When tempted, we can choose to obey God and do what we know is right. When tempted, we can also choose to disobey God and do what we know is wrong. If we obey God, we will be blessed and experience growth in our lives. If we disobey God, we will sin and suffer the consequences of that sin. But we can face temptation joyfully because it offers to us an opportunity for growth.

JAS 1:2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.