

It seems like the day before taxes are due is an appropriate time to remind you of Benjamin Franklin's famous observation, "In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." Of course that's not exactly true. There are two other experiences in life no one can escape - trials and temptations. While these are used by the devil to defeat us, God uses trials to grow us up and transform us into fully devoted followers of Jesus. We will see this morning that trials and temptations have different effects depending on our response to them. After all, the same sun that melts wax also hardens clay.

Last week we explored what the Bible teaches about Satan. He is invisible, powerful, malicious, crafty and organized. We learned that he is called, "the prince of the power of the air." Since he controls the environment on the earth, we see his dark work every day in the headlines. His objective, according to Jesus, is to "steal, kill and destroy." He wants to wreak havoc on the earth and oppose the work of God in the world. His handiwork is on display anytime you see a news report - a terrorist attack, a kidnapped child, a murder, even an unfavorable medical diagnosis can be used to defeat us. All these painful events are consequences of living in a fallen world. Two days ago I got news that a good friend of ours has liver cancer. That's the second friend diagnosed with that disease in a month. Life isn't for sissies. There is nothing easy about living on a fallen planet. The game is rigged and everything is tilted toward evil. The devil uses our external circumstances to drag us down and defeat us.

But there is another strategy the devil employs that is far more personal. It is called temptation. Temptation is an inside job. If the devil can succeed in getting our eyes off of Jesus, then he can extinguish any effectiveness we may have to serve God and be a blessing to others.

I want to walk through a section of James 1 and point out some valuable insights into the anatomy of temptation.

Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial (peirasmos); for once he has been approved (dokimos), he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him.

- 13 Let no one say when he is tempted (peirazo), "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil (there is nothing in God to which evil can appeal), and He Himself does not tempt anyone.
- 14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.
- 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.
- 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

The word translated "trial" and the word translated "tempt" is the same Greek word. Translators have chosen different English words because of the motivations behind our trials. God uses trials to test us and strengthen our faith. A faith that can't be tested can't be trusted. Satan, on the other hand, uses these trials to tempt us to choose evil. His objective is to take us out, to immobilize us and make us ineffective for the Lord. Where testing is a God-given opportunity for growth, temptation is a satanic solicitation.

Verse 13 tells us God will test us but never tempt us. And when He tests us, He tests us in order to approve us. That's why James is able to say, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing (dokimon) of your faith produces steadfastness." (James 1:2-3). The same trials the devil uses as solicitation to evil God uses for our sanctification.

The devil tempts us by turning our God-given desires against us. The word "desire" (translated "lust" in vv. 14-15) is a neutral term in the Bible. Desires are given to us by God. Desire, properly directed, is a good thing. Our bodies require food so God gives us hunger. We were created for community so God gives us the desire to belong. Sex is a gift ensuring the survival of mankind. But the devil distorts these good things and offers them on his terms. God wants us to desire. One of the failed strategies many churches endorse in overcoming temptation is a fruitless attempt to stifle desire. This is the goal of a lot of legalistic Christian teaching. The neutering of our desire is not only ineffective but it is counterproductive. C. S. Lewis famously said,

"If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

While Satan is the ultimate source of temptation, the scriptures reveal his two familiar accomplices - the world and the flesh. There is a consistent pattern from the beginning to the end of the Bible that makes it clear that Satan's temptation is targeted.

	Body	Soul	Spirit
Gen. 3:6	good for food,	delight to the eyes	able to make one wise
Lk. 4:1-13	stones to bread	worldly kingdoms	self-importance, pride
1 John 2:16	lust of flesh	lust of eyes	boastful pride of life

Verse 14 lays out the details of just how the enemy goes after us. His strategy is to draw us out (*exelkomenos*) like a fish drawn from its hiding place, and then to entice us (*deleazomenos*, from the verb *deleazō* "to bait, to catch a fish with bait, or hunt with snares"). Thomas Brooks was a non-conformist Puritan preacher in England in the 17th century. His book, *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*, is a classic. First published in 1652, the book details the strategy of our enemy. Brooks says, "Satan's first device to draw the soul into sin is, to present the bait - and hide the hook; to present the golden cup - and hide the poison; to present the sweet, the pleasure, and the profit that may flow in upon the soul by yielding to sin - and to hide from the soul the wrath and misery that will certainly follow the committing of sin." p. 15

We know that "everything that glitters is not gold," that sometimes, the things we find most attractive come with a hook hidden in the gift but we just keep taking the bait. My brother lived in Germany where his German landlord, who could speak no English, offered him a "gift." My brother was appreciative until he learned that "gift" in German means poison. The man was

offering rat poison to my brother to be sprinkled around his storage room to protect his belongings from rats. Some "gifts" can be deadly.

Notice what happens in v. 15. When our natural desire is coupled with an opportunity for evil, sin is conceived. James is clearly using biological language. The unmentioned father who initiates this coupling is clearly Satan. The grotesque child that is produced, sin, then produces its own offspring, death. The steps are clear: misdirected desire results in sin, and unconfessed sin produces death. And we all know what it feels like to be held in the grip of sin. Augustine described it this way, "I was held fast, not in fetters clamped upon me by another, but by my own will, which had the strength of iron chains. The enemy held my will in his power and from it he had made a chain and shackled me. For my will was perverse and lust had grown from it, and when I gave in to lust habit was born, and when I did not resist the habit it became a necessity. These were the links which together formed what I have called my chain, and it held me fast in the duress of servitude" (*Confessions* 8:5).

You may be more familiar with the words of the apostle Paul: "For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire (will) to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing." Ro. 7:15-19

Have you ever felt that way? Then welcome to the normal Christian life. A right response to trials and temptations can result in growth and spiritual maturity but a wrong response to trials and temptations will result in slavery and spiritual poverty and ultimately death itself.

What can we do to defend ourselves against the "wiles of the devil?" How can we shift our focus from negative, fearful thoughts about sin and death and evil and Satan and view life positively so we can offer life and hope?

1. Acknowledge the reality of the unseen world. I said last week that in a materialistic culture matter is all that matters. Many Christians are practical materialists. This world seems more real because we can interact with it through our senses. "Within us the dust of the earth and the breath of heaven are joined in a mysterious union only death can separate. But that relationship is often a strained one, for while the body is fitted for a terrestrial environment - with lungs to breathe air and teeth to chew food and feet to walk on dirt - the soul is extraterrestrial, fitted for heaven. It breathes other air, eats other food, walks other terrain... We live in a constant tension between those two parts, the lofty side of our nature and the lowly side. Like a tree, we are torn between two worlds, a part of us rooted in the soil, another part reaching for the sky. But because our roots can grasp soil more securely than our leaves can grasp sky, the soil seems more real. It is something we can see and hold in our hand. But heaven, heaven escapes our grasp. We can't hold it any more than a leaf can hold sky." Ken Gire

But reality begins with what is spiritual. For that world we need a different way of interacting, a non-physical sense to discern the non-physical world.

2. Understand God's strategic objective in the invisible war. We have been thrust into a high stakes game. We are all caught up in a competition that is being played out before rulers and authorities in heavenly places. These spiritual beings are watching to see if men and women created by God and given free choice, will submit to God or rebel against His rule. Listen to how Paul describes his calling.

"Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, ¹⁰ **so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.** ¹¹ This was according to the **eternal purpose** that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him." Eph. 3:7-12

You are I have been enlisted to be part of God's invasion force upon the earth. Jesus came to establish God's kingdom on earth. He didn't come not just to pass out wedding invitations to that celestial marriage ceremony between Christ and His church in Heaven. He brought Heaven down here and began a recruitment campaign for all of us to be part of His church that would pray, "Our Father, which art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven..." Jesus didn't teach us to pray, "Get me out of here." He taught us to pray, "Lord make up there come down here."

The role of the church on earth is to make known the manifold wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places. When we succumb to temptation the devil advances. When we resist temptation and worship God, the devil retreats. That is why James tells his readers, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

3. Put on Christ. You will never have a new perspective until you become a new person. The only remedy for "the old nature" is to get a new nature. "Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." Eph. 4:22-24. How do I do that? By putting on Christ and being clothed with His righteousness. Paul says it this way to the Roman Christians, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." Ro. 13:14

Putting on the new self is synonymous with putting on the full armor of God. When we put on Christ we take on the qualities of Christ and prepare for battle. Each piece of armor describes another aspect of Christ's abiding presence in our lives. We are not commanded to "pursue the devil" or "bind the devil" or "defeat the devil." We are however commanded to "put on the full armor of God" and "stand firm." That's because the battle has been won. Jesus defeated Satan on the cross. Colossians 2:13-15 says, "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him." So how can I put on the armor of God? I'll tell you next week.