

The Problem of Evil

Epistle of James
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Please turn with me in your Bibles to James 1 continuing our exposition of the epistle of James. This morning I'm changing the title slightly from last week. The title of this message is "The Problem of Evil." The problem of evil. I think it's a little more specific and accurate to what the text is talking about.

We mentioned in previous weeks that one of the hallmarks of James is that his writing is extremely practical and pastoral. He is not theoretical, philosophical, esoteric, and strictly speaking all of Scripture is practical. The Apostle Paul writes more theologically, more elevated in the concepts in maybe more profundity, and yet it's all aimed at, every verse of Scripture, nothing is given just for theoretical knowledge. It's given to make a claim on our lives to make a difference in the way that we live for Christ and so we need to understand that.

I just want to take a moment to say welcome to Gina. So glad that she's here this morning and praise God for the blessing that he's given to her. She's going to slip in late these next few weeks and leave early because, as you know, going through chemotherapy, her immune system is down. Continue to pray for her. But we rejoice that God has blessed her so much and that you're here with us this morning.

The problem of evil. James is not, he is especially practical. We see that in our passage this morning. He is going to deal with something that is one of the most difficult, complex, philosophical questions in the universe, the problem of evil, but he deals with it for practical purposes and explicitly pastoral concerns. He loves the people to whom he's writing and he realizes that if they don't understand this correctly, it's going to hinder their ability to bear up under trials.

Now the problem of evil, let me take a moment and we're going to describe it before we read the text and deal with it in kind of a big picture way, and then we're going to follow James and deal with it in a really practical and specific way. The problem of evil is essentially this: The Bible teaches that God is sovereign, the Bible teaches that God is good and therefore opposed to evil. If God is absolutely sovereign and if he's perfectly good, why does evil exist? That's the question. Why does he allow evil to exist? If he could eradicate it, if he has the power to eradicate it, why does he not do it?

Now, this is a question, as I said, that throughout the generations men have wrestled with. God gives us enough direction in his word to know that essentially the answer to that is God has allowed evil for his own glory and for the good of his people. In fact, the doctrine of providence, the church name, Providence, the doctrine of divine providence is essentially this: that God in his sovereignty, it's basically his sovereignty combined with his goodness in his motivations. The doctrine of providence teaches that God governs all things that he's made. All things and all creatures, he is sovereign over them, governing them to his appointed end. Not so as to eradicate the free choice of the individual, but still superintending that to his purpose so that he foreordains whatsoever comes to pass. It's a big picture of the sovereignty of God. It's mind-blowing when you conceive it and isn't it just completely actually logical that it would be mind-blowing to conceive of the way the infinite God who spoke the world into being out of nothing, governs his creation? Wouldn't it be ridiculous for us to expect that we could figure it all out? We who are of yesterday and know nothing. But it's the idea that he's governing all things for his glory and the good of his people.

Let me just say one thing that's helped me. It's something that occurred to me a few years ago that I think helps me and before we get into the text. One of my heroes in the natural world history is Winston Churchill. I've read several biographies on Churchill. I love to read stories about WWII and how he was instrumental in galvanizing the British people to stand up at a time when many were ready to surrender to the Nazis, to make terms, and they stood up and they kept fighting and they kept fighting and they kept fighting and then finally America entered the war and we know the rest of the story. But Churchill's greatness was seen in a way that would never have been seen without Adolph Hitler. I wouldn't know who Winston Churchill was if it were not for Adolph Hitler because he would have just been maybe a Prime Minister. Probably wouldn't have gotten to be Prime Minister, he would have just been a guy who wrote some books and who had some interesting adventures and who had some good political philosophy and ways. Not all of his political philosophies were so great, but I wouldn't know who he was. I wouldn't know about the greatness of his character without the presence of evil that brought it out.

We would not see the glory and greatness of our God had he not ordained and allowed evil to come into the world. We see his glory and the beauty of his wrath in punishing evil. We see the glory of his grace in making a way to pardon sinners like you and me by punishing our sin in the person of his Son on the cross. So that's something, ponder that, pray through that. I think that's part of the reason for God allowing evil, for his glory, that we might celebrate him and know him and delight in him.

Now, we're going to see that James comes at this problem a little more specifically and let's read James 1. We're going to go ahead and read verses 1 to 18 to get it in context.

1 James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. 2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect

result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. 5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8 being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. 9 But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; 10 and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. 11 For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away. 12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, 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, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, 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. 17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. 18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we ask that you might grant us fullness of your blessing to understand your word. We confess that these things are too high for us; that your thoughts are too far above us; that they are wonderful and true and we, Lord, are foolish and darkened in our understanding. So open our minds, open our hearts, help us to see and to understand and to bow our knees to such a glorious God and such a glorious Savior. We pray in his name. Amen.

The problem of evil. James deals with it not so much in a theoretical sense as why is there evil out in the world, he's dealing with the question, why is there evil in my life? Why do I struggle with evil myself? He's writing to those who profess to be Christians. He says, "My beloved brethren." He's writing to Jewish believers in the first century who have been dispersed after persecution broke out in Jerusalem and they are at various places throughout the Roman Empire, many in Syria, others Cyprus, other places. So he writes this letter to be circulated among them and to encourage them and one of the things that we see at the very beginning in these first 18 verses is his great concern for helping those that he loves bear up under suffering and trials. The key concept early in the verses that we read, verses 2 to 18, is trials and tribulations, difficulties. The word "tempt" is actually the same word translated "trial" in verse 2 and verse 12. In the Greek

it's the same root word, trial and tempt, same Greek verb, Greek noun in those different places. The same root.

So he's basically saying, "I understand that as you are going through trials, you're going through difficulties, you're feeling the pull of evil, you're feeling the pull of unbelief and maybe the desire to want to fall away and to stop following Christ, understand that when you're feeling that, that God is in no way responsible for the temptation to depart." The evil in our hearts, the question that he's dealing with, where does this come from? What is the source of the sin that besets us? That at times feels that it grips us? Where does it come from? James is emphatically, as emphatically as he can, making clear that the evil that we find in us is not coming from God.

A couple of key phrases that help us see this is his main concern. We saw first of all last week in verse 12, he's telling us that God's purpose, remember last Sunday we looked at God's purpose in suffering is to do good things to us, to help us have assurance of our salvation; to help us set our eyes on heaven. So in verse 12 he talks about God's good purpose in allowing the trials to come. In verses 13 to 17 particularly 13 to 18, he's making clear that God has no bad purpose in anything that he does. And two of the key phrases or clauses, when he says in verse 13, "God cannot be tempted by evil," that is, that the source of temptation is not from God. Evil is not something that God can even entertain in any way.

Now, this word "evil" is a key word here for us to understand. I mentioned last week that the two New Testament words for "evil," two Greek words are translated by our English word e-v-i-l, evil, and both of them have the sense of the root idea of being harmful or injurious. Something evil is that which hurts, damages, destroys. It destroys that which is good. It damages that which God has made. God has made all things good and evil is that which tears down the beauty and glory of what he's done. So evil is that which tears us down. It makes us less than we are meant to be. It can be translated "worthless; to fail to be what you are meant to be."

And good then is the opposite of that. Now, he's going to talk about good in verse 17, "every good thing given comes from God." In verse 17, we're going to look this week at how evil does not come from God and next week we're going to look at how only good things come from God. And his basic point in telling us this is he knows that for us to bear up under the kind of suffering that we can find ourselves in, we must be very clear on the character of God. We must know without any doubt what he's like; that he is perfectly and completely good. There is no shadow of evil or malice or bad intent in the God who holds our life breath in his hands.

God is one who creates things that are useful, good. That's what this means: useful, profitable, that which brings joy and happiness and blessing. Those are the things that come from God. That's God's intention, to bless, to build up, to provide that which is profitable, which adds and increases. Evil is the opposite of that and James's emphatic point is God does no evil. He wills in the sense of willing and in his heart, he never intends to diminish anything.

Now he allows it, yes, but he's not personally involved in that. In fact, when evil comes, what we're going to see is when he allows evil to come into your life, his heart is good. A good verse just to memorize is Genesis 50:20. Remember when Joseph had been sold into slavery by his brothers? They were going to murder him but then they decided just to sell him into slavery and he went into slavery and he was down in Egypt for about 13 years as a slave, a prisoner. Then seven years, so the seven years of plenty he was storing things up, working for Pharaoh. So about 20 years after, 21 or 22 years after they sold him into slavery, his brothers come down needing some help. Remember the story. The first time he helps them and he doesn't tell them who he is. He speaks to them through a translator. The second time, he tells them who he is and he reveals himself to them and they're terrified but he speaks kindly to them. Later, they think everything's okay but then when Jacob dies, they're worried again. "Now dad's gone, maybe his heart is really going to turn against us." And that's when Genesis 50:20, he says, "Listen, how can you think that I would harm you? What you meant for evil to me, God meant for good. The evil that God allowed into my life through you, he meant for good. His heart was good."

This is what James is trying to help us parse out in this passage, that whatever evil may be done to you or me, God means it for good, especially if you are a child of God. You can know that, "For all things work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose," to make us like Christ which is the ultimate good. So he always means good.

Now, so the question then, the problem of evil. We want to consider the rest of our time under three points and, first of all, we want to look at the danger. The danger. That's our first point this morning: the danger. Let no one say, "I'm being tempted by God. Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God.'" James issues, again, a command. He likes to start off with imperatives when he moves to a new subject. He starts off with the command and then he gives you the reasons. "Hey, let me tell you what," James says, "nobody needs to say this. Let no one say, 'I am being tempted by God.' Now let me tell you why: because God cannot be tempted by evil and he tempts no man." But the point is he has to say, "Let no one say, 'I am being tempted by God.'"

You know, if I were to ask you, if you were to ask me, you know, we're dealing with a situation, maybe one of us sins in what we say and the other is talking, or maybe we both sin and we're talking back about it and we don't sit there and say, "I'm sorry, God made me do it." I haven't heard anybody say that. "You know, I had this sin problem and God made me do it. He keeps making me do it." Nobody says that, but James apparently thinks that we need to hear this. "Let no one say when he is being tempted by evil that he's being tempted by God." Like I said, James isn't theoretical, he's intensely practical. He knows that though you and I don't voice the words, we truly believe God is responsible for our sin and he says, "Let no one say that. You think it, don't speak it and stop thinking it."

I mean, think about this, it goes all the way back to the beginning when Adam and Eve sinned. God comes to Adam and he says, "Why are you hiding? Where are you?" "I'm

hiding. I was hiding from you." "What have you done, have you eaten the fruit?" What did Adam say? He blame-shifted. He said, "The woman," first of all, "It's the woman whom you gave me." Who is he blaming? He's blaming God. "If you hadn't given me that woman, we wouldn't be standing here dealing with this issue. You're responsible for my sin." The essence and the wickedness of sin is that we blame God for our sin. It's insanity but that's the nature that we've all inherited is this insanity to blame him.

Now, how do we blame him? Satan is subtle and our sin nature is subtle. We don't just come out and say like I said earlier, "God is making me sin." But in our hearts, we hold beliefs that show that's really the bottom line. We talk to some person who says, you know, confesses to having an affair or you find out that a man's been having an affair, and he says things like this, "You know, my wife was not being responsive to me romantically anymore. I've been under a lot of stress at work. Things have been really hard. This woman in my life is really very attractive. And when you consider all of those circumstances, can't you understand why I did it?" Do you see that? "If you were where I am, if you were where I am and God had allowed all of these things to happen in your life which you could not control, don't you see it's inevitable that I sinned?"

I mean, we betray this all the time to how we blame others but we're really ultimately blaming God. Our vocabulary, we say things like, "You made me angry. You made me angry. I'm sorry I lost my temper but..." But and if just don't have any place in confessions. "I'm really sorry but..." whatever is coming after that, just stop. Or, "Hey, I'm really sorry if I offended you. If you're so sensitive that I offended you." We say things like that all the time. "You made me angry." And so in our minds we think that our outburst of anger or our harsh words, our negative tone, our ungrateful attitudes that infect those around us that are demonstrated, what's happening is we're sinning. We really believe that it's because of our circumstances. "Listen, there's so much going on. Yeah, I've tried to work on my... But you don't understand what I'm dealing with." And you can sometimes put together a pretty impressive little litany and if people are like, "We're sinners and we know. Man, that is tough." We can look at somebody else's sin and even think that for them. Things happen, things happen like, "Lord, why are you letting that happen to them too? This is just too much."

What I'm saying, things that happen to us have a profound affect, yes. They have a shaping power, yes. But they do not have the power to make you sin. Nothing that happens to you, according to the Scripture, has the power to make you sin. What Scripture says unequivocally throughout every page is that you and I are 100% responsible for every sin that we've ever committed.

Now, this can get, the problems of the human heart are complex and living in a fallen world where evil is present and evil things happen, yes, things that God hates happen; people abuse one another, do wicked things and those wicked things leave scars, but to be free, James is trying to tell us that to find freedom we must not blame our sin on anyone else because in blaming it on anyone else, we're ultimately blaming it on God. It doesn't mean that there's not real profound pain that needs to be worked through, yes. When things happen that we see happen in our world and some things as we share about our

past with each other, we can look at things, you may be able to look at moments and say, "How did this happen? Why did God allow that to happen?" We don't have all the answers. We don't know all the answers. I'm not trying to say that we do, but I do know this: we do know certain things and this is what James is trying to tell us. We do know that God is not the author of any evil anywhere but we have this tendency to want to blame him and to excuse ourselves.

That's the danger that James sees. There is something indigenous to the heart of sinful men that we want to blame God. So he says, "Let no one say that I am being tempted by God." Now, the doctrine. That's the danger. The second point after having considered the first point, the danger, is the doctrine. And there are essentially two things, two sub points under this number 2. There is 2A and 2B. There are two doctrines or two points of doctrine and the first point of doctrine, which I've been touching on already, is God is not in any way the source of the evil that afflicts my soul. God is not in any way the source of the evil that afflicts my soul.

He does not will to harm me or you. When he allows things, he does not willingly afflict even allowing those things, according to Lamentations 3:38. He intends no spiritual harm. He does not intend spiritual harm to anyone in anyway at any time. I mean, this is even true for unbelievers, that when you carefully parse out all the teachings of Scripture though God has wrath on unbelievers until they repent, at the same time as he has wrath on unbelievers, he also has love for all people including unbelievers. It's a different level of love than his electing saving love, yes, yes, but you cannot say that he does not have love for all people; that he genuinely, as we see in 1 Timothy 2:4, he desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. There is a genuine part of God's heart that offers the Gospel to all. He does not push to do evil, would be to do spiritual harm, would be to push someone toward hell. God pushes no one toward hell. He invites all people to be saved.

Now, it's true that those who are truly saved he actually, by his grace, grants new life. There is complexity to this but James is making emphatically clear that God does not do evil. He does not push people away. He cannot be tempted by evil. That is, literally he is untemptable. There is nothing in him that desires to harm spiritually. Then he says, "He Himself does not tempt anyone." That's emphatic. "He Himself does not tempt anyone." He himself does not in trying people, he never intends the trial to result in harm. He intends the trial to result in blessing.

So the first point of doctrine is God is not in any way the source of the evil that afflicts my soul. He is holy, holy, holy. He is too pure to look upon evil. When he allows affliction and trials, they are trials for our good. I mentioned this word "trial" in verse 2, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials," the same Greek word in verse 12, "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial." Verse 13, "Let no one say when he is tempted." The word "tempted" is the same Greek word as "trial," and so it means "to test, to try," but it can have a positive or negative connotation and the context tells us in verses 13 and 14 it's a negative connotation. That is, you can try something in

order to prove it genuine and this is what God does. When he tries something, when he allows affliction to come into our lives, his intention is to prove us genuine to bless us. Satan tempts. The same word is used of his activity when he tempted Jesus in Matthew 4:1. The word "tempt" is the word here "trial." He wanted to try him. Why does Satan want to try? He wants to try to destroy. Do you see that? He tries to destroy; to prove false; to tear away.

James is saying whenever a trial happens, God's purpose in that trial is completely good and the reality is that we've got to remember God doesn't owe us anything. We somehow get this impression that we are owed, you know, a good life. We're not owed a good life. The Scripture makes clear if we're owed anything, we're owed hell. So even if you took away sin, we're not owed anything. He creates us for his purposes. We didn't create ourselves.

It's interesting when you watch how Job responds. It's interesting. There God is trying Job and Satan is tempting him at the same time, okay? Think about that. Remember, God's the one who initiates the process, yes, but God doesn't do anything wrong. God doesn't do anything with a bad intention. God's intention in the whole book of Job is to bless Job. It doesn't look like it to you and me. It doesn't look like it to Job's friends. But what the Bible is saying is that God's intention was only to bless him.

Now, think back on that. Job, remember, well, first of all, it's so wild how that story starts off. You know, we're told Job is a righteous man, fearing God, shunning evil. That's the opening words of the book of Job. "There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job and he was righteous, fearing God, turning away from evil." And all the good things about Job. Then it says there was a day when the sons of God came to appear before the Lord and Satan came and apparently God holds court and from time-to-time the sons of God, that is the demons, come into his presence and Satan comes into his presence and God says to Satan, God's the one who says, "Have you considered my servant Job?"

And when you've read the book, you're like, "Really, I wish you wouldn't bring him up," because we think in a very man-centered way. We think, "I don't want to go through, I don't want to even watch what Job goes through again." Remember what happens to Job. Satan basically argues, "Hey, the reason that he serves you is you have a hedge around everything that he has. I can't touch him. If you'll let me touch what he has, he'll curse you to your face." God says, "Okay, you can have anything that he has, touch anything that he has, only don't touch him." And so Satan then does this amazing, brings incredible evil and calamity on Job. Remember the Sabeans, the Chaldeans, a group of people, three different groups come and take his camels, they take his donkeys, they take his sheep, they kill all the servants that are tending all of these flocks except one. There's always one guy who gets away so he can go tell Job about how terrible it was and we find out that Job then is just minding his own business, having a good day like he had a lot of good days, things are well, probably leafing through his financial records. You know, "Man, things are great. My cows," all this stuff. And the guy comes in and says, "Listen, the Sabeans came and all the camels," I'm not sure if I'm getting this right but basically the idea is one guy comes in and says, "All the camels are gone and they killed all the

servants and I alone have escaped." While he was still speaking, another guy runs in and says, "They killed all of the donkeys and all the servants except for me and I alone escaped to tell you." And while he was still speaking, another guy comes in and says, "The rest of the flocks are gone. All the servants are killed. I alone escaped to tell you." While he was still speaking, another guy comes in and says, "Your sons and your daughters were having a feast at the home of the oldest son and a great wind came and blew against the house and it collapsed and all of them are dead. All of your children are dead and all of the servants. I alone have escaped to tell you." And the Scripture says Job tore his clothes and fell down on the ground and worshiped and he said, "Naked came I into the world and naked shall I depart. The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

And the Scripture tells us God's verdict on what Job said. Through all this, Job did not sin nor did he blame God. Job did not sin nor did he blame God. Now some people misunderstand that and think Job didn't believe in the sovereignty of God. What did he say? "The Lord gave. The Lord has taken away." Satan couldn't have done what he did unless the Lord had willed to allow those things to happen so he rightly ascribed the sovereignty to God but he did not blame God for wrongdoing. He said, "Listen, I've got no rights. He's free to give and he's free to take away. Blessed be his name." And God says Job got it right.

Then in chapter 2, remember Satan comes back and says, "Skin for skin. If you'll let me touch him." So he gives him boils from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet. He's in such misery and agony that his wife says, "Curse God and die." And she says, "Why do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die. Look, God's obviously afflicting you. He's cursing you so curse him so he'll put you out of your misery." And Job says to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity? Shall we just accept good from God but then when he gives adversity, not accept it?" Do you see his high view of the sovereignty of God? But also the goodness of God. "God has not done anything wrong to afflict me." What do I deserve as a sinner? Nothing except hell. We read these last words, "In all this, Job did not sin with his lips." Job did not do what James is worried that we do. "Let no one say when he is tempted that I am being tempted by God." Job did not ascribe wrongdoing to God. God has done nothing wrong.

Now, what happens is Job is really wrestling with this because he knows he didn't do anything, he did not sin and bring this on as some kind of discipline. He doesn't know why it's happening. His friends come along and they conclude it must be happening because you have got some secret sin and wickedness that you're not coming clean on and they keep fishing for that. Like the next 35 chapters of them fishing, "Job, are you ready to come clean now?" And Job keeps maintaining, "Listen, I haven't sinned." Now, he gets out of line and he starts accusing God slightly of wrongdoing as things go along, but relatively speaking he's still the white knight compared to his friends according to God at the end of the book.

And when you read his friends' discussion, a lot of times their theology seems really good. They say a lot of things that are true but essentially their error was this: they concluded that for what happened to Job to happen, there must be some sin because it would be evil of God to do it if there weren't sin. That's essentially their theology. They believe that God must have done....and they don't believe God has done evil, they believe Job has, but they believe that if Job hasn't done evil, which he hasn't, they don't know that, but if he hasn't done evil, it would be evil of God to do this and that's why God says, "What Job said about me is much better than what you guys said. You'd better ask Job to pray for you so that you don't die." He vindicates Job at the end. "My servant Job, ask him to pray for you. You've been putting him down for 35 chapters, go ask him to pray for you."

And then Job is elevated by the Lord and blessed. He has more riches at the end, but the main thing is he says to the Lord after God, remember, calls him on the carpet and says, "Who is this who multiplies words without knowledge? Let the fault-finder contend with the Almighty." He says, "What have you got to say? I want you to tell me what I need to do. Hey, before we get started, let me tell you a little bit about myself." And he starts telling him, "Hey, Job, were you there when I hung the foundations of the universe? Were you there when I called out each star by name? Are you able to do all of these things?" And for two chapters he pours it on and then Job says, "Listen, I shouldn't have spoken." And God says, "Well, be quiet. I want to tell you some more." And for two more chapters he tells him, "You don't know anything, Job. I am God, you are not."

And at the end, though, at the end, Job says, "Before I had heard about you with my ears, now I've seen you with my eyes. I repent in dust and ashes." And it says that then the latter end of Job was greater than the former. He knew God in a whole new way. He had seen the glory of God. God's heart in all of that was to bless him because God does no evil.

So the second doctrinal sub point, the doctrine, God is not the source of the evil that afflicts my soul. He only means it for good. The difficulties that come into my life are there for my good from God's standpoint. The second doctrinal sub point is: my heart is the source of all the evil that afflicts my soul. My own heart is the source of all the evil that afflicts my soul. Where does evil come from? It comes from within my heart. It comes from within your heart.

The passage that was read earlier in the service, Jesus says, "It's not what goes into the man that defiles him, it's what comes out." For what comes out of the heart, that's where the adultery comes. That's where the rage, that's where the murder. Everything comes out of the heart. You see, sin is such a radical disease, it's such a radical enemy that's inside of us, that the problem is in me, not in my circumstances.

I heard someone say it this way and you might want to write this down: the people in my life, the circumstances in my life, the events in my life. The people in my life, the circumstances in my life, the events in my life do not make me the way I am but they reveal the way I am. People, circumstances, events don't make me the way I am, they

reveal the way I am. They provide an opportunity for the wickedness of my heart to be exposed.

So the indignation ought to always be not out there or the circumstances that God's allowing, but rather the wickedness that's coming out and this is the way to freedom. If you don't identify the problem, you can't be free. If you're trying to manage your life, to manage your circumstances so that you won't then sin because the circumstances are now different, that's not dealing with the issue. You're just treating symptoms. The problem's in the heart and the beauty of it is God is using the circumstances in your life, the people in your life, the events in your life, to reveal the problem to you. His heart is completely loving and benevolent. He's bringing these things in our lives to show us our great need of a Savior.

He makes it very clear the problem in James 1 is us. He says, "Let no man say, these tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted by evil and he does not himself tempt anyone." Look at verse 14, "But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." The word picture here: each one is tempted, that is tried and turned away from the Lord, evil pulling us away from God happens when we're carried away and enticed. These two participles here have the idea of drawing out. The first one: carried out, draw out, and enticed, to bait. Really it's kind of a word picture of what we try to do when we go fishing. You know, you've got fish, catfish hiding in a certain place. I don't know why you'd want to catch catfish but my nephew likes to catch catfish. So you try to catch a catfish, you find out where they might be. You know, there's a deep spot over here, maybe a hole, and so you try to throw and get the bait down in there. So you lure them out and entice them so that you can eat them. You could just go to the store and buy catfish.

But he's saying that what happens when we see evil happening in us, when we're sinning, it's not that things are happening around us, it's not the circumstances that God has allowed to happen in our lives, it is, those circumstances are revealing the lust that is in us and our lust is drawing us out and baiting us and leading us to sin. The problem is the heart, 100% the heart.

It's interesting, he doesn't mention the devil here. Do you see that? What's the source of evil in your life and my life? One of the ways that we escape responsibility is by saying the devil made me do it. What was it that Eve said? Adam blamed it on God, Eve blamed it on the devil, the serpent. "It's the serpent. He beguiled me and I ate." James does not deal with Satan in this passage. Now, you might see possibly he's in the background of the word "tempted," but he's not explicitly stated. He's like, "I don't want to major on a minor. I'm going to major on the major," James says. There are other places Scripture talks about Satan and we need to beware of him, yes. I'm not denying that, but James says if you want to deal with the issue of evil and really understand the problem of evil in your life, you need to deal with it. Evil, the greatest evil in your life is the evil in your own heart. Everything else pales in comparison.

It's lust in us and he gives this next word picture, is the power of it. Look what he does in verse 15: lust conceives. The picture is of having a baby. Lust has a child and the child is sin and when sin is accomplished, literally you could translate that, when sin is fully grown. Lust conceives sin and when sin is fully grown, it conceives death. So lust gives birth to sin. Sin grows up and gives birth to death. Why is there damage? Why is there death? Why is the evil, remember evil is damage, it's destruction, why is there destruction in your life? It's because of lust. My heart is the source of the evil. I can't blame anything on God. He's trying to bless me and show me the evil so that I can repent of it.

The danger, the doctrine, and then finally, the difference it makes when you see it rightly. The difference. The danger, the doctrine, thirdly, the difference. When you understand that it is not in the heart of God to do you any harm, it's just a hard thing to get our minds around, our hearts around, to really believe for we feel like that he might be pushing us away and our wicked sin nature doubts him because essentially what was the lie? He says, "Do not be deceived, brethren," in verse 16, the lie was that God is not good. The lie is that God wants to harm you. Essentially what Satan told them was, "He's holding out on you. He doesn't want you to be blessed. He doesn't want you to have good things. He's holding out on the good things. You see, he really is evil."

And that is in our DNA and even when we come to Christ, it still remains in the old man, this doubt of God's goodness and James is emphatically saying, "Listen, you have to fight against that. God is not in any way evil or harmful. There is no malice in God." He's not pushing you away though you're going through afflictions that seem to be pulling the sin out of you and you just wish that circumstances would change. He's not pushing you away. It feels like he is, he's not. He's actually showing you how much you need him. He's showing you how much you need him so that you will run to his Son in a deeper way and run to him. That's his purpose.

He is sovereign over everything that's happening, yes. He's not the author of any of the evil that has happened, no. But even the most heinous things that we have experienced, that other people might have perpetrated, God is able and meant that in his eternal purpose for your good. It's hard to get your mind around that but that is the fact that Scripture makes clear. In a fallen world, evil happens and he allows it to happen partly because if he didn't allow it to happen, he would have ended the whole universe when Adam sinned, eradicated it, we wouldn't have had a chance. And he would have been justified to send all of Adam's posterity to hell forever. But God is a God rich in mercy and patience and so he endures with great longsuffering the wickedness that was in us that still remains even in our old man so that he might redeem.

The trials are like x-rays. They're like MRIs that show the problem that needs to be addressed. The problem is our heart and what do you do? You see, if you believe God is not good, what do you want to do? What did Adam and Eve do? They hid from God. Remember, they're hiding which is crazy anyway, isn't it? How do you think you can hide from God? It's wonderful how the Lord dealt with them. He knew where they were but he said, "Where are you, Adam?" because he wanted Adam to see that Adam was hiding.

When you believe he's not for you, you want to run away. You find it hard to draw near to him. You find it hard to run to him. When you understand that there is nothing in him to push anyone away, and especially if you're in Christ, there's nothing in him but delight in you because of what Jesus has done.

Then you run to him. God is not a God who pushes us away. I shared that story a while back. I find myself thinking about it many times in my own life, the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman who comes up wanting to talk to Jesus and Jesus ignores her. Remember? And she's a Gentile. He's gone up into her region, though. He's up in Tyre and Sidon and he's walking through the village and she's crying out, "Lord, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon possessed!" He ignores her. She keeps shouting out until the disciples come to him and say, "Lord, what do we do about this woman?" Jesus says, "I came to the lost sheep of Israel. What are you bothering me with this woman for?" She comes up and says, "Lord, have mercy on me!" He says, "Should I take the bread from the children and give it to the dogs?" He apparently is pushing her away, pushing her away, pushing her away, but he's not pushing her away because God does not do that. And she had the faith to believe he wasn't pushing her away and she said, but even though he called her a dog because Gentiles, that's what Jews believed and there was a sense in which the Jews comparatively because of the covenants and the laws were so much more close to God than the Gentiles. She says, "Even the dogs get to eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table." And he says, "Woman, your faith is great. Go your way. Your daughter is healed."

He was drawing her out. He was drawing her to himself. Sometimes it feels like the Lord is pushing you away but when you understand what the Bible says, in your circumstances don't run away, don't listen to Satan, run to him and keep running to him and keep running to him. And how do you know that he'll receive you? Look at the cross. Look at the cross. God is a God who loves and who invites all who will repent to come to him. His blood is sufficient to wash us and his blood is sufficient not only to wash us but to on a daily basis help us to die to the lust that we find in our hearts. The Christian life is day to day dying to those lusts that rear themselves up, dying to that and walking in the Spirit, walking in the truth, and walking in victory. And God intends that for all of us and the circumstances he's bringing are not to push us away, they're to bring us to him.

Let's go the Lord in prayer.

Father, we thank you for your goodness, your perfect holiness and righteousness. We ask you to give us eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to trust more fully that you are perfectly good. Thank you that you are not only good but that you are merciful and gracious. You abound in lovingkindness. You see us in our misery and your heart is moved with compassion and you invite all people to come to Christ. We pray for those that are here that don't know you, that today they might run to Jesus, that they might repent, turn from their sins and run in complete trust in what Jesus Christ did at Calvary, dying on the cross, bearing our sins, and then rising from the dead to live forever. We pray that you would help all of us be faithful followers of Jesus as we learn to trust your perfect character, to see you as our loving Father. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.