

The Birth of Death

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon explores the origin of temptation, the deed that marks the birth of sin, and the fruit of sin, which is death.

Duration: 38:50

Scripture: James 1:13

Topics: "Sinful Nature"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of sin and its consequences. He emphasizes that God showed mercy to the Amorites for 400 years, giving them a chance to repent and serve Him. However, their iniquity was not yet full, meaning they had not reached the point of no return. The preacher uses metaphors from the fishing and hunting world to illustrate how sin can lure and entice individuals, ultimately leading to death. He concludes by urging the audience to turn to God and find freedom in Christ.

Transcript

I feel constrained that we should turn tonight to verses 13 to 15 in the first chapter of this very remarkable letter that was penned by James, apparently the brother of our Lord Jesus, according to the flesh. Let me read then from chapter 1 verses 13 to 15. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.

For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin.

And sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. The birth of death. James seems to consider the possibility of certain people, as they face their trials, coming to the conclusion that God is tempting them to sin.

That their trials and temptations have been arranged not by a satanic nor a human hand, but by God himself. Now, God does test us, but God never tempts his people. That is, God tests us in order to bring out our strength and the capacity that grace has given us to live and to overcome our temptations.

God never tempts us in order to seduce us to evil. Never. The charge, says James, does not stick.

God does not do that. As a matter of fact, he says God himself cannot be tempted. Neither can he tempt any of his creatures.

He never does. It would be morally inconsistent with his being. We humans have always been fond of blaming other people, haven't we? And the first sin took place in the Garden of Eden.

Adam blamed Eve. Eve blamed the serpent. And so it's gone on throughout the whole course of human history.

It's very, very rare to find a man who squarely faces the facts and says, yes, I did it and it's my own fault. I'm reminded of Bobby Burns. Some of you Scots people, I'm sure, know Bobby Burns off my heart.

Bobby Burns blamed God for so much. May I just give you a few words, a few lines? Says he addressing the Almighty, thou knowest thou hast formed me with passions wild and strong and listening to their witching voices often led me wrong. Do you see what Burns is saying? He's saying that God made him the kind of person he is.

Therefore, God is responsible for his sin. No, says James, that doesn't stick. God did not make you with your sin.

God made you without your sin. God does not tempt a man and God himself cannot be tempted. All right then, if temptation does not come from God, where does it come from? Now to me it's very significant that James does not even speak of Satan.

You read through this letter and you find that James, like other New Testament writers, believed in demons and he believed in the devil. But it's very significant that at this point he doesn't refer to demons, he doesn't refer to the devil. You know, he says where temptation comes from and he answers it in the words of my text.

Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own desire or his own lust and enticed. Then, when lust or desire hath conceived, it brings forth sin and sin when it is finished brings forth death. Now I want us to look at the way James impresses this upon us, that ultimately a man's temptation emerges from himself.

A man is tempted when he is drawn away and he allows himself to be drawn away by nothing other than his own basic desires. And this, as James in turn, leads not only to sin but to death. Now let's look at it then briefly together.

First of all, the desire which serves as a route for temptation. Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed of his own desire. I'm deliberately using that word desire, though in our reading this evening we read the word lust and as I read the text from the King James Version it says lust.

The older translations have it that way, they speak of desire as lust, and they're quite right of course in one sense. Because you see, the desire of a fallen man is essentially lustful. When we use the same word of the Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect man, it isn't lust, it is simply desire.

And it is sometimes used of Jesus without any immoral connotation. Jesus said for example to the disciples, with desire, have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I die. It's the same word, it's the word we translate or some people have translated here as lust.

But that was no lust, that was simply desire and there was nothing wrong to it. But you see, what is simply desire in us who are fallen, who have been infected by Satan, our simple desires are lust in the making.

James says all our temptations then emerge from the simple desire of our fallen nature.

Now the desire from which temptation comes is every man's own, says James. I want you to notice how he stresses this. The Revised Standard Version translates it like this, each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

Each man by his own desire, each by his own. Every man for himself. You can't blame God, you can't even blame Satan ultimately because you see, if there was nothing in me to respond to Satan's temptation, my temptation would not be temptation.

If there was nothing in my fallen nature to respond to the enticements of the evil one, it would not be temptation at all. Each person is tempted when he's drawn away by his very own desire. What a man desires in his own soul, in his own heart, for himself.

Ultimately then you can't blame anyone else. And sin and death emerge, according to this passage, from such a small beginning. Desire.

Desire results in temptation when we allow ourselves, in the words of the Apostle here, to be lured and enticed by our desire. Now these words are very striking, and those of you who are concerned to get this graphic picture, I believe that if you really pay attention to this passage in your own leisure, as well as tonight, as we are together here, you will find that there is much, much more to this passage than I can possibly bring out. The language is most graphic.

Where does sin, where does temptation come from, temptation that leads to sin? Simple desire, a man's very own desire. But how does that lead to temptation and to sin? Well, says James in this way, when a man is lured and enticed by his desire, lured and enticed by his desire. New Testament scholars tell us that there are many pictures here, many pictures, as it were, wrapped up in one.

This kind of metaphor can come from the fishing world, or from the hunting world. They tell us that if we take it from the fishing world, it is something like this. Here is a fish in the water, moving gradually in one evident direction.

But then the little fish sees something dangled just off to the right or to the left. And however a fish thinks or makes decisions, I don't know. But it decides that the thing that is dangled before it is something that it desires.

And so it moves off course and is lured and enticed. And it opens its mouth and it closes it, only to find that within the bait there was a hook and it is caught. Now these two verbs that we have here, have here, lured and enticed, involve all that.

It's a metaphor from the fishing world, so too from the hunting. But the picture is the same. Here is a lion roaming in the forest.

There are those who want to catch it, but they can't very well. The lion is the master of his own fate. You don't easily get near.

Well what do they do? They lure and entice it away. Somehow or other they put something near at hand, something that will attract the eye, something that will appeal to the taste, to the palate of a lion, or whatever the creature may be. And so he gallops out of his liberty and he makes a grasp for this, suddenly

to find that the trap door is closed behind him.

Lured and enticed. One scholar tells us that the metaphors stress even more than I have suggested, that they all suggest a matter of, or an experience of being pressurized, of being persuaded, of being forced. And one of the best scholars known to me puts it like this.

There is almost a kind of pressure, or drag, or draw, or enticement involved here, that we would describe in terms of taking something in tow. Some of you have been for a holiday recently, and you've had the car, and then you've pitched something behind it, and you've hooked it on, and you draw it behind you. There is that kind of pressure that is brought to bear here.

Desire entices us away, hooks us to itself, and it takes us in train. Do you know, my friends, whether we were willing to acknowledge it or not, there are many people that are simply hooked to sin tonight, and cannot get loose. Are you one of them? The desire that is the root of temptation.

What is simple in our Lord Jesus Christ and in the perfect man, but in us, because we are fallen, and sinful, and have a sinful tendency, it is something terrible. It is something that takes us in tow. Oh, there is nothing which is more tragic than this, to see a well-dressed person, well-educated and cultured, who can speak the language of politics, and of science, and of philosophy, and of the arts, and whatnot, but he's a man or a woman on tow, dragged along by the jaws.

Desire has made him a prisoner. Are you one? The desire that is the root of temptation. The second thing I want you to notice is the deed which marks the birth of sin.

Then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin. The language here is essentially the language of childbirth, conception and birth, and James apparently chooses these metaphors because they were familiar and they were most forceful and telling. Now we shall simply and briefly comment upon two aspects of conception and birth as they serve the purpose of the inspired writer here.

The first thing that James makes clear is this. Sin is conceived just as a child is conceived. Sin is conceived in the mind and the heart just as a child is conceived in the womb.

Desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin. James describes desire here as if desire were a person. He personalizes it, and he says desire is an aggressive, fertile being, always on the move, like a woman on the street looking for a partner.

When the simple desire you see has become a lust, it's always on the lookout for a partner to sin with, because desire of its own can never lead to sin. Desire must have the partnership of the will, and desire is on the go looking for a will, looking for an individual who will, will what the desire wants, so that together they may form a union, and in consequence of that union, sin may be conceived. Now the moment desire receives the consent of the will, that moment sin is conceived.

There is tremendously profound theology here. Sin is conceived the moment the will agrees to the desire. Now the importance of that is this.

Jesus said, you see, on one occasion, he said this, everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Now please notice, every man who looks to lust has already committed adultery in the heart. Sin has been conceived in the heart.

It's not born yet, it's not come to birth, it's not come to an action yet. The person's not been able to do anything, he's not been able to touch the woman, but the sin has been conceived. Sin is already conceived in the heart and in the mind, and only awaits the opportunity to express itself.

My good friends, I find this most challenging. You see, there will be multitudes of men and women on the day of judgment who have never committed adultery in the act, but who will be discovered to be adulterers in the heart, who will never have murdered in the act, but in whose souls the idea was conceived, if only they had the opportunity without being found out. I have no doubt that there are multitudes of men and women along this land tonight, like every other land, who would commit all the sins of the book if only they were not to be found out, and we're assured of it.

But God does not judge sin simply by the act. He sees the conception of the child in the womb. Sin conceived in the mind is sin in embryo, and the fetus is there even before birth.

It's a most challenging thought. What's your mind like, my friend? What do you think about? Is there anyone that you'd put a knife in, if you could? Is there an object that you would lust with, if you could? Before God, sin is conceived when the will consents to the desire. Sin is conceived, then, even as a child is conceived.

Sin conceived will sooner or later give birth to the deed. Desire, when it has conceived, brings forth sin. It's only a matter of time now.

Conception has taken place. Birth will follow. So I turn from the desire, which is the root of sin, and the deed, which marks the birth of sin, to the death, which marks the fruit of sin.

My text does not finish without saying this. And sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death. Now, there is a most intimate relation between sin and death, according to the Bible.

And it is so intimate, so real, so imminent, that you simply cannot separate the one from the other. You cannot have sin without having death. Sin carries death in its bosom from the moment that sin is conceived.

You notice, according to this text of James, according to this word of his, temptation is conceived by desire enlisting the will. Temptation and sin are thereby conceived. There is no other conception of death.

But the moment sin comes forth, the moment sin appears, death is already in the bosom of sin, in the heart of sin. There is no separate act of conception of death. Death is part and parcel of the sin that comes forth.

Now, James's statement here is a corrective to what has been a misunderstanding in many places of a statement made by Paul. There have been those from time to time who have misunderstood what Paul said when he said, the wages of sin is death. Now, when you say that, the wages of sin is death, it means different things to different people.

And there are some people who have concluded that because Paul puts it like that, they conclude wrongly, of course, they've not read Paul through and through. But they do conclude, nevertheless, that what Paul had in mind was this. Well, all right, sin pays a wage.

That wage may be death, but you see, wages can be negotiated. So it doesn't necessarily mean that every sin is to be punished by death. The wage may be negotiated.

It may be greater, it may be less. There are some sins that are not important, others are very important. All right, death may be the wage of the big sin, the great sin, so called.

Now, apart from the fact that Scripture doesn't classify sin like that, this particular word of James's corrects that possible misunderstanding before it's emerged. Death is already in the bosom of sin when sin is born, and it only awaits sin to grow up. Sin, when it is grown up, sin, when it is matured, when it comes to itself, brings forth death.

Death lies, let me repeat, in the bosom of sin before sin is born, when it is conceived. Death emerges as the child of sin when sin is full grown. Now, I guess all of us have been at some time or other puzzled by this.

Death emerges as the fruit of sin when sin is full grown. What does that mean? Now, this is not a Bible class, or I would go around the various alternatives and try to enumerate them and classify them, but this is not meant to be that kind of meeting tonight. Therefore, will you allow me simply, dogmatically, to say what I think it means? For there are very many alternatives to an understanding of this.

I want to read to you, in order to explain what I think it means, I want to read to you from Genesis chapter 15 and verse 16. It's an Old Testament story. God is entering into covenant with Abraham, and in the course of that, God says to Abraham as follows, know of a surety, he says, that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and there will be slaves there, and they will be oppressed there four hundred years.

Now, this was before Egypt. This was when Abraham was yet childless. They will be there, says God, telling him beforehand what was going to happen for four hundred years.

But I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve, and afterward they will come out with great possession. Now, this is the most relevant part. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.

The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. Now, please, can I summarize it? God said to Abraham, I have a land of promise to my people. At the moment, the people living in that land are the Amorites.

Now, the Amorites are sinners, and they're already under my condemnation, because they're sinners, every one of them, the whole nation. That says, God, nevertheless, even though they're all sinners, and they're guilty, and they don't deserve the gift of life, nor its continuance, I'm not going to exterminate them yet. Mark it, says God, I'm going to give them four hundred years to prove themselves.

Oh, God is gracious. I'm going to give them four hundred years to prove themselves. The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet so full that I must exterminate them.

And so, says God, you will go down to Egypt, and you'll have a holiday in Egypt for four hundred years, and I'll teach you something in Egypt too, of course. It'll not be a waste time for you in Egypt, but you go to Egypt for four hundred years. In the meantime, we'll see what the Amorites do.

And for four hundred years, God will hold the hand of judgment upon the Amorites, until ultimately, the iniquity of the Amorites was full. What happened then? Joshua goes in, and there is the slaughter of the Canaanites. We read of it in the book of Joshua.

Now, I've heard many people criticizing Joshua, criticizing the Almighty God, for the way some people are slaughtered, belonging to the Amorites. Wait a moment. I want you to bear in mind the fact that for four hundred years, God gave them special mercy, and was long-suffering that they should prove whether they will or whether they will not serve Him and obey Him.

That's the context. The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. Now, says God, sin, lust.

When lust is conceived, it brings forth sin. Sin when it is finished. Sin when it is full.

Sin when it has been given every opportunity of expressing itself, or when the sinner has been given every opportunity of repenting and of turning aside and of turning back to God in penitence and in faith. Sin, when it insists upon becoming more and more and greater and greater, ultimately brings forth death. You know, if this old book, the Bible, is true, then things are very serious.

What does James mean by death here? If we were to discuss this doctrine of death, which is the consequence of sin against the whole of the New Testament or of the Bible, we would have to say much more about it. We would have to refer, of course, to the fact that when sin brings forth death, then the first thing that happens is there is a sense of alienation in our spirit. We're separated from God and we don't want God.

That's death spiritually. We come under the sentence of God's wrath. That's another aspect of it.

And then, of course, sin deserves and receives death in the ultimate sense of final, irretrievable, irreversible separation from God. All that is involved in death. But I suggest to you that James has something different in mind here.

Another aspect of death which he is stressing very particularly. He may have the others in the back of his mind but I suggest to you that it's another one that he's thinking of here. Sometimes we speak of a point of no return.

A point of no return. You see it in some sports when a diver has begun his plunge or her plunge. There's no return.

In other sports, well, you can retrieve the situation a little but not if you're diving. And there are other sports too. But in life there is a point beyond which, once we pass it, we simply can't put the mechanism in reverse.

We have to go forward. You know, when sin brings forth death, it is always at that point where a sinner simply cannot go back. He cannot repent.

He cannot change his mind. He cannot change his heart. He cannot change his course.

He cannot change his master. There is only one way to go. It is on under the impulse of desire become temptation become sin and it is wrapped around me and I'm hooked up to it and I cannot turn left right or any other way.

I've just got to go on. You know life is serious because there are men and women in this condition tonight. They can't turn left or right.

They can only go on in the way of sin. You know this is the kind of thing that happens, is it not? In the formation of a habit. Something is suggested to us or we don't like it.

It's not right, the conscience says. And we argue around it a little and we say, oh my, the folk that told me that that was wrong, they're a little bit old-fashioned and square, they're not with it. And the book that teaches that such and such a thing is wrong, it's as old-fashioned as the hill.

It may be all right under certain circumstances, under my circumstances. And so the suggestion put to one arouses the desire within one. And the desire works upon the will, lures it, entices it.

And the will says, well all right, this once, it'll be all right. Only this one. And sin is committed.

You know what happens, don't you? The next time the same temptation comes, it's not quite as difficult to repeat. The initial doubt as to whether it was right or wrong, that initial tug of war is not quite as strong now. I can rationalize the situation now, and of course wasn't it pleasing? I had a little bit of pleasure, I had a little kick.

And so it's not as difficult to do it the second time. The third time it's still less difficult, until at last I can do it without a blush. As a matter of fact, as life goes on, it becomes a mode of thinking, and I can do it as easily as I breathe.

An act has become a habit, and the thing has become part and parcel of my life, and I cannot now undo it. Men and women, this is what this monster sin does. I know of only one who can deal with it effectively.

Politics can't, science can't, philosophy can't, logic can't. Art cannot. You may pose and glimpse at the most glorious masterpieces of art, but they cannot deal with sin in your soul, or the slavery of your spirit and of your passion.

But I tell you one who can. Said the angel, thou shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sin. He died that we may be forgiven for the things that are past.

He lives that we may be saved from the power of and the dominion of sin in the present. And he lives to come again, to conquer all aspects of sin in us, and finish in his people the work that he has begun here upon earth. I commend to you the Lord Jesus.

Are there things for which you've never been forgiven? Are there links in the chain in your life that have never been broken? When you sing that hymn, does it mock you? He breaks the power of cancelled sin. He sets the prisoner free. Is there a mockery to you? He is able to serve to the uttermost.

Why? Because he ever lived to make intercession for us, to plead for us. When we turn from our sin and come to him in our need, he pleads the merits of his blood on our behalf, and God forgives. And in the struggle with temptation as Christian men and women, we turn to him and cry an SOS.

He makes grace abound toward us, that we always may have all sufficiency in all things and abound unto every good work. That's the New Testament language. Very well, then.

In the face of what desire may be and may do, of the temptation that it arouses, of the sin that it conceives, and of the death to which it ultimately leads, I ask you, if you have never done so before, put your arms around the Lord Jesus Christ by faith. Claim him as your own. Name him as your Savior.

Acknowledge him as such. And if you have already done that, and perhaps have been unaware of all that he's able to do for you, make sure that you discover afresh in these days of terrible temptation, when everything in the whole world around us seems to arouse the desires of men to sin in one way or another. May the Lord Jesus, in all his glory and his grace, become not only more glorious to our view, but more precious to us in experience.

Trust him tonight. Make this the night when you turn to him and become unhooked from one mode of life and of living, to become by faith hooked onto him. Let us pray.

Oh heavenly Father, we thank thee that it is possible for us to gather like this, and that we can dare look into the awful tragedy of human life, seeing desire becoming lust, and lust leading to temptation, and temptation to sin, and sin to death, that we can look at it and examine it, because we know of one who breaks the spell and the fetter and makes men free. Oh our Lord, grant that every man and woman, every fellow and girl gathered with us here tonight, may be among God's free men. Oh that we may taste the liberty wherewith Christ makes men free, and thus living.

May we be to the praise and glory of your name, and a testimony to the message of the gospel, even forevermore. Amen. Amen.

We conclude by singing a great hymn of praise number two hundred and

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