

James 1:13-15

Why We Die, and What You Can Do About It

Main idea: Sin brings death, but Jesus gives life.

I read a true story about a wealthy couple who lived over a century ago named William and Sarah Winchester. They got married in 1861, and they only had one child, a daughter, who died in infancy in 1866. So when Sarah's husband William died in 1881, Sarah Winchester was left with a huge fortune all to herself.

Shaken up by the reality of death, she wanted to do all that she could to avoid it herself. So she went to a medium to find out how she might live forever. The medium told her, "As long as you keep building your home, you will never face death." She immediately got to work. She bought an unfinished 17-room mansion and started to expand it. The project continued until she died in 1922 at the age of 83. She had spent 5 million dollars on renovations, which was actually even way more money in the early 1900's than it is today. When she passed away, the mansion had 150 rooms, 13 bathrooms, 2,000 doors, 47 fireplaces, and 10,000 windows, and there were still enough materials so that they could have continued expanding her home for another 80 years.

[Video of the Winchester home]



You can actually visit Sarah Winchester's home today. You'll see staircases that go nowhere, many long, winding corridors that have no purpose, and doors that open to walls or even to the outside, not on the ground floor! Today, the house stands as a tourist attraction. It's a silent witness to one woman's dread of death.¹

It kind of reminds me of the parable Jesus told about the man who built bigger barns to hold all his stuff, not realizing that he wouldn't live forever.²

There's some really fascinating research being done about delaying death, and extending life. Scientists have determined that our bodies age because of a combination of how ultraviolet rays from the sun change our cells, and the lack of our body's ability to regenerate damaged cells. So research is being done to see if gene therapy or cell-repairing nanobots can extend our years on this earth.³

Other scientists are focused on cryogenic freezing, or increasing your telomeres, or even cloning.

But even if those kinds of things are possible, practically no one is under the delusion that we can live forever. Unless Jesus returns first, we will all die. But why?

James 1:13-15.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarah_Winchester

² Luke 12:16-21

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch/GASaqPv0t0g>

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (James 1:13-15)

Father, help us when we're tempted to stand firm in our faith. Help us always to rest in Jesus. In Jesus's name, Amen.

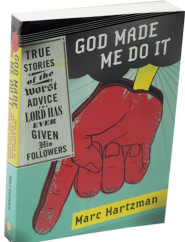
We have the tendency to want to blame God. We want to blame Him for bad things that happen in the world, and for bad things that happen to us or to our families. And we often want to blame Him even for bad things that we bring upon ourselves.

And even if you, personally, don't tend to blame God for any of these kinds of things, I would guess that you've probably talked with people in the last year who have.

Maybe they think that all this Covid stuff is God's fault. Or maybe they recognize that God is sovereign, meaning that He's absolutely in control, but they understand that to be a bad thing, because that means that God could have stopped their loved one from dying, but He not only didn't stop it, so it's somehow His will that they died. And if it's God's fault that all these things happened, then sometimes we even unfairly blame Him for things sinful people have done or continue to do.

I ran across this book called, “God Made Me Do It.”

[Picture of “God Made Me Do It”]



In the book, it talks about the man who thought God told him to perform surgery on himself. It talks about the man who thought God told him to TP a police station. And it tells the story about a woman who felt that God told her to direct traffic topless.

Sometimes people have said that God made them do even more devastating things, like shooting innocent people. Horrible things throughout history have been done in God's name.

But our Scripture this morning tells us that God doesn't lead us to sin. Verse 13.

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. (James 1:13)

Our sin is not God's fault. It's our fault. God isn't a sinner. We're sinners. And because of that, God doesn't need a Savior. We do.

Even if we try really hard, we can't keep from sinning.

There's a really funny show called The Good Place, that I don't necessarily endorse because it can also be crude at times. In the show, heaven is earned by doing more good things than bad, so that people can get enough points to go to heaven. But at one point, they realized that nobody had gone to heaven in more than 500 years because nobody had earned enough points!

[Clip from "The Good Place"]



Now, of course, heaven and hell don't work that way, and yet life is just as complex, if not more so, isn't it? No matter what we do, there's a good chance that we're sinning in some way, and that's not merely because of how we buy flowers or tomatoes. It's because our hearts and thoughts condemn us even when we do good things.⁴ So our sin isn't God's fault, it's ours, and we need a Savior.

Many churches teach that Jesus came not primarily because of us, but because of Himself. The thought goes that if God put us first, it would be idolatry, because even God Himself ought to put Himself first. And I can definitely see why they teach this. Jesus came to glorify His Father and be glorified by His Father.⁵ But it also says that He came to seek and to save the lost.⁶ God didn't need to save His glory. He's always had perfect glory, even before He created anything.⁷ Jesus didn't come to save God's glory. He came to save us.

God is perfect in every way. He never sins. He never even has an evil desire. God is always good, and always loving, and He loves us all the time.

So consider just how irrational it is to blame God for tempting us. He would never tempt us, because temptation to sin is so utterly far from His character. He would never lead us away from resting in Jesus. God wants us to glorify Him. He takes no delight in the death of the wicked. He desires that we would all turn to Him and live.⁸

In fact, Jesus taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."⁹

Now, God certainly brings us trials to test our faith so that we can grow in our faith and joy. Remember, James 1:2-3 told us:

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. (James 1:2-3)

And then last week, we read that trials can also lead to receiving a crown. Verse 12.

⁴ 1 John 3:20

⁵ John 8:54

⁶ Luke 19:10

⁷ John 1:1-3, 14

⁸ Ezekiel 33:11

⁹ Matthew 6:13

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. (James 1:12)

So we should expect trials and even welcome them. We should count them as joy. God sends us trials so that we would become more steadfast in our faith, and so that we would receive the crown of life. In that way, trials are good! And as we'll see from verse 17, everything good comes from God.

And yet, if in those trials, we're tempted to sin, we should not say God is tempting us.

So how is a trial different from a temptation? Take a look at verse 14.

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. (James 1:14)

When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, they were tempted by a serpent to do the one thing that God commanded them not to do: to eat fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.¹⁰ After they ate the fruit, God showed up and asked them why they ate it. And do you remember what they said? They started blaming everyone but themselves. Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent.¹¹

But if you read Genesis 3 carefully, you get the sense of who they were really blaming when they said these things. They were blaming God. "It's Your fault, God! You put the serpent and this woman here!"¹²

Church, when we sin, we have no one to blame but ourselves. I think Eve was smarter than Adam in that story, because she at least blamed the serpent, and certainly Satan tempts us to sin,¹³ but even then, nobody forced her hand to take the fruit.

Ever since then, we're all born with a tendency to sin.¹⁴ We inherited it from our parents, who inherited it from their parents, going all the way back to Adam and Eve. So James tells us that we can't blame our temptation on God. We can't even blame it on Adam and Eve. We're each tempted when we ourselves are enticed and lured away by our own sinful desires.

So let's talk about desire for a second. There are godly desires, and then there are sinful desires. Psalm 37:4 says:

Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. (Psalm 37:4)

I'm pretty sure it doesn't mean, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the sinful desires of your heart." No. It's talking about godly desires. And the most godly desire that we can have is Jesus. So I think what it's really saying is that if your delight is in the Lord, then you already have everything you could ever desire.

But if you delight in sin, then nothing will ever satisfy you.¹⁵

And if we follow that desire, bad things happen. Verse 15.

¹⁰ Genesis 3:1-6

¹¹ Genesis 3:11-13

¹² Genesis 3:12

¹³ 2 Corinthians 11:3

¹⁴ Psalm 51:5

¹⁵ Ecclesiastes 1:14

Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.
(James 1:15)

Once again, it's not talking about following godly desires, but sinful ones. When we dwell on sinful desires and allow them to grow in us, it leads to death.

That's why we all die. We all die because we've all sinned.

James wanted to be absolutely clear that we don't just die because that's the natural way of human existence. We die because we sin. We die because we've disobeyed the God that deserves all worship and praise. And we could spiritualize this and talk about spiritual death in hell versus eternal life in heaven, but that's actually not what James does. He simply makes the connection between our sin, and our death.

Sometimes there's a very obvious link between sin and death. When someone overdoses on drugs, their sin led to death. But even when the link isn't quite as obvious to us, James is saying it's still there. Sin brings death.

And the thing is, we can't do anything about it, because we've already sinned, and we continue to sin. Even if we try really, really, really hard, we can't keep from sinning.¹⁶ We will all die, and there's nothing we can do about it.

But Jesus did do something about it. He died on a cross for our sin.¹⁷ Through His death, we're given the gift of life.¹⁸

You see, sin brings death, but Jesus gives life.

Next week, we're going to talk more about the good gift of having life in Jesus.¹⁹ Only through Jesus can we have eternal life.²⁰ It doesn't come through building bigger houses, or freezing life the way it is, or through gene therapy. And it's not on this earth, but a new earth. A better earth. It will be a place that's truly heaven on earth.²¹ We'll talk about that next week.

But for now, I simply want us all to wrestle with this idea that we're all sinners in need of a Savior, and that Jesus is that Savior.

¹⁶ 1 John 1:8

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:3

¹⁸ Romans 6:4

¹⁹ James 1:17

²⁰ John 14:6, 17:3

²¹ Revelation 21:1-4