

THE FULL FAMILY CHURCH

DATE : 21 SEPTEMBER 2008

MESSAGE : SERIES ON JAMES (2) – **GOD NEVER TEMPTS OR PUNISHES US.**

Last Sunday we spoke about the positive effect of persecution and suffering and why it happen in our lives. Going through hardship is a very important part of our spiritual workshop. This is the workshop where our faith is moulded. If we do not go through hardships we cannot grow in our faith.

It always amazes me how incredible God works. Every time I work through the book of James, attacks increase during that time and things become more and more intense.

- My email address was hacked.
- Unreasonable pressure came from a previous relationship.
- And my partner suddenly experienced an attack of high blood pressure on Friday morning.

Have any of you had challenges during this previous week?

Yet, God does not leave us there. Today we will look at the wonderful way in which God manages the times of hardship in our lives.

Let us continue our reading in James 1: 13-18.

You know, I become so amused when I listen to people's excuses for bad discretion.

The old people used to say you cannot learn *breeding*; you are being born with it.

During my broadcasting career I was taught that discretion should always lead. Whenever you planned to do something and then doubted whether you should do it or not, you knew you should abstain from it.

When in doubt, leave out!

If you cannot trust your discretion, it is wise to bounce your idea or intension with someone you can trust. Merely a second opinion from someone you respect and trust.

Good discretion.

So many people think that when you are born again, you are on Holy Spirit auto pilot. There are people who think that the moment you become born again you

are to stop thinking all together. All you have to do is glow in the dark. Comfortable on the salvation gravy train on its way to heaven. They cannot wait for their lives to expire here on earth.

The one mistake after the other follows, because you forget that the Lord is a gentleman and will not lead your life on your behalf. It remains YOUR life in the first and last place and you have to take responsibility for this life. You have been placed here on earth for a specific reason. And the sooner you tap in on God's dream for you, the sooner your perfect goal in life will unfold in front of you. The Holy Spirit is there to assist, advise and to provide pre-knowledge to you. Yet, the DO and THINKING part should come from you.

Then some Christians take it a step further by playing the blaming game. When they act impulsively, insensitively and burn their fingers, the devil is blamed. Then devils and demons are kicked out from behind every bush.

I often wonder how many times the devil sits down and weep on the pavement because he gets blamed for things he had no part in. For something that came forth from our own stupidity.

But the worst one ... and we read about this as early as in verse 13; when someone does not want to take responsibility for his/her stupidity, and blaming the devil seems far fetched, then God has to own up.

God punished me for this or that. Then Jesus' blood and the price He paid on the cross for our sins had gone out of the window. We seem to forget that He also took the price for our stupidity upon Him. He also suffered the humiliation of our stupidity so that we have no need to continue with our ridiculous decisions.

Verse 13 says: "When someone **wants to do** [*that means even before we have done it. When we have not thought about it.*] something wrong, we should not say: 'God is tempting me'. We know that God cannot be tempted to do wrong, and He does not tempt anybody."

Listen to what James says further. He speaks about the source of our stupidity.

Verse 14: "Our own natural inclination [*our desires*] tests us, and drags us along and tempts us."

Paul states it also in another letter. He says: "The things that I have to do [*the right things*], that I do not, and the things that I should not do [*the things coming from our natural inclination*], those I do."

Then James continues to another verse in which he gives us perspective. He points us to the process of cause and effect. He places our stupidities in a process which shows us what would happen if we would not control our natural inclinations or desires.

Verse 15: "Once our natural inclinations have conceived, sin is the baby that is born. And when this baby gets a chance to become an adult, it gives birth to death."

James uses a powerful metaphor or comparison so that we can understand it, because we are people. We are all born and then we grow up. He refers to the life cycle of a human being. The birth of a baby and the growing up.

Yet, during the process, it takes a nasty turn when he says, this baby that is born, gives birth to death. In other words, something that was suppose to bring a lot of joy: the start of a new life ends in a disaster.

What James is actually saying here is: when we ponder on the wrong thing for too long, it nests in our minds. That becomes the only thing we can later think about. Everything we do is aimed at executing this thought. Then the day arrives when we put our thoughts into action. Subtly at first, because we are cautious not to be caught out. Then it becomes more and more blatant and less careful. Up to the point where we become arrogant about the matter and we overplay our hand. That is when destruction follows.

Have you ever watched a moth circling a candle?

At first the moth keeps at a safe distance. He is cautious. But as the light become more attractive and more pleasant he closes in more and more. He approaches the candle so much that he does not realise that there is not sufficient distance between him and the flame. And before he can prevent it, he enters the flame and is scourged to death.

Before we can come to our senses, we are trapped. We then become indignant when we are caught out and found guilty. It just seems so unfair.

This is the way in which this natural inclination within us operates.

Now James rubs in more salt into this fresh wound by continuing in verse 16: "Therefore do not be misled, my dear brothers and sisters. From above [*from our Heavenly Father*] only good things come, yes, perfect gifts. They come from the Father who created the heavenly lights. Other than the heavenly lights, He stands unmoveable. Not even His shadow moves like that of them. Because God has decided so, He conceived us as His children and let us be born through His Word which is true. So it came about that we became the choice of His creation."

Every person on this planet, whether you are a Christian, a Jew, a Muslim or Hindu ... whoever, are born with certain natural gifts or talents. Those are the gifts that are given to people by our good Father. He does not require of us to be Christians for receiving those gifts. He gives it whenever a person is born into this world.

This is the same God who remains the same: yesterday, today and tomorrow. He never changes. He will never neglect anyone. Everyone receives a measure of talents from Him as He thinks fit for that person.

It is our duty to develop out talents and to earn our daily bread through applying them. That is why we have received it. Firstly to honour and praise God through them, by using and applying these talents to the best of our abilities.

But we also have to serve our neighbours through is, and be a blessing to one another.

We have to realise that our natural inclination is to hate God and only to live for ourselves. This is part of our sinful nature. Paul states it clearly. Our natural attitude is only to love ourselves and not to love our neighbour.

This is why God gives us these guidelines. It is this selfish attitude that leads to death. This death that James refers to here is worse than the physical death. It refers to spiritual death. A life without any relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, and subsequent exclusion from fellowship with God in the hereafter.

If you apply these talents that your have received from Father God in the wrong way, you have to know that you are serving evil through the perfect blessing that God imparted in you. This is when these wrong things cause self destruction in you and those who are influenced by what you do.

James now takes it a step further and speaks about our attitude towards our neighbours. He is giving us clear guidelines here, about how to live in such a way that we remain within God's will, and to remain on the right track.

Have a look at what is written in verse 19: "My dear brothers and sisters, always be quick to listen and slow to speak, and not quick tempered. If you are angry you cannot do what God wants you to do. Therefore get rid of the filth and evilness that grows so lushes in your rage, and accept humbly the Word that God planted in you. This Word has the power to save you."

You will notice that James does not refer here to unsaved people. He addresses people who refer to themselves as Christians. Those that are reborn.

He realises very well that we are still carrying the sinful nature in us, even though we are reborn. And that we still get caught up in things that can bring about great danger in our lives.

Therefore he refers to the Word of God. This Bible; the manual for our lives. This Word that brings life and that is able to save us from eternal death and the subsequent consequences of an exclusion from any relationship with God.

He continues in verse 22: "You have to become people who do what the Word says. Don't just listen to it, by doing that you deceive yourself. You will agree: If

you only hear the Word and never do what it says, it is as good as looking at your face in a mirror without doing something about your appearance. You look at yourself, go away, and forget what you have seen. If you pay close attention to God's perfect law [*the Royal Law - "love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all of your mind, and equal to this: love your neighbour as you love yourself."*] and do what the law asks of you and do not forget what you have heard, then you can expect God's blessing on what you do."

So many of us only read the Bible habitually. Only to ease our conscience. We read a little devotion because we do not have time to dig deep into the Word of God, to mediate on it and to pray about it. This is the whole purpose of the Word. It is powerful enough to save our lives.

It is powerful enough to change our lives. To cut away the old dead branches from this gorgeous garden so that we can grow and bare fruit. This is why we should remain in God's presence through prayer and through studying His Word.

One cannot pour new wine into old wine skins or sew new cloth to old cloth. The wine skin and the cloth will tear.

God gave us a wonderful word of prophesy in this church. "Look out, I am starting a new thing ... and it starts now!"

The time has come to tune in to God's plan for our lives. It has to start with each one of us personally. After that it will permeate through the Body of Christ: this church that belongs to Him.

Now James addresses those of us who think that we are religious.

In verse 26: "If you think that you are religious, but do not keep your tongue, you are deceiving yourself. Your religion is worth nothing. Pure and unblemished religion in the eyes of God our Father is that we take care of orphans and widows in their needs, and that we do not allow the world to infect us."

James addresses the whole issue of religion here. Jesus had a huge problem with this concept. He went so far as to call the bunch of scholars of the law, serpents. Religious snakes who suffocated live out of people by oppressing them through man made laws.

James now says, if you think you are religious and you cannot control your tongue, don't even try to pretend to be religious. If you succeed in controlling your tongue and stop gossiping about people or use your mouth as a sewer, then try to look at the way that you reach out to other people. Especially those that suffer. He suggests that you take it a step further and take care of the frail, especially the defenceless, women and people about us who do not have what we have. Take care of them and reach out to them.

A little further in this letter James speaks about the tongue once more. We will get to that in a next sermon.

It is during times like these that we start to discover within ourselves how religious we really are.

Religion became an abusive word. People shrink away from this term. In a similar way also from the word, church. When you ask someone in a foreign conversation which church they attend? Then it seems like a snake had been thrown into their midst. Their eyes become glazy and an uncomfortable silence follows.

That is because people caused damage to this wonderful term - this word that in Greek means the Body of Christ here on earth, His Church. It is the duty of every Christian to set things straight and to put it in the right connotation that it deserves to be.

We never need to be ashamed to acknowledge that we are Christians, and that we belong to a church. Jesus was never ashamed of us when He became a public spectacle on the cross at Calvary. He carried our guilt with pride and great love. He did that for us when we deserved to be cast into eternal damnation. Come let us also begin to share in this relationship with our Lord Jesus.

Amen.

Pastor Anton Smith