

**Sermon by Canon Jim Holbeck at the Healing Service at St Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney on Wed
24 May 2006.**

Reading: James 1:12-18. Topic: "Victory Over Trials And Temptations."

Ever feel a bit battered? There are just so many things coming at you and you just get over one crisis and then another one appears. It's as though things are coming at us to test us all the time. Sometimes we are living in such a way that we are bringing all sorts of difficulties on ourselves. In that case we need to repent of our rebellion against God and ask for His forgiveness and help in Jesus. But at other times we are trying to do the right thing but everything seem to be going wrong or we keep facing pressure after pressure. It has a name. It's called "**Being Human.**"

1. TRIALS WILL SURELY COME OUR WAY. 1:12

James 1:12 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

We are all going through various trials and temptations but we can learn to cope with them. James knew that everyone including Christian believers were going to undergo trials and be tempted. He makes the promise to those who stood the test that they would receive the Crown of life (or God's approval) which God promised to those who love Him. John wrote the same thing in Rev 2:10 to show that though believers might have to suffer various kinds of trials including persecution, it was not that God had lost control but that He was allowing those things to happen in a world that wasn't perfect in any way. If they remained loyal to Him they would know His blessing. *Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.* Faithfulness and dependence on Him leads to His blessing.

2. HOW TO FACE THE TRIALS THAT COME

i). Recognise the source of temptation. It is not God. He doesn't tempt anyone towards evil. But there is another who is called the tempter, Satan who does tempt us. In Gen 1-3, we saw Adam and Eve tempted by the serpent in the Garden of Eden and giving in to the lies of the evil one. We saw Jesus as a man being tempted by Satan but winning victory over all the temptations Satan threw at him.

Paul was conscious that being unwilling to forgive someone could lead to an openness to being deceived by Satan, *2 Cor 2:10 Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ. 11 And we do this so that we may not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.* He warned that harbouring sin could give a foothold to the devil Eph 4:26-27. *"In your anger do not sin" : Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold..*

ii). Recognise why we respond to temptation

James then went on to talk about what one should do when faced with trials and temptation. He shows that trials will come to all of us and that we might be tempted to act in ways that were not right. but God is not the source of temptation. God cannot give into temptation and tempts no-one.

James describes temptation as acting in this way. We may be undergoing a trial of some kind. But there may be something in the trial that becomes tempting to us. James says that we are lured and enticed by our own desire. That means there is something within us that wants to respond to what we see or hear. We have a nature within us that has a bias towards evil. Eg., Gal 5:16-21, *16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.*

James then talks about desire as conceiving and give in to sin. By that he means that as we continue to focus on the things or people that tempt us we can lose our self-control and come under their control. In our desire to possess the inappropriate thing or person that is tempting us we can be possessed by the object of our desire. We've had a defeat. We have sinned and

fallen short. We have fallen into sin. We have rebelled against God and are guilty in His sight, even though we may try to suppress our guilt.

iii). Seeking God's enabling to give us victory

If we want to be changed God can help us. It's as we open our lives to Him that He can come in power to bring about a transformation within us. Instead of being continually biased towards evil we can know His presence in our lives wanting us to do what is righteous and good.

No illustration is perfect but **just imagine a bowling ball** on the bowling green. The ball is biased with more weight on the one side than the other. It cannot go in a straight line unless we put more weight in the other side to make it go evenly.

We're like that with our bias towards evil in the trials of life. It is natural for us to do evil.

We need a counteracting presence in our lives so that we can go along the straight and narrow and live as God wants us to live. But the paths of life are not always smooth and level like a bowling green. We need a presence in our lives that can make us keep going in the straight and narrow even when the ground tilts sharply or become rough with lots of obstacles ahead.

The only presence in our lives that can bring that victory is the presence of Christ within us in the power of His Spirit.

Paul put it like this in Gal 5:16 *But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*

We can overcome that bias towards evil no matter how rocky is the path before us, nor how powerful are the forces opposed to us to take us downhill. Instead of reacting naturally to the temptations and trials of life we can be different. Instead of letting our old nature rule our lives, we can let Christ by His Spirit change us to be like Jesus. Gal 5:17 *For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.*

There can be no victory without Christ in our lives. Paul contrasts in Gal 5 what he calls the **works of the flesh**, the characteristics of our old nature, the way we behave naturally to testing or tempting situations, **with the fruit of the Spirit**. When the trials and temptations come instead of responding in a godly way with God's strength we cave in and sin.

a). We sin in the area of morality. We become guilty of *sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality*. Instead of living as God wanted us to live as celibate until we find our life partner we give in to our inward desires and become guilty in the sight of God. We can suppress our guilt but suppressed guilt can lead to physical and emotional damage.

b). We sin in the area of religion. We become guilty of turning away from God and replacing Him with something or someone less challenging, what Paul calls here ***20 idolatry, sorcery***. Many people today have had mental stress and breakdown because they dabbled in the areas of the occult and were possessed by the power they were trying to harness. They live in fear of powers that are nasty and dangerous.

c). We sin socially with wrong attitudes that may lead to wrong actions.

Instead of doing what God said in loving our neighbour as ourselves we responded to those around us in negative ways as Paul writes, we became characterised by social sins *strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy*. We have no peace because our minds may be full of evil thoughts or even plotting revenge against those who made us angry or whom we envied because they seemed to have more than we have. How much time do we spend thinking or speaking evil of those whom we felt hurt us.

d). We sin in the area of drink. We become guilty of **sinning in the area of being involved in drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.** God has said Eph 5:17 *So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit,*

What stress has come into your life because you lost control and came under the influence of alcohol or drugs and became addicted to them instead of being besotted with Jesus and filled with His Spirit.

What has it done to your marriage, your family, your body, the physical and emotional health of those around you? We may say “I’m just a social drinker” but how often are you filled with wine rather than filled with the Spirit of God? No wonder Paul sums it up by saying for those who are showing forth that sort of lifestyle, *I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

It shows that such people are not born again of the Spirit of God and certainly not filled with His Spirit.

3. THE DECISION NEEDED TO CHANGE

What’s the answer to beginning to be different with God’s help and becoming open to more victories and more healing in our lives. Letting Jesus Christ to come into our lives and allowing Him to fill us with His Holy Spirit. What sort of life would that look like? What sort of characteristics might I begin to show if I did such a thing? Paul calls it the **fruit of the Spirit**, the outward evidence of the presence of Christ within us by His Spirit. *22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.*

How are you and I going to face the trials and the temptations that come our way? By going it alone doing our own thing in our own strength and have defeat after defeat so that we despair of life being any different.

Or letting Jesus Christ change us and fill us with His presence so that when people look at us as changed individuals they see for the first time, *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control.* Only you can determine the decision you need to make. If you want to be different, to live with more victories in your life, to be more open for God to heal you and to bless you, then pray with me the Prayer of Commitment and let God change you to be the person He wants you to be.