

The Daily Battle, the Forever Victory

James 1:12-18

While filming the movie Twins, Danny DeVito was on a diet. His co-star, Arnold Swartzenegger, would bring a dozen pastries every day to give to Danny. Seeing the pastries there every day was too much for Danny to endure. The temptation was too great and he went off his diet.

Eating pastries may not be considered a great sin, however, this story brings up an important point that we want to consider today as we meditate upon the words from James under the theme: The Daily Battle, the Forever Victory.”

One of the greatest challenges of living the Christian life is dealing with temptations.

This is especially true for new Christians, but also affects all Christians. It can be frustrating to know that your sins are forgiven only to immediately find yourself bombarded by temptations to continue in your sins. It happens so quickly whether it is in thought, word, or deed.

In our text for today we find helpful words for the Christian in the form of A PROMISE – to those who endure temptations;

A CAUTION – not to wrongfully impugn the source of those temptations;

& AN UNDERSTANDING of how sin develops.

Let us pray: Lord, we come before you at this time to meditate upon your holy word and how it applies to our daily life. Send your Holy Spirit to open our ears to hear and our hearts to receive your message for us today. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

THE PROMISE – Verse 12 starts off with some intriguing words: “The man who endures temptation will be blessed.” The word for blessed in Greek is *makarios*.

In ancient Greek times, makarios referred to the gods. The blessed ones were the gods. They had achieved a state of happiness and contentment in life that was beyond all cares, labors, and even death. The blessed ones were beings who lived in some other world away from the cares

and problems and worries of ordinary people. To be blessed, you had to be a god.

Makarios took on a second meaning. It referred to the "dead". The blessed ones were humans, who, through death, had reached the other world of the gods. They were now beyond the cares and problems and worries of earthly life. To be blessed, you had to be dead. That is the origin of the different saints' days -- they are remembered on the dates of their deaths. All Saints Day was for all the people who had died in the faith whose names we didn't know.

Finally, in Greek usage, makarios came to refer to the elite, the upper crust of society, and the wealthy people. It referred to people whose riches and power put them above the normal cares and problems and worries of the lesser folk -- the peons, who constantly struggle, and worry and labor in life. To be blessed, you had to be very rich and powerful.

When this word, makarios was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it took on another meaning. It referred to the results of right living or righteousness. If you lived right, you were blessed. Being blessed meant you received earthly, material things: a good wife, many children, abundant crops, riches, honor, wisdom, beauty, good health, etc. A blessed person had more things and better things than an ordinary person. To be blessed, you had to have big and beautiful things.

However, the word for James takes on a different meaning as revealed in what follows in verse 12 – “For after he has been proved he will receive the crown of life.”

Being blessed for enduring temptation is the gift of eternal life. This is an encouraging word that we need to take to heart. What follows are some words of caution.

“Let no one say they are tempted by God!” How easy it is for many to blame God for the temptations that come into their life. God is holy and does not tempt anyone to sin. James warning from verses 16-18 is to not be deceived by such thinking. God is the source of good, not evil. God does not tempt us with evil.

The one who loves to tempt us is Satan. He is constantly throwing temptations before us, trying to entice us to sin. Jesus called Satan the Father of lies, meaning he was the master deceiver. We can see his deceiving ways in the account of Adam and Eve at the tree where God forbid them to eat the fruit. We can also see it at the time when Jesus was out in the wilderness for forty days. In the case of Adam and Eve, they listened to Satan's lies and ate the forbidden fruit. In the case of Jesus, he turned to the Word of God and withstood the temptations of Satan.

We have temptations thrown before us. If we follow our own heart's desires we will most likely stumble and sin. If we follow the Word of God, we are more likely to stand firm and withstand the temptations. That's why we need the full armor of God everyday to withstand the temptations to sin.

Now we come to verses 14-15 that helps us gain a better understanding of how sin develops and how we can overcome it.

This verse calls our attention to temptation which includes desire and opportunity. For example, if someone had wanted to cheat on a test (the desire) and the teacher left the room (the opportunity), then that equals a temptation. But, remember, it is not a sin to be tempted. Remember our Gospel lesson for today where Jesus was tempted by Satan.

Sin is when we take the desire plus the opportunity and take action to fulfill the desire. St. Paul writes in Romans 3:23: "The wages of sin is death," meaning "eternal death." If we sin, meaning we have separated ourselves from God, and do not receive forgiveness – the blessed gift God offers to all who believe in Jesus and confess their sin before him – then we receive the punishment from God of eternal separation from God.

However, when we confess our sin and believe in Jesus, God is faithful and just to forgive all our sin and then he gives us the gift of eternal life with God.

What has to happen is that we change our desires so that our heart and mind are in agreement with God's will, not our own. The Word of God

has always been instrumental in helping people overcome sin. As an example, Jesus used the Word of God to overcome Satan's temptations. As we read of God's love, patience, and mercy, we desire to serve him. So, the more we study God's Word and become familiar of how God wants us to live our daily life, then we can conform more to God's ways and not the ways or desires of the world or our own heart.

Another way to overcome sin is to review the opportunities that are given to see if this is of God or not. The question, "What would Jesus do?" may be important to keep in mind here. The most important thing is to remember to avoid placing ourselves in situations, where we can do so, to be giving ourselves the opportunity to succumb to temptation. For example, your peers like to gossip about various people. You have the choice to join in the gossiping or to withdraw from the conversation or to confront your peers to lead them to put the best construction on an individual and not to drag a person through the mud, so to speak. We may need to ask for God's help in so doing to overcome our own weakness.

That leads us to the next help = self-control. Remember that temptation becomes sin when we put our desire with opportunity into action. If we can practice self-control so as to not yield to a temptation, then we can overcome sin. Adam and Eve had the desire to eat of the forbidden fruit. Satan gave them the opportunity with his words of deception. Only when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit did they sin. They did not practice self-control.

When we become Christians we receive the Holy Spirit in our lives who is always willing and ready to assist us to practice self-control. It is through faith in God's Word that the Christian believes that he has divine help. There is a contemporary song that says, "God will make a way where there is no way." Trusting that you are not alone helps you to practice self-control.

This all may be good, but let's look at this realistically – we sin. No matter how hard we try not to, we sin. So, we come before God and receive forgiveness. We confess our sin before God and to one another, as necessary, and receive the forgiveness God offers and we offer to one another.

Receiving forgiveness from God is what God offers through Jesus Christ, who willingly and lovingly took the wrath of God, the full punishment for our sin – death – and with his stripes we are healed – forgiven. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all our sin.

So, as we recap, temptation is not sin unless we act upon the temptation. We also always have God and his word to assist us and guide us to do what is right in his sight. When we fall short and succumb to the temptation and sin, we can come before God in our confession and receive what he graciously gives us – the forgiveness for all our sins.

God does not tempt us to sin, but is always there for us when tempted and succumb to it, that God is patient with us and cares about us and forgives us.

If you are carrying a burden of sin on your shoulders, bring it to God. There is nothing that he will not forgive. How wonderful is our God! We face a daily battle with temptation, but when we sin and turn to God for forgiveness, we have forever the victory! Thanks be to God! Amen.

(Turn to page 324 in the hymnal (LSB) and read the 6th and 7th Petitions of the Lord's Prayer and their meanings.)