

The Ruin of Desire

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

At different times in my life, I have been into fishing. Any fisherwomen and fishermen in the church? Not too many.

Fishing is interesting. There's all sorts of lures, excuse me, that you can use. Anyone use one like this?

This is a special lure that you troll with, so you go very slowly, and it is on the surface, and you're trying to catch kingfish. And so we used to catch kingfish, these sort of big surface pelagic variety of fish.

That's something that seems to lure them in. Pardon the pun. You're always trying to match the hatch, so there are other little lures that look like the type of food that the fish is drawn to in its natural habitat.

To us, that pink lure is wood, plastic, and a bit of metal. To a fish, it looks like life. To a fish, it flashes like food, moves like food, and promises to satisfy an appetite.

Yet beneath the color is a hook. The lure doesn't overpower a fish, does it? It taps into something that's already there, an appetite, a longing for that which would satisfy the fish.

And the fish rarely sees the hook, does it? It only sees what it wants to see. That's a pretty good illustration, isn't it, for our series, The Roads to Ruin.

James says, this is how temptation works. Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desires and enticed. It would seem the bait can be different for each of us.

For one person, there is a bait called approval. For another, pleasure. For another, money.

Control, success, comfort, revenge. Every destructive desire that wets an appetite makes the same promise. Take this, and you will be satisfied.

Amen? Take this, and you will be satisfied. Our key verse for this series says in Proverbs 14, there is a way that appears to be right, but in the end, it leads to death.

I've been reflecting on that, that simple verse. That's a sobering, serious verse, wouldn't you agree? There is a way that, at the beginning, appears to be right, to be life-giving even, but it will bring you to ruin, in fact, death.

Last week, you may not have heard this message, but Tristan, our youth leader, preached on doubt in the evening service, and he used as his sort of primary illustration the idea of being caught in a rip.

Who's been caught in a rip, or felt the undertow at the beach? I am a surfer, I sort of have surfed all my life, and I really appreciate the power of the sea.

And so when I was a father with young children, I was quite pedantic that when I felt that undertow pulling, and I would see other parents quite nonchalant about where their kids were in that, between the flags, but you could feel the pull.

I was a bit like Marlon from Finding Nemo. I was always like, kids, no further, no further, because I know that if you go a little bit further, even with a surfboard, it can be hard, but certainly without a flotation device, it's dangerous.

I remember talking to a guy called John Hubbard, who ran manta bodyboards. He dealt with professional surfers all the time, and he told me that there is a rip at Cronulla that goes from a surfing reef, Cronulla Point or Shark Island, it's called.

And in a big surf, it goes from there to Voodoo, which is a reef in the north. That's about six or seven kilometres. There are rips that will take you so, so far like a freight train.

And what the proverb is saying, what the illustration is saying is that this is serious stuff. I think in Australia, we know if you talk about the illustration of a rip, you know that's serious.

Doubt is a dangerous thing to hang out in too long because it's not a bad thing in and of itself to ask questions of faith. But where does doubt take you? Doubt takes you to unbelief.

Ultimately, and I would put it to you that there's not much that's worse than that's more ruinous than unbelief because that will change your eternal destiny. Unbelief will take you to eternal destruction.

There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end, it leads to death. It's a serious series wherein the roads to ruin.

So, we've had read to us James 1, verse 13, when tempted, no one should say, God is tempting me, for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone, but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.

Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin when it is full grown gives birth to death.

Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters, every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the father of the heavenly lights who doesn't change like shifting shadows.

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created. Desire draws us, desire deceives us, desire conceives sin, and sin delivers death.

There are two roads of desire found in James chapter one. There's desire that gives birth to death, but there's another desire, desire that gives birth to life. Two doorways, one to life, one to death.

The Greek word in James chapter one, 14, for desire is epithemia. It means the powerful inward longing that moves us towards something we believe will satisfy us. There's a powerful inward longing that moves us towards satisfaction.

It's actually the same word that Paul uses for the desire he has for Christ in Philippians 1. So it's not a bad word in and of itself. It's not a bad thing, desire.

But certainly when it is distorted and disordered, it becomes potentially sin. We could say disordered desire is a God-given appetite that has fastened itself onto the wrong object or seeks a good thing in the wrong way.

We've had this red globe at the back during this series. Hopefully, it hasn't been too creepy. But it represents the apple, the fruit of the Garden of Eden.

And there were two distinct doorways to walk down. One of obedience, trusting God, and one of disobedience. James says, don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters.

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father. Don't be deceived. Clearly, deception was right there at the start.

Desire gives birth to death, but it comes from deception. The ruinous road of desire is a road that starts with deception, like the fishing lure. Of course, the devil was tricky when he came to Adam and Eve.

He said, did God really say? Did he really say? Can you trust him?

Is he good? And I think that's probably at the start of every deception, of every disorder desire. Is God holding out?

Is he going to give me the best? Does he really want me to flourish? Or would life be better on that other road?

The road that God warned us not to go down. The deception is simply normally, I can't fully trust God, isn't it? The road to ruin begins with this question and idea.

I don't think I can fully trust God. James answers that line and says, every good and perfect gift comes from the Father. Now, I would suggest to you, there are few sentences worth, that are more worth hiding in your heart than that.

Amen? Anybody with me? Every good and perfect gift comes from God.

Every good and perfect gift comes from Him. He is so good. He is so wonderful to His creation.

He is so inclined to bless. Every good and perfect gift comes from the Father. What is it for you?

Where do you find the clash of desire? This series was almost called Money, Sex and Power. Because that's often the old-fashioned summary of disordered desire, money, sex and power.

We've spoken of the desire for approval, for money, control, success. But often we would hear that word desire, and we would connect it with lustful desire, sexual desire. Sexual desire is a road to ruin.

It's also a road to fulfilment in the bounds, the safe bounds of marriage, in a godly marriage, under God. But when you think of sexual desire, disordered, it's a terribly ruinous thing, isn't it? Sexual desire will ruin marriages, families.

People get so messed up when it's unchecked. James says, desire gives birth to sin. After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin and then death.

After desire has conceived. I find it intriguing that 2000 years ago, people were very similar. But when a person is tempted sexually with desire, the temptation is not a sin in and of itself, but if you let it hang out, it becomes a sin.

You know, we are sexual beings. We have desire, and we can be attracted to the other sex for sure. But it's what we do with that.

What we do with that becomes either something that is part of the human condition or something that is leading towards sin. James says, desire looks for impregnation in the heart and mind. Isn't that a probing full on picture?

Desire wants to be impregnated in our heart and mind. Dwell on something for long enough, and it will manifest in sin and then death. This road to ruin from desire is real.

It's real. What do you do then if you are on the road, on the slippery slope of desire, which is a ruinous road? Well James gives us this extraordinary statement.

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth. The text actually says, every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the father of the heavenly lights who doesn't change like shifting shadows.

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created. Desire conceived and gave birth to sin. Sin grew and gave birth to death.

James gives an alternative. He says, now God gives birth to something entirely different. God's truth gives birth to new life.

Hallelujah. There is something else that can be impregnated in us, that can be sown in us. There is a way that is narrow that leads to life, and it is the way of grace, self-control, habit formation and transformation of desire.

It's the way of the gospel. It is through the one man Jesus. Let's think about Jesus and what he did for us.

He was a man of intense desire, wasn't he? Wasn't he? He had some sort of, in a general way, a Buddhist idea of get rid of desire.

He was a man with desire. He desired the kingdom of God. He desired to do his father's will, to reach the lost.

He desired to eat the Passover with his disciples. He endured the cross because of the joy set before him. He experienced all sorts of other natural desires, hunger in the wilderness, anguish in Gethsemane, the agony of the cross.

Every temptation, his desires remained surrendered to the love and will of the father. Hallelujah. When he was in the wilderness, Satan offered him bread, recognition and kingdoms.

Jesus didn't take the bait. He refused every path that required mistrusting his father. In Gethsemane, he expressed a desire, didn't he?

That was a little bit strange. He said, could this cup be taken from me? I have a desire to avoid this cross, yet not my will but yours be done.

He entrusted that desire to the father. And at the cross, Jesus entered the death produced by our sinful desires. So that's the truth of James.

Our embracing of temptation and sinful desire will give birth to death. Ultimately, if we die without Jesus paying for our sin, we will die and die a second death, eternally. But that's not what happened when Jesus died on the cross.

He actually died for our sinful desires and the death that those desires produce. He carried our guilt, our idolatry, our grasping and our refusal to trust in the goodness of God. Then he rose again to give us the new life James describes.

He not only pardons our disordered desires and the sin and the guilt that comes from that, but in his resurrection and the giving of the Spirit, he promises to do something inside of us. Amen?

Put his Spirit in us and change our desires from the inside out, and give us what we need to be able to live a righteous life that honours and glorifies God the Father.

The greatest desire Jesus had was to honour and glorify his Father, and he can give that to us. The way is the way of the Master, the narrow way, the other way. There is a way that leads to death, but there's also a way that leads to life.

It's the way of grace, self-control, habit formation, and the transformation of desire, and it's this spirit-guided journey that every disciple is promised through the Gospel, through the cross and the resurrection of Jesus.

So what desire is presently warring against your soul? Peter talks about that in that language. Beware the desires of the flesh that war against your soul.

Well, what can we do? We can name it, name the aberrant desire. We can then repent of it, renounce it.

Say I've given an allegiance to this, but I take it back in the name of Jesus. Announce who you are in Christ, and align with others who are walking the journey of following Jesus. Name it, repent of it, renounce it.

Announce who you are in Christ, and align with others who are walking the same path. James says, he chose, he, God chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created. He chose, God chose.

If he chose, that birth is coming. It's organic. It's already been started by faith in Christ.

When we give our faith to Christ, there is the beginnings of a complete and utter transformation that God will do. He chose, he can do it. He's gonna birth something.

And what's gonna be birthed in us is the genuine desire to live righteously. Hallelujah. Something that's changed from the inside out.

We are not giving birth to sin. We're giving birth to life and righteousness through Jesus. So bring the disordered desire and let it die that Christ might fill you with a desire for the glory of his name.

So what is that desire? Is it to be admired? To be comfortable?

To control what happens next? To make someone pay? Is it to succeed?

To be loved by a particular person? To recover something that you've lost? To be sexually satisfied?

Can you name it? And after you name it, can you identify the promise it has been making? That's the helpful part, isn't it?

Maybe this will make me secure. This will prove that I matter. This will take away my pain.

This will finally make me happy. This will give me control. Does anyone find it embarrassing in the presence of your own company and God to go through this sort of stuff?

I think sometimes it can be shocking to just go, I'm really needy. If I stop enough to reflect and listen to the prompting of the spirit, I find sometimes it's just like, wow, is that what I'm really chasing when I'm taking my eyes off Jesus?

If your eyes aren't on the Lord Jesus, what are they on? That's my question. What is the ruinous road that lures you to walk down?

Once you've named that desire and exposed its promise, you can bring it into the presence of God and you might pray something like this, Father, I acknowledge this desire before you. It has occupied too much of my heart.

I have believed that it could give me life. I surrender its right to rule me. If you give it to me, help me receive it as a gift.

If you withhold it from me, help me continue to trust your goodness. But give me a deeper desire for you. For this is the narrow way.

This is the narrow way. Across this series, we've looked at five roads to ruin, hurt, power, anger, doubt, and today, desire. And I think it's true to say that beneath every road has been a heart searching for life.

But isn't it wonderful to be reminded this morning, Jesus offers life. And how does he offer it? He says, come to me.

I'm the way, the truth, and the life. Hallelujah. I'm the way, the truth, and the life.

It's a person. It's a relationship. If you are stuck on that ruinous road and you feel like Jesus is a long way away, it's because we've grieved the spirit of Jesus.

But the spirit of Jesus is the quickest being in the universe to respond to repentance and sorrow. Amen? All we have to do, it's not a long way away, when we're on that road, is to call out and say, Spirit of God, would you have mercy on me?

Jesus, come close. I'm sorry, I'm the one who's been pushing you away, and Jesus will be there. His invitation is, come to me, all who are weary and burdened.

I'll give you rest. Rest from that ruinous road. The narrow way is a person.

The psalmist reaches the place where every restless desire can finally come home. The psalmist writes, whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Could we close our eyes and I'll pray a blessing on us in the name of Jesus.

May you find the grace of God that brings salvation, that teaches us to say no to ungodliness. May you find that grace. May you experience the transformation of your desires to be in line with God's desires for your life in the name of Jesus.

May God grant you self-control and with self-control, the establishment of holy habits. May the lures that used to work on you just not work anymore, because our identity and deepest desires have truly changed. And all the people said, Amen and Amen.