

## Dealing with Temptation

Matthew 6:13

The subject of this afternoon's sermon is easy to introduce, because it is a subject that all of you are familiar with. All of you understand it. Because all of you experience it. So that's an easy introduction. But I must admit, it's also a hard subject to introduce because none of us particularly enjoys admitting that we are so familiar with it. The subject is temptation. Specifically, the temptation to sin. And the sixth and final petition in the Lord's prayer addresses this subject. The petition is simply,

v.13 "And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one."

I want to say a number of things about this last petition in the Lord's Prayer, but let me start with the observation that,

### **I. THIS PRAYER SHOULD MAKE US HUMBLE.**

Just as we studied last week, "forgive us our debts," there is in that petition the acknowledgement of sin. Sins that need to be forgiven, your sins. Reconciliation that needs to take place, because of your sins. So this petition is related to that need for forgiveness, taking a step backward, as it were. A prayer for the grace and strength to resist temptation.

Admitting, first of all, that temptation exists. And it exists for two reasons, two things that work together against you. Your two enemies, an enemy from without and an enemy from within. The Scriptures present them both, and understanding them both is the foundation of this final petition of prayer which Jesus gives as instructions to his disciples. So, first,

#### **A. An awareness of our enemy from without.**

Namely, Satan. The Devil. And you dare not underestimate

him. When I preach in broad, general strokes with regard to Jesus and his kingdom, the emphasis is upon the constraint which God puts on the Devil. He is bound, in that he can no longer deceive the nations. The nations belong to the church, and so we go to all those nations with the gospel of the kingdom. Satan cannot stop us. Jesus will build his church.

But this afternoon, the emphasis is a little bit different; not contradictory, but still different. For here, the emphasis is upon the danger of the devil. And his role as the enemy of your soul.

1 Peter 5:8 "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

You dare not forget that you have an enemy. A personal enemy, bent on your destruction. And so, as Peter continues,

1 Peter 5:9 "Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world."

James says the same thing,

James 4:7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

Resist the Devil. Recognize his presence and resist his influence. And to do that, you have to pray to God. "Deliver us from evil one," which is how the NKJV translates the verse. I, among many, believe that is actually the better translation, for the adjective for "evil" in the mind of Jesus was never abstract. It was always personal. It is not simply the influence of evil that we must avoid, but the one who personifies that evil. The Greek grammar gives us more than a clue as well, but including the definite article "the." "Deliver us from the evil..." A personal object is clearly implied, "the evil one."

So it is not just the principle of evil from which we need deliverance and protection, but from evil himself, the person of evil, the enemy of your soul. And you underestimate his destructive power only at your own great peril. So don't trivialize the Devil. That's one of the reasons that so much of our Halloween customs are so dangerous. The Devil is real, and we ought not make him a fun playmate. We shouldn't dress him up as if he were harmless, or something other than evil. Instead, we should pray, deliver us from the evil one, from his influence, from his temptation. He is a roaring lion, seeking to devour you!

Never lose that perspective of Satan, your enemy from without, "a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." But then you must also have,

#### **B. An awareness of our enemy from within.**

The Bible calls that enemy the flesh. It is within your heart, the old man. So you can never excuse yourself by saying, "the Devil made me do it."

James 1:14 "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed."

Sin starts within you. You are enticed by your own desire, tempted by something within your own heart. We read in,

Gal. 5:17 "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish."

There is a war that goes on in the soul of a Christian. The old man remains, the flesh, in order to wage that war.

Rom. 7:18 "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. 19 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. 20 Now if I do

what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. 21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. 22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

That is the enemy within. And that must be the subject of your prayer as well. "Lead us not into temptation..." You are asking God to free you from the temptations of your own flesh. You are asking God for help in order to wage that war. And, actually,

## **II. THIS PRAYER SHOULD GIVE US HOPE.**

Because God is able to help. In fact, the promise of the Bible is that,

### **A. God will protect us in the midst of temptation.**

And he does so as an answer to Jesus' own prayer, recorded in,

John 17:15 "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one."

So Jesus prays for his disciples in the same manner that he instructs us to pray for ourselves. Surely God will hear and answer the faithful prayers of his son. "Keep them from the evil one." So he teaches us to pray, "Deliver us from the evil one."

Our hope is that he will! And God's promise is that he will. You are all probably familiar with the verse,

1 Cor. 10:13 "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

So we aren't left to our own ability. We aren't left to fend for ourselves against this seemingly overwhelming opponent called the Devil, to say nothing of the war created by the desires of the flesh within us. As a Christian, you are not left with this irreconcilable war wondering what the outcome will be. Instead, though the temptation is real, though it is pointed and perhaps painful, God will protect his people in the midst of that temptation.

That doesn't leave us passive. After all, we are being taught to pray, "Do not lead us into temptation." "Lead me away from temptation." And we are exhorted to resist the Devil, with the promise that he will leave. But the hope is very real. And very encouraging.

So this I know about you, you face temptation. And you know that about me. We are all in the same condition, even if the particular temptations might differ. For one it mean be a quick temper. For another, impure thoughts or lustful desires. It might be sexual, it might be the addictive dangers of alcohol or controlled substances. It might be temptations of sin in your mind, it might be your words. It might be temptations with relationship to other people, it might be a failure to be faithful in the work and responsibilities which God gives you. It might be pride, or it could be a spiritual malaise. It might relate to eating without self-control or to a lack of gentleness or patience. Whatever the specific case, ""No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man." And the hope is clear: "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

2 Thes. 3:3 "But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one."

Isn't that a marvelously encouraging and helpful verse? Let me urge you to mediate upon that simple promise this afternoon. And as you pray, as Jesus teaches you to pray, do so with this promise well fixed in your mind and in your soul, "The Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you from the evil one."

And he will do it because,

### **B. God exerts greater power than Satan.**

Too often, I fear, we underestimate Satan. We underestimate his destructive power, and we think of him but lightly. Or we think of him not at all. But at other times, I think sometimes we overestimate his power. Beloved, God's power is greater!

1 John 4:4 "Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

1 John 5:18 "We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him."

When God protects, the evil one cannot harm. Or in the more triumphant language of Paul in Romans 8, "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Thus we have the great encouragement that,

### **C. Temptation can be overcome.**

Here, I fear, is where many Christians might stumble. For a variety of reasons, we are prone to think that the situation is hopeless. We are prone to think that all is lost. We accept the notion that there is nothing we can do about sin and temptation. We're enslaved. We're addicted.

How often we come to use that word these days, confusing things that are very different. Clearly, there are some substances that exercise a physical power over your bodies. We call them controlled substances. Drugs, and alcohol, for example. Dealing with the sin of drunkenness also requires that you deal with the physically addictive power of alcohol. And all the more with habit forming drugs. And in those cases, to deal with the sin, you also need to address the physical addictions.

But beloved, the essence of sin does not remain enslaving and controlling to a Christian. Temptation can be overcome, no matter what it is. If you are in Christ, you are not enslaved to sin, because “he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”

Again, this is for your hope. For your encouragement in the battle. For your incentive and motivation to pray as Jesus teaches you to pray, “Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” Consider,

1 John 2:13 “I write to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, Because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, Because you have known the Father. 14 I have written to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one.”

It is never sinless perfection. John himself teaches us that. But it is the promise that “you have overcome the evil one.” That’s the description of a young man! “I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one.”

How sad it is today that we assume young men are the ones most prone to losing the battle against temptation! How sad it is

when we assume that young men are representative of spiritual weakness and immaturity. The Bible uses the example of young men quite differently. Young men, you who are no longer children, are the ones who have learned, by practice, to overcome the evil one. People of God, temptation can be overcome! Satan can be resisted. And that is precisely what you are praying for in this last petition of the Lord’s Prayer. Satan’s defeat!

Paul puts it this way when he writes to the Romans.

Rom. 6:17 “But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. 18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. 19 I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness....22 But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.”

And so,

### **III. THIS PRAYER SHOULD BRING CONFIDENCE WITH RESPECT TO THE FUTURE.**

“...you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.” So there is, for the true Christian,

#### **A. The promise of a crown of righteousness.**

2 Tim. 4:7 “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.”

There is a crown that awaits, a crown of righteousness. It will be awarded to you by the righteous judge! A crown of righteousness! For you have overcome the evil one. Ultimately, then, it is,

### **B. The promise of eternal life.**

Surely, one of the greatest aspects of that eternal life will be our sinless perfection, a complete freedom from the very presence of any and all sin. It is gone, entirely removed. The enemy from without is locked away in hell, and the enemy within is totally and completely put to death.

But the first-fruits of that eternal glory is ours now. “You have overcome the wicked one.” And so the Christian, here and now, is called “the righteous one.” He is described as godly. You have become slaves of of God. And this hope is yours, confidence, this promise:

2 Peter 2:9 “...the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.”

Even more clearly,

1 Peter 5:10 “But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.”

What’s my point? Why am I quoting all these verses? To give you hope as you struggle with temptation. To give you confidence, based upon God’s promises. Hope in this age, for God’s protection in the midst of temptation. And hope for the age to come, that God will receive you into the glory of heaven.

And there is even one greater element of that hope, something that awaits until the end of the age. I mention it now

almost as an afterthought, but the implications ought to have such a motivating encouragement for you here and now.

When Paul is giving the Roman church his closing remarks, he makes an astounding statement in the form of a benediction,

Rom. 16:20 “And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.”

It is nothing less than,

### **C. The promise of Satan’s ultimate defeat.**

“The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.” You and I will be united with Jesus at that moment, fulfilling the very first promise God made as he established the covenant of grace with Adam and Eve after they fell into sin.

Gen. 3:15 “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

The seed of the woman shall bruise the head, crush the head, of the seed of the serpent. Jesus shall crush the head of Satan in the final, eternal judgment. And you, brothers and sisters, you fellow Christians, you and I shall be with him. “The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.”

So pray earnestly, “Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” Maybe you never thought of all of that when you pray the Lord’s prayer, but you should! For ultimately, this is a prayer that you know God will answer.

So what are the temptations of your life? In what ways does Satan find you vulnerable? How does he attack you, where does he tempt you? And what are the desires of your flesh that wage war with your soul? They could be temptations, and sins, which

you keep well hidden in your heart. And they might also be very obvious to everyone who lives close to you. They might be secret sins, that you cherish in your own heart. They could sins in relationships to others.

Be aware of both enemies, the one from without and the one from within. And pray for yourself as Jesus prayed for his disciples. Pray with and for one another. “Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”