

## Lead us not into Temptation (Luke 4:1-15)

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Let me tell you a story about four priests who went on a retreat. That evening the priests decided to tell each other, in complete confidence, their biggest temptation. The first priest opened up and said, 'Well, it's a little bit embarrassing but my greatest temptation is on-line dating. The rest of the priests were astonished. Then the second priest opened up and said, 'My temptation is even worse than that! - as soon as I get hold of any money I head down to the bookies and have a flutter. The others gasped in horror. Then the third priest perked up and said, 'mine is worse still!'. 'I can't control the urge to drink, and so often I steal the sacramental wine from the vestry. The rest of the priests were gob-smacked! Then finally it was the fourth priest's turn. The quiet one. He said 'I love to gossip and if you'll excuse me I need to make a few phone calls.'

Well there you have it - temptation. We all get it. Whether you are the person who holds high office or the man in the street. We are all tempted from time to time.

What is temptation? Firstly, **temptation is not sin**. We know this because Adam and Eve were *tempted* **before** the fall. In the Letter to the Hebrews (4:15) we are told that Jesus was tempted in every way "yet was without sin". So temptation is not sin, but yielding to temptation is.

So what does the Bible mean by temptation? The Bible sees temptation as a test, a time of trial, when we face a stark choice between two alternative ways. Either God's way or our own way. It is a test. And the trouble with temptation is it is always sensual. It appeals to our senses. That craving which demands gratification. There is always something attractive, something alluring, something appealing about what it is that is tempting us. That is why we have to **resist** temptation. We know that we have to resist temptation, because the sensuousness of temptation can bring us to places, that even though it is attractive, we would rather not be. Uncontrolled passions and desires lead to difficulties not only for us but for those around us. So temptation and the yielding to it, is not a good thing.

The author CS Lewis wrote of temptation ('Mere Christianity' – chapter 11) 'No person knows how bad they are until they try to be good.' He goes on...

'A silly idea currently around is that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you find out the strength of an army by fighting against it, not by giving in.'

So we all face temptation from time to time. And when we do, we always find it a trial. So how can we resist temptation so that it doesn't get the better of us? This is an important question to us because yielding to temptation can lead to the break-up of many good things. It can destroy us and it can destroy others. Haven't we seen both in our churches and among our politicians recently.

So for the rest of this morning let's look at how we can resist temptation, so that it doesn't get the better of us.

**Firstly, recognise the subtlety of sin.** In the story of the fall – man is tricked. Adam and Eve are deceived. The alternative to obeying God is presented as something which is good! Adam and Eve were promised knowledge, wisdom and power. I call this the mirage moment. You all know what a mirage is. A mirage is an illusion. It is something that seems to be there, but it's not. And when we are tempted, sin is often presented as a solution. Something that is going to satisfy a need. But of course it doesn't. In the case of the Fall, Adam and Eve were presented with a situation where they knew that if they took control they would be like God. Of course it didn't happen. They were deceived. So the first thing we need to recognise is the subtlety of sin, especially the way we try to justify it in ourselves. Sin is Sin.

**Secondly** we need to **pre-determine our pattern of temptation.** I find I am much weaker in the evenings. At this time, I am usually tired and I need a bit of a lift. And so often I will sneak into the kitchen and have a munch. And that bite of cheese soon leads to a sandwich, and a beer. And by the end of it I am feeling much worse than I did before entered the kitchen. And that is what happens when we yield to temptation. We find ourselves in a much worse place than we were before. Now all I am talking about is a sandwich. But you know what I mean. Deep inside ourselves there are temptations, passions and desires, that could absolutely destroy us. In other words, temptation isn't restricted to sandwiches. Temptation, if we allow it to have our way, can bring about us to ruin. A ruin of ourselves and those closest to us. I don't know what your temptation is, but **you** know what your temptation is, just as **I** know what mine are.

For younger folk it is an unhealthy amount of time on social media. They take their phones to their rooms and have them 24/7. For others it is the internet. So often we look for answers on the internet rather than turning to God. Our health problems, explanation of things. We ask Google or Alexi before we ask God? And not only that a myriad of what I can only describe as evil and lewd ways of satisfying the very basic elements of our natures. It is all there on the internet. And Let me say, we are all in this together. You, ME, everybody.

Whatever is your temptation, and that is something between you and your maker - Pre-determine your ways so that you can resist temptation when the time comes.

**Thirdly – protect the condition of your heart.** We all have a heart condition! You know what I mean by this. I am not talking about our cholesterol levels. What is the condition of your heart? May be I'd be better to use the word soul rather than heart. Much of this is to do with what you allow *into* your heart. What you allow into your heart forms your thoughts and attitudes. It ultimately shapes the deepest part of your being. If your heart is right, then you will be right. 'Clean the inside of the cup and then the outside of the cup will be clean,' Jesus says. (Matt. 23:26).

And how do we do this? Well I am speaking to you as your Christian brother and sister. We know what the Gospel teaches. We know our scriptures, or if we don't we really ought to. And what does Jesus say, in our Gospel passage this morning? He was tempted in an extraordinary way. He was offered remarkable power over the kingdoms of the world, far greater than any carpentry business in Nazareth. He was tempted in every way *by that which was not of God*. And what was his reply, 'Worship the Lord your God, and **serve** him only' (Luke 4:80).

As Christians we are told to guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7). So we have a responsibility here. When I was a teenager my parents used to say, 'what would Jesus say if he was sitting with you right now?'. And it is true. God is all seeing. Sometimes that makes me shrink. But we must remember that God loves us. He knows how we are made. He wants to help us. So protect the condition of your heart by going to the Lord. He knows that we battle against temptation. He had the same thoughts. How could he say things such as 'If your right eye causes you to stumble – pluck it out! He say this in the context of lusting after another person. Or 'If your right hand causes you to sin.' Well, what sort of mischief can we do with our hands? Jesus knows all about temptation. It was our Gospel reading this morning. So pre-determine your pattern of temptation, protect the condition of your heart, **and lastly, pray!** Pray! Pray! Pray!

I have found that if I am disciplined in my prayers I am much better to face the day ahead. And do you know what I ask for? I ask for the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, 'I am sending you the Holy Spirit, and He will strengthen you'. So daily I pray that the Holy Spirit will fall upon me and fill me, hold me, lead me, guide me. Do you remember the words of the little hymn?

*Take my will and make it thine  
It shall be no longer mine  
Take my heart it is thine own  
Let it be thy royal throne*

This is what we need. Ask the Lord by his Holy Spirit to lead you and guide you each day. This life is not meant to be done on our own. Pray the Lord's Prayer each morning or evening. Say to the Lord, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' Tell him what you need. Tell him what you are struggling with. Ask him to help you. Ask him to help you overcome the problem you are facing. Prayer that HE will give you the inner strength to overcome. And don't get confused about the word 'prayer'. Talk to God! We say that we have an intimate relationship with him but sometimes we act as if he is a million miles away. He is right along side us. Take every little thought you have. It doesn't matter how trivial you think it is. Take it to Him and ask him to walk with you through it. In your happy times, in your sad times, and especially in your times of temptation. Talk to the LORD Jesus and he will guide your steps.

**AMEN.**

**Additional Bible passages:** Psalm 50:15; Matthew 26:41; Hebrews 4:14-16; James 1:14-15