

Temptation

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Preacher: Rev. Clive Jennings

[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Morning. So, what tempts you? What's your temptation? What draws you away from the goodness of God? The thing is, how do we distance ourselves, as we heard, from the source of temptation? And let's be honest, we all get tempted. How do you distance yourself? This clip tells us something, something about our moral world, something about the world in which we live, the reality of life. And as the psychologist says, they don't care about doing wrong, but they do care about being caught. You know, the temptation is not to, the temptation is not to take temptation seriously, isn't it? You know, we need to take this issue that Jesus is talking to us this morning about. And as we see in the scripture, the earliest point in the Garden of Eden, even at the beginning, our moral stance is that we will be tempted. That is part of it. The next program examines when confronted with the evidence of how they try, the young people try to cover themselves, even to the fact that through lying, that a big bird came down and licked it. Nothing to do with me.

We are tempted to hide our temptation. And here we are at the beginning of Lent, as we go back to spiritual basics, to examine our discipleship, our relationship with Jesus, how that is shaped and affirmed in the areas where that is marred by temptation in our life. This is the beginning. No wonder the scripture comes for us today. At the beginning in our reading this morning, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Why? Why? Firstly, the wilderness is a craggy, desolate place that is devoid of life. Why would he take him there? To the very place that Jesus would have to rely on this anointing of the Holy Spirit, which he has just received. Jesus has just been baptized. The Holy Spirit has descended on him. We hear those amazing words really from echoed this morning from the cross, you know, this is my son whom I love, with him I am well pleased. God is pleased in us with what he does. He wants to take us away and empower us afresh from being drawn away from that relationship, that beautiful relationship that we are called to have with him. This is effectively the start of Jesus' power-filled ministry. To confront evil, the devil, Satan, the accuser, the deceiver, whatever you would want to call him in his tactics, he will be, as they say, hell-bent on drawing you away from a deeper and loving relationship with the Father. That's what he is about. That's his sole purpose is to disrupt whatever God is doing in you. The danger is with temptation is that we go into situations in our own strength. This is where we come back, because Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit and taken into the desert. This is how it works. And here we have being filled afresh to actually confront everything that the evil one's going to throw at him. The danger is with temptation is that it not only in our own strength, but also with our own doubts, our own insecurities. As we said, you know, faith is small as a mustard seed. That's enough. That is enough. Our faith in God. But we walk in that faith. Yet Jesus demonstrates that power to confront and resist the evil. All those things are available to us and through us in that daily filling of the Holy Spirit. Jesus proves us. You know, there is no excuse. There is no excuse. There is no saying, the devil made me do it. I don't know what your cake looks like.

[4 : 49] We each have our own cake. What does that look like for us, if we're honest? One significant area is that we are susceptible to deviation. We are susceptible, as the people of God, to being drawn away by being tempted away. And our culture diverts us away from walking closely with Jesus. You know, from the big questions that we should be asking ourselves. You know, who are we? What is God's purpose for me in my life? What is God's calling on my life? And so often we are diverted, aren't we?

The trivia that evil uses to draw us away. You know, what's my status on social media? So many people worrying about what their status is, whether they are liked or not liked, what people have said about them. You know, I have to conform because I don't want to offend anybody. You know,

what a lie that is.

How often have we been tempted away from confronting the real issues in our discipleship, our relationship with Jesus by being diverted? Three areas to be aware of. Number one, after fasting 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, if you are the son of God, tell these stones to become bread. The tempter comes at a time when you and I are vulnerable. That is the time that he will come. Maybe that's been your experience. It has certainly been mine. A time when you are vulnerable. Jesus is hungry. How many times have we been tempted in that place of our vulnerability? Maybe when finances aren't so good. Maybe we are tempted to, yeah, lie on our tax return. To turn to recreational drugs or alcohol as a substitute when we're under stress. To see gratification for our sexual needs in ways when maybe our marriage isn't good or maybe we're struggling with our celibacy. Temptation will come. Beware of temptation when we are vulnerable.

That is the time to draw close and be filled again and again. Turn these stones into bread. Typical. You can hear the evil one speaking, can't you, in our own lives. And Jesus said, it is written, man shall not live by bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

[7 : 25] Don't tell me that. This is where it comes from. Back to the word of God. You can be fed physically, we all know. But that does not mean you're fed spiritually. And what we're talking about here at the beginning of Lent is being fed spiritually. Get into the word of God in Lent. Come back.

Draw close. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus has been filled with the Holy Spirit. And if you were filled and fed by the Holy Spirit, you trust and rely on that filling. You know that God is with you, in you, and through you, living, working, and strengthening you. Yes, your stomach may be empty, but you don't sell your soul for a loaf of bread.

Many Anglicans at the moment are having to make tough spiritual decisions as to whether the recent decisions by General Synod are leading us away from sound, biblical, orthodox teaching in the Bible.

Often you hear those words, don't you? Oh, well, change the scripture to be what you want it to be. No. Sell yourself for what? To conform to the pattern of this world?

Paul spoke very clearly when faced with pressures in the early church. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then, then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing, and perfect will. The answers are all there in the word of God for us if we go back and hold to it. The evil one is persistent. Next is, we move second level. We move to a different level. The temple, the seat, and the very heart of religion that he takes Jesus to. What a cheek. Then the devil took him to the holy city, stand at the highest point of the temple. If you are the Son of God, he said, throw yourself down, for it is written, he will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against the stone. It's from Psalm 91. The evil one is tempting him with scripture.

[9 : 45] You know, how audacious is that? The evil one will use anything at all, even scripture itself, to try and draw you away from the closeness and love of God. Go on, test it. You're filled with the Holy Spirit. You can do it. God will catch you. Do you ever get that from people? Do you ever get that tempting, that goading, that challenging from other people who are tempting us in our faith?

You know, where is your God now? Call yourself a Christian? Why does your God, your God, cause so much suffering? You know, all those things that goading us into and away from that close relationship.

The evil one's sole purpose is to spread doubt, spread doubt in the people of God. Even at the crucifixion, the tempter comes and is active in people's hearts, as we will find as we move through our Easter story. You know, if you're the son of God, come down from the cross. You know, he can't even save himself. You know, the evil one just doesn't give up. That's why we need to be filled.

Jesus replies to the tempter, using Scripture straight back again from Deuteronomy 6. Cool move. It is written, do not put the Lord your God to the test. Full stop. Have some of that straight back.

Sometimes we need to answer Scripture with Scripture. You know, when that's being thrown at us in a context, it is also written, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and all your strength. The tempter will come and tempt you to weaken the Word that we read in the Bible, to water down Scripture that has been given to us. People, hold to the Word, and to the Word may flash. Amen? Amen. Thirdly, he takes Jesus to an even higher level. And here we go.

[11 : 59] This is the persistence. Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in all its splendor. All of this he will give you, he said, if you just bow down and worship him, what point do you get to? You know, does that ring true or resonate with you?

The evil one is replicating and deceiving us as though he actually cares for us, as though he's actually something to trust in or worship. Trust me, I will sort this all out for you if you do this one thing. I'll give you a solution. I don't think so. You know? What is our solutions to things that the evil one puts to us? You know, you find yourself in a position maybe of insecurity in your marriage or in your religion. Flirt a bit with others. You know, that'll make your husband and wife or your partner attract you a little bit more. No, I don't think so. Go on, spend that hard-earned cash on the lottery. All your problems will be solved. You can even give a few quid to the church.

You know? Have the larger car. You know? Never mind the overdraft. Have the larger house, like your sister or your brother or your neighbor, you know, which you've coveted for ages.

Deserve it. You deserve it. Gosh, you know, Clive, you deserve this more than anybody else I know. Why not? Grab that promotion, but grab it by stealth.

But what have you got to give up in order to get it? That's the thing. The devil never shows you what the real deal is, what you've got to give up to get. I don't come to church anymore because I have to work six days a week to keep up my lifestyle. I've heard it time and time and time before.

[14 : 09] I don't come to church on Sunday because I'm so busy for the other six days. If you're busy for the other six days, this is the one place you need to be on the seventh day to empower you, to equip you, to hear God's Word, to go out empowered into the world, to have this supportive structure that we talked about, about being church. You know, to engage in worship, to reset your spiritual life in worship for the one who can do all things, to stir up the gifts in us, to stand firm in faith together, to gain strength from each other in our shared discipleship. I can give you a list of things, and I'm sure you have them too, of where the tempter offers us so much if we worship his ways.

fame, popularity, money, significance, greed, status, pride, lust, the list goes on. He will offer you everything.

I remember speaking to somebody some time back who said, I said, what are you giving thanks for? And they said, actually, I'm giving thanks for the pay at pump in the garage. It's a great thing. Well, tell me about it. Why are you giving thanks? And they said, well, actually, I have a huge issue with gambling and addiction. I fill my car up and I go into the booth and there in front of me is all the scratch cards and everything. And now I pay at pump because I go and I don't enter into temptation. And I give thanks for pay at pump every day. That's another thing, how the evil one changes our vocabulary to soften the temptation, isn't it? You know, I'm having a flutter on the horses. You know, the highest number of suicides are being recorded through younger people who have been caught in the grip of online gambling at the moment. He or she is having an affair. An affair? No, no, I think it's called adultery, isn't it? I've managed, I've massaged, I love this one, I've massaged my tax return. I think they call that deception, I think. In response to all this, here's a phrase we need to learn more and more, brothers and sisters. Jesus says, away from me, Satan, worship the Lord your God and serve him only. Yeah? Away from me, Satan, it is written, worship the Lord your God and serve him only.

[17 : 09] Where does my strength come from? My strength comes from the Lord. And in the Lord, I just want to affirm you, if like me, if like me, you have been caught in sin, you have been caught as we all have, there is God's grace to come back to in the power of the cross. Don't stay with that guilt in your sin.

There is the line, I am forgiven, I am restored, I am whole, I am back with you, Jesus. Yeah? Don't be defined from your past, but be defined by your life with Jesus in the future as you step over that line. Be restored, be made new, be filled. Jesus went into the desert filled with the Holy Spirit.

Paul talks about putting on the armour of God. You don't go into a situation unless you have the armour on. Pray for the armour on every day. The things that we will face. The devil doesn't have a day off.

He doesn't give up on Sunday. Might be people actually sat here now. We might be sat here thinking, well, I didn't like that worship song. You know, no, behind me, Satan, I am here to worship my Lord and my God. It's not about preference. And that's why we're here, to worship the Lord our God and serve him only. You see, you can have the cake and you can eat it, I promise you. The

Lord gives us cake and allows us to eat it. He doesn't leave it just there to tempt us. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

He gives us what you need. Jesus gives us life, life in all its fullness. I'm going to ask you the question that I asked earlier. What tempts you?

[19 : 13] What actually is tempting you at the moment? And maybe you need to just step over that line in God's grace and say, I repent, I step over the line and I begin a new life. Whatever you might be carrying from the past. I don't know about you, the evil one has this amazing thing of telling me of things that happened years back where I didn't get it right. Have you ever experienced that?

Glad I'm not alone. You know, you have no place in this, Satan. I am restored, I am renewed, I am filled afresh with the Holy Spirit. What tempts you and where are all these levels? Away from me, Satan. I just sensed this morning that we ask for that refilling of the Holy Spirit that Jesus went in. The classic this morning was is that Jesus went into that situation filled and refreshed. To face everything that was thrown at him and still to stand in worship.

For whatever situation we're in, wherever we are, whatever we are facing in our own life, should we just ask for that now? Maybe you'd just like to hold your hands in anticipation of that filling that isn't just for now. It is day, moment by moment by moment. Paul says, keep being filled.

Be filled again and again and again. What does it prosper a person if they inherit the whole world but lose their own soul? That isn't Jesus' plan for us?

Come, Holy Spirit, I pray. Would you fill us afresh this Lent as we move towards Easter? Would you restore our relationship with you?

[21 : 24] Would we be filled again afresh to withstand whatever we are facing? In our discipleship? To truly reflect, Lord, the beauty that you see in us and through us and that we see in you.

Pray that the Lord would bless us in our Lenten journey. Pray that he would strengthen us, he would guard us, he would empower us and refresh us. Pray that we would use those words again and again.

Away from me, Satan. Because you have no place here. I belong to Jesus. Amen. Amen.