

Resisting Temptation

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[0 : 00] May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be found acceptable in thy sight O Lord our strength and our Redeemer.

! Amen. It isn't often that I am given clear instruction about what I am to preach about. Normally it is left up to me. But today on this first Sunday in February I am doing as I have been told. Which is not a first but it happens. And so we are part way through this teaching series of Christian character and with the subject resisting temptation.

I think I have drawn the short straw. But be that as it may. A few minutes ago Grace read that very long lesson about the story of Joseph in Potiphar's house.

[1 : 11] It is a wonderful story of seduction. There is that verse isn't there? Will you come to bed with me?

Whoa! Temptation. Real, live temptation. We have no idea whether Potiphar's wife was a looker or not. But what we do know is that Joseph certainly was.

If you are listening to the scripture, as Grace read it, it tells you that Joseph was well made. He was handsome. A real Adonis if you like.

The sort of man that turns ladies heads and they, Whoa! As he walked past. Is there any wonder that Joseph was tempted but at least he didn't succumb.

He didn't succumb. And his response was worthy of note. This is what he says in response to the request. Come to bed.

[2 : 24] No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you. Because you are his wife.

How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God? That was his response. And there is no such thing like a woman scorned.

And when she didn't get her way, she made Joseph pay. Pay big time. And so she told her husband when he came home, This is what this Hebrew has done.

He tried to seduce me. Lies, lies, lies. But there we go. That's how it happened. And so poor Joseph finds himself ensconced in jail for a crime that he had not committed.

And this is the whole reason that Christian people need to be aware that there is that little word called know, which has such a magnificent expression in it.

[3 : 45] Know and mean it. Know and mean it. Know and mean it. In fact, the moral standards of Joseph were extremely clear.

There was no way he was going to compromise his morals and sin against God. Tempted, resisted, and because of his stand in prison.

That's the basis upon which we base our thinking this morning. But I want to move on and look at what Jesus says about temptation.

And particularly in the sixth chapter of Matthew's Gospel. That part of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus is teaching his disciples how to pray.

First of all, he gives clear instructions about what to do. Don't be like the hypocrites who stand on street corners flouting their importance. Instead, when you pray, do it in private.

[4 : 52] Going to your own room and there. Don't use necessarily long words, but keep it simple and short. And then comes the words of the Lord's Prayer.

Which is short, but not particularly simple. Because there is one verse that has always caused me a bit of a problem. One verse that says, Lead us not into temptation.

Now this gives the impression that God in his infinite wisdom is actually leading us into temptation. And when they succumb, he can then point the finger at them and accuse them.

I told you not to do that and yet you did it. This is not really the case. Because one commentator states that the original Aramaic was cause us not to enter into temptation.

It can also bring us, it can also mean, do not bring us to the test. Now I can understand that.

Because inevitably, every day of our lives we are being tested.

[6 : 10] And it's whether we succumb that really matters. First of all, temptation is real. Don't run away with the idea that it isn't, because it is.

We are surrounded by things which seek to tempt us into all sorts of situations. Advertisements on television are a form of temptation.

You need to buy this, you need to buy that, you need to buy a bigger car, you need to have a bigger house. And so on and so forth. Tempting us to do things that we really, particularly don't want to do.

And then of course people are attracted to gambling. The number of sites, adverts that come on television. Tempting people to gamble with whatever, whatever, whatever.

In the hope that they might win huge sums of money. When they fail, they spend more and more, fall into addiction, and find themselves in a situation where there is no way out.

[7 : 10] Jesus knew what he was talking about when he talked about temptation. Because he himself was tempted when he was at his weakest and his most susceptible.

He spent 40 days in the wilderness and he was weak with hunger. What did the devil do? Tempted him at his weakest point.

If you are the son of God, he says. And the word if signifies acceptance that the devil knew that he was the son of God. Then prove it.

All you need to do is to command these stones to become bread. And you can eat your fill. And it would have been the easiest thing in the world for Jesus to succumb.

In this moment of physical weakness to have surrendered to temptation. But to do so. To do so right at the beginning of his ministry. It would have been the end as far as he was concerned.

[8 : 21] And so he declined the offer. And in doing so gained victory over the devil. There is one temptation at the moment which is current amongst youngsters.

It seems to be cool to be carrying a knife. And the papers this week have been full of the tragedy in Birmingham.

Where a 12 year old boy was stabbed to death by a 15 year old. For no reason whatsoever. Just murdered in cold blood.

Whether that youngster was tempted to show how manly he was. And he could do this. And this young boy, 12 years of age. Disastrous consequences.

Temptation is real. It's a fact of life. We can't get away from it. But in the end. Temptation is not in itself the end.

[9 : 36] It's yielding to temptation. That is the sin. William Barclay in his study notes on Matthew's Gospel says this. To modern ears the word tempt is always a bad word.

Well, it is. To modern ears the word tempt is always wrong. It always means to seek to seduce into evil. But in the Bible there is a Greek word which I can't pronounce.

And it's often better translated by the word test. Rather than tempt. And in the New Testament usage to tempt a person is not so much to seek to seduce a person.

Rather, it is to test that person's faith and their willingness to do the things of God. And Barclay goes on to use this illustration.

If metal is to be used in any form of structure or whatever, it is tested far beyond the stress that it is going to be needed in whatever project it's going to be used in.

[10 : 52] It is tested. And you and I are tested every day of our lives. We come into situations that cause us problems.

And we have to have the strength of will, aided by the grace of God, to not yield to temptation.

That's fine insofar as it goes.

But what about those temptations which the world throws at us? Catches us off guard. And before we know it, we are faced with a monumental challenge.

Shall I? Or shan't I? Bring it to a personal point of view. If I do this, will I be able to keep it from my loved ones?

Will I be able to look them in the eye? Will I be able to stand before my God and say I failed? Dare I take the risk? Common sense says don't.

[12 : 06] Use the word no. No. And stand up. Temptation is not a sin. Yielding is.

When I was a boy in Sunday school more years ago than I care to remember, we used to use the hymn book Golden Bells. I'm sure you've come across it. A bit dated now. The hymn we sang quite regularly was, Yield not to temptation. And I wonder if I might quote it to you. Yield not to temptation for yielding is sin. Each victory will help you. Some other to win. Fight manfully. That's his sexist. Dark passion subdued. Look ever to Jesus and he will carry you through. Perhaps two of the greatest sins, sin is around us. Perhaps two of the greatest temptations or tests are greed and sexual impropriety. Greed is always wanting more. And therefore being prepared to take whatever risk is necessary to increase our wealth.

[13:20] And this sometimes means resorting to stealing in order to satisfy the craving for that more wealth. And I can't ever forget the occasion when Bernie Ecclestone, Ecclestone, not EGG, he was the chap in charge of Formula One racing if you remember.

And he was once asked, Do you really need more money Bernie? He was a billionaire twice over. And he said, You can never have enough.

More or much needs more. And so this is temptation.

We need to do something so we can spend more and have more and enjoy more. Temptation. The desire for more wealth was the carrot that Satan dangled before Jesus.

Matthew 4 verse 8 describes the third temptation as Jesus being taken to the top of a mountain. So that Jesus could see what was there in front of him.

[14:33] All this I will give you, says Satan. You only have to do one thing. Just bow down and worship me and all this will be yours. Get behind me, Satan.

You shall not tempt the Lord your God. The clear response was a resounding no. Maybe it's a lesson for us to learn.

In these enlightened days it appears that anything goes and sexual morality is placed on the back burner. When the church is urged to catch up with the times and to embrace the liberal attitudes of society.

And this is where sometimes we fail. Because the Christian church is called to be different. It is called to be separate. We need to stand up and be counted and not just embrace the modernity of society.

This new mantra must be adhered to it all. Sometimes the church appears to be out of touch, out of date. And some would say it's completely irrelevant. And then comes the temptation to loosen our standards.

[15:52] To become more with it. To become more with it. And to take on board the trappings of modernity. And bring about change so that we begin to fit in. Whatever that means.

Paul in his letter to the church in Rome is quite adamant. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world. But be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Then you will be able to resist. To test and prove what God's will is. His good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12.

I was always given to understand. And I'm standing here as a Methodist. I always given to understand that Methodist was a part of the non-conformist structure.

John Wesley advocated that we should embrace the life of scriptural holiness. So scripture has to be the basis of everything we think and do.

[16:58] We take the authority of scripture as our benchmark. And we are prepared to be seen as living a different life to the norm. Because in that respect we are different.

Our principles are different. Therefore we should live our lives differently. We don't follow the path of conformity. We ought not to follow a sheep without a shepherd.

But be prepared to stand and be counted. And be prepared to be seen as different. Finally, and in a sense I've said enough already.

Change for change's sake is just not worth considering. Unless it brings about a revival of those things that really matter.

Scriptural holiness for one. Charles Wesley had the right idea when he penned two verses of a hymn. And it goes like this. A charge to keep I have.

[18:04] A God to glorify. A never dying soul to save and fit it for the sky. But this is it. To serve the present age my calling to fulfill.

Oh, may it all my powers engage to do my master's will. Last Sunday. Covenant Sunday. When we accepted and took on board the strictures that the covenant places upon us.

To live for Christ and not for ourselves. Lead us not into temptation. No. Do not put us to the test.

We are called to resist temptation. To live holy lives that espouse the love of God. And point others to Christ. That great shepherd of the sheep.

Who gave his life. For us. And for them. Our final hymn which we'll be singing in a minute. Is written in the first person singular.

[19 : 09] It's me, my, mine. Not you, they, them. And it goes like this. Guide me. We can all make this our own.

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah. Pilgrim as I am through this barren land. I am weak. But.

Thou art mighty. Hold me with thy powerful hand. And. If you take that on board. Hold fast to Christ. Resist temptation. And as we heard. James. 4 verse 6. Resist temptation. And the devil will flee from you.

And the future. The future. The future. The future. Will hold. No fear. Let us pray. Father. We are weak.

[20 : 07] But you are strong. Help us to trust. Help us to lean on that strength.

And to use it. In our Christian life. Help us when we are tested. Not to succumb. But to let the Spirit. Hold us fast. And lead us onward into life.

Accept our worship, O God. not to succumb but to let the Spirit hold us fast and lead us onward into life.

Accept our worship, O God. Forgive our sins and make us your people worthy of the name of Christ.

Amen. Amen.