

Struggles in Temptation

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[0 : 00] The first two verses. Luke chapter 4, the beginning, and Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil.

Everybody in here and everybody all over the world is constantly being tempted by the devil.

Everybody in here has already today been tempted by the devil, whether you're aware of that or not.

The fact is that you and I, everybody, has experienced temptation. Satan wants us all the time to disobey God and he wants us to break the moral code that God has set out for us and he's constantly at us in order to do that.

Maybe today some of you were tempted not to come to church and you had to battle against that particular temptation.

[1 : 23] It may have been, there might have been some, it may have appeared some valid reasons. Now we realize there are times when people cannot come to church and there are genuine and valid reasons why they cannot.

But there are times that Satan will tempt you not to go to church. And he is always disappointed, if we can use that word about Satan, when he sees people resisting that temptation and coming to church.

But the temptation doesn't stop there because we will also be tempted while we are in church. And Satan will try various methods to keep you from listening to the word.

He's a master at planting some picture in your mind, something which you're fond of thinking about, something that you're planning to do in the future, something that is part and partial of your life and may be causing you pressures and anxieties.

He'll bring it before your mind so that you will not hear the word as it is preached. That is part of his strategy. As Jesus said in the parable of the sower, that as the sower was sowing the seed, the birds were coming and they were lifting that seed as it was sown.

[2 : 45] And he went on to explain that that's the tactic, or one of the tactics that Satan uses, that he is taking away the good seed as it is being sown.

You'll be tempted not to accept the message. And if the gospel is in any way challenging you, if you are here without Jesus Christ as saviour, and when Jesus is held up before you, and that your heart is touched in order that you may receive and accept Jesus as saviour, Satan will be holding out all the reasons why you shouldn't do that.

And of course, Satan's great purpose in all that is to oppose God. He has no love or fondness for you or for me. Everything he does, as he works in people and through people, is to get at God. He hates God, and his whole purpose in the whole field of temptation is for people to disobey God, because he does not want God to be glorified in any way, in any shape, in any form in this world. And there are times that we will see the power of Satan manifest itself in this world in a very powerful, and in a very sinister, and in a very awful way.

[4 : 07] Satan hates God's people above all, because he hates God. And that is why, down through the history of the church, the Christian has been persecuted, why the Christian has been tortured, and why hundreds and thousands and hundreds of thousands, and we believe throughout the history of this world, millions of Christians have been put to death, for no other reason than that they love the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that is Satan. It is the reason why the Jew, who received God's promise, the Jew, probably no other race, has been so persecuted, whether it is in the time of Pharaoh, in Egypt, all the way down, and when you think of Hitler, and you think of his systematic campaign to exterminate and eliminate the Jew from the whole world, it really was quite extraordinary.

And there is no question whatever, that Satan, in a powerful way, was at work. There was no mercy shown to man, woman, boy or girl, as there was a systematic wiping out, because they were the Jew.

And there are times, as we say, like that, in the world, where Satan and the power of darkness will be shown in a fearful way. And Scripture shows us that that is how it will be in this world.

And as we said now, of course, that Satan hates God. Now, as we said, everybody is tempted, but we're not so aware of temptation until we become believers, until we become Christians, until we come to accept the Lord as Savior.

[5 : 50] We're always being tempted. But when you become a believer, you become more conscious of temptation. And one of the great encouragements that we have here today is to know that the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, was somebody, as he lived and walked in this world, was battered and severely tempted by Satan.

That is a great encouragement to us today. That Jesus knows and he understands when you and I are tempted. He knows how awful, how difficult it can be.

He knows the turmoil that we can go into. And he has promised to help us in temptation. I suppose one of the questions we have to ask is, why does God allow temptation?

Well, I cannot give a total answer to that. But the Bible shows us, for instance, in Romans 8, that God works everything for good to his people.

All the experiences, all the little things and all the big things in life. Even, I believe, our sin. He works it ultimately to and for our good.

[7 : 10] And one of the things that he works for our good are our struggles with temptation.

Because Martin Luther used to say that there were three things that regulated Christian growth.

Prayer, the word, and temptation. These three things. The word, our knowledge, where we're to study the word and to grow in that knowledge. Prayer, where we come to know and to fellowship with the Lord in prayer.

And temptation, that the Lord used this as a means of strengthening us and developing us in the faith. Now, this whole area of temptation, of course, as we know, is incredibly hard and difficult to work against and to fight against.

And there are times when we give in. And I believe everybody in here has yielded to temptation. You may be yielded to it today. And there are times you look back and you can see very clearly where you give in to temptation.

Other times we're not aware of it. But the Bible, again, is full of great people. You're Abrahams and you're Jacobs and Davids and Solomons and Elias and Peters and all these great people of God.

[8 : 30] And they give in to temptation. So if you look back and you say, Oh, I don't understand how I give in to temptation. You've got to remember, you're not the first and you won't be the last.

And many, many great, wonderful people have. But the Lord uses this temptation for us to grow. Because when we resist temptation, it strengthens us.

It strengthens our faith. It strengthens our Christian resolve. And it enables us to grow. Because growth is worked by resistance.

You look, for instance, in people who go to the gym. And if somebody, say, was going to... If a person was going, say, for instance, he was going to be a bodybuilder and he was going for some competition.

He'd be pumping, as they say, pumping iron. He'd be at it day after day. And he'd be working in order that his muscles would grow. He'd be looking for strength. He'd be looking for definition for all these things.

[9 : 31] He'd be working away. And if you were looking at him, you'd be saying to yourself, what on earth is this person doing? Such a punishing regime. But he's doing this in order that he will develop, that he will strengthen, and he will become what he wants to be.

And this is through resistance. It is through the pushing of these weights. It's a lifting of these weights. And that's how, through this resistance, there is a development and there is a growth.

You look at, for instance, Chris Oye, who won three gold medals. There are people who are saying, what a wonderful cyclist. It was after the Olympics. Pictures of him in his training, having to be helped off his bike.

He was in a state of collapse. He had pushed himself beyond the limit. In order to achieve. This is how it happens. And that is, spiritually, we look at the same picture.

And that is what God is doing within us. He is working in us, strengthening us through our battles with temptation. But we've also got to remember that temptation doesn't equal sin.

[10 : 42] And that is something that's very important to highlight and emphasize. Because a lot of people get into real trouble in their heart. Because they think if they're being tempted, then they're sinning.

There is a big step, initially, between temptation and sin. That, of course, can very quickly, that gap can become very small.

And very quickly move away from the temptation into actual sin. But we've got to remember that there is a distinction between being tempted and sinning.

And that, of course, is highly brought out for us in the nature of Jesus Christ. He was bombarded by temptation. Not just, as we see here in the wilderness, but throughout his life.

And, indeed, we know, probably, he experienced the future's temptation up to the cross and on the cross. Because Jesus said, this, talking of the hour of the cross, this is your hour and the power of darkness.

[11 : 43] This was a moment when it was like hell was unleashed upon him. And so he experienced temptation in a way and in a manner that we in this world will never.

And that is encouraging for us to know that Jesus was tempted violently, vehemently, and yet didn't sin.

So that makes it very clear to us that temptation in and of itself does not equal sin. We need to resist. But, you know, the devil, of course, he has 101 tactics.

And sometimes when he comes to us with the temptation, and it is we are in a state and in a condition where we're finding resisting the temptation very difficult.

And our heart goes out towards the temptation and we feel inclined to the temptation. And then a new temptation will come in. And you say to Yeshua, I do not have the strength, I don't have the will to fight this.

[12 : 51] And Satan will then whisper to you, right, do you know the best thing you can do? Is just give in on this occasion. And afterwards, start afresh.

And next time you're tempted in this way, then you'll resist. You know, he's really good at that. So that you say to Yeshua, oh, I, right, I'll just give in on this occasion.

And next time, I'll then be ready. No, you won't. You'll actually be weaker the next time. Every time we give in to temptation, we actually become weaker in the ability to resist it.

Every time we resist it, we become stronger in the way of resisting temptation. But of course, all the time, we are dependent upon the Lord and his grace and we must seek his grace.

And you know, there are times, sadly, because our own heart and our own nature is inclined to the temptation when we don't ask the Lord for help. Because we don't want his help.

[13 : 51] Because we want to yield. We want to give in. If we ever try to resist temptation on our own, we've said this before, a hundred times out of a hundred, we'll fail.

We won't be able to. Because we do not have the strength or the power or the capacity on our own to fight against Satan's temptations.

So we need God's grace and God's strength and God's help. Now we read here that Jesus, he was full of the Holy Spirit. And he returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.

Now, this as we remember, as we looked before, Jesus had just been baptized. And he had received the Spirit without measure. And Jesus, in his baptism, it's very interesting that it's right after his baptism that this incredible temptation takes place.

To a certain extent, the war began. When Jesus came, it was born into this world. But here, the battle really commences. Because Christ is, at this moment, in his baptism, he is engaging in his public ministry.

[15 : 05] It is here, in a very powerful way, as our representative, he is moving on to face the enemy. And where he is taking Satan and his power and his kingdom, the kingdom of darkness, on.

And so it is little wonder that Jesus is subject to great temptation. But it's also encouraging when we find that Jesus is attacked by Satan after a time of really great blessing.

Really great blessing. And he has received the Spirit, the Holy Spirit. He's full of the Holy Spirit. He received the Spirit without measure. And he is bombarded by Satan.

I would like us to take note of that. Because, you know, sometimes people who have been tempted, Christians who have been tempted, and particularly if they're going through periods of real temptation, feel that they cannot be really good Christians.

They sometimes wonder if they're Christians at all because they have been so tempted. And they've got this idea, oh, if only I were a better person. If only I lived closer to the Lord, then I wouldn't be experiencing these things.

[16:19] It must be because I am such a disobedient, such a poor Christian. Well, my friend, take encouragement from this. It was Jesus experienced this temptation when he was full of the Holy Spirit.

Now, of course, he was always full of the Holy Spirit. But it was after a period of great blessing where the heavens opened and God made this great declaration, this is my beloved Son.

And the Holy Spirit came down upon him and rested upon him. And then he's tempted. So I want you to take encouragement from that and realize that your temptation and your battles with temptation are no indicator that you're a poor Christian.

In fact, I would almost suggest that it's the reverse. Because it is often those who are closest to the Lord who are most vehemently tempted.

You know, sometimes people have the idea and they'll say, oh, well, you know, I don't need to pray for the ministers and the elders, you know. They're fine. They don't struggle with temptation.

[17:23] My friend, nobody struggles more. Nobody struggles more. But the moment you come into the kingdom of God, the moment you set foot, as it were, into the Lord's camp, Satan has you as a marked man, marked woman, marked young person.

You're an enemy. And he'll go for you. And the more you will do for the Lord, the more he will go for you. And that is why it is so important to pray for those who are in the Lord's work.

And I say that because I know that there are people who genuinely think, they think that ministers aren't tempted. My friend, they're tempted and bombarded continually.

Because if you are involved in any way in the Lord's work, be persuaded of it. And you just need to go through the Bible. Who was ahead, as it were?

Well, who was the disciple that was going to be leader in the early church? Peter. And what does Jesus say of Peter? He said, Satan has desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat.

[18:37] We have a dog that gets hold of its, it's got its wee bed and basket. And in that basket, there's this wee bed. Oven puts it in its teeth and shakes it.

Shakes it so hard, so furiously. And I say to myself, that dog must have a sore head afterwards. Boom, it's going like this. But you know, that is the very idea. That the Lord, it's the kind of picture that we have of Satan with Peter.

Peter got him and he's just shaking him. Bombarding him with temptation. Because Peter is the man who is, in a short time, he's going to be standing after Pentecost and preaching.

And thousands of people are going to be converted. And Satan is the one who made the great confession about Jesus Christ. Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Satan says, I have got to get that man.

And Jesus was warning Peter. And he says, you are a prime target for Satan. So my friends, remember the importance of praying for one another.

[19:45] Pray for every Christian. Pray for those who are outside the kingdom. That they will come into the kingdom. That the God of this world, who is the devil, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe.

If you're here today without Christ. And you can't see Christ. You cannot see the salvation that is held out. Do you know what's wrong? Satan has blinded your mind.

And you need that release. You need that your mind will be delivered. That the scales on your eyes will be opened. You ask the Lord, you can't do it yourself.

I can't do it. Only the Lord can do it. So you go to the Lord and say, Lord, deliver me. So that I may see and believe. And we need to pray for one another.

When we're in the kingdom. That we will be kept. And delivered. And encouraged. And given the ability to resist. And to overcome. More and more and more.

[20 : 49] As I said, the moment you come out on the Lord's side. And Satan will have you marked. And that is why it's amazing. You know when you come to communion times.

How often we find. And you find that in homes. In your own home. Before the communion. There's often something goes wrong. So often on a Sunday.

Things will go wrong. I find that all the time. There's always things going wrong. Because there's every kind of distraction. Everything. That's going to try and muck up your day.

So that you cannot preach. You can't concentrate. You can't do. And it's the same at communion time. And may I say to people. Who consider going forward to the Lord's table. You know.

Halfway through. A session. As it were. That's not a session. But between. You know. Halfway between one communion and another. You might be here sitting. And you're saying to yourself. You know. When it comes round.

[21 : 48] I'm going to seriously think about going to the Lord's table. When the time comes. Satan. If you're thinking like that. Satan will be out. And you say. I'm going to keep that person back. From the Lord's table.

Because every person. Who confesses. That Christ. Is doing. Something wonderful. When you come to the Lord's table. What are you doing? You're witnessing.

And confessing. Remember what Jesus says. You eat this bread. And drink this wine. You do show forth the Lord's death. Till he come. So every time.

You. Every individual. Comes to the table. You are proclaiming. That Jesus Christ. Died for you. As a sinner. And that Jesus Christ.

Is coming again. You do show forth the Lord's death. Till he come. And that's why Satan. Doesn't want. God's people.

[22 : 44] To be at the table. And that's why. He'll pull out all the stops. To try and keep you back. Because every person. Is one. More witness. To the fact.

That Jesus. Has died. For sinners. Jesus. Has risen. From the dead. And that Jesus. Is coming. Again. So remember. These things.

Because at this particular time. When the communion. Has passed. You may be thinking differently. But when it comes. Try and remember. That Satan. Will be out. To try and stop you.

But the wonderful thing. And God willing. We'll go on to look at this. Next week. That Jesus Christ. As our representative. Took on Satan. He took him on here.

He took him on on the cross. He took him on. And he defeated him. Satan. Is a broken enemy. Powerful enemy. Much more powerful. Than any of us.

[23 : 41] More powerful. Than all of us. Put together. But. Do you know something? The power. That is within us. In Christ. Is even greater.

Greater. Greater is he. That is in you. Than he. That is in the world. Isn't that a wonderful thought? To have Jesus Christ. As your savior. As your lord.

Gives you a power. To defeat. A power to overcome. A power to resist. And this is what Jesus. Did. In his own life.

And through his death. May we then. All look to him. Put our trust in him. And seek him. To be our lord. And our savior. Let us pray. Oh lord.

Oh god. We. We give thanks. Today. That we come to a savior. Who has won. A great victory. The savior. Who has gone.

[24 : 39] Ahead of us. And the savior. Who has prepared. A way for us. We give thanks. Oh lord. That there will come a day. When the battle. Will be over. Come a day.

When the weapons. Of our warfare. Which are not carnal. But are mighty. When these weapons. Will be demonstrated.

In such a wonderful way. To a oneness victory. And we pray then lord. To bless us. As we go through life. Help us to go forward. Believingly.

And trustingly. And help us to follow the lord. With all our heart. Take us all home safely. We pray and forgive us. Our every sin. In Jesus name. We ask all. Amen.