

Lead us not into temptation!

“Lord Teach us to pray!”

Matthew 6:13

June 26, 2016

³² And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” ³³ And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. ³⁴ And he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch.” ³⁵ And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ And he said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” ³⁷ And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? ³⁸ Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. Mark 14:32-38 (ESV)

Let us recite “The Lord’s Prayer” – and so we don’t have that tension which Alex talked about last week when we get to the part – trespasses, debts or sins – let us use the word sins so we all know what we really mean. Let us Pray! *Our Father...*

We are starting to wind down this brief series looking at *The Lord’s Prayer*. We are at the heart of the prayer, where the so called “rubber meets the road.” Last week Alex looked at the conditional petition of *The Lord’s Prayer* – “forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.”

It is the only petition of *The Lord’s Prayer* in which Jesus offers a footnote, or a commentary, an important one at that:

¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Jesus knew his disciples were going to continue to sin. Even after his death on the cross, his resurrection, his ascending back into heaven and the sending of the Holy Spirit on his disciples on that Day of Pentecost, he knew his disciples were going to continue to sin, at some level. If they wanted the assurance of forgiveness of their sins, then they were going to have to learn to offer forgiveness of sins to others.

While knowing that we are going to continue to sin during our life here on earth, even after we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, seems like bad news, it’s really Good News! Because the Gospel, otherwise referred to as Good News, is for sinners.

The word Gospel is a shorthand expression for the entire work of God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit. It represents all of God’s work in creation and throughout the entire Old Testament preparing us for Christ’s coming. It represents Jesus’ work here on earth – his life, his death, his resurrection. And it represents the present work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers today.

In fact the gospel is **only** for sinners. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 1:15, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” Jesus himself said “it is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick.” Many Christians tend to think that the gospel is applicable only to unbelievers who need to be “saved.”

For some reason, we tend to think that once we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord our entire sin nature is wiped away in an instant. It doesn't work that way. During our entire life here on earth, even after we come to Christ, and especially after we come to Christ, there is this cosmic battle between Good and Evil, between Christ and Satan. The apostle Paul put it best:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)

The only thing that differs among us Christians is how that sin presents itself, what it looks like. It's pretty easy to see when that sin manifests itself in outward ways – through sexuality or violence, but how about all the ways that sin is not so explicit? How about the sins of gossip, criticism of others, pride, judgmentalism, anger, frustration, unthankfulness, anxiety, selfishness, impatience, lust, envy, jealousy, greed, materialism, racism? Need I go on? How about lack of prayer – which is the primary issue in the passage this morning from the Gospel of Mark? All Jesus asked his three closest disciples, Peter, James & John, to do was to sit for a while and pray for him. And they fell asleep. “*Could you not watch one hour?*”³⁸ *Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*” Have you ever thought of not praying as sin?

I am currently reading a very good book, one that had been sitting on my shelf for some time, and when I say some time, I mean years, and there probably is something in my subconscious or conscience that didn't want me to read the book. The book is entitled, Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate. The book is mostly for Christians. It addresses all those sins that I just mentioned. Because the truth is that while we like to rank sin – there is murder, adultery, sexual immorality up here and down here is pride, gossip, criticism, materialism down here – God doesn't rank them. Yes, certain sins have much different consequences, but in God's eyes the punishment for the sin is all the same. The punishment is death.

The truth is we all need the Gospel, unbelievers and believers. Those that have yet to believe in Jesus Christ need the Gospel for salvation and those of us who have put our faith in Jesus Christ need the Gospel for salvation. So do we just go on sinning, knowing that we are saved not by our own work but only by what Jesus did for us on the cross? The Apostle Paul says “absolutely not!” The Gospel has the power both to save us and to change us! But for some reason, over the past 40 years or so we have lost that sense that the Gospel has the power to change us, so we expect very little change in us. And we have gotten just what we expected, very little change in the lives of believers, so much so, there is very little difference in the lives of believers and non-believers; whether it be the so called big sins or the so called respectable sins.

There is a very old hymn, dates all the way back to 1776, entitled “Rock of Ages!”

*Rock of Ages! Cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood from Thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure, save me from wrath and make me pure.*

So, do you know what your core group of sins are? Or as some others say, “your signature sins?” Is it lust? Is it pornography? Is it pride, gossip, criticism, materialism, unthankfulness, selfishness? If you’re anything like me you have a nice core group. What are you doing to confront them or to address them?

Recently someone led me to another book, entitled Getting to No: How to Break a Stubborn Habit, by Erwin Lutzer, which specifically speaks about that – how to address the sin(s) that plague us. You know it’s never good when someone close to you suggests a book with a title like Getting to No: How to Break a Stubborn Habit. No it wasn’t Mary but I think I did hear her say “Amen” quietly under her breath. The first step to confronting the sins that plague is the recognition that even though we have come to Christ for salvation, that during our life here on earth we are still confronted with many choices, often choices between good and evil, between God and Satan and even though the final war has been won, the battle still wages in each of us.

Could God have taken it away? Yes, but for some reason he chose not to. He still gives us choice, free will, at least to some extent. He gave the choice to Adam and Eve in the Garden and he gives the choice to us today. Lutzer even says, “the presence of Satan in the garden, and his activity on our planet today, often tips the scale in favor of evil choices.”

Not only do we have Satan’s influence still existing in this world during this time, we also have evil which still resides in each of us believers. We might call that residual evil. The temptation to sin comes not from God but from ourselves. The disciple James tells us that in his letter. In Eugene Petersen’s version of *The Message* it reads, *The temptation to give in to evil comes from us and only us. We have no one to blame, but the leering, seducing flare-up or our own lust* (James 1:14).

In the English Standard Version the entire passage reads:

¹² *Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.* ¹³ *Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.* ¹⁴ *But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.* ¹⁵ *Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

James 1:12-15 (ESV)

Even Jesus was tempted by Satan. In the beginning of Mark’s gospel it tells us that immediately after Jesus’ baptism, “the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being **tempted by Satan**”(Mark 1:12-13).

In the Lord's Prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he too is part of the prayer. "Lead **us** not into temptation!" And in our passage for this morning Jesus is praying that He doesn't give into the temptation of sacrificing God's will for Him as opposed to Satan's will, or his own human/fleshly will. Jesus, while he took on an earthly body during his time here on earth was not beyond temptation. What separates him from all other human beings is that he never gave in to those temptations.

Clearly God does not shield us from circumstances where we are vulnerable to sin. It even appears that there are times when God leads us into situations that stimulate our evil desires, but that is not to say that God causes us to sin – nor does He tempt us as Satan tempts us. Those are the times when we must learn to lean on God and ask Him to save us, when we are otherwise incapable of saving ourselves.

So, why does God allow us to be tempted? Erwin Lutzer in his book Getting to No: How to Break a Stubborn Habit offers us three primary reasons why God allows us to be tempted:

1. A test of loyalty.

God has a purpose for everything that He allows to happen here on earth, even when we can't see it. While being tempted by Satan always presents us with the opportunity to give in, that which is filled with many frightful possibilities and long-term consequences, it also presents us with the opportunity to say No!

Erwin Lutzer offers us these great words: "**God wants us to develop a passion for Him that is greater than our passion to sin!**"

God allowed Abraham to be tested by asking him to sacrifice his favorite son, Isaac. Abraham, like any other parent had to be strongly tempted to say no to God. He probably took as much time as he could building the altar, thinking of all the possible reasons he should disobey God. Reasons like Isaac is needed to fulfill God's promise and there is no way that Sarah is ever going to be able to understand. And above all, how could a merciful God expect a man to slay his own beloved son? Of course we know how the story ends, Abraham passed the test; the angel of the Lord stopped him from killing his son at the very last minute and provided a ram for the sacrifice in Isaac's place.

This is God's response to Abraham: "Now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me" (Genesis 22:12).

How do we know that Abraham loved God? Because he chose not to give in when all the powers of hell and the passions of his own soul were telling him to say, "no, don't do it."

Why does God not shield us from the many different circumstances that tempt us? He allows us the opportunities of difficult choices so that we can prove our love for Him. Opportunities to choose the love of God over the love of this world.

It says in 1 John 2:15, “if we love the world, then the love of the Father is not in us.” The response to each temptation leaves us better or worse, brings us closer to God or takes us further from God, neutrality is impossible. What it boils down to is this: What do we value more, the pleasures of the world or God?

The second reason God allows us to be tempted:

2. Spiritual transformation or character development

One of my favorite quotes of all time is from Max Lucado, in his book Just Like Jesus. A quote that is something similar to this: “When we put our faith and trust in Jesus for salvation God chooses to love us just as we are, he loves us just the same as he does his own perfect son, Jesus Christ, but he doesn’t want us to stay there. He wants us to grow. He wants us to grow into the image of Jesus, the image of which we were originally created.”

God’s primary purpose for our lives as Christians is that we all be “conformed, or transformed, into the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29).

God wants more for us than just our personal salvation. He wants to give us victory over sin. He wants us to be fruitful! He wants us to develop Godly character. He wants people to see Him in us. God led the Israelites, His people, through the desert and the wilderness for forty years, testing them every step of the way. Were they going to be faithful or not? These are the words of God’s servant Moses who led the Israelites on God’s behalf during their forty year journey:

“And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.” Deuteronomy 8:2 (ESV)

Again, temptation never leaves us neutral. We either give in to it or we say no to it. Temptation brings out the best or the worst in human beings. Sometimes God teaches us lessons by letting us suffer the consequences of our sin.

God wants us to humble ourselves by seeking others for help and accountability. And most of all He wants us to seek him, which leads to the third reason which Lutzer says God allows us to be tempted:

3. Strength for Our Weakness(es)

God uses our sin(s) to show us His grace and His power on our behalf. The depressing effect of sin is offset by the good news of God’s grace. These are the apostle Paul’s words, translated to us by Eugene Petersen in *The Message*, from Romans 5:20 –

When it’s sin versus grace, grace wins hands down. All sin can do is threaten us with death, and that’s then end of it. Grace, because God is putting everything together again through the Messiah, invites us into life – a life that goes on and on and on, world without end.

The Bible tells us that the Apostle Paul was given “a thorn in the flesh” so that he would remain humble. But it never tells us what that thorn was. Over the years many have believed that it was a physical ailment. Many others, including myself, tend to believe that it was a temptation which he struggled to resist. It says He asked God three times for deliverance. I’m guessing he asked God many more times to take it away. But God’s response to him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power [my power] is perfected in weakness [your weakness]” (2 Cor. 12:9).

Paul even boasted about his weakness, knowing that it provided an opportunity for God’s power to rest upon him: “For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10).

If you are beset by one particular sin, or maybe a particular set of sins, perhaps you are on the verge of seeing God’s grace displayed in a mighty and powerful way. A way you have never seen before. And although right now you may be preoccupied with the struggle, perhaps you may soon be preoccupied with God the Father, and Jesus his Son. Just maybe it’s not yours to take away. Maybe it’s one that only God can take away or maybe it’s one that God wants to leave there which allows you to turn to others for help and to trust in Him, that which leads us back to our Scripture for this morning (Mark 14:32-38):

One of our greatest sins, not taking the time to “watch and pray.” One hour! Is that too much to ask? Think of all the different things you spend more than one hour on each day. Add up all the time you spend on your cell phone checking Facebook, watching T.V., movies, activities. We say we’re willing to give up our will for God’s will, but not completely. We give a little and we take back. The world’s ways are not God’s ways. “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”