

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VILLA RICA, PCA
THE ART OF COPING WITH TEMPTATION

Preached at First Presbyterian Church Villa Rica 1/19/03

Luke 22:39 through Luke 22:46 ³⁹And He came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him. ⁴⁰When He arrived at the place, He said to them, **"Pray that you may not enter into temptation."** ⁴¹And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, ⁴²saying, **"Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."** ⁴³Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. ⁴⁴And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground. ⁴⁵When He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow, ⁴⁶and said to them, **"Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not enter into temptation."**

I appreciate the story of a little boy named Bobby who badly wanted a new bicycle. His plan was to save his nickels, dimes, and quarters until he finally had enough to buy a new 10-speed. Each night he took his concern to the Lord. Kneeling beside his bed he prayed, "Lord, please help me save for my new bicycle and please Lord, don't let the ice cream man come down our street tomorrow."

Jim Grant in an issue of Reader's Digest told about an overweight business associate of his who decided it was time to shed some excess pounds. He took his new diet seriously, even changing his driving route to avoid his favorite bakery. One morning though he arrived at work carrying a gigantic coffee cake. Everyone in the office scolded him, but his smile remained cherubic.

"This is a very special coffeecake," he explained.

"I accidentally drove by the bakery this morning and there in the window were a host of goodies. I felt this was no accident, so I prayed, 'Lord, if you want me to have one of these delicious coffee-cakes, let me have a parking place directly in front of the bakery.'"

"And sure enough," he continued, "the eighth time around the block, there it was!"

Temptation is a part of the human condition. But temptation is not sin. It is being led into the temptation that involves us in sin.

I read about a young woman out in Colorado who had herself sent to jail in order to avoid being tempted to marry. She asked a juvenile judge to place her in jail in order to prevent her wedding that was scheduled later in the month. She was only 17 years old and was in love with an older man. She knew that it was not in her best interest. Still, she couldn't resist him when in his presence. We don't know what happened to her after she was released from jail. We do know, though, what it is to be tempted.

I. JESUS WAS TEMPTED.

A. All through his life Jesus was tempted. As he began his public ministry he was led out into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. His strength then was what it had always been before and after; he relied upon the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, and upon prayer. He is the only person who successfully resisted every temptation. We ought to learn from him the art of coping with temptation.

B. As he came to the greatest crisis of his life the hour of betrayal, arrest and all the events that led up to the crucifixion he was tempted. He anticipated that he would be tempted.

We are not always taken by surprise when we are tempted, although we may be tempted at times when we are not expecting it. But because he knew the scriptures he knew all that was to befall him. He knew that he would be taken as a lamb to the slaughter. His concern was that he would not weaken, that he would not yield to the temptation to doubt the love of His Father, that He would not seek to evade or avoid the will of God, and that He would exercise faith throughout the whole experience. He told his disciples just before he went to the Mount of Olives, to be prepared for Calvary, **Luke 22:37** ³⁷ **"For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, 'AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS'; for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment."**

The Son of God recognized that temptation begins in the thoughts of the heart. We must keep our hearts from those thoughts that would lead us into temptation. In the Lord's Prayer he taught the disciples to pray "lead us not into temptation." We may spend more time praying for forgiveness than we do in praying not to be led into the temptation that makes it necessary to seek forgiveness.

There is a connection between the thought and the

deed. He taught in the Sermon on the Mount "You have heard it was said, you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Surely we miss the point if we try to make that mean we never look at the opposite sex in order to avoid temptation. It means we are to recognize that sin begins when we yield to an improper desire, which originates in the heart, in the thought life.

When Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane for the last time he knew that the struggle was with himself. His human side would want to find a way to avoid the cross. He would be tempted to doubt his Father's love, His Father's wisdom in decreeing that the atonement for sin could only be handled by his going to the cross. He therefore sought the strength and grace that comes through prayer and only through prayer. He prayed, "Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done."

Scripture tells us that he was in an agony. He was praying most fervently. His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground. This was not a quiet, nodding-off-to-sleep prayer. He was truly desperate for help from heaven. He needed the assurance that comes only from God, which comes only through prayer. In answer to his prayers an angel from heaven came and strengthened him.

C. Notice that as he rises from prayer he finds the disciples sleeping. It says they were sleeping from sorrow Vs. 45. How often we do that same thing. We have a problem. We face a crisis and we go to bed. We don't have the faith to pray. We just do what the disciples did. Jesus told them for the second time -- **"Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not enter into temptation."** Vs. 46.

He had warned them of the impending hour of suffering. He had told them to get on their knees and seek the strength that comes only through prayer in order to avoid yielding to temptation. Peter thought he would never deny the Lord, and he would not have denied him had he done what the Lord counseled him to do -- pray, Peter, don't sleep, pray. But he did not, and when the hour of trial came he had no strength for it.

II. THE BEST DEFENSE AGAINST TEMPTATION IS PRAYER

A. We must recognize that temptation is bound to

come and that the sins that temptation leads to are destructive. We can be like the train locomotive that decided it was tired of running back and forth on the same boring track. The unhappy train thought of the adventure and excitement it was missing because it had to run on tracks. However, jumping the tracks resulted in a horrible crash.

My dear friends, terrible crashes do take place when people decide that they can ignore God's laws. You can make shipwreck of your life by trifling with temptation.

A young married woman sits in her pastor's office. She describes to him a marriage gone stale, a husband with misplaced priorities, and a situation in which she has excessive time on her hands and a longing for romance in her heart. "Yesterday I had lunch with a fellow I almost married," she confesses. "I hadn't seen him in years. Did I do wrong?" Her question is itself a confession that she recognized the danger of the situation.

What would Jesus have told her to do? Our text gives the answer -- **"Pray that you may not enter into temptation."** Pray that you may be content with your marriage. Pray that you may not break faith with Christ by looking around for something to stimulate and excite you that you know is wrong.

The world snickers when the actress in the musical *Oklahoma* sings, *"I'm just a little girl who couldn't say no"* We may join the world in smirking when Mae West sighs seductively, *"to err human but it feels divine."* The Devil would have you believe that you are missing fun if you live for Christ a life of fidelity and faith. However, when white collar crime is counted in the billions of dollars, when young lives are being drained and often destroyed by drugs and alcohol, when untold millions live their lives in emptiness and despair, guilt and brokenness, in a day in which the media presents and the internet gives access to and even glorifies fornication, adultery, homosexuality and violence, in a day that one out of two new marriages will end in divorce, when record numbers of children will grow up in broken homes, it is time we deal with the power of the tempter in our lives.

When we pray not to be led into temptation, when we seek God's strength to resist the temptations that come to us to have resentment, to doubt God's love, to dispute with God's Providence and question His wisdom and will, we are declaring that sin is destructive to our lives. We also are affirming that there is One whose power is greater than that of the Tempter and the course he would suggest that would take us away from a good and loving God. The apostle wrote **1 John 4:4 greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.**

In ancient mythology there are many stories about the island where the sirens lived. When ships sailed close to their island, the sirens sang so beautifully that the enchanted sailors would steer their ships upon the rocks to their destruction. The sirens then would collect their spoils from the wreckage. However, one day a ship came past on which the sailors did not heed the song of the sirens and sailed on in safety. The reason the sailors were not interested was that Orpheus, the god of music, was on board and he sang a sweeter song than any known to the sirens.

That is an imperfect analogy of what happens when we entrust our lives to Christ. The best antidote for temptation is to be so filled with his song, his salvation, his service so that there is no room for temptation. However, that does not relieve us of the burden of praying daily for his divine care. If Jesus, the Son of God, found it necessary to pray for strength in trials and temptations, how much more ought we weak believers to rely on prayer?

The battle against sin never ceases in this life. We go from battle to battle and victory to victory. Some of you, like the disciples of old, may be sleeping when you should be praying. You have sorrow or heartache, or trouble that you find disagreeable and disappointing. So you give in to feelings of despair and discouragement. In that attitude you are sure to fall victim to temptation. You are to rise up and pray. You are to resist the Devil so that he will flee from you. You are to be like the importunate widow in Christ's parable who persistently went to the unjust judge and finally got relief, for he says in his parable that if the unjust judge would grant relief because of her crying and tearful entreaties, how much more will the heavenly Father grant deliverance to his elect.

You certainly won't be praying according to scripture unless you pray in Jesus' Name. And you won't be praying in Jesus' name unless you know him and believe in him as your Savior and Lord. Have you prayed the sinner's prayer and asked him to be your Savior and your Lord, to forgive you of your sins against him and come to know the peace that he alone can give? If not, come to him today and begin the life of a disciple of his. I invite you in his name to pray with me as I close this service and ask him into your heart.

Hymn # 674 "I Need Thee Every Hour"

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