

Today I Pray, 5: Lead us not...

Reconnect – March 28, 2010

Text: Matthew 6:9-13; Romans 8:26-27

Key Thought: God is there for us in our struggle with temptation and evil, because He's been there too.

[Jesus said,] "This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'"

Intro: Famous cheaters

- Match up the cheater to the person they cheated on: (use Jesse James/Sandra Bullock, Tom Cruise/Nicole Kidman, Jon/Kate, Tiger/Elin, Hugh Grant and Elizabeth Hurley, Jude Law and Siena Miller, Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston, Charlie Sheen/Denise Richards, Eric Benet/Halle Berry)
- All of these men have the same thing in common: everyone thinks they are crazy! Leaving beautiful, successful women for affairs with everyone from prostitutes to coworkers and losing everything
- The slide could have had many more people on it too – everyone from politicians to princes – it seems that infidelity has mushroomed these days into serial infidelity – multiple affairs
- But what all of these tragic situations have in common is this: they all started with a single moment of temptation

The power of temptation:

- What incredible power temptation has – the incredible ability to bait and switch
- Every temptation is appealing – if it wasn't, we wouldn't be tempted, would we? But at its core, it's a lie: it's a bad trade, giving up what is good, or right, or healthy, for something else that LOOKS good, or that we think we deserve, or that we think will fulfill us
- Once we give in, we ultimately find (sooner or later) that it's not true: we've been lied to – the trade wasn't a good one – we've ended up with the short end of the stick, and been left with dust and ashes
- There are probably infinite ways to be tempted, because there are infinite ways to make wrong choices, to sin – everything from losing our temper because we feel that it will improve a situation, to judging someone else out of envy, to being dishonest to get ahead
- And why does it seem like temptation just manages to find us, wherever we're at, at any time?
- In some ways, it's such a personalized thing – one person's struggle is another person's shrug of the shoulders – and yet in other ways, we're all tempted by the same things
- It's a world of temptation – and we're weak – and the devil is at work, pushing evil
- And it is in this world, our world, that Jesus teaches us how to pray – to invite God to be involved in our lives as we navigate all of these minefields, to ask Him for His help

Jesus' prayer: Matthew 6:9-13

[Jesus said,] "This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'"

Where does temptation come from?

- “Lead us not into temptation” – I’ve always wondered why Jesus phrased it that way
- Is He teaching us to ask God not to tempt us? Is there a chance that God actually WOULD lead us into temptation? Like, “Well, God, you might want to tempt me today, or have me tempted today, but if you could just hold off, that would be great”?
- And then things get confusing fast, because if you flip over to the part of the Bible that we call James (likely written by one of Jesus’ brothers) it reads like this:

God blesses the people who patiently endure testing. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. And remember, no one who wants to do wrong should ever say, “God is tempting me.” God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else either. Temptation comes from the lure of our own evil desires. These evil desires lead to evil actions, and evil actions lead to death. So don’t be misled, my dear brothers and sisters. (James 1:12-16, NLT)

- So what’s the deal? Where does this temptation come from that we’re asking to NOT be led into?
- The word we translate as temptation is a Greek word from that time – *peirasmos* – but it’s generally agreed by Bible experts to mean more “testing”, rather than “enticing”:

“For every trial brings temptation. Financial difficulty can tempt us to question God’s providence in our lives. The death of a loved one can tempt us to question God’s love for us. The suffering of the righteous poor and the ease of the wicked rich can tempt us to question God’s justice, or even his existence. Thus testing almost always includes temptation, and temptation is itself a test... But while God may prove or test his servants in order to strengthen their faith, he never seeks to induce sin and destroy their faith.” (Moo, James, 72-73)

- Tough times are going to come – they come for everyone, and when we’re in a tough time, a lot of times, that’s when we find temptation jumping into the mix too – we’re stressed, or we’re sick, or we’re out of our routine, or sleep deprived, or we’re alone, and then our weaknesses get exploited – the world around us, or the devil, or our own fallen natures put that pressure on us to go the wrong way, to make wrong choices that will ultimately hurt ourselves and others
- God brings us into hard times, and He leads us through them – because we grow through them – we are refined by them – we learn through them what matters and what doesn’t
- What Jesus is teaching us to ask for, is relief – relief in the middle of our tests, in the middle of our trials – protected space, so that we can learn to resist more and better
- And Jesus prays this prayer along with us, remember – the Bible says about Jesus that,

“...we have a great High Priest who has gone to heaven, Jesus the Son of God. Let us cling to him and never stop trusting him. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same temptations we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it.” (Hebrews 4:14-16, NLT)

- Amazing that God knows us so well and still loves us so much – even though we don't live up to his standards, even though we are fallen and we can't match his perfection, it doesn't affect the way He loves us and welcomes us and our prayers
- “Lead us not into temptation” – “Lead us not into the testing that brings temptations”

Resisting temptation

- “But deliver us from evil” – it's linked to what comes before – keep us away from it, on the one hand, and when it comes, on the other hand, get us away from it ASAP
- How are we going to resist temptation? When it's all around us? When we're prone to wander and make wrong choices? When we're “only human”?
- Jesus was human too – He was fully God, but He was also, somehow, uniquely, fully human
- Some might find it ironic that Jesus would be the one talking about temptation
- After all, how can someone who never sinned – who never “fell” – really know temptation?
- But then again, the person who resists temptation, at least to a certain degree, as C.S. Lewis said, knows more about temptation than the person who just gives in, right away, every time – they've seen much more of temptation
- Therefore, the longer you resist – the stronger your resistance – the more you know of it – which means, that if Jesus was able to perfectly resist, then there's nothing He didn't see or experience – He knows it through and through, better than anyone, and how to resist it – it might sound strange, but He's the expert on it
- Eugene Peterson says this about this prayer: **“What continues to strike me is how companionable this prayer is. Jesus prays with us; we pray with him. Jesus does not teach us about prayer, he prays with us; we do not learn about prayer, we pray with him.” (Tell It Slant 188-189)**
- So how can we resist?
 - Recognize there is a battle – it's not just with yourself, it's with the Devil, the personified force for evil in the world, who is opposed to God and everything and anything else that's good
 - Prayer and reading the Bible – build yourself up spiritually
 - Be honest with a friend about it (temptation thrives in the dark)
 - Be around people more (temptation wants to isolate us)
 - Cultivate good habits
 - Help others; work to defeat evil and spread hope
 - Tell someone else about your faith – and how you're not perfect
 - Work hard; take on responsibility for others
 - Create buffer zones around what tempts you, when you're strong
 - Cut things out of your life – take drastic action
- And put this section of the Bible to memory:

“If you think you are standing strong, be careful, for you, too, may fall into the same sin. But remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you will not give in to it.” (I Corinthians 10:12-13, NLT)

Key Thought:

God is there for us in our struggle with temptation and evil, because He's been there too.

...we don't even know what we should pray for, nor how we should pray. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all things knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. (Romans 8:26-27, NLT)

Conclusion: Sometimes we will fail

- But what do we do when we fail? What do we do when we give in? Or when we embrace temptation – when we don't even resist it? Or when we search it out? When we consistently do the wrong thing, and we don't seem to learn from our mistakes?
- We are weak – we are broken – we are bent – we are fallen – and we make mistakes, and other times we embrace evil – we screw up big time, we fail, we reject everything good that we have
- We push the button, regardless of the hurt we know that it will cause, and we justify it to no end, to anyone who will listen, including God
- Our consciences attack us – and when we listen to them, the guilt and the shame threaten to overwhelm us – we can try to deny it for awhile, but we generally feel rotten – what can we do?
- And the farther we go down this path of trying to follow Jesus, the more we try to bring Him into the centre of our lives – the more we realize how far we have to go and how much more we need Him
- We're going to celebrate the Lord's Supper this morning – to remember all that He has done for us – and to ask for His continued help in our struggle with the world around us, our fallen nature, our flesh, and the Devil
- Jesus loved us enough to go to the cross and die, to help us overcome our sin – to take the penalty of all the wrong we've ever done on Himself
- He didn't need to do that – He was okay, the only one who would have been able to stand before God
- But in dying for us He spreads His life to us, and begins to change out the fallen, twisted parts of us for new ones full of life and hope
- What you're going to hear and see next was recorded by singer Johnny Cash near the end of his life – when he was never more popular, or respected, or acclaimed
- This was his response to all of the admiration, all of the acclaim he received
- I'd like us to watch this together, and then once it ends, at that time, if you could come over to the side table to receive the bread, and the wine or the juice, and then take it back to your seat and wait with it until everyone is back – just in silence

Response: Communion

- [play video: "Hurt" by Johnny Cash]
- [get emblems, share together]

Because God’s children are human beings – made of flesh and blood – Jesus also became flesh and blood by being born in human form. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the Devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he deliver those who have lived all their lives as slaves to the fear of dying... Therefore, it was necessary for Jesus to be in every respect like us, his brothers and sisters, so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God. He then could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people. Since he himself has gone through suffering and temptation, he is able to help us when we are being tempted. (Hebrews 2:14-18, NLT)

“Amazing Love”

“The Lord’s Prayer”

I'm pretty sure I'd get her to play it at least, softly, if not do it fully. Basically I had thought to show the video and have people get their communion emblems during the video - but the video is powerful, and I want people to be able to experience it. So, that means, show the vid, and then I thought about having people get up in silence to get the stuff. Then we do communion, and then maybe Amazing Love at the end. So if she could be ready to go on that, it would be great. I can't really guarantee it all, but this is where I'm at, and it's Thursday... ;) I think I like it.