

PRAY THAT YOU WILL NOT ENTER INTO TEMPTATION!

SERIES: JESUS, SAVIOR OF THE LOST

by Ron Ritchie

The history of the church of Jesus Christ, beginning on the day of Pentecost in 33 A.D., is filled with wonderful stories of faithful men and women who willingly followed Jesus all the days of their lives regardless of their circumstances. Some stories were filled with joy; for example, the time Peter and John were able to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in the temple area, and even though they were arrested, some five thousand men came to believe in Jesus as their Messiah.

Other stories were filled with trials and temptations to forsake the faith, such as the one about the second-century Bishop of Antioch, Ignatius, who was taken in chains from Syria to Rome because of his faith in Jesus. He forbade the members of his church to seek to release him from imprisonment, because he was looking forward to suffering for Christ. He said, "Let fire and the cross, let the company of wild beasts, let breaking of bones and tearing of limbs, let the grinding of the whole body, and all the malice of the devil, come upon me; be it so, if only I may gain Christ Jesus." Later in the second century, Polycarp, the eighty-six-year-old Bishop of Smyrna, refused to escape death by either fleeing or denying Christ. Between being chained to a stake and having the fire lit at his feet, he demonstrated the key to his faith as he prayed, "O Father, I bless You that You have counted me worthy to receive my portion among the number of martyrs."

In every century men and women who loved Jesus Christ have found themselves in situations where they were tempted to deny him for the sake of momentary relief from persecution including beatings, rejection, and death. The key to their faithfulness under such pressure was based on the encouragement our Lord gave his disciples in word and personal example in the garden of olive trees called Gethsemane just before his arrest, trial, crucifixion, and death on the cross of Calvary. "Pray that you do not enter into temptation," he said. In Luke 22:39-46 we will be reminded once again of the value and need for meaningful time in prayer with our Lord in order to remain faithful to him in the midst of all the trials and temptations in our daily lives.

Jesus approached the garden of Gethsemane

And He came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him. (Luke 22:39)

Jesus, God's final Passover Lamb, had completed the Passover feast for the last time and had turned it into the first Lord's Supper. During the ceremony of the second cup, he broke tradition as he took the unleavened bread, which was a symbol of his sinless life, broke it, and said, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." Then during the ceremony of the third cup he again broke tradition as he took the cup and said, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood."

Then the faithful Servant of Isaiah 53 rebuked, warned, encouraged, and comforted his disciples about the difficult days to come for them after his betrayal, arrest, trial, death sentence, and crucifixion. But he did not stop at his death, but went on to give them even more encouragement about his resurrection and Ascension. In the upper room, according to John 14:1-3, he said, "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you...I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." He followed this with the promise that while they were living in this fallen world the Father would send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, a source of power far beyond any strength of their own, to be in them and with them for the rest of their

lives as they began to build and minister in the age of the Spirit. He prayed that God would protect them in the days ahead (see John 17), and then they all went out of the city to Mount Olivet and entered the garden of Gethsemane.

In Matthew 26:31, our Lord warned his disciples that he and they were about to become the fulfillment of Zechariah 13:7: "You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I will strike down the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered.'" Then our Lord further encouraged their hearts (26:32) by saying, "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee." Finally, just before they entered the garden on the side of Mount Olivet, Jesus had to rebuke the boastful Peter, who said once again that even if the other ten disciples fell away he would never forsake Jesus. Jesus then said for the second time (see Luke 22:31-34), "...before a cock crows, you shall deny Me three times." But Peter kept insisting that he would die first before he would deny Jesus as Messiah, and all the others said the same thing.

Jesus entered the garden of Gethsemane

And when He arrived at the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." (Luke 22:40)

What is prayer? Ray Stedman, in his book *Talking to My Father*, has one of the finest definitions of prayer I have ever found:

The purpose of all faith is to bring us into direct, personal, vital touch with God. True prayer is an awareness of our helpless need and an acknowledgment of divine adequacy...Although God certainly knows all our needs, praying for them changes our attitudes from complaint to praise and enables us to participate in God's personal plans for our lives.

Our Lord taught his disciples early in their ministry together to pray, "...do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:13). The temptation he was referring to is called unrecognized temptation; the stresses and pressures of the flesh, the world, and the devil are so hidden and deceiving at times that not even the strongest of Christians can recognize all the ways we can be placed into situations in which we will be led into sin. Since the beginning God has sought to teach us how to trust him to interpret temptation as to whether it is from the flesh, the world, the devil; and about the reality that we cannot handle any of their awesome temptations in our own strength.

In Genesis 4:1-8, Moses relates the story of Cain and his brother Abel. Both brothers were encouraged to bring an offering to God, and as he looked at their hearts he found Abel's offering acceptable but not Cain's. Cain's heart became filled with jealousy and anger. The Lord appeared and spoke to him about his unrecognized temptation. He said, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door [like a lion]; and its desire is for you, but you must master it."

It took the presence of the one and only living God to analyze what was going on in Cain's heart, just as it does in ours. Cain could not see it. It affected him spiritually, emotionally, and it even affected his face! His countenance had fallen. Only the Lord could say, "Cain, your heart is filled with anger against your brother, and it is affecting your emotional well-being, which in turn is affecting your physical well-being. Come back to me with a thankful heart and bring your offering. Trust me to lift up your countenance; tell me how you're struggling, what you're feeling, and what's going on. I will solve this problem for you, because you can't solve it yourself; you can't even see it. If you refuse to listen to me, however, you need to know that sin is crouching at the door of your heart looking for a moment when it can devour you, but you must master it. And the only way you can master anger, sin, and the temptation to kill your brother is to ask me to give you the courage and strength." Unfortunately, Cain refused to turn to the Lord. He went right out and murdered his brother.

What is temptation? In the original Greek the word *peirazo* means to test, to try, or to prove. It may be used in a positive sense as in the case of Job, who said in the midst of his trial, "When he has tried me, I shall come forth as

gold" (Job 23:10). Or it may be used in a negative sense: to tempt toward evil. Man was created to worship and serve the Lord. Temptation is an enticement to sin, to worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator. Temptation strikes at the heart of our relationship with God and his purposes. Since the fall of man in the garden of Eden, all humanity has been tempted to sin by the flesh, the world, and the devil. It is in this sense that our Lord is using the word temptation.

Each Christian, upon inviting Jesus to become their Lord and Savior, is given the gift of the person and power of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit of God within each of us who provides the power necessary to choose to walk in the Spirit and to resist the temptation of our old nature (the flesh) to live destructive and immoral lives. Paul wrote to the Galatians, "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please" (5:16-17).

At the same time, each Christian is surrounded by the world system and its various man-centered philosophies that daily tempt and entice us to forsake God and depend on ourselves for all that we need physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually to cope with our present realities. John reminded the first-century believers, "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:15-17). In addition to those sources of temptation is the devil himself with all the powers at his disposal, seeking to entice us away from our God and worship him instead. Paul told the Ephesians, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). It is overwhelming, isn't it? We can't understand or see these things, so we need to turn to God. We can see the world, and we certainly know the flesh, but what do you do with these forces you can't see or smell? We obviously need God; that is why we should always pray. We should ask him whether each temptation is an attack from the flesh, the world, the devil, or all three.

Temptations from the flesh, the world, and the devil are not sin. It is how we handle temptation that determines whether we sin or not. James tell us, "...each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (James 1:14). Through prayer we find the key to understanding and resisting our temptation.

We all know the story of how Joseph as a youth was sold into slavery by his brothers and sent down to Egypt. One of Pharaoh's captains bought him and then entrusted him with the management of his household (see Genesis 39). The captain's wife did not miss the fact that this young single man was "handsome in form and appearance" and eventually tempted him to "lie with her." But he refused the temptation and (even before the Ten Commandments) said, "How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?" She persisted to the point that Joseph was forced to flee, only to be falsely accused and then imprisoned. But God did not forsake him; eventually he raised Joseph to great power and enabled him to save many people from famine, including his brothers who had betrayed him.

On the other hand, King David, who was also a godly man, took a walk on his rooftop one spring evening, and looking down on the housetops of Jerusalem, he saw a married woman named Bathsheba bathing, and she was very beautiful in appearance. He was tempted, and rather than choosing to go back to bed (he had seventeen wives already!), he sent messengers and took her, and he and Bathsheba chose to enter into sexual immorality. The difference between the way these two men faced temptation was that Joseph chose to please God, avoiding sin and resulting in life, and David at that moment chose to please himself, which resulted in sin and brought forth death, (see 2 Samuel 12:11-12) not only for himself but for his family and the whole kingdom.

In Luke 22, the disciples were being tempted to fight over who would be considered the greatest in the kingdom of God (22:24-27). They were being tempted to let their faith in Jesus as their Messiah fail and to never return to follow their risen Lord (22:32). They were being tempted to deny him as well as forsake him during the difficult

days ahead (Matthew 26:31-35). And they would be tempted to leave the ministry altogether because of his physical absence and the fact that they did not want to be classed among criminals (Luke 22:37). We can also see that the permission Jesus gave Satan to sift Peter and the other disciples like wheat had already begun to take effect (22:31). Satan meant the sifting for their destruction, but Jesus allowed it for their spiritual wholeness. They needed to have their pride sifted out so that they would become men of humility, but it appears that at the moment Satan had a strong hold on all of them as evidenced in the three boasts of Peter: (1) "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!" (Luke 22:33). (2) "I will never fall away." And (3) "Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny You" (Matthew 26:33, 35).

Our Lord understood the difficulty of his approaching ordeal and of the temptations the disciples would be struggling with. At this moment in history all of the powers of hell would join forces with the flesh of the disciples against Jesus, to prevent, if possible, the will of God from being done on the cross. So Jesus went to spend time alone with his Father to ask for the strength and courage to face the eighteen hours to follow in the hands of the Sanhedrin and the Romans on the way to the cross. And before he went to pray he said to all of them, "If I need to pray, I am encouraging all of you to spend this time in prayer so that you may not give in to the temptations to abandon me, each other, and your faith."

You may recall that as part of our May vacation in Europe we planned to visit our young missionary family in Paris, Dudley and Janet Weiner. One evening we went out to dinner with Carl Gallivan and the Weiners. Early in the dinner Carl asked Dudley and Janet what we could pray about on their behalf. He wanted them to tell us about their personal needs rather than about the ministry in general. There was a long, thoughtful silence, and then Dudley asked for prayer that he would not lose his intimate relationship with the Lord in the midst of building a new church. Janet asked for prayer that she would not lose her joy in the Lord in the midst of the many responsibilities that came with supporting her husband and raising their four children. Carl then added that in view of the deeply entrenched demonic powers surrounding them in that evil city, we should also be praying that God would guard their children so that they wouldn't be tempted to buy into that evil philosophy. They were thrilled that Carl was so insightful, and we did pray for them. Dudley and Janet understood their temptation, that it was right at the door. We continue to pray for the Weiners that they will not enter into the temptation of allowing the many activities of their family and ministry to draw them away from following and depending on Jesus Christ for their every need.

Having instructed the disciples to use the time to pray that they would not enter into the temptations to betray, deny, and forsake him...

Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane

And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, saying, "Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done." Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground. (Luke 22:41-44)

For Jesus, prayer was as necessary as breathing. We have seen since the beginning of our study in Luke that there was an ongoing conversation between Jesus and his heavenly Father. In essence we found that Jesus never said one word, never went anywhere, and never did anything without checking in with his Father. He taught his disciples that his desire was to do the will of his Father on earth.

Jesus entered the garden of olive trees called Gethsemane (which means the olive press). Within an hour he would struggle with his Father about the cross and whether he was willing to go through that agony and separation. The pressure would become so intense that just as olives are put in a press in order to receive the oil, so our Lord was pressed to the point that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground. In Matthew 26:36-38 he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." And he took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, and began to be grieved and distressed. Then he said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me." Luke then states, "And he withdrew from them about a stone's

throw, and He knelt down and began to pray."

Our Lord needed the presence and power of his Father in order to enter into the battle that was planned before the foundation of the world: the defeat of Satan and his destructive forces over the lives of men, women, and children. The Prince of Peace who had been rejected just four days earlier as he rode a donkey down from Mount Olivet into Jerusalem was now kneeling in a garden on Mount Olivet. He was God's final innocent and sinless Passover Lamb, about to take the full wrath of God for the sin of humanity that would be laid on him within hours so that Satan's captives could be set free to worship and serve God once again. Our Lord was feeling acute emotional pain as he looked with apprehension at his coming ordeal. He was being tempted not to go to the cross.

He prayed, "Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me, yet not My will, but Thine will be done." Remember that within the previous hour our Lord had celebrated his last Passover and at the same time had taken the second and third cups of a four-cup meal and changed them so that it would become the first Lord's Supper. During the second cup he had taken a piece of unleavened bread, which symbolized his sinless life, broke it before the disciples, and said, "This is my body which is given for you...." Then he took the third cup and said to them, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the [new] covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:27-28).

The cup that he was referring to in his prayer was the shedding of his blood for the forgiveness of sin. For if he was going to die on that cross for the sin of mankind, that meant that this innocent Lamb of God would have all the sin of humanity in Adam placed on him. He would experience sin for the first time in his eternal life, and then he would have to experience the full wrath of the holy God against that sin. The result was that for the first time he would be completely separated from the presence, love, and holiness of his Father. He would express that separation when he said on the cross, "My God, My God why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). So here he grieved and became distressed, for he felt the desire not to do the will of his Father.

Finally in the midst of his temptation he made his decision: Not my will but your will be done. How was he able to make that choice? Hebrews 5:7-9 tells us: "In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation..." He did not let his feelings of fear rule him. He said, "I do not want this, it will hurt, it will separate me from my Father, I will lose my life, and my disciples are going to forsake me, but I am going to obey my Father!"

Hebrews 4:14-15 also tells us that after his death, resurrection, and Ascension Jesus became our great high priest: "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." We might wonder whether the Lord really understands some of our more bizarre and weird temptations, but his word here assures us that although he did not sin he experienced temptation in every way that we do. And because he is now our great high priest, we can bring all our sins and temptations to him, no matter how weird and bizarre, and he will understand, intercede for us, and forgive us if we fall.

We heard the words "Thy will be done" when our Lord taught them to his disciples in the beginning of their ministry: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). What that meant was, "*Abba*, Father, may your righteousness, love, mercy, and grace come into my heart and then be expressed in my life, whether in the midst of joy or pain, so that I and all those around me may see your life of righteousness and justice in me." Later Paul would write to the Corinthians, "...He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf" (2 Corinthians 5:15).

The Father lived out his life in the Son in the midst of trials, temptations, joys, and sorrows in order to carry out his will on earth. In the same way we are called to allow our risen Lord to live out his life in and through us so that his will may be done and his kingdom may come on earth as it is in heaven. Our Lord was being tempted to

avoid the cross and the separation from his Father, but in midst of the temptation he learned obedience from the things that he suffered.

"Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him." Once again we are reminded that what we see is not all there is. God surrounded his Son and has surrounded his people with these wonderful angelic beings who were sent to minister to Jesus and to us in a variety of ways, especially in times of trials and temptations. This gift of love from the Father was first seen in the life of Jesus at his birth and then again just before he began his ministry on the mount of temptation. After Satan tempted our Lord three times, Jesus ordered the evil one to depart: "For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.' Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him" (Matthew 4:10-11) after he had fasted for forty days and nights. Now our Lord needed to be strengthened even more, for "...being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground."

A few weeks ago one of our elders called a private meeting for PBC's elders to join him in prayer based on James 5:14-15: "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up...." He told us that he had been diagnosed with a serious illness. He told us that he was not afraid of death and that he was willing to "drink the cup" the Lord had handed him. We anointed him with oil and, although we thanked God for the medical help he had received, our real hope was in the healing touch of our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Each man told the Lord what they desired for our beloved elder, yet each man including that elder said in essence, "Not my will but your will be done."

After a time of agonized prayer before his loving Father...

Jesus found his disciples sleeping in the garden of prayer

And when He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow, and said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation." (Luke 22:45-46)

Matthew wrote that he came and addressed Peter, who had been so outspoken earlier, and said, "So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (26:40). The evil stress was so great at this point in their lives that the only way the disciples could cope with it was to go to sleep, hoping that when they woke up the temptations would be over. Not so! Sleeping simply put off the ability to cope and defeat their temptations. Do you ever feel like getting a nice, soft pillow and disappearing from reality for awhile in the hope that some temptation won't be there when you wake up? Jesus was saying, "Don't go to sleep, go to prayer about that temptation."

Christ refused to sleep in the face of this temptation of the flesh to avoid the cross, but instead in the midst of suffering he learned obedience. He was telling them, "Keep watching all the events around you and realize that you will enter into a variety of temptations in the days ahead. You will be like sheep that have been scattered because the shepherd has been struck down. The key to your faithfulness in remaining my disciples and my faithful witnesses is prayer to our loving heavenly Father, who will provide the power to overcome the flesh." Peter boasted in the flesh that he would follow Jesus to his death if necessary. In his spirit he meant it, but in the first trial after he said it, our Lord had to point out that his flesh was weak.

In Matthew 26:42, Jesus went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Thy will be done." And in a third prayer he said the same thing once more. "Then he came to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!" (Matthew 26:42-46).

Our Lord began his earthly ministry on a mountain where he went to pray and fast for forty days, only to be tempted by Satan to worship him. He closed his earthly ministry with an hour of agonized prayer in which he struggled with the temptation to avoid the cross. If our Lord Jesus Christ himself, the Son of God in his humanity,

prayed when he was faced with temptation, you can see why he told his disciples at the beginning of this hour and then at the end, "Pray to God your Father that you do not enter into the temptation to deny and forsake me in the difficult days ahead."

Paul would later write to the Christians in Corinth, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). He means not that you will be able to get away from the temptation, but that in prayer God will give you the ability to endure temptation while you're in it. These are difficult and stressful days for many of us, and the pressure in this community from the flesh, the world, and the devil to deny and forsake the Lord is mounting all the time. There is a great need for each and every one of us to pray to God not just for ourselves but also for each other that we will not enter into that temptation.

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