

SERMON

Matthew 6:13

And Lead us not into Temptation

Nunawading and Waverley, 10-10-21

Dear friends in Christ,

When it comes to temptation, all of us have trigger points. For example, in our relationships, we may be overly sensitive, you need to be appreciated, you hate injustice or self-discipline is your thing. Maybe you need to be right all the time or you just prefer to be left alone and not be bothered with problems. In these huge range of personality features there is the temptation for conflict. What I say about living with human beings applies to our relationship with the Lord. We may be fearful of witnessing, stingy with our money, or would prefer others to serve. When things are not going our way, we are tempted to be impatient with the Lord or think he is doing a poor job. There is a whole world of temptation around us.

Jesus gave us a prayer to help us: **lead us not into temptation.** Does that mean our heavenly Father tempts people to fail? James, the brother of Jesus, sets the record straight: **When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.** There is no evil in our Father. Rather, he may test us by allowing us to be put under pressure and get close to those trigger points. That is why prayer is so important.

The problem is in ourselves, our culture and the influence of Satan; it wouldn't be fair to blame our loving friend and Saviour for these circumstances. When Luther was pondering temptation, he was thinking of **false belief, despair and other great and shameful sins.** Think of our present times. Selfishness is the big one. We desire to look after ourselves and the Lord comes second or fiftieth. The temptation to make something more important than our Lord Jesus is always present in our lives. Today, there is also the cult of the individual and the mistrust of others in authority, which is aided by social media. These external forces can tempt us to rebel against the Lord. From a spiritual point of view, we don't stand a chance.

People are only aware of temptation when they are trying to be good persons. As Christians, we wish we could be braver, speak up more, be kinder, not fall for drink, gambling or aggressive behaviour, be looking things I should not be looking at, nagging and controlling, demanding and

commanding, attacking and blaming. We want to be merciful, forgiving and be reconciled with people (fifth petition). We aim to be generous, giving people (fourth petition). We want to put God first and we desire to honour him in all we do (first petition). Our desire is to do his will (third petition). Temptations arise because we are trying to follow Christ. After all, the devil is not going to waste his time on those who do as they please. So, this is a prayer for spiritually minded people.

Let us picture in our minds Jesus pulling the apostle Peter from the water so that he wouldn't drown. Peter was tempted by fear, waves and wind when he hopped out of the boat and put his feet on the lake surface. The Lord asked him, **why did you doubt, Peter?** This scene in the Bible is for us. Jesus is here, today, stretching out his arm to pull us up. Consider his own temptations in the wilderness, the Garden of Gethsemane, and constantly being tested by his enemies who were out to trick him. His family were putting him under pressure but he stayed the course. Every moment he was resisting. Unlike us, he could stop himself from failing. Sometimes we are only aware afterwards that temptation was occurring yet he could see it coming and was ready. What this means for us is that we have a Saviour; he saves us in our temptations for he understands them and can sympathise with us. First, he forgives us and takes the hurtful failures away. Then he supports us. He lends us his strength. His power is there waiting for us to tap into it. And so, the Holy Spirit reminds us to pray: **lead us not into temptation.** "Help me when it is getting too hard, Lord. Help me to come back from this, to check myself before I topple over the cliff." He guarantees to answer this prayer because he has succeeded when we cannot.

Even if we can never get on top of things e.g., an addiction or anger, complaining or worry or doubt or jealousy, he promises us a final victory. At the resurrection a new self will arise where every part of our natures will be in harmony with the Lord. I hope there will be challenges in his visible kingdom so that we can put our new powers to the test. Every day there, we shall have this sense of triumph that we truly are better persons.

This is a very humbling prayer because it is based on an admission that we are weak. It is simply a prayer for our Lord Jesus to hang on to us.