

Sermon Text for September 6, 2020

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Deuteronomy 6:16-19, Matthew 6:9-13

“Lead us not into temptation”

Many consider this time that we are facing a time of trial. How will we face this trial as individuals? How will we face this trial as family units? How will we face this trial and come through it as a church, more unified and more in love with each other, or divided and embittered by the differences that separate us. I think the former more closely describes us as group, but whenever you face a trial each person is capable of choosing to strike out in their own direction and move away from God’s desires and purposes simply to fulfill their own selfish desires and their own wishes and wants.

We had a ministerium meeting this past week, just in case you haven’t heard this from me before, we have a great group of pastors in Strasburg. It is fascinating how the leadership of each of our churches is addressing this pandemic in such a different way. One church felt like the pandemic was creating such a rift within society and potentially within the body of Christ that they encouraged a day of fasting and held a service of repentance so that individuals could repent of their sin during this pandemic. In times of high stress and in times of where the goal posts are moved and we are journeying in new territory there is a temptation to go it alone.

I hope you were moved last week with the challenge to identify an individual from whom you needed to ask for forgiveness or that you needed to forgive. In some ways it is easier to remain the prayer that we have before us, what we call the Lord’s prayer, where we receive God’s forgiveness, remember how easy that was last week? That way we wouldn’t have to address the inevitable confrontation with sin. It is not an inevitable outcome, sin that is, but the confrontation is bound to happen which is why we ask to stay away from it. There is a modern interpretation to this phrase and it goes something like this: It is easier to stay out of trouble than it is to get out of trouble.

Let’s go ahead and read the phrase that we have for today in the Lord’s prayer.

READ SCRIPTURE

I’m wondering if you caught a nuance that we have in our Old Testament reading which is then reflected all throughout Scripture. Here we find in our Lord’s prayer a request that we would be led away from temptation, that we would not be faced with situations in life where we would have to choose between that which God would want us to do and that which we want to

do which is obviously not what God wants us to do. Another common phrase is: When in doubt, don't!

But our Old Testament reading we find that we are described as continuously testing God. The commandment here in Deuteronomy tells us: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." When that is stated it means do not contribute to God losing his patience with us. Again in this Scripture we find a reference to the time at Massah which is found in Exodus 17:2-7 where the people complained to God because they did not have enough to drink and God wanted to wipe them off the face of the earth because he had had enough of their complaining but Moses intervened, but he called that place Massah, which means testing.

So we find in Scripture that it is much less about us being put to the test and more about us putting God to the test. But Jesus prays that we would be led away from temptation. From the beginning of time when Cain and Able had their little run in and God says to Cain in Genesis 4:6-7 as he tries to cheer him up as he was dejected because God did not receive his sacrifice in the same way that he received his brother's sacrifice, he tells him: sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it. And then the next verses we read that he goes out and kills his brother Abel.

Isn't that our perspective and the reality that we face? Sin is lurking at the door, like a lion ready to pounce, and so we better have Jesus intervene for us and we better pray that we not be tempted into sin and that we would be driven away from temptation as it lurks at the door. We are tested by our own desires at all times, whether it would be for water like at Massah, wealth, sex, hedonistic impulses, sloth, you know all the deadly sins that grip us and try to take us away from living a productive and an obedient life. Rarely would we find ourselves like the psalmist in psalm 26:2 who asks God: "Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and mind." We would more likely pray: lead us away from temptation, I'm not trying to prove anything here.

When we move into the New Testament this topic of temptation and testing (by the way we are using these words interchangeably because Scripture uses them interchangeably) continue to manifest itself. One of the most important Scriptures that we ought to learn in the New Testament that we ought to learn that deals with this topic is James 1, the entire chapter. Go ahead and pull it up. He begins in chapter 1 lauding those times that we are tested because it builds character. He says: "whenever you face trials of any kind consider it nothing but joy." But how many times have you heard it said, or maybe you said it yourself, God is just testing me,

putting me to the test. Look at vs.13, “No one when tempted should say, I am being tempted by God...” then it goes on, “but one is tempted by ones own desires.”

That should be very clear. That should make sense. It is our own desires that lead us into temptation, not God’s wishes or desires. Now what we do with that temptation is another story altogether. We can choose to turn our back on that sin which is lurking at the door, or we can find ourselves weakened by it and succumbing to it. When we pray lead us not into temptation we are really praying: Give me the strength to resist temptation. But do not blame God for your testing and your temptation. That is a result of your own desire.

There is another actor in this whole part dealing with temptation. There is one in the Bible who is called the adversary, the tempter. We find the presence of Satan throughout Scripture as the one who consistently leads us into temptation, the ying to God’s yang. We find Satan at work in Jesus’ life from the very beginning of his ministry when he tempts him three times. In fact we find that Jesus was driven into the desert by the Spirit and there Satan was waiting for him to test him. One of those times is when Satan encourages him to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple to show to the world that he was God and Jesus responds with these words from Deuteronomy, Do not put the Lord your God to the test.

We read in Hebrews 4:15 that we have a Savior who understands us intimately, even to the point where he was tested and tempted in every respect like we were. This is not something that we ought to just pass over. Jesus understands when we find ourselves in the throes of temptation, he went through it as well. But, as Hebrews states: Jesus is one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Jesus understood what it was like to be tested. When he was in the garden of Gethsemane in the last evening with his disciples he beseeched them twice that they would not fall into temptation and fall asleep. But they did. He knows what it is like, which is why we can pray, lead us not into temptation, give us the strength to fight the temptation that draws us towards our desires and away from your wishes.

The Bible does give us some good news in regards to our testing. If you look at I Corinthians 10:13 we read: No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with your testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.” The problem in all of this is not God’s will, but rather our desire.

When we pray lead us not into temptation we are not saying keep us away from bad things. We are saying: Lord, lead us in paths of truth and peace and joy and reconciliation. Lead

us in the direction you want us to go with our lives so that we are not anxious, we are not worrying, we are not so upset about the littlest thing, the smallest thing that happens to us. Bring us into your pathways, O Lord. Show me the way, O Lord. Amen.