

Temptation

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

07/07/2024

Danny Jankovics

Camden Valley Baptist Church

www.cvbaptist.com

This morning's text comes from 1 Corinthians 10, and we'll read from the first 13 verses of that chapter. 1 Corinthians 10—I apologize in advance; all of my notes are in the NIV from 1984, so if it sounds a little different to your Bible, that would be why, but I know no other version, so I'll be stuck with that one.

1 Corinthians 10, and I'll read from verse 1 through to verse 13: "For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: 'The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry.' We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day 23,000 of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall. No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

Okay, before we begin, let's just ask for the Lord's help. Heavenly Father, as we come to Your word, we ask for Your help. Please help us to listen, to understand, and to put into practice. And help me to speak it boldly and clearly as I should. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

In 1967, English philosopher Philippa Foot introduced a thought experiment in ethics, which later became known as the Trolley Dilemma. Now,

the intention of that experiment was to discover how it is that we determine what is right from what is wrong when that answer isn't clear. And while the hypothetical she proposed has gone through a number of iterations since, it more or less goes something like this: You find yourself standing next to a railway track with a train fast approaching. Up ahead, five men are tied to that same track. They cannot break their bonds, nor can you reach them in time. They will most certainly die. Fortunately, you're also standing next to a railway switch. And should you pull the lever, that would divert the train onto a different track and spare the five men. However, there is a maintenance worker on the other track who is not expecting the oncoming train, and he will not be able to react in time. So, if you pull the lever, then by your action, you have condemned an innocent man to death. But if you decide to do nothing, then by your inaction, five men will also perish. What do you do?

Now, in the face of temptation, we can often feel like we're in a trolley dilemma, where we're in a situation that is specific to us, where the outcome seems a foregone conclusion despite your best efforts. But is that true? Now, in verse 13 of 1 Corinthians 10, we are given three promises regarding temptation that show that that's not actually the case—that we're not in a trolley dilemma when we are faced with temptation. And the intention this morning is to break down those three promises and understand them, and then to put those promises to the test.

So, let me read that verse to you again, 1 Corinthians 10:13: "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

So, our first promise then is that no temptation has seized you except what is common to man. So, unlike the trolley dilemma, where you are placed in a situation that is unique, specific only to yourself, and there's little you can do to help, we are promised that what we are faced with in temptation is common to man. And that means that despite the stereotypes, arrogance is not a temptation that's limited purely to the French, and neither laziness to the Greeks, nor gluttony to the Americans. And it means that vanity is not a temptation that besets only women, nor an inappropriate response to anger something that affects men and only men. And it means that selfishness is not limited to the generation known as baby boomers, and neither is self-indulgence only applicable to those from Gen Z. No, all the temptations are common to man, across the races, across the sexes, and across all ages.

However, a common set or a common pool of temptations is not the same thing as a common experience with those temptations. So, if I was to take

one temptation from that pool, let's say gambling, for one person, that temptation may be a daily struggle, a struggle which can last years or even a lifetime. But for somebody else, they may have never felt the compulsion or the pull or the draw to want to gamble. And so, when that temptation comes, they're so hardened against the idea of gambling that it's not even like a temptation at all. It just seems to have no effect. Now, the temptation is common, but the experience comes from two different extremes.

Now, I know our time this morning is short, but it's important that we spend a bit more time on this promise because this one, unlike the other two, has a great bearing for how we treat others in the face of temptation. Now, I picked gambling on purpose because it's not the worst of sins, but it's not the least either. It's kind of a middling sin, if you like. But this morning, I want to challenge you a little by asking you some harder questions when it comes to temptation. How would you react to a brother or sister in the Lord who came to you and told you that they were struggling against the temptation of suicidal thoughts? Or if they said that they had an unwanted pregnancy and they were considering their options, how would you respond if someone came and confided in you that they were battling against same-sex attraction? Or if they were struggling with gender dysphoria, would you treat them differently to the people who were sitting next to you this morning? And should they fail the temptation, do you immediately question their Christianity?

Now, I'm not suggesting for a moment that these sins are not serious. On the contrary, all sin is serious. It was the simple act of deliberately eating the wrong fruit by which death entered the world and all creation was cursed. And it is for your sin and for my sin that Jesus had to die. No, all sin is serious. However, we tend to look at others and base our experience in the way in which we react or respond or even judge others. And when we do so, we often miss the first and most obvious sign of the Spirit's sanctifying work in the life of a believer. And that is the struggle against sin and temptation.

Paul tells us in Galatians 5 and in Romans 7 that the sinful nature or the flesh and the Spirit, they're in conflict. There's a war between them so that you do not do what you want. And James tells us in James 4 that the indwelling Holy Spirit envies intensely. So, there may not have ever been a struggle in the past, but when the Spirit comes, there most definitely is. And that struggle rather is against temptation that is common to man.

Our next promise then is that we are not tempted beyond what you can bear. And again, unlike the Trolley Dilemma, where you are given no time, no help, and the consequences are severe, we are promised that we are not tempted beyond what we can bear. Or if you'll forgive the double negative,

our temptation is not unbearable.

Now, that word "unbearable" in common vernacular seems to be synonymous with annoying or disturbing. For example, "I couldn't get to sleep last night because the noise from the party next door was unbearable." Okay, but that's not the definition used in this particular instance. A better example actually comes from the world's strongest man competition. Now, I don't know if you know this competition, but it's when these huge, hulking physical male specimens from around the world come together in a competition to see which one of them is the strongest. And they compete in events like strapping themselves to a jumbo jet and pulling it down a tarmac, or lifting up these huge concrete spherical balls unaided off the ground and up onto a ledge. But my favorite event simply involves two buckets of water. And yeah, they're just asked to hold them. But not in the way you're thinking.

So, each contestant is asked to put their arms out by their side at shoulder height with their palms faced upwards. And for want of a better description, they bring a shelf at that height and measure it where the palms are on both sides. And the competition or the event starts when they pick up the buckets of water, and all five fingers of both hands touch the underside of that shelf. And the event finishes when just one finger separates, and the hands drop. Now, despite the awkward position they're in, these are strong guys, and this is not a big deal. They pick it up, and it's easy, at least at first. But as time goes on, their demeanor begins to change, and their breathing starts to get ragged; they'll grunt and they'll groan; they'll even go red in the face, and the eyes will begin to bulge. And at the end, the whole bodies are trembling and shaking under the strain until eventually, inevitably, the hands drop. It's at that point that the weight of the water in the buckets has become unbearable. And we are promised in temptation never to be taken to that point. We will never be tempted beyond what we can bear. However, that doesn't mean we get a free ride. Just like the men in the competition, the strain and stress showed as they were trying to hold the buckets up; we can be pushed all the way to a breaking point. But we are promised never to be tempted beyond what we can bear.

So, our third promise then is that God will provide a way out under temptation. And again, unlike the trolley dilemma, where you are damned if you do or you're damned if you don't, we are promised that under temptation, we will always be provided with a way out. But did you notice? It's a way out. It's singular. Now, that doesn't mean that there are temptations and temptations only ever have one way out. No, there are temptations for which there are multiple ways out. But it does mean that every single temptation we have has at least one way out. But that doesn't mean that that way out comes without consequence.

Consider Joseph and Potiphar's wife. In order to escape her clutches, he took the only way available to him and fled, leaving his coat behind. But the consequence for spurning her affections was a wrongful accusation of rape and years in prison. For Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, refusing to bow down to the king's idol meant they faced the fiery furnace. And for Daniel, who would pray only to God, he faced the lion's den. While it may not be without consequence, we are still promised that there is a way out.

So, three promises then regarding temptation. But are they true? Can we trust them? When you look through the biblical account, what you find is a litany of failures in the face of temptation from beginning to end. From Adam in the garden with the fruit all the way through to Peter in the circumcision group. Failure after failure, even from those considered men of the faith and those from whom the promises were given. And some of those failures were truly horrible in the extent of what they did. So, can we trust these promises? How can we know that they're true?

Thankfully, we don't have very far to look. Because while there are three promises here, there's also one single statement of fact that underpins the three promises that were given. Did you notice it there in the verse? It's these three words: God is faithful. God is faithful. God does not say one thing and then do another. God doesn't change His mind only to then change it back later. No, God is faithful. What He says, He will do. And God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And so, despite the many failures, the promises are true, and they can be trusted.

Even so, it's possible for us this morning to put these promises to the test. Because despite the many failures, through the gospel, there is one person who never sinned: Jesus, the Son of God. And thankfully, recorded for us in Matthew 4 are some of the temptations in which Jesus faced. So, my intention this morning then is to take the promises against the temptations of Jesus and see if they hold up.

Now, it's true that all three promises apply to every temptation, but in the interest of time, since we've been conveniently given three temptations of Christ, we'll do one promise for one temptation and see if they're true. So, if you can turn your Bibles to Matthew 4, and we're going to read from verse 3.

Matthew 4, verse 3, where we read this: "The tempter came to Him and said, 'If You are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.'" Okay, so our first promise is that all temptations are common to man. But on first reading, when we look at this temptation, it doesn't sound common, does it? "If You are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." That won't work on me, and it won't work on you either. But in order to

understand what's going on here, we need some context. Now, context in two different ways. First of all, we need to understand what Satan does in temptation, and then we need to understand what's happening to Jesus at this point.

So, firstly, Satan's method of operation in temptation hasn't changed since the beginning. It generally follows two patterns. The first thing is he will get you to doubt God's word to you or doubt God's goodness in that word. And secondly, he'll suggest or intimate an action you can take to bring matters into your own hands.

And for Jesus, well, for his context, we need to go back a little further in our Bibles. In fact, back before chapter 4, into chapter 3, and verse 16 at His baptism. If you read with me from there, chapter 3 of Matthew, verse 16, we read this: "As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water. At that moment, heaven was opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is My Son, whom I love; with Him, I am well pleased.' Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, He was hungry." Can you see now why Satan picked the words that he did? The last words from God, last audible words from God, came back in chapter 3, verse 16, at Jesus' baptism, where God said, "This is My Son, whom I love." And so, Satan starts with, "If You are the Son of God," to throw doubt on that word. Then he gives Him an action to take: "Turn the stones into bread." Sounds a bit strange. Why would He need to do that? Because He'd been fasting for 40 days. And in an underestimation, He was hungry. He was starving. And it was God who put Him in that position. So, Satan is trying to get Him to take matters into His own hands.

Now, hunger is something we all understand. We've known it since we were born. We've been crying for it when we were hungry. You've experienced it as soon as or as recently as this morning when you got out of bed and had some breakfast. We all understand hunger. We also understand how hunger can lead us into sin. You can eat too much, or you can steal to make sure that you're fed. So, this common experience is one that Jesus knows, perhaps at a greater level than we ever will. But how did He do in His temptation? Did He succeed? We have our answer in the next verse, in verse 4. Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" So, we have one promise, one temptation, and one victory for Jesus.

Alright, time for round two. Let's read from verse 5 for our next temptation. "Then the devil took Him to the holy city and had Him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If You are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw Yourself down. For it is written: "He will command His angels concerning

You, and they will lift You up in their hands, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone." Now, again, on first reading, it can be difficult to understand what's going on here. And again, context is going to help us.

Now, back in verse 1 of chapter 4, we are told that the Spirit took Jesus into the desert. Well, what's in the desert? Apart from sand, there's nothing in the desert. There's no shelter. There's no people. There's no food, and there's no water in the desert. And Jesus has been there for 40 days. That's 40 days in the blistering heat of the day and 40 nights in the freezing cold. That's 40 days without any other person to talk to or to converse with. And that's 40 days without food and with scarce access to water. And humanly speaking, Jesus was physically, emotionally, and mentally at breaking point. His body's beginning to shut down. Knowing this, Satan takes Him to the highest point in the temple, where He is now both literally and figuratively standing on the edge, looking down at the ground so far below. It wouldn't take much to push Him over the edge. So, he reminds Him that if God loves You as He said He did, then He's promised You'll be okay. "Throw Yourself down."

And was this temptation more than Jesus could bear? Well, we have our answer in the following verse. In verse 7, Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Two promises, two temptations, and two victories for Jesus. But Satan left his very best for last. We read in verse 8, "Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give You,' he said, 'if You bow down and worship me.'"

Now, here's a temptation we can understand. Power, fame, riches, fortune—all this just for bowing down before Satan. But for us, we know that's something that we don't deserve. But for Jesus, who is the Son of God, He's only being offered that which is already rightfully His. But what makes this temptation particularly difficult is that Jesus knew why He had come and He knew how He was going to die. Can you imagine what He was shown, compared with that which He knew was to come?

He may have seen a king who was dressed in the finest livery, with a rich purple robe on his back, which signifies he comes from royal blood. But He would have known a back covered in purple, not from a robe but from the welts from the flogging He's received, mixed with crimson as the soldiers would cruelly twist bone and metal into their whips, which rendered the flesh from His back. He may have seen nobles, royalty, dignitaries coming to pay homage, to bring tribute, and to bow down before the king. But He would have known a lineup of Roman soldiers taking their turn to beat Him, to mock Him, to spit on Him. Even the passersby hurled their insults at Him, including those who were crucified with Him. He may have seen a

crown of gold, bestowed with the finest of gemstones, showing that He had the right to rule. But He would have known thorns twisted into a crown and rammed on His head, scratching bone and piercing skin.

He may have seen feet pedicured, perfumed, washed, and hands with rings on every finger. But He would have known the bone of wrist and the bone of foot pierced, crushed by cruel nails pinning Him to a cruel cross. And if you think that's hard, well then, here comes the real kicker. Jesus didn't know simply how He was going to die; He knew why. Or more to the point, He knew who He was dying for.

You see, brothers and sisters in the Lord, He knew it was for you. And crucially, He knew it was for me. For me. This is the One through whom, by whom, and for whom all things were made. He weighs the nations on the scales as if they were fine dust. For me. How much more insignificant am I compared to the dust of the nations? And what did He gain from this transaction? Though it cost Him dearly, what was His return on investment? Did He gain in me a devoted disciple? No. Did He gain an obedient servant? No. Did He gain a loving son? No. What He gained was one who so often in the face of temptation rushes headlong into sin, two feet first, all in, never a second thought. For me.

You see, from where I'm standing, these words don't sound like a temptation at all. Rather, they sound like good advice. So then, what way was given to Jesus out from this temptation? Only one: that He trust His Father in heaven, that He serve only Him, and that He willingly suffer an agonizing and humiliating death. For me. And brothers and sisters in the Lord, for you. Amazingly, we hear His response in verse 10. Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'" And Satan fled. And angels attended Him. Three promises. Three temptations. Three victories. The promises are true. And they are yes in Christ Jesus.

So, friends, where are you this morning? When we look through the biblical account, we see so many failures and only one who never sinned: Jesus, the Son of God. The rest of us, we fall short of that standard. Paul tells us in Romans 6:23 that the wages of sin is death. And so, we all die. Because we've all sinned. But Paul continues, "The gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord." But where are you this morning? Are you still trusting in your own goodness and hoping beyond hope that God will lower His standard to meet yours? No. That way lies death and hell. Instead, look to Jesus. Receive from Him the free gift of eternal life by repenting from your sin and trusting in Him. And you will know for the first time that when He died, He died for you.

Temptation

But brothers and sisters in the Lord, in the face of temptation, look to Jesus and take hold of the promises that we have. No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. You are not tempted beyond what you can bear, and a way out will be provided for you so you can stand up under it. God is faithful. What He has said, He will do. But when you fail in temptation, yes, when—not if—when you fail in temptation and when you fall into sin, then don't simply look to Jesus. Flee to Him instead.

You see, when we sin, in our guilt and our shame, every inclination of our heart compels us to act like our father Adam in the garden. Do you remember? He heard the footsteps of the Lord God in the cool of the evening, and he ran away and he hid. No, brothers and sisters, flee to Christ. Yes, straight away, as soon as you realize what you've done, like the prodigal son when he comes to his senses, he leaves the pigsty behind and he heads out for home.

Because we have in Jesus a high priest who is able to sympathize with us in our weaknesses, says the writer of Hebrews in Hebrews 4:15, "For He was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." To Jesus be the honor, the glory, the praise, both now and forevermore, for He is worthy to receive it.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Our heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of Your Son. For we admit that each one of us has fallen short of Your standard, and without Christ, all that remains is death and hell. Our Lord, we thank you that through repentance and faith, we have eternal life. And we thank you that You have given us the promises we need in temptation, that in all that we do, glory might be given to You. Help us in our struggle, we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen.