

'Lead us not into Temptation but Deliver us from the evil one'. Matt 4v1-11 & Jas 1v 12-15

Today we conclude our series on the Lord's Prayer. The last two lines of Jesus' teaching to his disciples are quite dramatic and remind us that, after everything, we are invited to cry to God for help in times of testing and trials.

Lead us not into Temptation – mmm Temptation – the glittery, glamorous charm of it; the colourful, attractive lure of it. No one is free of it – what's yours? Think about it now, try to admit it to yourself. When I did my A level Spanish I read a delicious book about the Spaniard and the Seven Deadly sins. It's quite easy to see how the nation's temptation to sin is indulged from a distance but I wonder what the book would look like if it was written about us? Some of my own temptation is easy to see because I carry it around my waist! It is good to identify and recognise the way we drift. We have a couple of phrases which help us to understand our attitudes to temptation: Resist temptation; Give in to temptation. Shops use temptation to persuade us to buy products: eg. Chocolates, deodorant. We can see how they link to the sin of gluttony, pride, lust, greed, envy, wrath & sloth.

I was tempted, I was very tempted, to play you a couple of my favourite hits from the 80's, when I was a cool hipster at The University of Liverpool. There was Temptation by Heaven 17; New Order's (sing...) Temptation.

More recently, the Arctic Monkeys recorded a song called Temptation - Play extract.

It's not difficult to hear what he's trying to resist, but I was also astounded by the understanding of temptation: **DESIRE...SIN...DEATH** (there it is in the song and there it is in James 1 v 15!) and the need to refer to it in a secular context where records don't sell if they mention religious concepts. But there's the allure again...

So let's turn to our passages this morning and find out how Jesus models the way to remain faithful in Temptation. I was interested to find that the references to the word Temptation only come in the New Testament. The word 'to tempt' can also be translated as 'to test'. So Stuart asked me yesterday: Does God lead us into temptation? If we look at the beginning of Matt 4. We read 'Jesus was led by **the Spirit** into the desert to be tempted **by the Devil**.' This divinely intended moment before Jesus begins his ministry harks back to the time when the Israelites under Moses, wandered the desert for 40 years. There the Lord humbled and tested his people as he does Jesus in this passage '**in order to know what is in your heart and whether or not you would keep his commands.**' And he tests us in the same way to see if we are faithful to him. Jesus uses the word of God to respond to the Devil. Unfortunately, we often have the wrong impression of the Devil, as someone with a forked tail and horns – easy to spot. It is more likely that the Devil is permitted to range in our thoughts and our desires in a quite beguiling manner. You can read the passage deeply and imagine yourself in Jesus' shoes - well sandals then - hungry, cold and possibly delirious from lack of food and sleep, being drawn in by the evil one into the way of thinking that leads to destruction. We all have a tendency to do this at times, but Jesus is ready with words that the Devil is very familiar with and I would encourage you to look back at the passage and to find the references in the old testament later. In 1 Peter 5 v 8-9. We are encouraged: '**Be self controlled and alert. Your enemy the Devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world**

**are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.'** We can pray not be led into temptation but what way can we be ready to face temptation? By knowing God's word and using it in the way Jesus did.

So let's look at the second part of our quote in the Lord's Prayer: **'but deliver us from the evil one'**. Or as we say **'deliver us from evil'**. Why both lines? Why do we need the second part? Well, as I pondered it came to me that there are times when 'evil' is thrust upon us. Temptation the colourful, alluring, beguiling; we see it, we have a choice about it; we have an option to turn towards the light. Evil: dread, pain, desperation, degeneration, depression, circumstances out of our control; no choice. However, God still calls us to be faithful and without fear. Jesus was in a very different position as he wept in the Garden of Gethsemane and as he prayed in Mark 14 v 36 **'Abba Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me, yet not what I will but what you will.'** The Devil prowling around... the chief priests cooking up a plan; the disciples running scared. This is the dark end of the prayer – contrasting with the colour of temptation – the cry when there's nowhere else to go. Women and children being bombed to smithereens in Syria, while their husbands and brothers fight a bloody street war. Ebola and the many prayers of people dying, nursing the dying, ravaged villages and we don't even talk about AIDS anymore. Heroin... on our streets, the delicious 'once won't hurt, will it?' crime creator, underbelly, vortex sucking people in. Jackie Pullinger, arguably one of the most amazing Christian women of our time wrote of 'the pull, the pull of the drug' and there we're slipping back to temptation! Please Lord, deliver us from evil, from any brushes with the evil one: may we not pass that way, your grace Lord to sustain us, your son to intercede for us. Oh Lord, let this cup pass...

Nevertheless, God's calling on our lives is not to flee from the circumstances we find ourselves in, but to model a way of living, which is a life of love without fear. If we love God and trust in him fully, we will loosen our hold on our own life and surrender it into his hands as Jesus did in Gethsemane. We do not choose a path into evil as even Jesus begged for the cup to pass. But whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, in the end we have to dig deep into the well of the fruits of the spirit that will enable us to persevere. Do we trust God enough? In 1 John 4 v 18 he says: **'Perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love'**. Our passage in James almost gives us a recipe for how to do it, how to live the life of love. Joy in trials, testing develops perseverance, and perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete not lacking anything.

I am not being trite here. We are called to find God's path for us through difficulties. We have no idea what some people suffer on our doorstep. As we are members of a church we can look after each other practically and pray for each other. But we can't avoid what is given us to go through.

It is always interesting to note that the life with Christ is often compared to that of an athlete. Paul refers to training in Philippians and James, whilst on the subject of trials and perseverance, refers to the 'crown of life' which is the type of crown the athlete's would have received. We speak of trials for young sportsmen and women and horse trials, which are all tests of stamina, endurance and resilience. This is a life to which we are called: let us not slide into illusion that this life of love in Christ is easy. The prayer we say acknowledges this.

Pray the Lord's Prayer to end.