

## SERMON WED MARCH 9 2022

### MW LENT 1 2022 Mercy in Temptation

One of the most common causes of automobile accidents is distracted driving. And one of the most common distractions these days occurs when people are distracted by their cell phones, with devastating, even deadly results. Each year nearly 400,000 injuries and 4,000 deaths result from car crashes involving distracted drivers in the United States.

There is another kind of deadly distraction. It is spiritually deadly and can result in eternal destruction. It occurs when we lose focus from God's will and God's way; when we look away from the Lord and instead turn to the attractions of the world. This distraction is what the Bible calls temptation.

During this Lenten season we seek to focus on Christ and his cross. But so often our view is distracted by other cares of life that direct us away from our Lord and his will for our lives.

Tonight we consider the reality of temptations in our lives, and we seek God's power to overcome temptation. We will consider the Bible reading from 1 Cor 10 to guide us to escape temptation.

There are three insights from this passage that are pertinent to our struggle with temptation.

First, we need to understand that temptations are persistent. Paul makes this point in verse 12 of 1 Corinthians 10, writing: "**Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.**" In other words, don't let your guard down! Temptation will catch you when you least expect it.

The reason that temptation is persistent is because the tempter is persistent. Satan and his demonic minions will do all that they can to seduce you to sin.

In our text St. Paul describes how the ancient Israelites were tempted with idolatry, sexual immorality, discontentment and even outright rebellion against God.

And notice what the devil did to tempt Jesus in the wilderness in our Gospel reading. Satan didn't stop with one temptation but tried three times to tempt Jesus to sin. The devil persistently attempted various tactics to entice Jesus to do something, anything, against God's will.

Just so Satan is tireless in tempting us. If he can't get you in one area, he will try another until he finds a weakness in you. Satan will undertake to place many tempta-

tions in your line of vision so that, like a distracted driver, you take your focus off God and the righteous path that God directs you to.

You may be attacked with temptations of the flesh, appealing to your appetites and lusts with pornography or gluttony.

Or you may be tempted to escape the challenges of life by addictions to alcohol or drugs or social media.

Or the temptations may come from the world as you are seized with greed for power or possessions.

The second insight about our struggle with temptation is that it is progressive. This means that they start small but grow and become more deadly as time goes along.

In our text Paul describes how the Israelites in the wilderness progressed from complaints against God to outright rebellion against him to the ultimate sin: replacing God by idolatry.

The same is true for us. Temptation begins subtly but grows in its destructive power. Take the example of adultery. It begins with the attraction to someone other than your spouse. You think, "No harm done."

Then it progresses to sexual lust, but you say to yourself, "I can handle it." Next the temptation is to have a one-night fling with the other; you hear a voice say, "Just try it."

Ultimately you find yourself entangled in an ongoing affair that normally will lead to the dissolution of your marriage.

Someone has described the progression of temptation thusly: ***Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap character; sow character, reap your destiny.***

With each progressive step into temptation, it gets more difficult to get out of temptation. What appears harmless at first eventually becomes deadly. **PAUSE**

If you been paying attention, I think you'll agree that so far this message about temptation doesn't sound very hopeful.

Temptation is persistent and it is progressive. But these are not the last words on temptation. There is in fact hope for us. Because not only is temptation persistent

and progressive, but victory over temptation is possible!

This victory over temptation is promised in the final verse of our text from 1 Corinthians 10 (verse 13), which states: **“God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”**

Note in this verse that the one who accomplishes the victory over temptation is God and God alone: **“God is faithful ... He will not allow you to be tempted beyond your ability ... He will provide the way of escape.”**

God is the one doing the action in those verbs. God in Christ is the one who gains the victory for us over temptation.

Victory over temptation is possible because Jesus defeated temptation. For 40 days in the wilderness, the devil threw all the artillery of temptation at him there and throughout his life—ultimately to the places of Gethsemane and Calvary.

Hebrews 4:15 says that **Jesus was tempted in every respect as we are**—with the temptations of lust and greed and power and selfishness.

But that’s where the similarity with us stops, because the verse goes on to say that he was tempted, **“yet without sin.”**

This means that although Jesus was tempted to sin, he was not overtaken by sin. He was not overcome by temptation so that he succumbed to and submitted to it.

Our Lord is the only human being who can make the claim of winning over temptation every time.

But he claims the victory not for himself; he claims it for us. He resisted temptation to sin perfectly in order to credit his sinless life to our spiritually bankrupt account.

Then he assumed the penalty for our sins, our submission to temptation—by suffering and dying on the cross, thereby paying the wages of our sin with his death.

The good news for us tonight is that in Christ we have victory over temptation in two ways.

First, when we fall into temptation and succumb to its sin, through repentance we receive the forgiveness of that sin.

If you recall last week’s sermon on Ash Wednesday—then you’ll remember that those who truly repent receive God’s mercy. This is why we engage this topic of re-

pentance “in view of God’s mercy.”

As we travel down the highway of life, we may be distracted in our driving by temptations that allure us and detour us from the direction God has laid out for us.

But when we renew our focus on God and on his mercy, he pardons our waywardness and restores our relationship with him.

This is what our text means when it says that **“with the temptation [God] will also provide the way of escape.”**

But the text says more. It says that God will also provide you with the ability to endure temptation!

This means that when you face sinful temptations, God will empower to you say no to them.

He does this by keeping your focus on his mercy. You drive through life **“in view of God’s mercy,”** and that mercy and grace of God sustains you in the midst of temptation. In view of God’s mercy then, we can say no to sinful lusts and desires.

In view of God’s mercy, we focus on Christ and his purposes for us. We are not distracted from him, but we **“fix our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.”**

And so we travel through life with our eyes fixed on the road—the path of righteousness centered in Jesus Christ.

We are not distracted by temptation or deterred by Satan’s attacks. Instead, we keep God’s mercy in view, know that he is faithful and will provide an escape from the treachery of temptation. Amen.