

## Lent 1: TEMPTATION

Matthew 4:1-11 [MW20-09]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Kaiwaka and Wellsford, Sunday 01 March 2020

When preparing us for ordination, the bishop said:

'you need to preach on sin and temptation at least once a year'

So here we are then: TEMPTATION

- are you tempted to block your ears, read the Pew Sheet, cringe in your seat or are you eagerly awaiting what is to come ...
  - then again may be you are tempted to let me do all the work and I'm not going to, I'd like to get you guys involved too
  - so here's your chance: what is "temptation"?
- I'll give you 30 seconds to think about it, and then we'll share our responses

[30 seconds and responses] - Thank you for those thoughts

I came across this which seems to me to encompass much of this "temptation" thing:

- one 3 year old's explanation for being in the kitchen on top of a chair, eating cookies
- 'I just climbed up to smell them and my tooth got caught'

The dictionary on the other hand says this:

Temptation is an enticement, an invitation to do or want something that is wrong or forbidden

Temptation

- something which seeks to draw us away from what is healthy wholesome and good
- and note this about temptation: it promises to deliver far more than it ever does

Having established that temptation will lead us off the path of life

- maybe even put us on the road to destruction
- I guess it follows that temptation is to be resisted
- however in order to resist temptation we have to first recognise temptation!

Any ideas? How do you recognise temptation? [ideas, thoughts, suggestions]

Here's a kind of "4 Way Test" that I think is very helpful

- it comes from *The Word for Today* putting these 4 principles from the Apostle Paul to work in our lives will help us recognise and resist temptation

1: All things are lawful for me, but not everything is beneficial (1 Corinthians 6:12)

- ask yourself: is it helpful spiritually, mentally, physically?

2: All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything (1 Corinthians 6:12)

- ask yourself: is it habit forming? does it bring me under its power and control?

3: If what I eat causes another to sin, I will never eat meat again (1 Corinthians 8:13)

- ask yourself: will my actions cause me to lose my influence and respect with others? Will it hurt or confuse them?

4: Whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31)

- ask yourself: am I doing this to promote myself or honour God?

When we look at the situation with Jesus and the devil

- it encompasses the whole temptation thing  
you may like to look at Matthew 4:1-11 in your Bible
- the first thing to notice is that Jesus was alone when the Tempter came  
temptation often happens in private, in dark, shady places  
with soft enticing words like: "who's going to know?" "nobody will notice"

The father of a small boy would occasionally sneak into a neighbour's orchard and take some of the best fruit. He always made sure the coast was clear first. One day with his son tagging along, after carefully looking in every direction and seeing no one, the father crept through the fence. he was just about to help himself when his son startled him by shouting: "Dad! Dad! You didn't look up. You forgot to see if God is watching!"

The second thing to notice in the gospel reading is that the temptations Jesus faced

- basically cover all the temptations we face ...  
bread: physical appetites, material things, desires, wants  
nations: power over things and people, control, status  
temple: to be seen and known, honoured and revered, to be someone special

Jesus was tempted in every way as we are

- he faced the same situations you and I face  
exactly the same
- Jesus knows just how it is for us  
there are no shortcuts
- the first thing Jesus had to do  
before any great miracles, any preaching of the kingdom, any healing  
any storytelling, before even calling a single follower ...

... Jesus had to learn to recognise and withstand ... TEMPTATION

- to recognise and overcome the temptations that would destroy his ministry  
before it had even begun
- these are the same things that face us  
the same things that have the power to destroy us

The first thing Jesus does is show the way through

- it is of supreme importance then that we notice, remind ourselves and swot up  
at least once a year, because it is a test, an exam we face  
every single day of our life
- and our track record as human beings is not that hot

Take this story about the devil ...

...who came before God all dejected and wailed, "Almighty God I want you to know that I am bored! Bored to tears! There's nothing for me to do all day long. Nothing!" "I don't understand," replied God. "There's plenty to be done, only you've got to show more initiative. Why don't you lead people into sin. That's your job!" "Lead people into sin. Lead people into sin!" the devil shot back. "Why, Lord, before I can get a chance to say a word to anyone they've already gone and sinned!"

So, how do we stand against temptation

- how do we resist temptation? what did Jesus do? [answers]

One of the things Jesus did was quote scripture

- so here is a scripture, one of my least favourite verses  
I'll tell you why in a minute

1 Corinthians 10:13

*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.*

This is a marvelous promise

- as soon as you recognise a temptation  
God promises you will be given the way to bear it
- only sometimes I want to argue with God  
that it is too much, I'm not strong enough, I can't bear it

Note that it says "bear" = put up with, endure

- it does not sound like much fun  
maybe it seems like it would be more fun to give in
- but not in the long run  
not if we keep hold of the 'big picture'
- remember temptations, like glossy magazine ads  
promise to deliver so much more than they ever do
- note these wise words I came across:

*Temptation will take you further than you want to go; keep you longer than you want to stay;  
cost you more than you're willing to pay.*

- and that's true every time  
every single time ... there are no exceptions

There's a programme I used to listen to on Radio Rheema regularly

- there was a guy I was very keen on who always did the introduction  
and then talked with the host at the end
- one time I turned on the radio and there was no familiar voice  
someone else was doing the introduction  
I wondered, 'what's happened to Mike?'

I found out in a later programme that Mike had resigned

- because it came to light that he was involved in an 'inappropriate relationship'  
I don't need to go into details
- it was very sad, I felt sad for Mike and his family  
for the team who made the programme, for the organisation they represented  
for all the flack they were getting because of this

I remember thinking to myself, maybe if Mike had known what it was like at the end

- he would not have been tempted in the beginning  
if he had known the hurt that would be caused, the loss of his job
- maybe he would have made other choices  
maybe it would have helped him be strong
- maybe if he had remembered:

*Temptation will take you further than you want to go; keep you longer than you want to stay;  
cost you more than you're willing to pay.*

- things would have been very different

We are not able to stand against temptation in our own strength

- only in God's strength  
that is the way Jesus did it ... that is the only way for us to do it
- to be like Jesus and say a loud, clear “No!”  
that leaves no room for negotiation, no room for “maybe”
- resisting temptation means saying a firm “no” and shutting the door  
not leaving it open just a crack so we can take a peak now and then

A young girl said this about dealing with temptation:

When the devil comes knocking I send Jesus to the door.

The devil sees Jesus and says, “Oops. Sorry. I must have the wrong house.”

Stay out in the open

- make sure the alarm bells ring if you are in private and hear the words:  
“who's going to know”
- fill yourself with the scriptures  
and remember there is a bigger picture  
maybe it can look like you are missing out now, but not eternally

James 1:12 says:

*Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.*

We Kiwis are generally pragmatic, practical people

- so I will share with you a 'rule of thumb' given by Ian Grant  
that I heard many years ago  
when he was speaking to a gathering of teenagers
- Ian Grant said if you want to know whether or not you should do something  
imagine Jesus coming in and standing beside you
- if you would be embarrassed if Jesus saw you doing it  
DON'T!
- and how do you “don't”?  
when facing temptation, learn the lesson of the dog at obedience training:

A piece of bread or meat is placed on the ground near the dog. The master says “No!” which the dog knows means she must not touch it. The dog will usually take her eyes off the food because the temptation to disobey would be too great. Instead the dog will fix her eyes on the master's face.

This coming week I invite you to

- reflect on “temptation” and how you may become stronger to resist it  
by remembering the 'lesson of the dog': always look at the Master's face

Let us pray:

*Jesus,*

*as we keep our eyes fixed on you.*

*may we follow faithfully the way of life.*

*We ask for your help in recognising temptation*

*honesty to face it*

*strength to resist it*

*and the humility to give God the glory. Amen.*