

April 5, 2017 **Repent: Turn to Jesus When You Face Temptations** Mark 14:32-38

Flip Wilson was a comedian who loved to say, “The devil made me do it!” In the 1980s millions laughed at the “Church Lady” on *Saturday Night Live*. She was quick to blame bad behavior on “Hmm... Who could it be? Satan?!” I recall Bugs Bunny with a little angel on one shoulder and a tiny tempter devil on the other. Years earlier, St. Paul wrote: *No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind* (1 Co 10:13). Comedians and apostles agree: temptation is a fact of life. Temptation has been with us since our first parents traded in righteousness for forbidden fruit. Comedians are on to something because it is easier to laugh about temptation than to resist it! Deep down we know that temptation is no laughing matter. We laugh to hide a guilty heart.

No temptation has overtaken us except what is common to mankind. I think we wonder if we live in an age of *uncommonly awful* temptation. We pray “Lead us not into temptation.” But looking around our world, does it seem like God no longer listens to that petition? Just take a quick tour through a few commandments:

- We are to remember the Sabbath Day, yet only 1 in 5 Americans attends a house of worship every weekend. And that number drops every year.
- We are to honor our father and mother, yet that can be tricky when half of our nation has a father and a mother AND a stepfather and stepmother and perhaps a second stepmother and now mom’s new boyfriend.

I could go on, but I won’t. You get the picture. As long as we live in this world, we live on the devil’s turf. Temptation is *all around* us. As long as we have a body, we live with a sinful nature. Temptation is *within* us. The devil will never tire of tempting us. Like a roaring lion, Satan will not stop. Where should we turn for help in temptation? There is one real solution:

Repent! Turn to Jesus When You Face Temptations.

Turn to Jesus when you face temptation because Jesus knows all about it! The water from his baptism was barely dry when *the Spirit sent [Jesus] out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan* (Mk 1:12,13). Jesus went toe-to-toe with the devil. He tempted Jesus’ belly—make these stones into bread. He tempted Jesus to put the Father to the test by taking a flying leap off the pinnacle of the temple. He tempted Jesus to forsake the Father’s saving plan by bowing down to worship the devil. Think about it. Satan is bold enough to tempt the very Son of God. He is brazen enough to use God’s Word against the Word made flesh. His singular purpose was to derail God’s salvation train before it ever left the station.

Jesus knows all about temptation. From the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in the desert to the final night of his ministry in Gethsemane’s garden, the devil tempted Jesus again and again to flee from the Father’s saving plans. In Gethsemane, Satan tempted Jesus with raw fear! **Fear** of complete rejection by his followers and even his Father. **Terror** at the thought of the next day’s torture. **Dread** at the thought of death. Utter **horror** at the literal hell he was about to suffer. Gut wrenching **disgust** at the thought of drinking the contents of the cup he would gulp down.

Jesus prayed earnestly for the Father to take the cup from him. What was in the cup in Jesus’ trembling hands? The rebellion of Adam, drunkenness of Noah, lies of Abraham, deceit of Jacob, adultery of David, greed of Matthew, denial of Peter, betrayal of Judas, murder of Paul - all of it was in the cup, and more... The sins of my past that I am desperate to keep secret. They’re in the cup! The thoughts in my head that would make a criminal blush if revealed. They’re in the cup. The words I’ve spoken to hurt others. They’re in the cup. The deeds I’ve done to please myself and make others miserable. They’re in the cup. What have you thought, said, or done today that’s in the cup? And the One who knew no sin drank the cup and made these sins his very own.

Where sin is, there also are sin’s wages: death, judgment, and wrath. This is the deep end of Christian truth! The Son of God, who is PURE HOLINESS, takes the world’s sinfulness and

makes it his very own. The eternal Son, who is LIFE personified, faces death by crucifixion. The thought of what was about to happen to him *terrorized* him as man and *revolted* him as God. In spite of it all, he stayed perfectly in tune with the Father's will. He prays, "*Abba, Father... everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.*"

Jesus turned to his Father in prayer, and trounced temptation. Drinking the cup to the bottom, Jesus left the garden and carried his cross to the place of the skull, where God condemned sin in the likeness of sinful flesh. In Christ, God's justice is perfectly served in his Son. Through Christ, we receive mercy, forgiveness, and healing! In a garden, our first father, Adam, sinned and then ran. In a garden, Christ, our brother, remained holy and stood firm!

Meanwhile, a stone's throw away... "[Jesus] returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. 'Simon,' he said to Peter, 'are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.'" Peter, James, and John had been with Jesus when he raised up Jairus' daughter from the dead. They saw the amazing work of Jesus as the little girl started to breathe again, stood up, and got the hug of her life from her parents! Peter, James, and John were there when Jesus was transfigured before their very eyes. The things they had seen and heard!

Yet, they were capable of letting Jesus down. James and John sent their mother to ask Jesus to let them sit at Jesus' right and left in his heavenly kingdom. They assured Jesus that they too could drink the cup that Jesus would drink! Peter promised Jesus that even if everyone else fell away from him, he never would. Peter said he was willing to die for Jesus! These men who were willing to die for Jesus and reign with Jesus couldn't keep their eyes open to watch and pray with Jesus. Jesus had only asked one thing of them: "*Stay here and keep watch.*" Instead of being a source of comfort for Jesus, they snored loudly—overcome with sorrow. They did exactly the opposite of what Jesus asked.

Watch and pray. Watch! How many accidents have happened because someone took his or her eyes off the road and put them onto a phone? How many batters have struck out because they took their eyes off the ball? Keeping your eyes open is important. How much more important it is to keep the eyes of your heart on the lookout for Satan's tricks! Procrastinating our life of worship... Laziness with holy living... Apathy in our life of prayer... Eyelids droop. Vision blurs. Souls go to sleep. Satan prowls closer and closer, circling for the kill! "*Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.*" Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity" (Eph 5:14-16).

Watch and pray. Pray! The flesh is weak, but—praise God—our spirits are still willing. Turn to the Lord in prayer when temptation comes! Turn to the Lord in prayer because with God, all things are possible. He's tougher than temptation and his will is always done. "*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 endure it*" (1 Co 10:13).

Without God's gift of prayer, the Judas in us would quickly betray, the Peter quickly deny, the John quickly sleep, the David quickly covet, and the Cain quickly kill. When the flesh trembles in weakness in the face of temptation, turn to Jesus. Place yourself completely in the hands of the One who triumphed over temptation. He has the strength and the desire to keep you standing firm in times of temptation! Turn to Jesus with prayers of repentance. Rest your soul in the wounds of Jesus for forgiveness for the times that our weak flesh has fallen!

Temptation is no joking matter. It rears its ugly head again and again, day in and day out. Martin Luther once quipped about temptation: "You can't keep the birds from flying overhead, but you can keep them from building nests in your hair." Turn to Jesus in times of temptation. When you do, you tell Satan's birds to go nest elsewhere. Satan is good at tempting. Jesus is better, no, perfect at saving! Turn to Jesus. Only Jesus. Always Jesus! Amen.