

Sermon by Canon Jim Holbeck at the 6pm Healing Service in S. Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney on Wednesday 1st March, 2006 Reading: Mat 6:13, James 1:1-15. Title: "Lead us not into Temptation"

If you have very strong temptations it shows something significant about you. It shows you are human just like the rest of us. It's par for the course for being human. How does one overcome temptation? How does one endure the trials we all face without giving in to wrong thinking and wrong behaviour? Jesus taught us a prayer to pray so that we might walk in victory. It is part of the Lord's Prayer He taught us. He said we should pray to God our Father, "*Lead us not into temptation*" You might well say, "*But surely God who hates sin in all its forms, wouldn't lead us into temptation and sin!*" James in his epistle writes that God is never the source of temptation or sin. Jas 1:13 "*When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.*" What then does it mean to pray, "*Lead us not into temptation?*"

1. WE WILL ALL BE TEMPTED

Paul wrote in 1 Cor 10 about the temptations Israel faced in the wilderness in the time of Moses and the Exodus. They were tempted to turn away from YAHWEH the invisible God to false gods, to sexual immorality and to continue having wrong attitudes towards God in their difficult circumstances. *1 Cor 10:6 Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. 7 Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." 8 We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. 9 We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, 10 nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. 12 Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. 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.* We are all tempted in those same areas. The temptation to replace God with idols such as possessions or other people whom we love more than Him. The temptation to sexual sin. The temptation to grumble at God because of the difficulties we are facing. We are all liable to fall. But God never lets us be tempted beyond our ability to resist, provided we turn to Him to find the way of escape.

2. TEMPTATION OF ITSELF IS NOT SIN.

Many people as they encounter strong temptations think they must be evil people. But temptation of itself is not sin. It comes naturally to us as we live as humans in this world. Martin Luther the great German reformer put it in a memorable way when he said that you can't stop birds flying over your head, but you can stop them building nests in your hair. We can't stop temptations coming to us. But what we can do, is to stop those tempting thoughts from taking root in our minds. We can as Paul wrote take *every thought captive to obey Christ* so that our thinking doesn't get out of control. It means that when we are faced with temptation we refuse to keep dwelling on the tempting thought so that we don't then yield to the temptation. Temptations will always be with us, but we don't have to focus on them and give them more strength than we should. Victory over them is possible.

When does temptation lead to sin? James in James 1:14-15 explained that a man can give way to temptation when *14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.* If we give in to temptation then we are guilty before God, and need His forgiveness. But if we are tempted and resist temptation, then we don't have to have a sense of guilt about it. We are only guilty when we entertain the temptation and yield to it.

It means that when we pray, "Lead us not into temptation", we are asking the Lord to guide us in our everyday lives so that we will not come into tempting or testing situations where He knows we are likely to yield to temptation and fall into sin. The extreme temptation you face, has been faced by millions of other people over the years. Don't ever think that your case is just too hard, and that you have to succumb to that strong pressure. By the grace of God, you can be a victor over temptation, and not a victim of it. You can get help to overcome.

3. JESUS CAN HELP AS NO OTHER PERSON CAN

The writer to the Hebrews wrote of Jesus, *"For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. 2:18.* We may feel that no one could understand the tremendous temptations that we are personally experiencing. We may find it hard to ask for help in this area, because we think that people might be shocked. Surely no one could be feeling it as strongly as we are. But the writer says that Jesus knows the strength of temptation personally. He resisted to the nth degree every temptation that was thrown at Him, and never gave in. Because of that suffering He is able to understand where we are at in our difficulties. As Hebrews 4:15 puts it, *"15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.* He not only sympathises with us; He is also able to give us the victory we need.

4. WE WILL ALWAYS NEED THE LORD'S HELP

Jesus gave many warnings against becoming too complacent about the power of temptation. Eg., In Mark 14:38 He asked His disciples to support Him while we went to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, *" Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."* They failed Him.

If we think we're beyond temptation we're in a pretty dangerous situation. We might have won some victories in areas where we once knew defeat, and we think that those temptations will never have the same power over us again. That kind of attitude is a recipe for disaster. Many of those who embezzled didn't expect that they ever would. They wanted security, and sought it in things rather than in God. As Paul wrote to Timothy, *"People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction." 1 Tim 6:9.*

Most of those who have fallen into the sin of immorality, never expected it would happen to them. They felt they could stand firm, but they relaxed in their supposed personal strength, and fell into sin.

God in His mercy is reminding us all that all of us are weak, and need His continuing grace and strength to help us win the victories we cannot win alone.

You can win over temptation. You can begin to experience feeling better about yourself, when you admit you're weak, and keep turning to the Lord for His grace. The way to victory is the way of humility, recognising how weak we are of ourselves, and praying with all sincerity, *"lead us not into temptation."*

5. TEMPTATION AND HEALING

You and I can be tempted to think in wrong ways about God and about ourselves. You may be tempted to think that God is too big to care about your concern. *He's got a whole world to think about and to sort out so why would He have time for me?* You can get rid of that temptation by reading His word and seeing that He loved you enough as an individual to send Jesus to die for you on the cross. You matter to Him.

You may be tempted to think that you are too insignificant to matter to Him. God might heal other people but you find it hard to believe He could heal you. But God's promises are for all His people who trust Him. Paul writes in Rom 8:31-32, 31 ... *If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*

A major temptation will be to look at verses like these and say they are not true in our experience. It's the temptation to stand in judgement on the word of God and on the promises of God and say "untrue"

Reality is letting God's word and promises stand in judgment on us and say "Unbelief".

One day we might come to know and experience more of the "all things" that are ours in Him.

You may be tempted to think that it's too late to ask for His help; that it's selfish to ignore Him for so long and then when you are in trouble to ask for His help. It's never too late. As the dying thief hung on the cross he cried out, "*Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.*" Jesus promised him at the very last stage of his life, "*Today you will be with me in Paradise.*"

Jesus' disciples witnessed one of His miracles and He said to them, Mark 11:22 ... "*Have faith in God. 23 Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.*

The temptation for us is to ignore or reject such a promise from the lips of Jesus because a situation seems to have no solution. We once had contact with a woman who had become spaced out. As a young mother she would sit just staring out into space. No one seemed to be able to help her. Her husband asked that they might come and stay with us. She sat in our yard seemingly oblivious to all that was happening around her. This went on day after day. One night we had dinner and prayed for her asking that He would remove the problem because only He seemed to know what it was. Next morning we went downstairs to find her cooking breakfast and totally healed. She has been healed ever since and now for many years has been in full-time ministry for the Lord with her husband. God removes mountains we don't know about and could never move by ourselves.

What mountain are you facing tonight? An inability to resist temptation? An addiction you can't conquer? A mind-set you can't break? A resentment you can't let go? An illness that is threatening your life? In faith speak to the mountains in your life and tell them to go in Jesus' name. And keep praying *Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil.*