

Overcoming the Temptations

Sermon March 5, 2017

How can we have a balanced, serene, meaningful and happy life among temptations?

It is very important for all of us to know the Word of God, which has to have prestige and priority for us in every situation and in every decision.

Most weakness of our lives comes from the fact that behind our actions there are not decisions.

If a person reached the point where he once and forever gave his life to Jesus Christ, accepted Him as his personal Saviour, made wisely an irrevocable decision and said YES to Jesus, that person would have power and strength to say NO to the temptations in many ways. That person will ALWAYS ask the Lord before every decision and actions: Lord, what do you want me to do?

Based on our New Testament scripture reading, I want to direct our attention to Jesus Christ. What kind of person was Jesus and what kind of personality and attitude had He as a human? Let us see how Jesus resisted during temptations and how He pushed back and refused all kinds of temptations.

What is a temptation? Somebody said that temptation is another option that comes before us, or another opportunity.

What does it mean? During temptations, Jesus had two options, two opportunities. In our story, Jesus' first option was to remain obedient in all things to His heavenly Father. The other possibility was to listen to the Devil and to do what the Devil expected Him to do.

One option was to use His divine power ONLY to carry out and complete His mission in this world. The other option was to use this divine power sometimes for other things, for example, to change the stones into bread.

One possibility was to lay His life into the Father's hands. The other possibility was to do sometimes what He would like to do as an independent person.

However, for Jesus, there was no second alternative or other option. His only option was always to fulfill Our father's expectations with truth and justice.

CLEAR YES OR NO!

As God's children we should be strongly committed to the Lord. Today we should decide again to have only the Lord Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour in front of us, following Him in every circumstance.

Previously, we already took many oaths to keep Him and only HIM in front of our eyesight. Did those oaths become degraded in you, or are they still very important for you? Is Jesus, for you, the ONLY option amongst many? When you make decisions, and if something better will please

your own human desire, are you pushing Jesus Christ away to follow your own personal desire? Do you have a CLEAR YES OR NO during temptations?

Let me share with you a practical example.

- We make a mistake. One option is to recognize and acknowledge the mistake we made and we try to fix it. The other option is to blame somebody else and to create a whole story and a big speech to protect and to clean ourselves.

Jesus never took the second opportunity, but He pushed back all kind of temptations.

When He reached the end of a long fasting period, the devil appeared and offered Jesus his help. It seems the devil wanted something good for Jesus. Jesus was hungry and the devil asked him to turn the stones into bread, because He had the power to do that. Jesus rejected this. Jesus quoted one sentence from the Bible: "Man does not live by bread alone, but by the words that come from the mouth of God." (Deuteronomy 8:3)

The devil was not successful, so he came up with another trick: "I think it is important for you, Jesus, to be popular, well known, to be worshipped." The devil wanted to boost up Jesus' self-esteem as he does often with us as well saying: pay attention to yourself; nobody should be more important for you than yourself; people should notice and admire you. Jesus, if you are the Son of God, jump off the ledge of the church, because in the Bible it says that God will preserve you. Jesus did not even go into a discussion about this temptation with devil. He just ignored the devil. We all should pay attention on our temptations that they are coming from the devil. We should have enough faith and strength to say: Devil, you are so stupid that I don't even pay attention on you.

Jesus did not discuss the devil's request. Jesus simply quoted a sentence from the Bible: "do not tempt God, your Lord" (Deuteronomy 6:16)

Then a third attack occurred. The devil said: the whole world will be all yours if you fall down and worship me. Jesus answered again with a Golden Verse saying: "You shall worship and serve God alone." (Deuteronomy 6:13)

So Jesus did not get in a conversation with the devil, and always answered with a verse from the Bible. This is why He was able to win against the tempter.

Jesus Christ's attitude is clearly teaching us that there IS an absolute truth in every situation, an absolutely straight way we should follow, and these are not changing in any century. Jesus taught us that there is an absolute truth that applies to all generations and all ages.

There is a standard measurement, certified by God, the Bible, which can be used in every situation of life, and has to be adopted. Even if it is difficult to follow it, even if the majority of Christians do not respect it and call it outdated, God is not outdated, and His expectations are the

same today as they were 2,000 years ago. Even today, according to the classification of God, there is right and wrong. I hope you don't want to choose evil over God.

Today, we have to understand and to learn that it is not worth listening to the devil and even to think about the options he provides. The devil's recommendations are life threatening, and if you accept them, you have to deal with horrible consequences. We should not answer the devil with a little whispering NO, but with a strong NOT AT ALL!

We live in a world where people are unsure about so many things. This is the devil's tactic - to question everything around us and IN us. The devil is attacking us in every second and in many ways. He has thousands and thousands of tactics. He knows that the "bread", food, and money are important to everyone. He starts to offer options to have more than we need. We have high-technology. We need not only an iphone and a laptop, but also an ipad or maybe two because this way we feel more important. Popularity is also a sensitive point. Everybody wants to have a successful life and, for many, it does not matter in which way they achieve it. Some people are indifferent with whom they make business, but to make more money is more important. Is there in us a clear, unwavering strong character, the same we saw in Jesus? Can we stick to what we already recognize as truth, even when it may be disadvantageous at the moment?

Do you think and spend quality time in discernment before you make a decision? After you make a decision with God, do you stick to your decision to make everything according to God's will, even though it would cause you difficulties? I wonder what drives our decisions. What determines what we do and what we will not do? Who controls your life?

We all live under a double effect. We are influenced by our society and how other people are thinking and acting these days. The devil knows us, our expectations, our selfishness, our need for more comfort and love. The devil knows that our human vanity has no bounds. We all live between two effects: one comes from God and the other one from the devil. The questions are: Which one prevails? To whom are we listening? Whom do we love and serve?

In Revelations, Jesus talks about Christians who are "lukewarm" and they cannot make a decision based on God's expectations. Their excuse is that "always something comes up which is changing my way of thinking and their actions".

There is a Hungarian poet who talks about these things in one of his poems. I will quote him:

"Something always comes up.
 You open your lips to tell the truth,
 but before you say it, you let the lukewarm half-truth come out.
 Since you have more needs ... you want more ...
 you agree to dirty money ... because you want more.
 You could be still a hero,
 remaining honest and true to yourself
 to your children and to God,

but your ego is bigger ... because something always comes up.”

This is our story as well. Something always comes up. We always postpone the vital and most important things because we WANT something else, something more sparkly. In this way, we miss those things, which in the long term would make our lives more complete and would give our lives a better result ... but something always comes up.

We believe that these are great excuses, but they are only weak explanations, lies. Why do we allow those things to come up?

I often hear excuses that people were not able to come to the church because ... something came up ...

The question is: What do we really want? A more comfortable existence for us and our children on this earth or a spiritually? A while ago, not at Calvin Church, a father told me that from now I won't see his wife in the church because their son's karate is at the same time as the church service. My question is, what will help their son to make him a more honest, conscious and strong child of God – God or karate? Whom are we going to put behind us: God or our small desires?

Our desire could make our earthly life a bit more comfortable, but God will give us a better life in the eternal life. Which one is more important for us? These 70-90 years on this earth or eternal life? More comfortable life or real life? Will you take the courage today to confess and accept the truth, or will you continue to be led by half-truth?

Jesus, based on His decisions and actions, was characterized as a solid character.

Heisenberg, a German writer, says that, most of the time, the reason for our weakness is that there is no discernment behind our decisions. We don't spend enough time on our knees in God's presence before we make a decision and before we act. We have to learn today from Jesus Christ, who always first made a wise and irrevocable decision, and then followed them through. From Him, we can get strength during our temptations to say NO to the devil. Before our actions, we have to ask: “Lord, what do you want me to do?”

Today I am recommending to you to make a strong decision to follow Jesus.

Once, a minister had pre-marital counseling with a young couple who wanted to marry. The groom asked the minister why is “as long as we both shall live” in the vows? Then the minister asked him, saying: Ok young man, how should we change this sentence according to you? The guy started to hesitate.

The young man became very frustrated when the minister told him that he will take the vows that from now he will sleep only with his wife, and that he will say NO to any other women in the world. The groom jumped from his seat, saying: “this is ridiculous”.

Jesus once said YES to the Father, and he never changed His mind.

Who is able to act and live like Jesus?

If you are asking me if I am able to live always according to God's expectations, I have to say NO, I cannot.

The Bible says that first we have to make the commitment, we have to try with all our mind, heart and spirit, and God will empower us to be Christ-like. This is why we have to learn and memorize the Golden Verses that in certain situations we should recall them and use them to push the devil back, as Jesus did: "It is written ..."

We know that we have not enough strength to win against all our temptations, but God our Father, who called us to be His children, has a plan for us. The Bible says that God already started His work in us through the Holy Spirit, and He will give us strength during temptation.

Not our faithfulness towards God, but God's faithfulness towards us, will keep us and hold us in this life. Our responsibility is to stick to God, to ask for His help, and He will give us strength to live a balanced, serene, meaningful, and happy life.

God promised that, if you will try very hard to act according to His will, He will help you to reach His eternal glory, where at the end He will say: "To the one who conquers, I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches."

(Revelation 3:21-22)