

Friday Communion Service

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Preacher: Chris Smart

[0 : 00] it to us tonight. Let's sing once more to God before we turn to look at his word. We're going to sing this time on page 187, and it's the words of Psalm 143.

Psalm 143, and the tune is Love Unknown, and it's from verse 5 to the end of the psalm. Psalm 143, and from verse 5, therefore I call to mind the days and years long gone. I ponder all your works and what your hands have done. To you in prayer I spread my hands. For you I thirst like arid lands.

My spirit fails, O Lord. Come quickly to my side. Hide not your face from me, lest to the pit I slide.

Psalm 143, from verse 5 to the end of the psalm. Let's stand and sing our praises to the Lord. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[2 : 40] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. It's a human desire to provide for ourselves, thinking that somehow we are able to do that. And then when times like this, a particular wilderness experience comes your way, we can be very tempted to provide for ourselves if we don't see the answers coming quick enough.

I think many people will react to God in the same way. He may not deny his existence, and if you're a Christian here tonight, you'd never dream of denying his existence.

[4 : 47] But to all intents and purposes, God may not come into our daily thinking very much once we begin to give in to this way of thinking. So, temptation will come, and it'll ask you to strike out independently of God in your life, not to wait necessarily upon God's direction and his will. It goes back to the Garden of Eden. It's the heartbeat of what he offered to Adam in his original rebellion against God's care, against the fact that God had provided him with what he needed.

Not necessarily all that we want, but all that we need. And so, Satan will try and seduce us. He'll tell us the lie that we can live without God, and after a fashion, people can have very successful lives without one ounce of faith. Plenty of rich, happy people out there at one level who don't believe in God, but they've swallowed this great temptation and this great lie that we can provide for ourselves. And Satan played on the very strengths of Jesus. He says, you've got the power, you turn the stone into bread. And that, again, may be the very area he will attack some of you, your strengths. Not your weaknesses, but where you're strong. Time and again, what I see Christians failing is in their areas of strength. Most of us aren't so dumb that we know that we've got to guard our weak points, but sometimes it's your strong points that the devil will overplay. You're a perceptive person, for example. Then he can overplay that, and you become a critical person, etc.

So he can make you overplay your strengths in one way or another, and then he can make you doubt in the provision of God and make you want to provide your own answers. And I think there's one area of real temptation, modern life, modern city life for you, that in relationships, you may be very tempted to take that matter completely into your own hands without God really being in the situation and provide for yourself, even if that relationship is with somebody outwith the faith.

And that can be a very serious temptation, and one will guarantee you will almost definitely decapitate your faith in Christ. Second temptation, verse 6. He says there, I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will be yours. What is he tempting Jesus to do there?

He's basically saying, take the easier route in life. All right, Satan says, you want to go for this mission, you want to do your job? Fine. But I've got a better way of doing things than God's way.

[7 : 59] God's way is long, it's complicated, it's very, very painful. I've got a far better idea than all of that. Look, I've got control. I have all the empires of man at my fingertips. I will give you all the influence you want, Jesus, to get your message out there. You can have all your crusades anywhere you want. I'll give you prime time on every satellite channel out there. You can get your message across the entire message across the entire world. All I ask is that you put my name in the credits at the end. Bow down and worship me. It's easier, Jesus. Less pain, Jesus. Not so much suffering, Jesus. Go for it. And any time you and I face that scenario and hear that voice, we are fighting the same fight, the same temptation Jesus did. The easier options, the easier way. Sometimes you'll be faced with a scenario in life and you've got a choice before you. And not always, but frequently, perhaps nine times out of ten, the easier option will possibly be the wrong one. It's very rarely, I think, with God. It seems that the easier way is the right way. And so, is the devil prodding some of you in these days? Take the easier way. Run, maybe, from some of your problems. We live in a day and generation of that believes in escapism, escaping from our problems through pleasure, through addiction, through whatever, through burying ourselves even at work, but escaping from responsibilities.

Some men will do that by ignoring their family responsibilities, by escaping to work, because there's less grief and less hassle. They know what they're doing there.

Are you tempted to easier answers and easier and quicker routes to access joy in your life? There are things and people that are offering you pleasure there, very easy to take. Why is it? It's a temptation. Easy answer, easy route for what you want in life. Sometimes it's a lot easier, is it not, to hide your witness in your life from showing in college, university, or in the workplace that you're a Christian. Some folks talk of submarine Christians, that they only surface on Sundays.

The rest of the week, we kind of keep our Christianity pretty much hidden. Chameleons, we blend in so much, it's very hard to see any of that salt and light that Jesus once talked about in our daily lives, in the lecture rooms, in the workplaces. Because then there's no rejection, there's no difficult questions about your faith, there's no accusations of being a bigot, being intolerant, or any such thing. And so, he comes with the easy answer. Take this, do this, it'll be better.

She's available, sleep with her. There you go. Have it all there now. Basically, he's asking you to to swap God, the one true source of pleasure and satisfaction for an idol, for Satan, one of his idols, for success, for wealth, for popularity, for whatever it might be. Because idols come with such power to us because they seem to offer the easy answer. It's usually an immediate answer as well, while God's ways are often weighed. And then you get the blessing. Third temptation, verse 9.

[12 : 09] The devil led him to Jerusalem, standing up in the high point. If you are the Son of God, see your identity attack again. If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written, Satan's now playing Jesus at his own game. He can quote scripture too. He will command his angels concerning you. God will protect. So, what is the third temptation? It is to test God. To test God.

And that's the same as to say, I'm not sure I can trust God. So, let's organize a little experiment. Shouldn't God be protecting me after all from all the hassles of life? Shouldn't I have some kind of extra security blanket as a Christian? After all, how could the Father let all this happen to his Son?

How could God let this happen to me, you might say? And you go through things in your life, and you wonder, how can God let this or that happen to me? And these things are incredibly grievous and difficult at times.

And those are the moments when this temptation might strike at you. It could be that someone dies around you. Why, God, did you let that happen? He lets you get ill. Or if you're a parent, He lets your child get ill, and that's even worse for you. He lets you fail in some way.

Or you watch some dream evaporate that you've always, always pursued, and now you've got to watch that dream die. You go into a business deal, and it goes bust. A hope dies. Whatever. There's so many ways.

[13 : 50] And what we must realize, though, about everything in the Scriptures, but particularly books like Job and Jeremiah and parts of the New Testament, make clear to us is that we can never be naive about suffering. We can never believe that we're going to be protected from all these things.

And if we're naive about that, we're going to be more susceptible to this kind, this third temptation. We'll be tempted to question God, tempted, as it were, almost to test God. Why do you not do this?

Why will you not help? To try them out in some way, which is just really another way of saying, I don't trust you. It's how it's so subtle. I don't really trust you.

So, we've got this happening to Christ, coming at his sonship. And if Jesus and his sonship was not protected from all the testing and all the trials, Satan whispers this lie in his ear, because of this fasting, because of this great need that you're in, Jesus. Let's test God and see if he's really worth trusting. If Jesus and his sonship can go through all of that, are you going to go through anything less? No. Impossible. Fat. Being marked out with sonship, being adopted into God's family, sons and daughters of God, means that you're not going to see some super protection from these trials and hassles of life. Rather, you're going to experience perhaps more of them. And if you think that becoming a Christian is all about health and wealth and protection, then you'll just crash and burn, which I guess is what would have happened to Jesus if he tested God and threw himself off the temple. So, we are not to put ourselves in the way of temptation temptation in this way either. I don't know if these have touched your life in any way, but I guess they should have done. But all they're doing and all we've done is briefly run through a variety of ways that you and I can face temptation. And what we have read of is that every time Jesus experienced it, he suffered. It galled his soul to have these temptations before him.

Not with anything evil in him was he tempted, but tempted to do good things, but in wrong ways. And that's what takes us to the words of Hebrews 2, where it says, he himself suffered when he was tempted. But the words I really want you to focus on and take home with you as well tonight, though, is the second half of that verse, verse 18. He is able to help those who are being tempted precisely because he went through all of those things.

[17 : 23] So, the question then, we are not alone when we face temptation, when you may get some insight into the depth of your own sin, the reality of your human nature. And that may often come at this time of a communion season. You look in the mirror spiritually a little bit, or Satan forces your nose into the mirror and says, look at this, how can you go to that table? You're a joke.

When we go through this, this passage is saying to us, we are not walking alone. You do not face temptation alone. You do not face the battles. You do not face the war of temptation alone. For the events of Christ's temptation are a continuing battle, if you like. And he is able to help. The question is, how? How does Jesus Christ help you in real ways when you are faced with real temptations?

Of all the kinds that we talked about, to provide for yourself, to take the easier route in life, to test God in some way. How does he protect you in the face of these temptations? What's the protection that he gives us? You can look at it in two ways. There are external defenses.

Briefly mention that. And then I want to focus on the internal defenses and give you an image to take home with you about those external defenses. Our God is so great and so powerful that tonight he can stop temptations coming your way. All the powers of hell could come against you, and you will not even know it, because he'll stop the attack even coming towards you. Christ has the power to guard you from temptations by keeping the attacks from you. He indeed taught us to pray for that kind of external defense. Lead us not into temptation. So there will be places in Aberdeen. There will be people.

There will be experiences. And you must not go there. You must not look there. You must not touch there. And he can keep those very places and people out of your life and stop a thousand attacks coming against you. And I suspect he does on a daily basis. Of course, we don't know, because he stopped them, so you never see them. What a God. And he's going to be keen to do it, isn't he? Because he suffered when he was tempted. So he knows how much it can rip your guts up inside. So he's going to be keen to protect you, much keener, perhaps, than we are sometimes to fight the temptation. So there's external defenses in that you just guard you. But I want to think about the internal defenses.

[20 : 39] that we need to have as believers. And I hope that our whole time around the bread and the wine, the sacrament will strengthen. Because the reality of life is we're constantly going to be walking past temptations on probably a daily basis. And I think in a city, it's got its own particular temptations.

There can be, you can be a little bit more anonymous. If you've escaped from some little community in the islands or the highlands, you can get away with murder after a fashion.

Because you might not be known the same. It's like the Garden of Eden. There was the tree that they were not to eat from. And where was it? Did God stick it in a little corner of the orchard, miles away from where Adam and Eve normally went back and forth every day? No, it was bang slap in the middle.

And the reality is, if Jesus is going to help you and me to fight our temptations, we need an internal source of defense that we can carry with us on a daily basis. Otherwise, we're going to be stuffed. Because temptation, by and large, will be around you and about you.

And you're going to keep bumping into it, into him or into her. Always, it's going to be about you. So the image I want to put into your minds of the kind of defenses that I believe the New Testament gives to us in Christ. It's like a castle. There's three levels to the defense here.

[22 : 20] You've got the moat around the castle. You have the walls of the castle itself. And then in the center, you've got the keep, the strong point. Three parts, the moat, the walls, the keep. And so internally, you have got to have that kind of defense system working in your heart. First one, moat.

Use this to think just quite simply of the consequences to our sins and having accountability.

Often where the thought of giving in to a particular temptation can be stopped is when you think about the damaging consequences that will follow if you give in to your temptation. And you may say, well, no one will know or no one will see. But very often you can be tempted with things that you know. If it gets out, relationships are going to be strained. Things will go wrong.

Could be the temptation of giving in to a bitter rage, shouting and arguing. And where that will yet again put a relationship on the home front back into the deep freeze.

And so before you speak that word, before you're ready to let rip, you stop, you think, you, what's the consequences? What's it going to be like to live in this house for the next week if I just let rip again? What's it going to do in the relationships in your life, in husband and wife, parent and child, worker and boss? You've got to sink through that. Sometimes helping to find accountability that somebody you can share with can be helpful as well in this temptation. But internally, you chew through the consequences. That's the moat. That's the first line of defense, obvious enough. But of course, we all know you can be aware of all the consequences, but if temptation has really got you in its grip, you will give in despite the consequences. When a temptation is almost slipping into an addiction, then you're really in trouble. That's really when you'll need extra help, accountability, external, someone to help too. Because then, to hell the consequences, we say. That's literally what happens. So you've got to have more than a moat, but the moat helps.

[25 : 15] Sometimes it's enough to stop the temptation there. Then you've got the castle walls. Now, thinking about this, I'm using it as an image to think of one specific thing, our identity in Christ. So bear with me in this point.

This is, after all, what we've been talking about in Luke 4. Where was Jesus assaulted? On the point of his identity. So, Hugh Martin said, this conflict, Christ's temptation, is prolonged through the whole history of the whole history of the church. This battle of temptation with the heat being where?

Focused on identity. Am I, am I not a child of God? So here is where Christ strengthens us with big walls that we carry internally, where you know that you are a child of God, that your identity is that you are a new creation, that all the titles that Christ has, heir of God, that you're now co-heir with him. He's the son of God, your son and a daughter of the Most High. That's why Satan attacked Christ's identity as a son, because Satan knew that if he successfully endured that temptation, he was doing it as your representative, just as he had been baptized as your representative. So we're being baptized into a race of sinners in order to redeem a race of sinners, in order to make that race of sinners into a race of sons and daughters of God. So that is why he has sailed the sonship of Jesus, because he knew he has sailed it because the Son is going to share it with you. And you see the power of this when you go to verses, for example, in Romans 6, and you start chewing over what they're actually saying to you.

For example, Romans 6, 6, For we know that our old self was crucified with him, so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin. Any slaves here tonight? I bet there's one or two of you.

That you are in a trap with temptation, and you need to speak to somebody about it. But when you're faced with the onslaught of temptation, there is a way of stopping it. Dead.

[28 : 09] When you remind yourself, and you meditate upon this reality, and you use verses like this to rub that reality into your soul, that you are now a new creation. You're a son and daughter of God.

And as he says, therefore, in Christ we have died to the power of sin in his death. It'll be present always, but it hasn't got the compelling power that it once had. And we have been raised in his resurrection to a new life. Now that's you. If you're a Christian, that is the risen power of Jesus Christ in your soul. Do you believe it? Or do you need to go home and do some meditating and rub it into your soul? So you realize, hang on, it's actually saying our old self was crucified.

There's a new self, body of sin, done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin. Dead to sin. Dead to its tyranny, though not to its presence. Dead to its power to compel us.

So that is what the wall says. Your identity. Remember that you are free now in Christ, not to sin. And that is very helpful when you're in the heat of the temptation, in the heat of the battle.

Because any army that's about to fight a battle and already believes that they have lost the fight, they will lose that battle. They're about to enter the battle, but in their brains they've already lost it, then they will lose it. And when you face temptation, you have to remind yourself that we are now free to choose not to sin, to choose to fight the sin. And we've got the grace, the new life of Christ pulsating through our spiritual veins to resist the temptation. I don't know how clear that is, but that's why Satan attacks the identity so much of a believer. And that's why he attacked it in Christ.

[30 : 47] And the last one, the keep. We're now in the center of the defense system. And this, I would simply say, is it's a love for Christ. It's a touch of the consequences as well, and that you will do nothing to threaten your relationship with Christ. So you have to have such a strong ardor and love for God, that that becomes the best defense against sinning. Spurgeon put it this way. He said, holy wonder, holy wonder, holy wonder will lead you to grateful worship and heartfelt thanksgiving.

It will cause within you godly watchfulness. You will be afraid to sin against such a love as this.

feeling the presence of the mighty God in the gift of his dear Son. You will put off your shoes from your feet, because the place whereon you stand is holy ground. And especially it's the keep that's going to be strengthened, perhaps, as you come to the table on Sunday by God's grace, and you eat the bread and drink the wine and do all in remembrance of him, of what he has suffered for you, what he did for you.

Now, he endured temptation and successfully resisted it, and now extends that victory to you. When you eat and drink, you're feeding your faith, you're able to connect to that victory more securely. So the question is, and the keep, how much do we love God? How much do we love this Jesus?

Because that's the point where we will resist more, when we don't want to lose him, when we don't want to lose the joy that we have found in knowing God in Christ. That if knowing God really is the most exultant, most glorious thing a human being can ever experience, then you've got to be dumb to want to lose that. And it's having that hunger for that, that thirst for Jesus, more than anything else, will push out the temptation, silence them and push out the sin. Chalmers talked about it. He said the heart, the human heart, is so constituted that the only way to dispose it of an old affection, an old hungering or desire, is by the expulsive power of a new one. So when you face the fire of temptation, temptation, how do you fight the fire of temptation? You and I must learn to fight the fire with fire.

[34 : 10] You've got to so indulge in Christ and love Christ and God and drink deep there and go mining to get more out of your relationship with God, that that is the central part of your defense mechanism.

Because if you think about why we give in to sin, it's always God-related. Why, for example, did David commit adultery with Bathsheba? Because he was looking for something that he could have gotten God, but he didn't think God would give it to him. He was looking for an intimate joy, but looking for it in the wrong sources. Well, that is often the very language that is used to describe the relationship between a believer and God, intimacy and a joy that only God can really bring to the human heart. And as you work on that, then you use that fire to fight fire. So how much do you love him?

How much do you work at knowing him? Spending time to meditate, that's that somewhere between prayer and reading your Bible stage, or you're chewing over prayerfully so that you get that sense of God upon your soul. And you realize that he is better than all the other pleasures out there that are tempting you.

You fight it with fire. So you've got the keep, you've got the castle walls, you've got the moat, you've got all that internally. You take that, can take that anywhere in life. And I suppose you could throw in one little element into that picture, what about the sun? Because some days the castle can be sitting there in the shade, or some days it's beautiful skies and the sunlight is shining down on the castle. Well, those are the days when the sunlight is shining and break through the clouds that it's easier to face temptation. Those are the days when you sense the presence of God, when you're aware of God's presence.

But there are other days it's like the clouds are thick, like it was today driving down Aberdeen, and it's all gray and it's all miserable looking. It's not the silver city anymore, it's just three.

[36 : 38] And there's those days when you don't feel God nearby, and those are the days when temptation will have more power, and when actually the castle in a sense will perhaps be more vulnerable to attack, because you just don't feel he is near. So that awareness, I believe, of God's presence allows us to view temptation in a different light. The closer you keep to God, the more you will see temptation for what it is, a cheap lie, a tawdry thing, a horrible thing, a nasty thing, compared to the beauty and the wonder of God himself.

So, Jesus can say to us, I have suffered temptation, and I know how to protect you from it. Here's some defenses. Take them home with you and chew over them. And just in case there's someone here tonight who's saying, great, my castle's in ruins. It's burnt out. My friend, you should come to the table, just with a repentant heart, and he'll give you some new building material, bricks and mortar, and you can rebuild.

It's from the depths of his grace. You sometimes only discover how deep God's grace is when you really have sinned and given in to temptation, and then so quickly he comes back and he puts out the fires, he washes out the mess, and he begins to rebuild and restore the ruins.

So, there is no one here tonight, if in your heart you want to come back, you want the defenses to be rebuilt, there is no one here tonight that God cannot do that for. If you're in the grip of a real temptation, a real addiction, then yes, you may need an extra help. You may need someone to come alongside and speak to someone about it. But the offer is there. This is the truth, that Jesus Christ was tempted and is able to help those who are being tempted. So, there is no reason why any of us should stay away from the means of grace this coming Lord's Day. May we come with great expectation.

Amen. Amen.