



Week 5: Joy in Temptation (Philippians 2:12-30)

Discussion Questions

1. What type of temptation do you feel most susceptible to – physical, emotional/mental or spiritual? Share examples with your group.
2. How does the word of God support you in times of temptation?
3. How do the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus give you encouragement in your Christian walk and, particularly, in times of temptation?

To dig deeper...

Work it out (vv.12-13)

4. Why do you think Paul asks them to obey ‘much more in my absence’?
5. What does he mean when he asks them to ‘work out your salvation’? Why ‘with fear and trembling’?
6. How do you think we might put this command into action?
7. And what happens at the same time as *we* work? Why do we underrate this miraculous work?

Shine like stars (vv.14-15)

8. Any grumblers or complainers or arguers among us? What’s the key to doing everything *without* these??
9. What will be the impact on our relationships?
10. What will be the impact on the **world**? What do you make of that description of shining like stars? (See how important our relationships with one another are for our witness!!)

Hold fast to the word of life (vv.16-18)

11. Hold ‘fast’ is the more accurate translation, rather than hold ‘out’. So how does this work? What impact will us holding fast to the word of life have for our shining like stars?
12. How do you make sense of Paul’s desire to boast on the day of Christ that he did not run or labour for nothing?

Note – this is not about Paul’s ego, because what he is saying in v17, if I may paraphrase, is something like – “I’m not saying I’m so great or anything; I don’t mind if my service for Christ is seen as something quite small compared to yours – I’m happy!”

Timothy and Epaphroditus (vv.19-30)

13. What stands out for you in Paul’s account of both these men?
14. And so comes to an end this huge section which began in 1:27 all about living worthily. Read the conclusion to the sermon again and see if you can identify something that has challenged you personally and/or something which you consider as a church we need seriously to take to heart.

Talk 5/9 (Philippians 2:12-30): 17/08/14

“Joy in Temptation” by the Rev’d Dr Daniel Rouhead

INTRODUCTION \ TEMPTATION!

This week we move from humility to temptation. Last week, I used C.S. Lewis’ definition of humility. This story about C.S. Lewis connects to this morning’s theme.

In September 1961, Harvey Karlsen, a high school student in Brooklyn, New York, wrote to C. S. Lewis in England. Harvey had read Lewis’ book *The Screwtape Letters* and asked the author, “When you wrote this book, did Satan give you any trouble, and if he did, what did you do about it?”

Three weeks later, Lewis penned a reply in which he affirmed that he still had plenty of temptations. He said that in facing them, “Perhaps . . . the most important thing is to *keep on*; not to be discouraged however often one yields to the temptation, but always to pick yourself up again and ask forgiveness.”

Temptation is just as relevant for us today, as it was for C.S. Lewis and the people of Philippi. Even though we are citizens of heaven, we live in a world with very different values to us:

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.”

Philippians 2:14-15

It can be really tempting to take on the values and behaviours of the people around us. Even Jesus was tempted by the devil, and we can see the types of temptations we are subjected to in the three temptations of Jesus. Paul urges us not give into temptation and keep our purity, by holding fast to God’s word. Paul gives us 2 examples of faithful Christian servants to inspire us and keep us focussed on God’s kingdom.

1. Types of Temptation \ Matthew 4:1-11

When everything is going well for us or when we feel close to God, it can feel easy to resist temptation. However, there are times in our struggle when we become weary, weakened, and susceptible to the temptations that seem to be placed in our path. The types of temptations we face lie in the account of the temptations of Jesus.

When Jesus had completed the fast of forty days and had communed with God, he was, in this hungry and physically weakened state, left to be tempted by the devil. Such a time is always the tempter’s moment—when we are emotionally or physically spent, when we are weary, vulnerable, and least prepared to resist the insidious suggestions he makes. This was an hour of danger—the kind of moment in which many people fall and succumb to the subtle temptation of the devil.

Satan’s first temptation was to entice Jesus to satisfy his craving for food, that most basic, physical, biological need. It was a temptation of the senses, an appeal to appetite, and in many ways the most common and most dangerous of the devil’s allurements. The devil tempts Jesus to turn stones into bread. During the long weeks of seclusion, the Saviour had been sustained by the spirit as he spent time in meditation and prayer. We can also be tempted by an appeal to our

senses, be it too much of a good thing, or things that may feel good, but actually aren't good for us at all.

The second temptation was more mental and emotional, with Satan tempting Jesus to throw himself upon the Father's protection. He took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and quoted scripture: "'If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. "'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus could prove to everyone that he really was the son of God. Here the tools of temptation are doubt – "If you are the son of God", Satan says. In our actions, we can put God to the test, either seeking God for our own benefit or because we really don't trust in him.

In his third temptation, the devil casts away all subtlety and scripture and all deviousness and disguise, with a spiritual temptation. From a high mountain he showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Though they were not his to give, Satan offered them all to Jesus. Satan offers Jesus his true destiny to be Lord of all, but not the Father's way. In our lives, we can be tempted to take God's place and rule our own lives, or try a spiritual shortcut by substituting God with something or someone else.

2. Hold Firm \\ Verses 15-16

If temptation surrounds us in the values and behaviours of those around us, as well as Satan himself, then a strategy for resisting temptation is vital. Paul wrote these words about resisting temptation:

Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labour in vain.

Philippians 2:15b-16

First, Paul tells the Philippians they should stand out from the people around them, urging them to "shine among them like stars in the sky". By resisting temptation, the Philippians would shine light into the darkness of sin and rebellion that surrounded them, and be an example to the world around them. But there was more to it than that.

One of the songs from *Les Misérables*, is called Stars, and connects very much with this imagery.

Stars
In your multitudes
Scarce to be counted
Filling the darkness
With order and light
You are the sentinels
Silent and sure
Keeping watch in the night
Keeping watch in the night

You know your place in the sky
You hold your course and your aim
And each in your season
Returns and returns
And is always the same

Stars do fill the darkness with light, but also bring order, stability and certainty to the world.

And so the Philippians are called not only to be an example, but also figures of certainty and reliability in their community.

Second, Paul tells how they can accomplish these things, living up to Christ's example: "Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life." Some translations say, "as you hold out the word of life", emphasising the example the Philippians were called to be. However, hold firmly or hold fast to the word of life, is a more accurate translation and emphasises that the Philippians cannot do it alone, and must rely on Christ and his word.

We see in the temptations of Jesus his reliance upon God's word to resist temptation. After each temptation, Jesus responds to the devil with a portion of scripture, rebuking him:

1. "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"
2. "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"
3. "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

We are called to be like the Philippians. We are called to resist temptation. We are called to live God's way and not be influenced by the culture around us. We are called to be examples to our community, and the people we come in contact with. We are called to resist temptation by relying on Christ's words and not on our own strength. We can trust in the power of God's word to be our defence and shield in times of temptation. Joy comes from knowing that Jesus himself was tempted, we are not left alone to resist temptation, and resisting temptation helps us to grow as disciples of Christ.

3. Two Examples \ Verses 19-30

This passage finishes with two examples of people who were tempted, but did resist, staying true to Christ and his church. We should be encouraged by these examples for our own journeys of faith.

The first example is Timothy. Paul writes this about him:

I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. ²¹ For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:20-21

The temptation for Timothy, and for us as well, is to look out for own interests, and not those of Jesus Christ. Even Christians are tempted to be Me-first and selfish, rather than generous and focussed on others. Paul is confident that Timothy is different, because he genuinely cares for the welfare of others and puts Christ first. In fact, he has proven himself to Paul, through their service together of the gospel.

But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.

Philippians 2:22

As we each respond to God's call on our life to serve him and his church, let us be inspired by Timothy's example to stay true to that call.

The second example is Epaphroditus, who was sent to Paul with their offering to support Paul in his time of need. On the way, as Paul writes:

Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow.

Philippians 2:27

Epaphroditus had agreed to make a long journey to support one of God's servant, the act of a true servant, and yet it had almost cost him his life. The temptation here for Epaphroditus would have been to completely lose trust in God, and to walk away from him and his church and ministry. Paul acknowledges this risk:

...because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.

Philippians 2:22

Despite everything that had happened to him, Epaphroditus was still not focussed on himself, but on his brothers and sisters in Philippi:

For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill.

Philippians 2:26

When we face our own trials and hardships, let us be inspired by the example of Epaphroditus who remained faithful to Christ, and his brothers and sisters in Christ.

CONCLUSION

We will all face temptation because even Jesus faced temptation. Joy comes from knowing that Jesus faced temptation, but did not fail:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet he did not sin.

Hebrews 4:15

It doesn't matter what type of temptation we face, when we hold fast to Jesus and his word, we can resist, and stay true to Christ. May we be like Timothy and Epaphroditus, who resisted temptation, and were faithful and obedient servants regardless of the cost, and the cultures and attitudes of those around them. Then we will shine like stars in the sky as we hold firmly to the word of life.

Amen.