Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Unseen dangers are quite scary, aren’t they. They make for some of the scariest movie scenes. The hero is merrily going about his or her business, but you know that they have an unseen enemy, like dragon or a lion. Perhaps it is a large dragon eye watching the hero walk past, or the lion’s view from atop the rock as the hero walks underneath. Whatever the case, the hero has unknowingly escaped attack and probably death from a dangerous enemy. But later in the movie, the hero learns about this mortal enemy and begins to take steps to avoid or even defeat it.

Well, as Christians, we have enemieS – actual, dangerous, spiritual enemies. And if we don’t know this, we are in danger of attack. So, we need to understand what our enemies are and how they operate, so that we can be ready when they attack.

And the Lord Jesus understood this, which is why He included this petition in the prayer that He taught us to pray: “*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*.” And so, having already asked for **provision** – our daily bread, and **pardon** – forgiveness of sins, **we believers now ask God for protection from temptation and evil**. And we are going to work through this request for protection by asking and answering four questions: **First**, what is meant by temptation and evil? **Second** – What are we asking for when we ask for protection from temptation and evil? **Third** – What lessons about temptation and evil can we learn from the Lord Jesus? And **fourth** – What can we do to better resist temptation and evil?

1. So, first of all, **What is meant by Temptation and evil?**
   1. You see, the Bible uses the word ‘temptation’ in at least three ways:
      1. The first describes **trials or hardships**. For example, **James 1:2** says, “*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds*.” And the Old King James Bible has it as ‘temptations’ instead of ‘trials.’ And trials are not sinful in and of themselves, but they can become an occasion to doubt God or to commit other sins.
      2. The second way that the Bible uses temptations is to describe **enticements to sin that come from *outside* us**.
         1. A theologian once wrote: “Whoever has God for his friend will find **Satan** to be his enemy.” And that truth comes straight out of Scripture. **1 Peter 5:8** says, “*Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*” **Ephesians 6** speaks of “*the schemes of the devil*.” And they began way back in the Garden of Eden, with the temptation of Eve, and every human being since her as felt the sharp end of the devil’s attempts to entice us into sin.
         2. But another external enemy is **the world**. **1 John 2:15-16** says, “*Do not love the world or the things in the world … For all that is in the world- the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions- is not from the Father, but is from the world*.” So, the world is everything that is contrary to God’s revealed will – false ideologies, forbidden pleasures, power, pride, etc.
      3. But the third way that the Bible uses ‘temptation’ is to describe **enticements to sin that arise from the sinful nature *within* each one of us**.
         1. **James 1:14-15** says, “*But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death*.” And here we are talking about lustful thoughts, greed, anger, and selfishness, etc.
      4. So, temptation can arise from trials, external enemies, like the devil or the world, and the internal enemy of our sinful nature.
   2. And one more point before we move on. Verse 13 has a marginal note in relation to the word “evil.” And the note explains that the Greek word can be translated as “***the evil one***.” And one need not make a dogmatic choice, either way, because they basically add up to the same thing. But because the Bible associates temptation *with the tempter*, and evil *with the evil one*, and because the Lord Jesus had only very recently come through His temptation battle *with Satan*, I believe “*the evil one*” is probably what is in view here.
2. So, now that we know what is meant by temptation and the evil one, we can move on to our second question, which is: **What are we asking for when we ask for protection from temptation and the evil one?**
   1. And I hope it is obvious to all of us that we are not praying, Lord God, please don’t tempt us to sin. And that is because **God never entices us to sin**.
      1. **James 1:13** is crystal clear about this: “*Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one*.”
      2. And not only does God not entice us to sin, **1 Corinthians 10:13** says, “*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*.”
      3. And not only does He always provide us with a way of escape, He has also given us His Son, Jesus, to be our sympathetic High Priest. Hebrews 4:15 tells that because He was tempted in every way as we are, without ever sinning, He is able to help those who draw near to Him in time of need.
      4. So, our Father in heaven puts limits on how much temptation comes our way, and we have an always available temptation ally in the Lord Jesus, and He always opens a door of escape.
      5. All too often, though, we do not make use of our ally, and we ignore the escape door, choosing instead to run through the temptation one.
   2. **So, what *are* we asking with this petition?** Well, our Lord’s Day summarizes this so helpfully: “Uphold us and make us strong with the strength of your Holy Spirit, so that we may not go down to defeat in this spiritual struggle, but may firmly resist our enemies until we finally win the complete victory.”
   3. But you know, even beyond what we are directly praying for, when you pray this petition, you are making known your hatred for sin and confessing your weakness when it comes to resisting it. You are counting on God to never leave you or forsake you. You are asking the Lord Jesus for help to resist temptation when it comes. You are trusting in the Spirit to help you with your prayers, and to be your strength and shield. In other words, you are relying, fully and utterly, on your God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to be your rock, your refuge, and your fortress.
   4. Many of us are parents. And I am sure you will have had your young child ask you for help or protection. Daddy, catch me when I jump in, OK? Don’t let me fall! Don’t leave me alone! Can you fix this for me? And requests like that just melt your heart and honour you, don’t they! And you love to do what they ask. Well, as it says in **Matthew 7:11**, “*How much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him?”* And to not be led into temptation and be delivered from the evil one is a really good thing! But we must ask it of Him, regularly!
3. Well, that brings us to our third question, which is: **What lessons about temptation and the evil one can we learn from the Lord Jesus?**
   1. And God willing, it won’t be too long before we are in Matthew 4, once we begin that sermon series later this year, so just some brief thoughts today. But it is worthwhile to do this because the three temptations that the devil placed before Jesus basically summarize the most ordinary temptations that we all face. And they are to do with pleasure, pride, and power.
      1. The first was to do with **pleasure**. Jesus was desperately hungry, after His 40 day fast. And the devil suggested that He turn stones into bread. And eating is not sinful. It is actually necessary. The question was: Did Jesus trust His Father to provide for His daily needs? And we have His answer: “*It is written, ' Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'*” Rather than choose the immediate and momentary pleasure of bread, Jesus chose the substantial and eternal pleasure of obedience.
         1. And this should be our response with all ‘pleasure’ temptations. **Proverbs 23:31-32** says, “*Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder*.” And it is the same with sexual temptation and the temptation to gamble. The momentary pleasure will be replaced by bitterness and ruin and regret. So, choose, instead, obedience.
      2. The second temptation was to do with **pride**. The devil said, ‘Come on, Jesus. Jump off the temple and the angels will catch you, and everyone will know for sure that you are the Son of God!’ But this was not the way for the Lord Jesus to reveal His glory; that was the way of the cross and the empty tomb. And so, He replied, “*Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'*”
         1. In other words, do not try and force God to fit into *your* program or *your* timetable or *your* methods. Do not demand a sign from God, as though He owes it to you to perform. And do not neglect church and Bible study and hang out with your Non-Christian friends at places where ungodly stuff is going on, and then pray, Lead me not into temptation. Instead, learn from the Psalmist:

*Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end. Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain! Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways.*

* + 1. The third temptation was to do with **power**. The devil said, ‘Worship me and I will give you all the kingdoms of the world.’ And he did, literally, own all the people of the world at that time, for apart from a handful of Jews, the whole world was mired in unbelief. So, this was a temptation to seek a shortcut to power. Don’t do whatever it is that you came to do; I can give it to you, now! Don’t wait for your Father to give it to you; I can give it to you, now! But Jesus replied, “*Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ' You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.'*”
       1. And Satan is always offering us an easy way out, isn’t he. All that stuff about keeping His commandments? Ha! My way is much easier! If you would just listen to me, you can enjoy every pleasure, and be successful, and be admired. And you can have it all, now!
  1. And we heard earlier that **the devil is a schemer**. He pokes and prods until he finds the weakness or the opening in the armour. Maybe you have no interest in pride or power, but pleasures of one sort or another? Or maybe you have your pleasures are under decent control, but what about pride? Or, what about the desire for power and influence? And maybe what you have under relatively tight control today, might become an opening for him next year or in 10 years?
     1. Indeed, this is why it says in **1 Corinthians 10:12**, “*Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall*.” If King David, the man after God’s own heart, the writer of Psalms, could slide into sexual sin and murder, let us not be foolish enough to think that we could never commit those or any other sins, or too harshly judge those who have fallen into sins like that, and are repentant.

1. And that brings us, fourthly and finally, to this question: **What can *we* do to better resist temptation and the evil one?**
   1. Well, let’s begin with the obvious: And I will put it in the form of a question: **How often do you pray this petition**? Really? How often do you include the words “Lead me not into temptation but deliver me from the evil one” in your prayers? As we noted earlier, it is a prayer that your Father in heaven loves to answer. But you must ask it of Him, regularly, daily, even hourly!
      1. John Piper once said, “I suppose, in my little prayer nook in my study, where I have a little prayer bench that I built in 1975, as I’ve bent over that bench thousands of times, the most common prayer has been, “Lead me not into temptation. Deliver me from evil. Keep me. Keep me. I feel so utterly unable to do the next thing. Help me … I cannot do it.”
      2. And we too must ask our Father, regularly, for spiritual protection.

* 1. But the Lord Jesus taught us another strategy for resisting temptation in **Matthew 5:30**: “*And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell*.” In other words, take radical steps to limit your exposure to temptation. And so, for example, if that means just using a brick phone, so that you cannot use it for pornography or gambling or wasting hours of time, just use a brick phone. And if that means you must run out of the room to escape sexual temptation, like Joseph did, with Potiphar’s wife, then run away. You have heard me quote these words from John Owen many times: “Be killing sin or sin will be killing you.”
  2. And then, as we have also repeatedly said throughout this sermon, **ask the Lord Jesus to help you resist temptation**. And I mean, literally, do this! In the moment of temptation, cry out: “Lord Jesus, you know what I am facing. Please give me your grace and mercy to resist this temptation!
  3. Earlier in the sermon I quoted **1 Peter 5:8**, which says, “*Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*” Well, wrapped around that declaration are very helpful instructions in regards to resisting temptation. And there could easily be a sermon on each of these, but today we can only be brief:
     1. The first is: “***Be*** ***sober-minded****.*” And this is the opposite of being drunk, which is when your thinking is unclear, and you do whatever you feel like. So, this is a call to be disciplined and discerning; to not do whatever you feel like or what everyone else is doing. And it is our exposure to the word of God that deepens and strengthens our sober-mindedness. Think of **Romans 12:2**: “*Do not be conformed (or made like) … this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that … you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect*.” (Hold up Bible) And this is where we learn the will of God.
     2. The second instruction is: **“Be** **watchful**.” And Peter was surely thinking here of Jesus’ instructions and example in the Garden of Gethsemane. You see, the hours before the cross were, for Jesus, the most intense moments of temptation. The devil did all He could to turn Jesus away from the cross. It is why Jesus *needed* to pray. But He also knew that the evil one wanted to tempt the disciples. And he said to Peter, “*Peter, Peter, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat*.” So, “*watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation*.” But did Peter pray? He did not; he fell asleep instead. And do you remember what Peter did soon after that? He denied Jesus, three times. So, Peter knew what he was talking about here, from bitter experience.
        1. C. S. Lewis has a book called ‘***The Screwtape Letters***.’ They are letters from a senior devil to a junior devil about different temptation strategies. It is an excellent insight into the devil’s schemes. And Lewis said that what scared him most about the book was how easy it was to write. But it is a book that every Christian does well to read.
        2. If we know the strategies of the devil, we will be watchful; we will expect temptation and better able to resist it.
     3. But Peter also concluded his instructions regarding the attacks of the devil with these important words: “***Resist him****, firm in your faith*.”
        1. And you *can* resist him, beloved. By God’s grace, and looking to Christ, and by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, **James 4:7** says, “*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you*.”
        2. In **1 John 2:14**, John describes believers as those who have “*overcome the evil one*.” And then in **1 John 4:4**, he explains why this is so: “*Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world*.” Is the devil powerful? Yes. But the Lord Jesus Christ has crushed his head! And the Spirit of Christ lives within you!
        3. So, you are not a powerless pawn in the devil’s hand. By faith in Christ, you can resist him.

* 1. And then, as we have already noted, when you do succumb to temptation, **do not despair**. The devil will tempt you do exactly that. He will whisper in your ear: How can you be a child of God? Look what you have done, again! But your Father says to you: “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*.”

Brothers and sisters, young people and boys and girls, you are in a battle. You have spiritual enemies, both from without and within. But “*He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world*.” So, pray for spiritual protection, regularly: “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.” Amen.