

The Favorite Weapon Of Sin Luke 23:1-25

To say that "temptation" is a powerful and effective weapon used by the adversaries of our soul, the world, the flesh and the devil, is truly an understatement. Temptation is so very powerful. And because "temptation" is so powerful and so effective, it is the most favorite of weapons used by our adversaries.

But why would that be so? Why is "temptation" so very effective? Why does it work so well?

The answer is a simple one. Temptation is the one thing that promises to bring to each of us the thing that we want most. Whatever that may be!

And oh dear friend, we really do all want things. It's part of our basic nature. And we not only want things, we want what we want when we want it. And that is usually now. Now! And "temptation" most often promises us that we can have it when we want it. Now!

And so, for that reason, "temptation" works! It works! Not because it actually does bring us what we want when we want it. But the promise alone is often powerful enough to cause us to move on ahead with our desires.

And that is what we see taking place all throughout our world, our culture, our homes, and especially within our own souls, people wanting what they want and reaching to have it . . . at any cost!

And the desire to have it "now" is a driving pervasive force, creating turmoil wherever that desire touches. And "turmoil" surely is rampant in our world today, filling every quarter, our homes, our neighborhoods, our culture and certainly all out into all the powerful nations around our world.

And again yes, "temptation" and "sin" is at the heart of every form of that turmoil, reaping destruction in its path as it flows throughout our world.

And it's not hard to recognize the sinful weapons of temptation that those purveyors of turmoil like to use most. Beginning with the powerful governments of our world as they brandish their latest weapons of war.

Also, our political parties promise to use their influence to pass laws that will give people the things they want most. And so they do!

And also, over these recent years, the members of our Social Media have developed a favorite name for themselves as they promote their causes. They call themselves “Influencers”, “Influencers”. And so they are! They really are!

But our National Press and our Broadcast Media, have been using those same methods all along, just without bragging about it, all seeking, with every word they speak, to “Influence” you and me to not only believe the words and concepts they are preaching to us, but even more, tempting us to also join with them and to “act on” their influence.

And none of these “influencers” like to think of themselves as being “tempters”, the ones who are furthering the causes of the sinful temptation and turmoil. And also, no, most of those “influencers” don’t use the word “sin” as they try to “fix” the problems that cause the turmoil. They prefer to stay away from that word and instead call our problems by some other more acceptable name.

But oh dear Christian, for those of us who have Christ as our Savior and Lord, we do know what is at the heart of all of the turmoil of this world. It really is sin! Sin! And at the heart of most every sin is sin’s favorite weapon and that is “Temptation”, “Temptation”!

But where am I leading too with these thoughts today and what do the things being said have to do with today’s passage that we’ll study here in Luke chapter 23? It is this!

It is to say that yes, no matter the day or the time, or the people involved, whether it be the people in the day of the Lord Jesus or it be the people of our day, all of the behaviors and influences and concepts being shown to us in all that is taking place are reaching to do the same thing. They are reaching to “influence us” to tempt us” and to “cause” us to believe what they want us to believe and to do what they want us to do, and ultimately to “sin”, to “sin”!

All of this is to say that as we read and consider the words of our scripture passage here in Luke chapter 23, it is so very easy to see that “temptation” is the first and primary weapon being used both in and by each of these purveyors of

evil turmoil. Each of them wanting what they want and wanting it now, Judas, the Scribes, the Pharisees, the Chief Priests, Pilate, King Herod, and on and on. All of them using “temptation” to cause them to move on ahead to make it happen “now”, “now”.

Listen as I read these words! Verse 1,

¹ Then the whole company of them (the Chief Priests, the Scribes and the Pharisees) arose and brought him (the Lord Jesus) before Pilate. ² And they began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.” ³ And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.” ⁴ Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no guilt in this man.” ⁵ But they were urgent, saying, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.”

⁶ When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. ⁷ And when he learned that he belonged to Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. ⁸ When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. ⁹ So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer.

¹⁰ The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him.

¹¹ And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate. ¹² And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.

¹³ Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, ¹⁴ and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. ¹⁵ Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. ¹⁶ I will therefore punish and release him.”

¹⁸ But they all cried out together, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas”— ¹⁹ a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. ²⁰ Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, ²¹ but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!”

²² A third time he said to them, “Why? What evil has he done? I have

found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him.” ²³ But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. ²⁴ So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. ²⁵ He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will. (Luke 23:1-25)

Though as we read this passage, the word temptation is not mentioned, temptation clearly does underpin all that has been taking place, within every conversation and every behavior of most every person mentioned here, with each one of them willfully giving in to it.

May I also mention that such is the way of temptation! It has a way staying unseen to the natural eye, unspoken with the voice, but always present and always at work within the hearts of men and women, seemingly almost to have a life of its own.

And temptation seems most always to follow along the lines of each person's individual weaknesses and inclinations. If a person has a desire for money, as with Judas, then that is where temptation is most at work.

And it is the same for a person who has a hunger for power or position or recognition, as with the Chief Priests and other Jewish leaders. Or if it be immoral behaviors as we know about King Herod, and on and on. With each desire of the heart, temptation seems always to be eagerly at work.

In that way, temptation seems to be much on the same order as the way that God described “sin” for us in Genesis 4. There He said to Cain as Cain was about to go out and kill his brother Abel, Cain “sin is crouching at your door and it desires to have you, but you must master it.

Those words give us the understanding that “sin” has a life and a power all its own. And temptation seems also to have its own power. And it seems always to be crouching behind every door, ready instantly to spring out and ensnare its prey.

And so it was here, within each of these men. And not just among Jesus' accusers. Temptation was also busy at work even within the hearts of Jesus' own disciples.

Recall that even while Jesus and the disciples were still in the upper room, temptation was lacing its way through each of their hearts and their conversations as they argued about who would be greatest among them when they would come into God's Kingdom.

The most obvious temptation though could be seen in Judas! How long Judas was being tempted within his soul, we can't know. But we are able to see those moments when satan entered into Him and how he gave in to satan's temptations,

Then next, we find Peter boasting about how he would go anywhere and suffer anything for Jesus,

And then later, we see Peter being tempted by a spirit of fear and denying that he even knew Jesus.

Then, as the chief priests and scribes took Jesus into custody, we see their own brand of temptation guiding their behavior. These men who were called to be the keepers of the oracles of God, men who were supposed to be of the highest order of moral decency, being overcome by their desires and obsessed with the need to have Jesus crucified,

Then next, we see the temple guards and soldiers, all giving in to cruel and inhumane emotions as they beat and mocked and mistreated Jesus, behavior that was completely uncalled for,

And then the crowds of local people, some of them no doubt part of the same crowd that had welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem a few days earlier with shouts of "Hosanna in the highest", now with only a thirst for blood in their hearts they were crying out along with the chief priests for Jesus to be crucified,

And then, Pilate, though he himself found no fault in Jesus, tempted by perceived threats eventually gave in and ordered that Jesus be crucified.

And another thing that we notice about "temptation" is that it likes to appear to be innocent, as we see with Pilate in another of the Gospels when he washed his hands.

Again, please note that the word “temptation” is not mentioned even once within these accounts, but again, such is its way. Temptation does not want to be noticed and it does not announce itself. It instead prefers to remain unseen, cleverly hidden within the basic fabric of the things that men think and say and do, patiently waiting for its opportunity to foment up to the surface, and to cause behavior and conduct that a person will surely later regret.

The words of James chapter 1 come to mind. Listen! Verse 14 . . .

¹⁴ . . . 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. (James 1:14-15)

Deep within each of our souls we have motives and agendas hidden there, desires that may lie dormant for long periods of time. But when given the opportunity, those desires will surely well their way up to the surface, erupting into behaviors and temptations that are sometimes so wrong and so cruel that even we are surprised by our behavior. Thankfully though, our Lord does have a remedy for some of those behaviors.

He reminds us in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that,

¹³ No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Please do note that implicit within these words is a warning that we must be careful about the use of the word “they”, that temptation does not just take place in those “other people”, but rather, temptation is “common to every man and woman”, to each one of us, to you and me, and to be sure, it is actually at work even at this very moment.

But thankfully, as these words tell us, God is faithful to always do His part and He will warn us ahead of time that temptation is at work.

How does God give us those warnings? He warns us first through His word, and those warnings are recorded for us all through these scriptures, presented to us within the failures and sinful behaviors of the men and women that we read about, beginning with the accounts of Adam and Eve as they were tempted

and gave in to it, then on to Cain as he was about to murder Abel, and on and on.

And then here with these temptations that we see taking place in Jesus' disciples and the chief priests and Pilate, each of them with desires held deeply within their souls that somehow work their way to the surface into the many forms of sin.

And yes, temptation does continue even to this very day, within each of our personal circumstances and behaviors, each of us being influenced and sometimes even controlled as those temptations well up within us.

But may I also add one other way that God gives us warning about temptation. And this form of warning is immediate to every temptation. It comes through the "still small voice" of God's Holy Spirit.

Folks nowhere are these words of 1 Corinthians 10:13 more needful and effectual than at the immediate moment of temptation. And that is when God is most faithful to warn us that we are about to succumb to temptation.

But please understand . . . we must have ears that are willing to hear!

May I say that again! If we ever hope to hear the "still small voice" of God's Holy Spirit, then we must first have ears that are desirous of hearing His warning. God is always willing to do His part, but we must be willing to do ours also, and that is to hear.

And one thing further . . . once we hear God's quiet voice speaking to us, we must immediately turn and flee. Just as Joseph immediately got up and ran when he was being tempted by Potiphar's wife. Whatever the temptation that comes to us, we must immediately respond to God's warning and flee . . . run from it!

May I please repeat these warnings one more time dear Christian, because temptation simply is. It is ever-present and it is pervasive. And though we are able to escape its power over us, we must understand that temptation itself is inescapable. Even Jesus was tempted, and not just a little, but in every way, just as each of us are.

So then, we must take all of these warnings to heart and we must be ever-vigilant to seek the covering of God's provisions and His protections. As these words of 1 Corinthians 10:13 assure us . . .

¹³ No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Before we close for today, may we also give a moment's thought to a question that has been in the minds of bible scholars for all of time and is also probably a curious thing to each of us, and that is "why did God allow temptation to be in the first place"? "How did it get here? Did God, who is pure and holy, create such an unholy thing as temptation?"

May I answer that question with the only answer that God has provided to me on such matters. And it is this!

No, God did not create sin in any of its forms. However, for mankind to have the "free will" that is needed for him or her to exist within the activities of human daily life, God did "ordain" that men and women could make choices.

And yes, God did know that because men and women were not Gods and did not have the ability to remain perfectly Righteous and Holy, they would be capable of being tempted and of making wrong and sinful choices.

And all of mankind has done exactly that and continues to do exactly that. When being tempted, we often make wrong and sinful choices.

But thanks be to God, with all this being so, as part of His Plan, He also provided mankind with the Covenant of Grace, that provision that reaches into men and women's souls and provides us with this warning spoken about in 1 Corinthians chapter 10.

But not only that, God also provided us helpless sinners with the "Grace" to repent and to turn from our temptation and sin and to receive the Grace of Salvation that would cancel out all of those wrong and sinful choices that we gave into along our way into His blessed salvation. And praise be to God for His indescribable free gift.

And so then, for each of those mentioned in our scripture passage as they succumbed to their temptations and sins, the disciples, the scribes, the Pharisees, the Chief Priests, King Herod, Pilate, the servants and the soldiers, every one of them who were making their wrong choices, they each were under the same simple rule and provision. "Repent and turn from their sinful behavior and they would receive blessed forgiveness from God and would enjoy eternal life with Him, beginning even at the first moment of their decision. What a blessed provision!

Those words again in 1 Corinthians 10 as we close,

¹³ No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Pray with me.