

TEMPTATIONS ON THE PINNACLE

NO. 689

A SERMON
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“Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”
Matthew 4:5-7

THE clearest and most important exposition of the revelation of God in the inspired Book is the revelation of God in the renewed man. Every Christian will discover, in proportion to his advances in divine knowledge, that the very things which are written in these hallowed pages are written in his own experience.

We never fully understand divine truth until we have experienced it. The diamond of divine promise never glistens so brightly as when it is placed in the setting of personal trial and experience, and the gold of sacred truth is not valued until it has been tried “so as by fire.”

Holy Scripture is full of narratives of temptations. Expect therefore, Christian, that your life will be as abundantly garnished with them as is a rose with thorns. Provision is made in the Word of God for the assaults of Satan from all quarters and in all fashions. Believe therefore most confidently, that the wise provisions of forethought are not made in vain, but will be needed in your own proper person.

You will have to do battle with those spiritual foes which have beset and buffeted other saints in days gone by, and you will be wise to array yourself in those pieces of heavenly armor which proved to be so great a safeguard to them in their seasons of warfare.

This remark that the Word of God is written out again in the life of the Christian, is emphatically true in that part of it which concerns the life of Jesus, for every Christian is the image of Christ, in proportion as he is a Christian. In proportion as the Spirit sanctifies us, spirit, soul, and body, and makes us like the Master, we are conformed to Him, not only in the holiness and spirituality which sanctification produces, but also in our experience of conflict, sorrow, agony, and triumph.

In all points Jesus was made like unto His brethren, and now it remains that in all things His brethren should be made like to Him. The Savior’s public life begins and ends with temptation. It commences in the wilderness in a close contest with Satanic craft, it ends in Gethsemane in a dreadful affray with the powers of darkness. There are a few bright spots between, but the gloom of the desert deepens into the midnight darkness of the cross, as if to show us that we also must begin with trial, and must reckon upon ending with it.

The victory of our Lord was won upon Golgotha in blood and wounds, amid the blasphemous exultation of His foes, and the victory of the believer will not be cheaply bought. Our crown is not to be won without wrestling and overcoming. We must fight if we would reign, and through the same conflicts which brought the Savior to His crown, must we obtain the palm branch of everlasting victory. Be it so, O Master, only let us be prepared for it, and by Thy grace may we be strengthened, so that we may be more than conquerors through Him who hath loved us.

I shall this morning first of all take you, dear friends, to *look at the temptation itself as we have felt it*. And then, secondly, I shall offer *a few considerations deduced therefrom*.

I. First we are to VIEW THE TEMPTATION ITSELF.

The landscape is colored by the glass through which the observer looks, but still the landscape is really seen, and so in giving you this morning much of that which I have myself been made to endure, I may color our Lord's trial, but you will see it notwithstanding, and the Holy Spirit will show you what is really of Jesus, and what is only mine.

Our trials are sent us on purpose to make us comprehend our Lord's trials, and especially is it so with ministers of the Gospel. Martin Luther was a mighty master in the art of consolation, because there was scarcely a temptation, except that of covetousness, which he had not experienced. Melancthon bears witness of Luther that he was sometimes so tempted of the devil that he appeared to be at the point of death. The sap and strength of his life seemed to be dried up, and his soul was full of heaviness.

After such seasons he would so preach that each of his hearers thought that he was speaking concerning him alone, and wondered whence his knowledge was derived. He learned the art of spiritual navigation from having himself done business upon deep waters of spiritual tribulation. Luther's remark stands true, that prayer, meditation, and temptation, are the three best instructors of the Gospel minister, and since I have been much of late in the last school, I cannot do other than use what I have learned.

Now it may be, while I am describing this temptation of our Lord, or rather our own temptations as they are conformed to the temptations of Jesus, that I may meet the peculiar case of some troubled one who has been long in doubt and darkness, and who may today find light and peace. If it be so the Spirit of God shall be glorified, and it shall be to me a sweet recompense for those gloomy hours through which I have lately groped my way.

I first call your attention to *the place of this temptation*. "Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on the pinnacle of the temple." It was a *high* place and a *holy* place, hence a double danger. It was a *high* place, the temptation could not have acted upon the Savior had He been sitting in the desert or kneeling in the garden, but aloft, above the city, on the towering pinnacle, the foothold was slender, and the fall would have been terrible.

Beneath Him lay a wondrous panorama, the courts of the Lord's house, the streets of the city, the towns and villages of Judea, and the broad acres of Immanuel's land. Little, however, would He care for all these, for His thoughts were concentrated upon the combat within, yet the widened prospect must have added to the sense of elevation, and so have aided the temptation.

Brethren, it is very hard to stand in high places. Those of you who are in humble positions of society may be very grateful for the safety which usually grows out of lowliness. No doubt you envy those who are more known and more wealthy, but if you knew all, instead of envying them you would thank God for the lot which is meted out to you.

I would be afraid to exchange my temptations with any other man, and yet I know my own to be full more than I should be able to sustain were it not for the grace of God and the promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee." It is hard to carry a full cup without spilling some of the contents, when half full you may carry it more carelessly without a slip, but when the golden chalice is full to the brim, beware, thou cup-bearer of the King.

You may walk along the plain, nay, you may leap like the children at their play, you may sport at random where you will, but up along yon narrow knifelike ridge, where awful precipices descend on either side, take care, O traveler, for one slip may be fatal. Look beneath you through the grim mist which hides the depths below, and be deeply grateful for the invisible and omnipotent hand which has sustained you until now.

The remark as to high places does not merely apply to really high places of wealth, or influence, or fame, but to places high for us, comparatively high places of enjoyment and satisfaction. Nor must I exclude holy places from the remark. The mountain may be Tabor, but it is a mountain still. If you are called to the elevated position of one who dwells in rapt fellowship with Christ, there are temptations peculiar even to that happy state of mind.

The pinnacle is none the less a pinnacle because it happens to be the pinnacle of the temple. Nay, let me here note, that it is even more dangerous. The place was not only high but holy. Note how that is

marked in the text. He takes Him to the *holy city* and to a pinnacle of the *temple*—two words, as if to bring up vividly before the reader’s mind the sanctity of the position. To stand in a high place, my brethren, in God’s house is very desirable and very honorable, but oh, it is both responsible and perilous.

Let those beware whom God exalts in Israel. He of whom it is written that it were better for that man that he had never been born was not less than an apostle. He who kept the bag and was the intimate friend of Christ is that man whose damnation surpasses all others in its flaming terrors.

It is a very delightful thing, no doubt, to minister to a large congregation, and to be pastor of a numerous flock. It is a very good degree to earn to be an officer of the Christian church. It is no small privilege to be permitted by the pen or by the tongue to edify multitudes of saints, but alas, the high places even of God’s temple are dizzy places, and lofty positions in the church are sites where temptations attack us which would be unknown to us if in the humble obscurity of a retiring piety we were to lie down in green pastures and feed beside the still waters.

After all, if I might be allowed to envy anybody it would be the position of John Bunyan’s Shepherd, singing, as he feeds his flock in the valley—

*“He that is down need fear no fall,
He that is low no pride;
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide.”*

What think you, brethren, were the temptations which came upon the Savior on account of His position on the high and holy place? We frequently forget when we are speaking of the Savior that He was most truly man. He was divine without mitigation of the royalty and splendor of deity, but He was man, altogether such as we are, so that He felt as you and I would have felt in a similar condition. How then did He feel? Did He not tremble with fear of falling?

Standing there and looking down, I believe the natural fear came over Him that He must fall, and that falling, He would stain the battlements of the consecrated place, and crimson the house of God with His own blood. You will think me singular in imagining that the Savior could be the subject of such feelings, but was He not a man, and what man would feel otherwise? It is natural that a shivering emotion of dread should creep over anyone standing in so lofty and unprotected a position.

Now this is a temptation—a temptation to which God’s servants who are put upon the pinnacle of the temple will find themselves frequently subject. But is it a fault to be afraid of falling? Yes. No. It is no fault to be afraid of falling, else the Savior would not have felt it. He was holy and consequently no sinful emotion could cross His breast. But there is a something growing out of the fear of falling which is very faulty, namely, the temptation to do something desperate in order to escape from the position which is so full of peril.

It is right for me to be afraid of falling into sin. It is not right for me either to mistrust God’s grace which will sustain me, or to run to foolish means in order to escape from the particular peril in which I happen to be involved. Jesus did not doubt His Father’s care—He could not, for He was perfect, but He did tremble because of the danger in which He was placed. He must have done so, because He was a man of like passions like ourselves.

Now, brethren, may I picture some of you lifted up to such a position? Either in wealth, or in honor, or in communion, or in some way, you are lifted up into a sphere of danger, and you begin to say to yourself, “Suppose I should fall! Oh, suppose I should disgrace my profession, and bring dishonor upon the cause of Christ! What if my foot should slip and I should defile the church of God with the blood of my eternal ruin and of my present disgrace.”

I can understand that thought crossing your mind without any sin being involved in it, nay, with even a good resolve springing from it, namely, to walk humbly with your God. But I can suppose it to be the

fulcrum upon which Satan may plant his lever, and begin to work so as to bring you into a very sadly weakened and wretched state of mind.

Oh brethren, when I see others falling from their pinnacles, when I feel my own head grow dizzy, when I look down and see the ruin that must come upon every man who apostatizes from the faith, when I look up and see the holiness of God, and then look down and feel the attractions of the world enticing and drawing me down to destruction, I can but tremble. I cannot do otherwise, and I cannot understand the man who would not. If you are placed in such a position you *must* feel it, it is not possible for you to escape from the fear lest, after all, after having been honored and favored you should become a castaway.

This seems to me to be the reason why the devil put our Lord on the pinnacle of the temple. The first effort of the devil was to sap the foundations of the Savior's strength with *a doubt*. The devil whispers to Him, "*If—if* thou be the Son of God." Faith is the Christian's strength. He who doubts not staggers not. Unbelief is the source of our chief weakness. As soon as we begin to distrust, our feet begin to slide. Hence, Satan, knowing this, injects that cruel and wicked suspicion, "*If—if* thou be the Son of God."

Notice the point of attack, it was our Lord's sonship. Satan knows that if he can make any of us doubt our interest in the Father's love, doubt our regeneration and adoption, then he will have us very much in his power. How can I pray, "Our Father which art in heaven," if I do not know Him to be my Father? If the dark suspicion crosses my mind that I am no child of His, I cannot say with the prodigal, "I will arise and go unto my Father," for I do not know that I have a Father to go to.

Having a Father, I feel sure that He will pity my infirmities, that He will feel for my wants, redress my wrongs, protect me in the hour of danger, and succor me in the moment of peril. But if, *if* I have no Father in heaven, if I be not His child, then, miserable orphan! what shall I do—whither shall I flee?

Standing on a pinnacle as God's child I shall stand there erect, though every wind should seek to whirl me from my foothold. But if He be not my Father, and I am upon a pinnacle, then my destruction is inevitable, and my ruin will be swift and total. "If thou be the Son of God."

Oh, dear friends, beware of unbelief, those who justify unbelief hold a candle to the devil. I cannot suppose myself doing better service to an ill cause than by excusing you in your unbelief of God, or excusing myself in it. God is faithful, why do we doubt Him? God is true, how can we suppose that He will be false? That we are His children is also true, if we have believed in Jesus. If, having nothing, I have cast myself at the foot of the cross, if, all guilty and defiled, I have seen in Jesus Christ all that my soul can want, then I am one with Jesus, and a joint heir with Him. I must be the child of God, because I am one with Christ Jesus, His only begotten and His well-beloved.

Dear brethren, let me exhort and stir you all up to seek after the full assurance of your sonship with God the Father. Give no sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids, unless you know that you are in the divine family. Remember that doubts here are perilous to the last degree, and most of all perilous to those of you who stand upon the pinnacle. Let those doubt who are in the valley and they bring themselves sorrow, but those on the mountain must not doubt, for it is by faith alone that they can stand, and where to slip will be so destructive, they must take care that their faith is firm and strong.

Thus you see the Savior was first assailed with a malicious and cruel insinuation of doubt. The cunning tempter has paved the way for *the Satanic suggestion*, "Cast thyself down." That advice looks like the most absurd thing that could be suggested. He is afraid of falling, and is therefore bidden to throw Himself down. Ah, but if you do not understand this, it is because you are not acquainted with Satanic machinery.

The human mind oscillates very strangely. Though at first may be driven by main force from left to right, it naturally swings to the left again, returning by sheer necessity to the same point. There have been persons who have starved themselves to death from the fear of being poor and destitute, and have brought on disease by fearing disease. There have been instances of persons who have sought to destroy themselves when condemned, because they dreaded being hanged. What escape from death suicide can offer it were hard to say, but some have tried it.

In a position where I cannot stand, the natural thing is to throw myself down directly. You are afraid as you stand on the brink of the cliff, afraid that you may fall over, and all the while a mad inclination to fall over may steal over you. It is strange, but then we are strange creatures. Though it looks to you as if it would be a very unlikely temptation to a man afraid of falling to say, "Cast thyself down," it is not unnatural, it is consistent with the well-known laws of consciousness that we are often tempted to do the very thing which we are afraid of doing, and to do it in order to escape from it. Cast thyself down, lest thou shouldst fall.

Let me show you the shapes in which this temptation has come to some of us. The minister of Christ is placed in a position where his labors and his troubles are incessant. He is afraid with so much to do and such delicate things to handle, that he may make a mistake, and injure the church which he designs to bless. The dark suggestion crosses his mind, "Give it up, leave the work," that is to say, do the worst mischief that you can do to the church in order to prevent your doing it any mischief!

The same thing happens in business. You have been toiling hard to pay every man his own, to provide things honest in the sight of all men. You have been able to do it until now, but things are, at this moment, very unpropitious. Satan has whispered to many a tradesman, "Throw it up, get out of it! Go somewhere else! Leave it, and flee the country."

Take another case. You are a Christian, and you wish to be an honor to the Christian church. But you live in a family where there is everything uncongenial to your piety. You can scarcely get alone to pray, you certainly never hear a good word from any others of the circle. You have been fighting for God until now, and the enemy is at this moment saying, "Do not try it any longer, renounce your profession, give it all up, go back to the world again," that is to say, in order that you may not dishonor Christ you are tempted to dishonor Him, and for fear lest you should fall, the whisper is, "Fall at once." It is strange, but strangely true!

I thank God for the story of Jonah. That miserable, morose old prophet has ever been a warning to some of us. When God said to Jonah, "Go to Nineveh and preach!" "No," thought Jonah, "I cannot do it. How can I go and preach to such a city? It will not be to my honor." So away he goes to Tarshish. He little knew that in trying to avoid trouble he was running into it. So it is also with us. You want to go to Tarshish to get away from Babylon, that is, you run into the depths of the sea to escape the rivers. You run into the fire to escape from the frying pan.

Should I happen to be addressing a Christian who is passing through this terrible, severe, and fiery ordeal, I would point him to the Savior standing on the pinnacle of the temple, with the suggestion, "Cast thyself down," and bid him imitate Him in standing fast and firm against the desperate foe. "Stand fast in the LORD, and having done all, still stand."

The suggestion to cast Himself down was next *backed up by a text of Scripture*—wicked advice sustained by a foolish argument. "Cast thyself down; because he has given his angels charge over thee, to keep thee." You notice he knocks out the words, "in all thy ways," which limits the protection promised.

The Lord never promises to keep us in ways of our own choosing. If we go into By-path Meadow, we go there without a guarantee of divine protection, for the Word has it, "in all thy ways." Every duty that is required of us, and every path that is mapped out by providence, shall have divine protection accorded to its travelers, but if we go our own road, we have no promise that we shall be cared for.

When the devil takes something away from a text, he generally puts something of his own in its place. He therefore added these words, "lest at any time." His object was to make the text more general than it was—to take away its specialties, to break down its hedges, and to remove its landmarks, and so he says, "to keep thee, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone."

Old Master Trapp has well observed that in his day the king was bound to protect travelers on the King's highway between certain hours, "but," said he, "he did not promise to protect them out of the King's highway, nor did he promise to protect them in it if they traveled at all hours, for instance, at the dead of night." So we have a promise that along the King's highway to heaven no lion shall be there,

neither shall any ravenous beast go up thereon, but the redeemed shall be found there. But if I strike off a path into the wilderness, or go away into the jungle of my own superstition and my own folly, I cannot expect protection, and if I begin to travel *at any time*, choosing my own times instead of waiting for the pillar of cloud, then I am not under the divine protection, nor can I expect it.

Does the text, as you find it in the ninety-first psalm, give you any reason to believe that if you throw yourself down from the pinnacle, God would bring you to the bottom safely? Certainly not. A fair reading of it only shows that God will keep us in the path of duty. And so, dear friends, let us, when Satan tells us a Christian is all right and always safe, go where he may, let us respond to that, that it is true the Christian is safe in the way of duty, and will be kept in the path of God's commands, but he that presumptuously runs in the teeth of God's will, and disobeys the Most High, must look to it lest a lion tear him in pieces.

Brethren, it is a precious doctrine that the saints are safe, but it is a damnable inference from it, that therefore they may live as they list. It is a glorious truth that God will keep His people, but it is an abominable falsehood that sin will do them no harm. Remember that God gives us liberty, not license, and while He gives us protection He will not allow us presumption.

I did know a person once when I was a child, I remember seeing him go into a country wake in a little village where I lived, though he was a professed Christian, going to spend the evening in a dancing booth, and with others drinking as other men did, and when I in my warm zeal said to him, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" his reply was, "I am a child of God, and I can go where I like and yet be safe," and though for the moment I knew not what text to quote to answer him, yet my soul revolted from the man ever afterwards, for I felt that no child of God would ever be so wicked as to take poison in the faith that his Father would give him the antidote, or thrust himself into the fire, in the hope that he should not be burned.

If God sends me trouble He will yield me deliverance from it, but if I make trouble myself I must bear it. If providence permits the devil to set me upon a pinnacle, even then God will help me, but if I throw myself down, and go in the very teeth of providence, then woe unto me, for I give proof by my presumption that the grace of God is not in me at all.

Yet the temptation is not uncommon. Do such and such a thing, your eternal interests are safe, therefore shun God's service, throw up the reins, and let the horses go as they will, God will guide them. Do not touch the tiller, the God of the wind will manage the vessel, do not put your shoulder to the wheel at all, but cry out to God to help you, and sit down and be lazy.

That is the devil's talk, and our poor silly distracted minds too readily drink it in. But if God gives us grace, we shall say, "God helps those who help themselves. God works for those who work for Him, and in the name of God, I set up my banner. Wherever He will call me I will go, though it be through floods and flames, and if He sets me upon the pinnacle of the temple, I will do nothing but stand there till He takes me down, but as to throwing myself down in order to escape, O my Father, my God, by the love thou bearest me, help me to wrestle with this temptation, and make me more than a conqueror through Thy dear Son."

Only one thing more remains to be spoken of while upon the text itself, and that is *the answer which the Savior gave*. He said, "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." I noticed when I was carefully reading this verse over and thinking of it, that Jesus met a promise misused with a precept properly applied. At that moment the precept was worth more to Christ than the promise.

Beloved, there are certain people who love the promise part of God's Word, but cannot bear the precept. We have men among us who when the minister preaches upon a sweet text are greatly delighted, that is savory meat such as their soul loves. But if the pastor expounds a precept of God's Word, they turn upon their heel superciliously and say, "He is a legal preacher."

It is not safe to pick and choose in the matters of divine truth. All hail, ye fair promises! You meet me as the angels met Jacob at Mahanaim. But all hail, fair precepts! You meet me as Nathan met David, and rebuke me for my sins. You also are my friends, and I salute you and am glad to bear you company.

Brethren, we cannot do without a promise, precept, exhortation, and rebuke. The compound of the Scripture, like the powders of the merchants for sweetness and excellence, must not be injured by being robbed of one single ingredient. Love the precept, I pray you, be of the mind of David, who wrote the whole of the one hundredth and nineteenth psalm, not so much in praise of the promises as in praise of the statutes and the laws of God, as he found them given in that part of the Old Testament which it was his privilege to read.

Sometimes a precept is the necessary counteracting principle to guard us from the perversion of a promise. Promises alone are like sweetmeats given to children which when too profusely eaten bring on sickness, but the precept comes in as a healthy tonic, so that you may feed upon the promise without injury.

Brethren, is there one of you who is so false and faithless as to desire to shun God's service and God's love? Hear this, "Thou shalt not tempt the LORD thy God." You do so. You do tempt God. You tempt Him to sanction your sin when you use wrong means in order to escape from danger.

A Christian in business, who is going to stoop to a transaction that is not altogether clean in order to escape from his present pecuniary dilemma, is tempting God, for he asks God to help him, and then uses evil tools to effect escape. Will you tempt God to assist you in defrauding your neighbor? Dare you ask God to aid you in doing what is not strictly upright? Do not dare to do this. "Thou shalt not tempt the LORD thy God."

The Christian worker, who dares to run away from work, and says, "God will take care of me," what is he doing? He is asking God one of two things, either to destroy him, which God will not do, for He is a faithful God. Or he is tempting Him to uphold him and comfort him when he is not in the path of duty, which it would be wrong for God to do, since He cannot give the sweetness of His comfort and the joy of His countenance to a man who would thereby be countenanced and encouraged in sin.

Beware of provoking God to jealousy. Do let your walk be such that the Lord may be honored thereby, and may look down with complacency upon you. Do not run to such shifts as would involve your asking God to assist you in a wrong thing in order to obtain your deliverance. Though there be great depths beneath you, you cannot fall while He upholds. Though others are dashed in pieces, and you can hear the crash of their fearful fall, yet He upholds the righteous.

Though your own brain turns giddy, and you are ready to slip from your foothold, yet the eternal God is your refuge, and underneath you are the everlasting arms. Your extremity of weakness shall be the opportunity of His power, and when you fall back faint and ready to die, then it is that the angelic wings shall be of service, and the cherub-helpers shall bear you up in their arms, lest you dash your foot against a stone.

Only be you very courageous and confident, and say unto the fiend of hell, "Get thee hence, for the God who allowed me to be placed here never did forsake me and never will, and while He is for me I will not fear." What may occur is no business of mine, it rests with Him. It is mine to stand in the path of duty, for thus I shall be in the place of safety.

II. I have said thus much upon the temptation itself, and now in closing I wish to offer A FEW CONSIDERATIONS DEDUCED FROM THE WHOLE.

The first is this. It is a commonplace thought, but it has tasted like nectar to my weary heart. *Jesus was tempted as I am.* You have heard that truth a thousand times, have you grasped it? He was not exempted from any of even the sinful temptations which occur to us. He was tempted to the very same sins into which we fall. Do not dissociate Jesus from yourself. It is a dark room which you are going through, but Jesus went through it before. It is a sharp fight which you are waging, but Jesus has stood foot to foot with the same enemy.

It was a great encouragement to the Macedonians in their weary marches when they saw Alexander toiling always with them. Had Alexander always been riding on Bucephalus when the rest of them were marching, they would have grown weary, but Alexander marched like a common soldier, and when

water was scarce Alexander thirsted with them, and refused to drink of the little water which was reserved as a royal luxury. “No,” said he, “I will suffer with my men.”

They won their battles, and they drove the Persian rabble before them as lions drive a herd of sheep, principally through the personal prowess of Alexander. First to leap into the ditch, first to cross the river or scale the rampart, always adventuring himself for death or glory, every man grew into a hero at the sight of the hero.

Let it be so with followers of Jesus. He stays not in the pavilion when His children are in conflict, He robes not Himself in scarlet apparel like a king at his ease, but He buckles on His armor and puts on His helmet, and above the cry of them who contend for mastery may be heard His cry, “I have trodden down strength.”

Jesus goes so far into the fight that He advances beyond the front rank, and can say, “I have trodden the wine-press *alone*, and of the people there was none with me.” Oh comrades! let us be of good cheer, Christ has trodden the way before us, and the bloody-bedabbled footsteps of the King of glory may be seen along the road which we traverse at this hour.

There is something yet sweeter—*Jesus was tempted, but Jesus never sinned*. Then, my soul, it is not needful for you to sin, for Jesus was a man, and if one man endured these temptations and sinned not, then by the same grace another may do so. I know it seems to some of you beginners in the divine life, that you cannot be tempted without sinning, but believe me, this is not only possible, but I hope attainable by you.

A man may be tempted to run away from the service of God, but he may hate the temptation, and then there is no sin in it to him. If I should meet a thief on the road home today who should ask me to break into a person’s house, I should at once scout the suggestion. Do you think I should sin because I happened to be tempted in that way? Not at all! The sin would lay with the tempter, not with the tempted person who instantaneously rejected the suggestion. If I were to dally with the thief, and say, “How much is to be gained by it? What are your plans? I will go with you if so-and-so,” then I sin, but if I say at once, “How dare you come to me with such a temptation? I loath it,” then I should commit no sin.

Often God’s servants, in their worst and most bitter temptations, are to a great extent free from sin and are to be pitied—not to be blamed. John Bunyan has a famous picture of Christian going through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, when the fiends whispered temptations in his ears. “So,” said he, “I did verily think that these were in my own heart,” whereas they were only temptations of the devil, and not his own, and whereas he hated them, there was no sin in them—to him I mean. Of course, there was sin to the person who made the suggestion, but not to the person suffering it, inasmuch as he stopped his ears against it, and refused to touch it.

Now, Christian, in this you may be encouraged, that you may go through the fiercest possible temptation heated seven times hotter, like Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace, and yet the fire may not injure you, but you may come out with not so much as the smell of fire upon you, though you have trodden in the midst of the glowing coals.

The third thing which comforts us is this, that *Jesus not only did not fall, but He gloriously triumphed*. Satan received a desperate fall and a deep discouragement as the result of this conflict, and as He overcame, so may we. Jesus is the representative man for His people. The head has triumphed, and the members share in the victory. While a man’s head is above the water you cannot drown his body. The head is above the great water-floods of temptation, and we, who are the lower members, are not drowned, nor shall we be. We shall wade through the swelling current, and land safely upon Canaan’s side.

“They feared as they entered into the cloud,” it is said of the disciples on the Mount, but their Master was with them there, and therefore their fears were frivolous. We too are fearing, because we have entered the cloud or are in the midst of it, but our fears are needless and vain, for Christ is with us, armed for our defense.

Brethren, our place of safety is the bosom of the Savior. Perhaps we are tempted just now, in order to drive us nearer to Him. Blessed be any wind that blows me into the port of my Savior's love! Happy, happy, happy wounds which make me seek the beloved Physician, yea, blessed death, which with black wings shall bear me up to my Savior's throne. Anything is good that brings us to Christ. Anything is mischievous that parts us from Him. Come, you tempted, wheresoever you wander, come to your tempted Savior. Come, you cast-down and troubled ones, however much dismayed, come to Him.

*“Though now He reigns exalted high,
His love is still as great.”*

He forgets not the temptations through which He passed, and He is ready to succor and to help you in the same. Ah, but there are some here who do not know Him, some who say, “We do not understand this sermon, for we never feel such temptations.” I can understand why not. You see you have no spiritual life.

The tree planted by the river feels not the ague which breeds in the fen, and lurks in the morass, but put a man there and before long you will see him shivering from head to foot ere long. And the carnal mind, dead in sin, knows not the miasma of temptation which lurks around him, but oh, if you were alive unto God your struggle would begin, and you would cry to the strong for help. My advice to you is that which I gave to the Christian just now, the believer must go to Christ for help, and so must you. There is balm in Gilead, there is a Physician there.

Sinner, if you look to Christ you shall live. Though you stand today upon the pinnacle, for life is such, though death be your dreadful fate, and the fiery lake be your everlasting portion, presume not, dash not yourself further into sin, plunge not into ruin, but lift your eye upwards and say, “My God, my Father, help me. Thou God, the Son who did redeem with precious blood, wash me from my sin, Thou Spirit of the living God, renew me in heart and life,” and it shall be done, for “he that asketh receiveth, he that seeketh, findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

**PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
PSALM 91 AND MATTHEW 4:1-11**

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.