



*Save us during the time of trial
and Deliver us from Evil*

28th February 2021

2nd Sunday of Lent

Main Point:

The sooner we acknowledge times of testing as an opportunity for God to strengthen our faith, greater will be our ability to endure these evil seasons and experience God's salvation.

Slide 1 | Intro | Last Friday afternoon, I received a txt from Branson saying "Mum, can we order pizza tonight?" Then, a few seconds later, "I feel it would be a great way to celebrate the end of a week of tests."

Indeed, that week Branson had had an English test, a Physics test, a Maths test and an Engineering topic test – all in the one week.

Obviously, he felt, his successful endurance through his time of testing deserved a reward! – thankfully, because my Lenten fast did not involve refraining from food, his reward did not represent a temptation for me!

Those of us who have decided to fast from something upon which we depend, during lent – are right in the middle of our 'time of testing'. Certainly, for me, as I enter the second week of no television, there is a constant temptation to flick on the TV, as a way of distracting me from my To-Do list.

As we continue our series on prayer, while walking through the wilderness, it is a highly appropriate week upon which to reflect on a rather perplexing line of Jesus' prayer.

The line is, "Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil".

Before you all put your hand up to say 'Hang on! You missed the two lines about asking God to forgive us as we forgive others!' Let me reassure you, that both Bill and I will focus on these, during our walk in the wilderness.

So, most of you will remember that these words in Jesus prayer, underwent a change.

When I go to share communion to those who can't come to church, I use the traditional language of the Lord's prayer, which says,

'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'

The more you meditate on asking for God to 'lead us not into temptation', the more you realise why this line needed to be changed.

It can easily be understood as suggesting that because God does lead us into temptation, therefore we need to ask him NOT to do that. However, we know from a letter written by James, that God does not tempt us.

"No one, when tempted, should say, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one." (James 1:13)

The important word to note here in Jesus' prayer is the Greek word, *peirasmos*, which can be translated as temptations, tests, trials or even troubles and difficulties.

But, knowing the meaning of this word still doesn't really help us.

Should we be asking God to 'not lead us into testings, trials and difficulties?'

This also seems Scripturally problematic. Only a few weeks ago, we read that after Jesus' baptism, the Spirit *led* Jesus into the wilderness for the purpose of being tested by the devil. (Matthew 4:1).

We know that from the early chapters of the Bible, the Lord tested Abraham when he asked him to sacrifice his son Isaac (Hebrews 11:17).

And our Lenten journey through the wilderness, is specifically designed to remind us of how the Lord led the Israelites into the wilderness of Sinai, for forty days and forty nights, to be tested (see Exodus).

So, in 1975, after much study the English-speaking churches internationally and ecumenically settled on "save us from the time of trial". Not everyone was happy, but it was an agreement.

So, we now ask the Lord to 'save us' during the times of trial.

Let's look a bit more closely at how the Lord answers this portion of our prayer.

Point 1 | Our trials are designed to develop endurance

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he gives Abraham as an example of one who had great faith. He was one who, 'hoped against hope' that he would be as God had promised, the father of many nations.

In verse 20, **"Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger and in this he brought glory to God."** (Romans 4:20)

Let us not forget that Abraham's time of trial involved many temptations, not only as he awaited the birth of Isaac, but especially when God asked him to do the unexplainable, sacrifice his son.

However, in a few verses after the portion we read today Paul writes,

"We can rejoice too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation." (Romans 4:3-4)

So, our trials have a purpose ... we call them 'character building stuff'.

Remember, we talked about Branson at the beginning of today's message. Even though Branson didn't much enjoy his week of testing, never once in his schooling years has he said, *'You know, Mum, it is really strange – today our teacher gave us this thing called a 'test' – and he expected me to be able to tackle questions, without looking at the textbook!'*

He has never identified that being tested was a strange phenomenon. Why? Because he understands that being tested is part of being a student.

Tests are designed to give students (and their teachers) a gauge at how well they have absorbed and applied the knowledge taught in class.

The Apostle Peter actually said something very similar,

Point 2 | Our trials are an appointed characteristic of our discipleship journey

Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. (1 Peter 4:12)

If you are a disciple of Christ, you are a *student* of Christ – disciples adopt the attitude that our life is a learning journey and there are appointed times in which tests are on the schedule.

And sometimes these tests all seem to fall at the same time!

That's why Paul tells the believers at Thessalonica that all disciples of Christ are appointed to walk through times of trial and testing.

"We sent [Timothy] to strengthen you, to encourage you in your faith, and to keep you from being shaken by the troubles you were going through. But you know that we are destined for such troubles." (1 Thessalonians 2-3).

That's a very strong way of saying "these hard times were placed here by God." They didn't happen by accident. In fact, this is the opposite of chance or bad luck.

For the child of God, there are no accidents, only incidents.

There are no accidents with God, only incidents that are appointed by him for our good and his glory.

Everything that happens in the world is either caused by God or allowed by God, and there is no third category. Nothing ever “just happens” and nothing is caused by someone or something outside of God’s control – just ask Job! (see the book of Job).

Perhaps that is why, as early as Constantine, the rhythm of the church year, intentionally designed a period of lent in which we purposefully enter a time of testing and trial, to expose our temptations and the crutches that we so easily rely upon.

Now, let us move on to the third important lesson about times of trial.

Point 3 | Our times of trial are dangerous places with rugged terrain.

Paul knew of the dangers that lurk in times of trial,

“For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless” (v. 5).

How does the devil tempt us in hard times?

First, he tempts us to doubt God’s goodness. He whispers in our ear that God has forgotten us, that he doesn’t care, and that he isn’t good.

Second, he tempts us to retaliate against others with criticism and resentment. This is one of his favourite tools when the hard times involve problems with friends and family members.

Third, he tempts us to give in to despair and discouragement. Perhaps we’re sick and feel as if we’ll never get better again. Or perhaps we’ve just tired and worn out and we feel life is just too hard to keep going.

That’s what Paul feared for the Thessalonians. He worried that under pressure these new Christians would crumble and give up on God.

So, what do you do when our time of trial seems to go on and on – way passed what we ever thought possible? How can we keep our faith strong?

Of course, we regularly pray, 'Lord save and sustain us during our time of trial'.

But, as well, we remember that our times of trial are designed to help us apply all that we have learnt during the good times. They remind us of our discipleship commitment – we are students of Christ, who expect that part of our learning will involve being tested.

Application | Our commitment to be a disciple of Christ reminds us we are students, who are prepared to be tested.

If we forget that we are a student, it is easy to fall into a victim mentality:

We've all met professional victims. They are always talking about how they have been mistreated. But perpetual victimhood dooms you to a life of self-centred misery in which you learn nothing from your trials.

What a difference does knowing you are a student, not a victim, make?

A victim says, "Why did this happen to me?" A student says, "What can I learn from this?"

A victim blames other people for their problems. A student asks, "I see an area of weakness in me, how can I strengthen this weakness?"

A victim believes their hard times have come because God is trying to punish them. A student understands that God appoints hard times in order to help them grow.

A victim spends their days complaining. A student has no time to complain because they're busy listening to the Lord's guidance as to their next steps.

A victim feels so sorry for themselves that they have no time for others. A student focuses on helping others so that they have no time to feel sorry for themselves.

A victim begs God to remove the problems of life so that they might be happy. A student has learned through the problems of life, God alone is the source of all true happiness.

The disciple of Christ has learned the same lesson James learned.

“Count it all joy when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces perseverance, and perseverance hope.” (James 1:2)

It is just not possible to have that kind of attitude as long as you focus on the trial itself. But if you shift your focus to God’s desire to grow you to maturity in your faith, then you can find joy even in the worst moments of life.

So, today as we pray, ‘save us from the time of trial’, let us acknowledge that difficult times are usually the times when God is most at work in our lives, transforming and maturing us to be the disciples who live for his glory and honour.

Some reflection and discussion questions

1. Are you walking through a ‘time of trial’ at the moment? Perhaps in the area of your health, or pain in your body, or feelings of tiredness and lack of purpose? Describe the characteristics of your ‘time of trial’:

2. Did you understand the difference that although His Father led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, God does not tempt us by evil?
3. James 1:12-24 says,

God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. ¹³ And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. ¹⁴ Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away.

Are there specific temptations to which you are vulnerable, at the moment?

In what way are these 'enticing you and dragging you away' from the Way of the Lord?

4. In the past, have you been tempted to fall into a victim mentality? The first step of walking away from a victim mentality is to identify the times where you are succumbed to that attitude. When was the last time, you fell prey to a victim mentality?

5. Ask the Lord to forgive you from the time you fell into this victim mentality, and to 'save you from falling into this valley again.

Look out for the February Prayer devotional → → → → → → → → →

