

Priority Prayer For a New Year

By Mark Raines

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Matthew 6:13
Preached on: Sunday, January 7, 2018

Grace Reformed Baptist Church
1225 North High St.
East Haven, CT 06512

Website: www.grbcct.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/grbcct

Let's open our Bibles at the book of Matthew and chapter 6. Matthew chapter 6 and we're going to read verse 13.

13 And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank You that we can be together tonight and we can remind ourselves that You are a mighty fortress and You are the one that we can run to and we can hide ourselves in You, that You are our refuge, You are the one who protects us and shields us. And Lord, as we embark on a new year now as we think of all that may lie ahead for us, we want to gird ourselves about with Your truth and to strengthen our hearts by remembering the power that we have in our God and Your willingness and ability to help us. And so as we meditate upon this text tonight, we pray it would give comfort and encouragement to us and that, Lord, we would truly receive this word and mix it with faith and that we would lay hold of this for the year to come. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

R. Kent Hughes is a Bible commentator and he tells of a time back in 1962 when he shared an apartment with three friends who were all committed Christians, and all of these men hoped to go into the ministry one day, and in the end they all did, all were still in the ministry at the time of his writing this book apart from one, actually the one he was the closest to, and he recounted how there were times when he'd spend all night in prayer with this friend of his praying over a map of the world, things like that. Well, eventually their callings took them to different places and Hughes went into the ministry and his friend went to work as an evangelist for a national organization. Very difficult ministry it was for him and for his family, and eventually the man left the organization wounded and embittered by the experience. Also had a bad effect on his marriage so that the next thing that Hughes heard from his friend was that he'd left his family and was considering a divorce. As soon as Hughes heard about this, he booked himself a flight that night and the next morning he was on his friend's doorstep at 7 a.m. and spent the rest of that day talking to him and listening with him before flying back to Chicago that night with a promise from his friend that he wouldn't do anything rash. Well, Hughes said a year later he received an engraved invitation to attend the man's wedding with his new wife aboard

the yacht Mia Vida in Huntington Harbor in California. And Hughes takes up the story, he says, "Mia Vida means 'my life,' and as I read the invitation, I imagined Frank Sinatra singing, 'But best of all, I did it my way.' So long to 22 years of marriage. So long to the wife of his youth. So long to the call of Christ."

And so it was a sobering tale and one that Hughes himself pointed out shows that we should never think that we are too strong. None of us should ever think that, "As for me, I am above the possibility of ever falling." No, not even the Christian worker, not even the man in the pulpit, stands there with a suit and a tie on on a Sunday morning, should ever think that I am above falling. We should never consider ourselves above that in any way. And so with that in mind, that's why a petition such as the one that we have read this evening is so vital for us and so timely for us as well, especially at the beginning of a new year, because who knows what challenges we may face? Who knows what temptations may come our way? And as we've just seen, we are, all of us, every single one of us, very vulnerable to temptation. And so how vital it is that we understand the importance of this prayer and making this line of the prayer our own.

John Newton said of this particular verse, "This petition is seasonable at all times and to all people who have any right knowledge of themselves or their spiritual calling." So there's something that all of us can benefit from in a meditation on this line of the Lord's Prayer. This can be a prayer for the New Year, if you like, and we have three considerations to ponder this evening and the first is the reality. Consider the reality of experiencing temptation, that is to say that temptation is something that is common to man, and not only that, it's something we see running right through the pages of the Bible, from beginning right through to the end. There in the beginning, the opening pages of the Bible, there in the first book of Genesis, there chapter 3, the Bible is only three chapters old and Eve is there confronted by the serpent who says, "Did God really say you should not eat of every tree? You won't surely die. No, wonderful things will happen. Your eyes will be opened and you'll be as gods and it's going to be wonderful." And there she was within just a few days of creation and she was tempted. Abraham. Abraham when he left the land of Canaan went off to Egypt and the king of the land saw his wife Sarah that she was a very beautiful woman and he took a bit of shine to her, and so what happened Abraham was tempted not to trust in the Lord but try and cover his own back and he ends up telling lies. David also faced temptation on the roof of his palace. When he should have been out there on the front line of the battle with his men, sees a beautiful woman bathing and there he is tempted. Elisha faced temptation when he was tired, when he was exhausted, just to end it all. And in the New Testament, there's Peter. Peter thought he was so strong. Peter thought he could never fall. "Well, some of those others, yeah, I wouldn't be surprised if they do. Those lot there, they might deny you, but not me. No, no, no, I am rock steady Peter. I am Mr. Steadfast. I will never deny you, though all others will forsake you, not me, never." And yet within a few hours of all of that big talk, there he was and he denied his Lord three times even with curses.

And so, this is the reality that we see in the Bible, the reality of experiencing temptation. It's right there from the beginning through to the end. In fact, one writer has put it this way, his name's Lohrmeyer. He said this, "We might call the Bible, the Old and New

Testaments, the book of temptations. On its first pages stands the temptation of the first man and woman, and on its last, the prophetic descriptions of the great temptation, which is coming to the whole world to try those who dwell on the earth, Revelation 3 verse 10. Between this beginning and this end there stretches the history of the people of God and with it then histories of individual men of God, and this single history too is a continuous chain of temptations which has gone on since the world was created and will go on until it ends." So you see temptation is like a thread that runs all the way through from beginning to end and it's the same for us too. We will all of us face temptation from the oldest believer to the newest babe in the faith, from the Sunday school teacher through to the college student, the elderly church member, the single mom, the elders and deacons. We will all of us face temptation.

Now, why is that? The one reason is because we all have remaining indwelling sin and we all have sin natures and James chapter 1 verse 14 tells us the power of sin remains within us and that can draw us away and cause us to fall dramatically. So there is this potential within. It's like gunpowder. It's like a powder, a mini powder-keg that we carry around in our hearts and as we make our way through this world, every day there are these sparks shooting off and firing in our direction and any one of which, if it finds its mark there, could cause our hearts to ignite in a fireball of sin.

So that's one reason, the sinful nature within. The other is the powerful enemy without and here we're talking about the devil, and our Lord refers to him in the second part of this prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." And the word there in the Greek is in the masculine sense, and so it indicates a person, a being. This is the devil. This is Satan. This is the evil one. And the Bible describes him as the tempter. We see that played out in Matthew chapter 4 with our Lord in the wilderness. He's also specifically described as that in 1 Thessalonians 3 verse 5 as the tempter. Peter says he's the one who goes about like a lion seeking whom he may devour. How does he do that? By temptation. By bringing to us as the tempter different forms of temptation, one after another. He may start with something small and if that doesn't work then he'll work up to something bigger, a more enticing one. Temptation suited to our age and to our situation in life, temptations to which you and I are peculiarly vulnerable and susceptible. To small children it's the temptation to be selfish. Adolescents are tempted to have a smart tongue and answer back maybe in a sarcastic way. Young people are tempted towards sexual immorality. And then as they grow older, it can become the temptation to become bitter and cynical, maybe covetous, maybe envious of what someone else has or what someone else has done in their life. So many different temptations that Satan can bring.

One old Puritan called William Jenkins has said this, "The devil shapes himself to the fashions of all men. If he meets with a proud man or a prodigal man, then he makes himself a flatterer. If a covetous man, then he comes with a reward in his hand." Listen to this, "He hath an apple for Eve, a grape for Noah, a change of raiment for Gehazi, a bag for Judas. He can dish out his meat for all palates. He has a lace to fit every shoe. He hath some to please all conditions." So that's the way he operates. He has a lace for every shoe, a temptation for every person, and he makes it all seem so attractive as well. "You really have to do this. You've got no choice. Look at the situation you're in. There's no

way out. There's nothing else you can do. You have to do this. And besides, even if you do it, it'll be all right. No one will know. No one will find out."

Perhaps you remember William Carey. When he was a young man, before he was converted, he worked as an apprentice shoemaker in a store for a man called Mr. Nichols. And it was Christmas time, and this was the time when the apprentices had to go around and collect the money from the other tradesmen in the town and they would usually get a tip for doing so. And young William Carey went to the home of the ironmonger, and the ironmonger saw William Carey, saw he was a young boy, thought, "Ah, let's play a little trick on him," and he got a counterfeit coin and he gave it to Carey and he thought, "Well, I'll tell him about it afterwards." And so William Carey went away and he looked at what he'd given him. He saw it was a counterfeit coin. So that was no good to him and so he thought, "What I'll do is I'll swap it over with Mr. Nichol's money bag. I'll just swap it over and take a real coin for myself. He'll never know." But then after Christmas when Mr Nichols happened to bump into the ironmonger, the ironmonger said to him, "Oh, did William enjoy my little trick with the coin?" And then Nichols realized he had the coin in his money bag and saw what William Carey had done and it was a small village and soon everybody knew about this thing and William Carey was mortified as to what had happened. But you see, that's the wile, that's the craft of the devil, isn't it? "He'll never find out. You can get away with this."

This is what he's all about, continually plotting and scheming and designing temptations for us. Maybe you've experienced one already this year. The year's only seven, eight days old, isn't it? Or maybe he has one prepared for you for this year, personalized, hand-crafted, tailor-made temptation that he's put together specifically for you, my Christian friend, to bring you down, to destroy your Christian testimony. And so we need to watch out. We need to be ready for this. We need to be armed. We need a prayer like this that our Lord is teaching us here to pray. So that brings us to a second point. That's the reality of experiencing temptation. Now consider the difficulty in understanding temptation and by that I mean the word, temptation. There's a difficulty we have when we look at this prayer. "Lead us not into temptation," but surely God would never lead us into temptation we say, and our mind goes to James chapter 1 verse 13, where it says, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempts he any man." And so there it is, it's in the book of James. God doesn't tempt anyone. And so if it says that there, then why do I need to pray, "Lord, lead me not into temptation? God isn't going to tempt me anyway." What's the answer to that? The problem we have with that is our understanding of the word temptation, because it's a word that in the Greek can have two meanings. It's a word that can be used to describe temptation and allurement and enticement to sin, but it's also a word that can be used to describe a test or a trial, something that's designed to prove the quality or the worth of something. The word can mean that too. In fact, that's the way that it's more often used in Scripture to describe a trial or a test, and so does that mean to say then that we have to pray, "Lord, do not lead me into a trial. Lord, don't lead me into any testing situation." It can't mean that because trials and tests aren't of themselves necessarily bad things. Test is actually a good thing. Boys and girls, may not seem like a good thing, but a test at school is actually good. It forces you to study. It shows you actually what you know about a

subject. Tests and trials aren't necessarily bad things. Quite the opposite, in fact. In the Bible's view, the Bible says trials are good things. "Count it all joy, my brethren, when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

So that's what trials do, spiritually they're very beneficial for producing all kinds of gifts and graces which otherwise we may not produce. Job, after going through that experience of deep trial, says, "After he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold." So trials in and of themselves are not necessarily bad, they have productive, positive purpose in our lives. Temptations, on the other hand, are not viewed in the same light. Temptations can allure us and entice us to sin and so that's why we need to be so prayerful and so careful when we are going through a time of trial, because trials in this life can easily become, to us, temptations. One is because of our sinful nature. James chapter 1 verse 14, we can quote that again, "Every man is tempted," not by God, "every man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed." So it's our own hearts, this powder keg that we carry within us, our own sinful nature gravitates towards sin and makes us very vulnerable in trials. But then the other reason is also the devil. The devil, that's why Jesus links the two, temptation and the evil one. He puts them there in the same verse because it's the devil's business and his preoccupation to turn trials into temptations. When he sees a trial coming upon us, he then begins to work overtime. He goes into overdrive, as it were, to turn that trial into a temptation. Like Israel in the wilderness, when the water supply ran out, they came out of Egypt, and there they were. They had no water for three days, and they found water. It was so bitter they couldn't drink it. It was a trial to teach them to look to the Lord and to rely upon him. But what happened? It became a temptation to them because of their own sinful hearts and maybe the devil at work there and they begin to grumble and murmur and complain. Job, God sent that trial into his life to purify his faith, to refine him, but immediately Satan gets to work there and is tempting him to deny the Lord and destroy his testament. Or think about the Lord. The best example of all, this is Matthew chapter 4 and Jesus is sent into the wilderness. You look at that verse, if you have time, you can look up later on Matthew chapter 4, verse 1, read it. Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert. God sent him into the desert to be tempted by the devil, it says. Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. God sent Jesus into the wilderness to prove the quality, to show that he is the Redeemer, the mediator. But when he was there, the devil came and began to turn that situation into a temptation to try and make him to sin.

And so that's the challenge that we face in life, situations ordained by God, sent by God to produce spiritual good in our lives can, because of the sinfulness of our own hearts, and because of the enticing, tempting work of the devil, those situations can become situations of temptation. Imagine a man who experiences a time of financial challenge. It's an opportunity for him to prove the Lord and prove his faithfulness in that situation. He might, because of the sinfulness of his own heart and the devil, be tempted to steal. Or a person who falls into depression may be tempted to turn to drink or to drugs. Or our children become prodigals and turn away from the Lord, a test to see if we will maintain our prayerfulness on their behalf can become a temptation to complain about the church, moan about the pastor, "He didn't spend enough time with them." Those kind of things,

something that comes to us from God as a trial can become to us a temptation because of the pull of sin and the power of Satan.

So what to do then? We've seen the reality of experiencing temptation, the difficulty in understanding temptation, now finally think about the strategy for dealing with temptation. How do we cope in the face of a powerful foe and the spiritual powder keg of our own hearts? What strategies should we employ? One very immediate one is a very practical one, what we could call even a geographical one. I remember reading some words by an alcoholic, former alcoholic, he used to be in AA, and he talked about how people who belong to that group, they will sometimes do what they call a geographical, that is to get themselves away from the temptation of having a drink they just get themselves out of that place or out of that town or away from those companions who lure them back into that. He says, we do a geographical. There's actually good common sense and very biblical, isn't it, as well? You think about the best example is Joseph, isn't it? In Potiphar's house, when Potiphar's wife comes over and she's trying to lure him and all of that and Joseph, he can't get out of there fast enough. You cannot see him for dust. He does a geographical. That's the one way.

Here our Lord is showing us that the spiritual and the prayerful and it's to pray in this way, "Lord, lead us not into temptation," not, "Lord, don't ever lead me into a difficult trying situation." No, those are needful and beneficial for our spiritual lives but, "Lord, don't ever lead me into a trial which because of my own sinful propensity and because of the devil's own powerful tempting capacity because of the combination of those two things could be too much for me. I could be overwhelmed. I may be overcome by that. Don't lead me into that." Now that little word "into" there it's an interesting word. In the Greek it's a word which the scholars tell us has the meaning of "into the power of" or "into the grip of; into the hands of," and that's what Jesus is teaching us to pray. Not that we be kept from all trials but that we be kept from falling into the tempting power, the hold, the grip of them. A bit like being in a boat in a storm. You want to stay in the boat. You don't want to fall over the side into the storm, into its hands, into its power. "Keep me from falling overboard into the grip of that temptation." Jesus prays this way for his disciples. John chapter 17 verse 15, "Father, I ask not that you take them out of the world, but while they're in the world, you keep them from the evil one." That's the prayer here. Not that we would be immediately zapped out of the world and its trials, but rather we'd be preserved from the power and the hold of the devil who could tempt us to our own destruction in it. That's what he's praying here. Don't let them fall into the hands of, into the grip of the evil one. That's the prayer that Jesus is teaching us to pray.

John Calvin in his "Institutes," he puts it this way, "To both these kinds of temptations which assail us, whether kindled within us by our own concupiscence or presented to us by the craft of Satan, we pray our heavenly Father not to permit us to yield, but rather to sustain and raise us up with His hand, that strong in His might we might be able to stand firm against all the assaults of our malignant enemy, whatever imaginations he may inject into our minds, and also that whatever is presented to us, on either quarter we may convert it to our benefit. Our petition therefore is that we may not be overwhelmed and

conquered by any temptations, but that we may stand strong in the power of the Lord against all adverse powers that assault us."

So that's the prayer here. It's an awareness of our own weakness and an awareness of the power of the devil and so we pray, "Lord, lead me not into temptation, into a situation of trial that could easily become a temptation for me. Lord, help me. Deliver me." So you lose your job and it's a trial to see if you really do trust the Lord, and yet in that it could become a temptation to hate your boss or maybe say bad things about the company. You have a health problem, it could be a time for spiritual growth, extended prayer and study but also you could become embittered and angry at God. Or maybe a close family member is taken away and spiritually the design is to cast you upon the Lord that the Lord alone would become your refuge, but in that situation, the devil goes into overdrive and says, "Why would God do that? Why would he take someone like that away from you? He doesn't really love you. If he loved you, he would have kept that person for you." The financial challenge comes into our life to teach us to trust Jehovah-Jireh and yet it can become a temptation to cheat or steal or gamble. There are so many ways that we can experience this and so you see how needful this petition is, as we set forth into a new year, how vital it is that we pray every day, "Lord, lead me not into temptation. Lord, keep me from being tempted beyond what I'm able to bear. When I'm in that situation, Lord, would You, as You promised in Your word, make for me a way out." J. C. Ryle puts it this way, "This petition teaches us that we are liable at all times to be led astray and fall. It instructs us to confess our infirmity and beseech God to hold us up and not allow us to run into sin. We ask Him who orders all things in heaven and earth to restrain us from going into that which would injure our souls and never to allow us to be tempted above that which we are able to bear."

And so this is the way that we are to pray. This is the way we should come to God. This is a prayer we know will be answered by God. In fact, I don't know if you've ever thought about this, maybe that's the reason why you haven't always had some of the things that you've wanted in life, the great job, the big career change, big amount of money in your bank accounts or a relationship with some particular person at some point in your life. You know, you name it. You could fill in the blank for yourself there, can't you? Maybe that's the reason why that particular thing never happened, that door never swung open for you. It wasn't that God didn't answer your prayer, it was that that was the way that God answered your prayer. He shut that door in your face. He didn't allow you to go through that door there for this very specific reason that we find in this petition, because he knew had he opened the door, had he allowed you to go through that door, it would have led you straight into the power of a temptation, which would have been too much for you. That's very often the reason.

And so we know God answers this prayer, perhaps we've seen this in our own lives, perhaps you can relate to something there. But of course the ultimate reason we know God answers this prayer is from the life of our Lord himself. There in Gethsemane, he faced temptation, the last temptation, the final, the greatest temptation of all, to turn away from the cross, to avoid the suffering and the pain and the forsakenness of the cross. That was a powerful, powerful temptation. You can imagine how the devil came to him with

all his powers of cunning and wile and tried to show him how reasonable, how rational that would be to turn away from the cross. And yet there our Savior prayed and he agonized. He prayed there in the garden and he was able, wasn't he, he was able to overcome that temptation and to do all that the Father would have him to do and so we can be sure that the same help that our Lord received will be made available to us, come to us in our hour of temptation. There'll be help for us in prayer because we have the Lord Jesus as our merciful high priest, the one who has been tempted in all points such as we are and yet without sin. And we know he's now our great high priest who has gone up on high and he will present this prayer when we pray, he'll present it to the Father so we can have confidence when we come to the throne of grace that we will find mercy and grace to help in time of need.

There's a story told from the days of the English Reformation and there were two men who were condemned to burn at the stake by Bloody Queen Mary and one of the men was very bold and was sure that when he went to the flames there would be no danger, he would stand firm. The other man was a much more fearful fellow, he was terrified of the physical pain and felt sure that as soon as he felt that pain he would recant and deny his Lord and so he begged the other man to pray for him. The other man chided him and said he should have stronger faith, but when it came to the events, the man who had been so bold, actually he recanted at the first sight of the flames and he was released and apparently went away and lived the life of an apostate, while the fearful, trembling man who all night was praying, "Lord, lead me not into temptation. Deliver me from the evil one," when the moment came, he stood firm. He died a martyr's death and brought glory to God amidst the flames.

It's a powerful and effective prayer and that's the way that we're to pray as we enter into another year with who knows what temptations may befall us this year. We as individuals, as believers need to pray, "Lord, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."