

## TEMPTED OF THE DEVIL

The Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches includes six churches in Ukraine. Ten days ago, Volodymyr Mykyta, pastor of Church Covenant of Grace, in Ukraine, sent the following message to the elders of the communion:

brothers shells fell 10 km from our house. what is happening is the beginning. They hit military targets. Then they plan to hit infrastructure facilities. there is a lot of anxiety in the city. preparing for the worst. Please remember us.

The following day, Pastor Mykyta wrote:

They started bombing us from 22:00. We are in shelter. Fighting began on the borders of the city. the tank farm is on fire. me and my family, plus the people in the bomb shelter.

One week ago, he wrote:

Brothers today is one of the decisive nights for the city of Nikolaev. The second day there are fights around the city. Russian troops are sending a lot of military hardware from Crimea. In our city, bridges have been raised and mined. Mer and the governor of the city are ready to fight to the end. Our troops are on the outskirts of the city. Fight heroically. Today in your churches remember us. Today, despite the complexity of the situation, we gathered with people for Divine Service. It was a small miracle for us. And may God have mercy and help us.

In his last communication, sent six days ago, he wrote:

Right now... Orcs from Russia are back again... they are advancing on the city from two sides. We hope in God. We pray for our soldiers. I'm with people from the church and a group of lay people in the shelter. We held a small Bible reading and prayer service. We hope for the mercy and power of the Holy Trinity.

Whatever one may think about the justness of the war, he must have compassion for Pastor Mykyta and his church. The Ukrainian people have many difficult days ahead of them. The faith of the Christians there will be tested. God is faithful, however, and sustains His people in time of testing.

When God called Abraham, He promised to make of him a great nation. Within three generations, Abraham's descendants had become a great people in Egypt. The Scriptures say, "And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them." (Exodus 1:7) They were such a formidable people, that the Egyptians feared they would Egypt. So, the Egyptians made them slaves. They made them slaves, and brutally treated them. (Exodus 1:13, 14) The more the Israelites were oppressed, the more their numbers grew. So, Pharaoh commanded that every newborn Israelite boy should be killed. The Israelites were miserable in their bondage. They cried out to God for relief, and God heard their cries. The Scriptures say, "And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had

respect unto them.” (Exodus 2:24, 25) God appeared to Moses, and told Him that He would deliver the Israelites out of their bondage in Egypt, and bring them to a land that could call their own. (Exodus 3:1–9) The Lord did deliver them, and He did so with a demonstration of His great power. He brought upon the Egyptians ten plagues, and lastly drowned Pharaoh’s army in the Red Sea. He brought the Israelites to Mount Sinai, and there He gave them His law, and made a covenant with them. He promised to be their God, and He obliged them to obey His law.

Although God was faithful to Israel, they were not faithful to Him. At Mount Sinai, they worshiped idols, and, in their journey to the promised land, they regularly grumbled against God. They were neither grateful nor trusting; So, more than once, God destroyed a number of the people because of their sins. When the Israelites came to the border of the promised land, Moses sent in twelve men to reconnoiter. When they returned, ten of them reported that Israel could not take the land from the inhabitants; only Caleb and Joshua dissented. The people believed the majority report, and once again grumbled against God. They were ungrateful, and disregarded God’s past faithfulness to them. Because of their lack of faith, God told them that they would not have the privilege of entering into the promised; only their descendents would. Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years until the unbelieving generation died.

The Book of Deuteronomy relates that, when the Israelites were finally ready to enter into the promised land, Moses reviewed their history with God, and the law He gave them, and he exhorted them to faithful obedience. He warned them that when they prospered in the land, they would be tempted to forget that He prospered them; they would be tempted to forget their need of Him. Moses commanded them to be faithful to the Lord, the one true God, to serve Him only, and not to serve other gods. He said to them:

Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth. (Deuteronomy 6:12–15)

Moses warned them not to test God. He said to them:

Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah. Ye shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes, which he hath commanded thee. And thou shalt do that which is right and good in the sight of the LORD: that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest go in and possess the good land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, To cast out all thine enemies from before thee, as the LORD hath spoken. (Deuteronomy 6:16–19)

Moses told them that God tested them in the wilderness to see which of them would be faithful, and which would not. He allowed them to hunger so that they would learn to trust in God, who had promised faithfully to provide for all their needs. In allowing them to hunger, God taught them that, in order to have life, they needed, not only material food, but spiritual. They needed not bread, but the Word of God. Moses said to them:

All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness,

to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live. (Deuteronomy 8:1-3)

God's people had to learn that God tests man; man does not test God.

In order to remind God's people of these things, God commanded the people to observe the presentation of the firstfruits. When the Israelites settled in the promised land, every man must take the first produce of his harvest, and offer it to the Lord. He should do this as an act of gratitude and sacrifice, understanding that he owes everything to the Lord. He should give the first fruits to the priest, and say to him the following words: "I profess this day unto the LORD thy God, that I am come unto the country which the LORD sware unto our fathers for to give us." (Deuteronomy 26:3) With this confession, he would acknowledge that the Lord is faithful to fulfill His promises. The priest would then take the basket of produce from the man, and set it down before the altar. Then the man should rehearse the history of Israel, saying:

A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous: And the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage: And when we cried unto the LORD God of our fathers, the LORD heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labour, and our oppression: And the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders: And he hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land, which thou, O LORD, hast given me. (Deuteronomy 26:5-10)

With this, the man would acknowledge that his forefather, Jacob, did not dwell in the promised land, the land of plenty, but was a Syrian who had little, and with a few men went to Egypt. There his descendants became a strong people, great in number, just as God had promised. The Egyptians oppressed the Israelites, but the Lord, ever faithful to His promises, heard their cries and delivered them from their bondage and brought them to the promised land, just as He had promised. The man should then rejoice at the Lord's faithfulness to provide for the needs of His people.

King David understood the kind providence of the Lord, and wrote in the Book of Psalms:

I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust... Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. (Psalm 91:1, 9-12)

He that trusts in the Lord will find that He proves faithful, and provides for him all that he needs.

The perfect example of a man who believed that God is faithful, and who was Himself faithful God is the Lord Jesus Christ. When John the Baptist baptized Jesus, Jesus received the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness so that Jesus might be tempted by the devil. Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty

years, and in that time God tested their faith, to determine whether they would trust Him, and obey. God allowed them to hunger, so that they would learn their dependence upon Him for all things. Jesus was in the desert for forty days, and in that time God tested Him, to prove that Jesus would trust Him, and obey. In that time Jesus ate nothing, depending upon God to sustain Him. The devil approached Jesus, and said to Him, "If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread." (Luke 4:3) When the Son of God became incarnate, He did not cease to be God; He did not, however, live as God, but as a man. He did not rely upon His own divine powers, but upon the power of the Spirit of God. For Him to turn stones into bread to feed Himself would be to betray His Father in heaven, to selfishly break His agreement with His Father that He would live in the world as a man so that He might die for mankind. So committed was Jesus to living as a man, and not as God, that He did not answer the devil on His own authority as the Son of God; He rather answered the devil on the authority of the Word of God. Jesus said to the devil, "It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God." (Luke 4:4) Jesus cited from the book of Deuteronomy the passage in which Moses explained to the people that God tested them in the wilderness to know if they had hearts that were true, and to teach them that they had to rely upon God, not only for their material needs, but also for their spiritual needs. Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, understood this better than any other man; He understood it perfectly.

The devil took Jesus up to a high mountain, and there showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment in time, and said to him, "All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine." (Luke 4:6, 7) Satan, the Scriptures say, was the god of this world. Of course, God is ruler over all. Yet, God allowed Satan a certain dominion over the kingdoms of the world. The Son of God came into the world to destroy the works of the devil, to overthrow Satan's dominion and to establish His own. This would come for Jesus at great cost, however; He would have to suffer and die, and become sin so that sinful men might be redeemed. The devil offered Jesus a far easier path, from one point of view. Jesus had but to bow before the devil and confess him as Lord. The act was quite simple, yet it would cost Jesus far more than His life; it would cost Him his soul. Jesus would later ask His disciples, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26) Jesus again answered the devil from the Scriptures, saying "Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." (Luke 4:8) Jesus again cited the book of Deuteronomy, the passage in which Moses warned the people not to forget the faithfulness of the Lord God, and commanded them to worship Him only.

The devil brought Jesus to Jerusalem, and set Him on the highest point of the temple. Then he said to Him, "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. (Luke 4:9-11) Here the devil himself cited Scripture. The devil had twice tested Jesus, and Jesus has proved faithful. Jesus loved His Father in heaven, and He obeyed Him. The devil now told Jesus to test God. He told Jesus to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. If His father in heaven loved Him, if He was true to His word, then He would allow no harm to come to him. Jesus again answered from Scripture. He said, "It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." (Luke 4:12) Jesus again referred to the book of Deuteronomy, the passage in which Moses commanded the Israelites not to test God as they had done at Massah. God has promised to take care of His people; He has not, however, promised to protect any foolhardy person who presumes upon His providence. After Jesus proved Himself faithful, the devil finally left Him.

The devil tempted Jesus so that He would either die, or be disqualified. The Spirit drove Jesus into the desert to be tested so that Jesus might prove faithful. Jesus did prove Himself faithful. He is the only man ever to live a life of perfect faithfulness. By His humble obedience, He proved Himself qualified, not only to redeem the world, but to rule it.

Jesus is not only the Christian's Lord and savior, however. He is also an example to follow. Saint Peter wrote to Christians suffering persecution:

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. (1 Peter 5:6-9)

If the Christian will humble himself before God, then God will lift him up. If the Christian has any care, then he ought to surrender it to Almighty God and leave the caring to Him. The Christian ought to beware, knowing that, just as the devil tempted Jesus, so he tempts the followers of Jesus. If, however, the Christian will faithfully and steadfastly resist the devil as Jesus resisted him, then the devil will leave him just as he left Jesus. (1 Peter 5:6-9; James 4:7)

Let us remember God's faithfulness to His people. Let us never test God. Let us rather, when tested, be faithful to God.

Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.