

“LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION!”

Mark 14:32-42; Matthew 6:13

**Lord's Prayer Lenten Series
Maundy Thursday April 5, 2012
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“Lead us not into temptation.” To understand this petition it is helpful, I believe, to look at Jesus' words to his disciples when they went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray after sharing in the Last Supper. Jesus said to his disciples, “Watch and pray that you might not enter into temptation.”

How does Jesus lead us not into temptation? How do we overcome temptation in our lives? We do it by watching and praying. We do it by realizing that our spirit might be willing, but our flesh is weak. May the Holy Spirit guide and help us this evening as we spend a few moments looking at these two important ways to withstand temptation.

Now in looking at these two parts it is important to realize that you can't have one without the other. For instance if a person only concentrates on the activity of watching; if we spend all of our time simply observing; simply becoming aware of the world in which we live; and yet at the same time ignore the reality of God, of prayer, of worship—then we have dramatically limited God.

So often today we hear or read reports that come from observers. From people who are paid a great deal to analyze and evaluate what is happening in the world. And yet there seems to be something missing. In all of the reports of these observers about political candidates and issues, or about economics or whatever, it seems so often we are missing at least half of the apple.

We are only watching and not praying. We are only relying on our own powers of observation and not taking seriously the Biblical perspective. The reality of God has often been ignored. But Jesus says to us, “Watch and pray.” Keep both your physical eyes and spiritual eyes wide open.

Now, of course, there is also an opposite temptation which is often found in the midst of Christian people. And that is the desire to concentrate only on praying, only on the spiritual dimension. We are always tempted it seems to me to concentrate only on religious things; only on our relationship with God and to start thinking that this world really doesn't matter.

And yet Jesus calls us time and again to watch and pray. To live not only in the kingdom of heaven, but also to live with both feet firmly planted in the kingdom of this earth. Let me this evening give you some examples of what I mean.

Watch and pray. There are some people today who follow Jesus who believe that all illness can be solved simply by prayer. In other words, when some kind of physical affliction comes their way they hide in their room and wait for the miracle to happen.

And yet it seems as if what Jesus would call us to do is to spend just as much time and effort at finding the most competent medical help we can find. Healing is not only of the kingdom of heaven, it is also a gift of God to the kingdom of this earth. Watch and pray.

Or sometimes there are parents today who say that they are going to attempt to shelter their kids from this world, going to keep them away from secular schools and ideas, going to rely only on the power of prayer and the spiritual. They claim that if children are too aware of the real world, of all the pitfalls and temptations, they may go down the wrong path.

But Jesus has said to us, “Watch and pray.” Watch and pray so that you will not enter into temptation. Watch and pray because while the spirit is indeed willing the flesh is weak. The best way to be prepared for this world is to be aware of the real world; to know and understand the choices. And yet we also need to live in a relationship with God and the power of prayer. And we need parents who nurture, pray for, set an example, and teach their children right from wrong.

Dr. Alvin Rogness, president of the seminary when I was there, often said that a Christian today should have the Bible in one hand and the daily newspaper in the other. Watch and pray. We are part of two kingdoms—the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of heaven. And if we ever become too earthly or too heavenly, then we have lost our sense of balance.

Recently there have been a number of shocking reports that STD’s are at epidemic levels, and that alcohol and drugs continue to affect many young people’s lives. In spite of all the campaigns to make people aware of these dangers, many people are reacting as carelessly as ever.

And yet where is the watching? Where is the sense of reality, of common sense? At the same time where is the Biblical understanding of the gift of our bodies and lives? Where is God’s intention and plan in all of this? What does God teach us about love?

Watch; watch; be on your guard that we do not let society dictate our attitudes or behavior. And yet at the same time pray. Live each day in the power of God. But why should we be so concerned about this today? It is because as Jesus says our spirit may be willing but our flesh is weak. We need to pray, “Lead us not into temptation.”

We often hear two common refrains out of our mouths today. The first of these is, “We just weren’t watching.” We didn’t see what was happening to our marriage until we had drifted too far apart. We just weren’t watching what was happening with our children until we had lost complete control.

We just weren’t watching what was happening with our use of alcohol or pain killers until we were addicted. We just weren’t watching our use of credit cards until our debts were out of control. We just weren’t watching how we were being hurt, or manipulated, or deceived in a dating relationship. We were not watching. We were blinded. We were asleep.

The second refrain that often comes out of our mouths is this one, “We have ignored the Biblical teachings.” We haven’t taken the time to read or study God’s Word. We have let other things

get in the way of regular and faithful weekly worship. We don't take time to pray. We have tried to do it all by ourselves. But Jesus says to us, watch and pray.

Lead us not into temptation. To pray this petition, my friends, means that we need to watch and pray. It means that we be very aware of the reality and dangers of this world. And that we are centered in a living faith relationship with Jesus.

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. Amen.