

“Blessed is the Man”

“Testing” and “temptation” are part of our Scripture readings for today – but did you know that both words come from the same Greek word, *πειραδω*? “God *πειραδω*-ed Abraham” and Jesus was “*πειραδω*-ed by Satan.” So why is this word sometimes translated as “test” and at other times as “tempt” – and how does one decide?

Well, *Scripture interprets Scripture* – so we look to the context of Holy Scripture to find the best translation. In so doing, “Who is doing the *πειραδω*-ing” is an important question. And here, the context from James’ Epistle is helpful. “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one.”

Martin Luther explains the Sixth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer (“And lead us not into temptation”) in this way: “God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory.”

When the three great enemies are at work – they are “tempting” you – they are trying to lead you into false belief – they are trying to lead you away from God – away from Jesus Christ – away from His Word – away from salvation.

When it is God who is at work – He is “testing” your faith – leading you to trust in Him – leading you to Christ – to the truth of His Word – leading you into the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.

Like Jesus who was with the wild animals in the wilderness, you are surrounded by the three great enemies – “the devil, the world, and [your] sinful nature.” They are constantly at work to “lead you into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.”

However, God is constantly at work to “guard and keep” you from the abduction of the three great enemies – to “strengthen and keep [you] firm in His Word and faith until [you] die.”

Eve was tempted in the Garden of Eden – sin crouched at the door for Cain – Joseph endured many trials that God intended for good – Abraham was tested with the sacrifice of Isaac – Jesus was tempted in the wilderness - and He tested Philip (and the other disciples) when He asked where they would get food to Feed the 5,000.

When God is “testing” Abraham – you can be sure that the devil is right there, looking to take advantage of the situation. When Jesus is “tempted” in the wilderness – God is also at work, for His angels “were ministering to Jesus.”

Fresh of His Baptism in the Jordan River, with the Father’s words still ringing in His ears (“You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased”) – Jesus is thrown out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit, to be tempted.

The Father is pleased with this – that Jesus be tempted in every way, just as you are, yet He remains without sin. The temptation of Jesus in your place is just as necessary as His birth and death in your place. Because He endures all your temptations, overcoming them – He has won the victory for you.

You are like Jesus in the wilderness – surrounded by the three great enemies, and yet God ministers to you. In the midst of your many trials, you might not think (or know) if this is God at work, or the devil – because you are just struggling to survive. It’s like a tug-of-war with God pulling in one direction, and the three great enemies pulling in the other direction – and you are caught in the middle.

In your day to day life, you are aware that your sinful nature is at work. Your sinful nature is simply addicted to sin – it’s what he desires – it’s the direction he wants to go – so you continually struggle with lust, greed, making excuses for yourself, jealousy, pride, and so on.

Sometimes you are like a smoker who knows he should quit – but that’s about as far as the battle goes. You just do what you want to do, and God doesn’t get a Word in edgewise. You live in the dark, in deception – led by the lies of your sinful nature – “and when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”

At other times it really is a struggle. Like an addiction, its often the same temptations that haunt you. You know it's a sin. For instance, you know that God wants you to live a sexually pure and decent life – but the lure of the temptation draws you away from God's Word, highlighting what you desire, until you do it.

Afterwards you realize it was all a lie. The satisfaction is temporary – and it is quickly replaced with guilt and remorse – the loathsome feeling of being an out of control sinner who is enslaved to his sinful desires.

But the devil is not done with you yet. He doesn't just want you to sin – he wants you to believe his lies and live in despair! He wants you to believe that there is no way God could love and forgive someone like you – that you are a lost cause, damned to hell – so you might as well live the rest of your life in shameful things and vices.

“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love Him.” Blessed is Abraham – not because he had the internal fortitude to resist temptation – but because he trusted that the Lord would provide.

Abraham “passed the test” if you will – trusting not in himself (or anything or anyone else) – but trusting in God alone. God had promised that the Savior would be born from Isaac's descendants – and believing that promise, even though it seemed impossible, Abraham raised the knife to do what the Lord has told him to do.

Blessed are you when you hear God's Word and keep it – when you follow the example of Jesus and meet temptations head-on with God's Word, and in faith, live according to that Word. Blessed are you – when faced with temptations – you believe that “the Lord will provide” a way out of temptation for you.

Blessed are you – when the temptations are conceived in you and give birth to sin – you believe that the Lord has provided for you a way out of sin's stranglehold. Contrary to the devil's lies – God forgives you – He has provided His beloved Son as the Lamb of God to be sacrificed to take away the sin of the world – to take away your sin.

The three great enemies try to keep you in the dark about this Gospel of Jesus Christ, or lead you away from it – God is always leading you to this Gospel, and delivering it to you. And so He does today.

He comes into your midst today, to provide for those in despair – overcoming it with the sacrifice that He has provided for you. Blessed are you who hear and believe His promises – who receive the Body and Blood of Jesus, once sacrificed upon the “mount of the Lord” – but given to you now, for the forgiveness of all your sin, so that you may be certain that God has not forsaken you, but saved you.

Dearly beloved, the victory is yours, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.