

Sing before the service: Scripture hymn 14-2

Our help is in the Name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Beloved, grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Psalm of praise: 147:1, 4

Prayer

Psalm 95:5

Scripture reading: James 1:2-18; Matthew 4:1-11

Scripture text: James 1:2-18; Matthew 4:1-11; Catechism Sunday 52

The devil's temptation of Jesus Christ is revealed to us in order to comfort and encourage us.

- From this temptation it is clear that the Lord withstood the cunning and the works of Satan and even broke its power.
- You should note that the devil tempted the Lord Jesus before His public ministry.
- This was so that the Lord Jesus could immediately show what we were to expect of Him: He would conquer the devil utterly!

We know also that the Lord Jesus is called the second Adam.

- That is because Adam was also tempted by the devil in Paradise, but was unable to withstand him. Adam fell into temptation when he was confronted by it, and thereby brought all of mankind to a fall.
- Jesus also, like Adam, was tempted on behalf of the elect, those chosen by God out of all mankind. But He left the contest differently from Adam: He perfectly and completely withstood the temptations, and thereby already gained a victory over the devil in principle.

Let us consider the question of temptation from three angles.

1. Evil and the church

2. The Father and his children

3. Jesus Christ and the believers

1. Evil and the church

Immediately after Jesus was baptised, He was tempted.

- There seems to be something in the view that every member of the church must know that, if he wishes to enjoy the grace of forgiveness, the devil will concentrate all the more on seducing him.
- That is why we pray that we will not be led into temptation, but delivered from evil.
- We therefore do not only pray for the forgiveness of our sins, but also that we may live holy lives.

Evil has many agents by which it can infiltrate the church. After all, we read in Ephesians 6:12 that our struggle

- is not against flesh and blood,

- but against the rulers,
- against the powers,
- against the world forces of this darkness, and
- against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

The dark forces have been working against God's kingdom throughout all the ages, **and always they have been directed against mankind, because they cannot rise against God Himself.**

- That is why we read in the Bible that evil spirits take possession of people – as, for instance, the demoniac of the Gerasenes,
- but also of heretics, false teachers, of whom we read that numbers of them infiltrated the New Testament churches.
- Then there are also the sins with which the devil confronts us in our everyday lives, and before which we often fall.

When you meet with temptation, it affects your faith, because it puts your faith into a crucial test before refinement (James 1:3, 4).

- For that reason there is a certain correspondence between temptation and faith, because the temptation to which you are subjected lets your true faith come to light.
- Someone with a strong faith will not allow himself to be seduced by temptations.

Furthermore, the Lord shows that there is a direct relationship between wisdom and withstanding temptation.

- The reason is that wisdom is to be found where the Holy Spirit leads the believer. (James 1:5)

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. (James 1:5 NIV)

- Wisdom also comes with perseverance in prayer and certainty in faith concerning that for which you pray.

All this is necessary so that the church must realise that it needs continually to pray that

- the Lord preserve and deliver us from being assailed and seduced by the Evil One.
- We pray, with this prayer, that we may be blessed by the Holy Spirit with insight and guidance, so that we can do as a church what the Lord desires of us.

2. The Father and his children

In our prayer we acknowledge the Lord of heaven and earth in His omnipotence, but through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ we know Him also as our Father.

- For that reason we look to Him for our preservation, to Him and His power and majesty.
- We trust also that He, because He is our Father, will preserve us from all evil.
- Our trust also rests upon the promises He has given us over all the centuries.

James 1:13 shows that it is not always true that temptation produces endurance.

- *Sometimes something quite different happens, namely that people fall into sin, and then in addition allows Satan to prompt them in what they say about it.*
- *They do not realise that the fact that they fell into temptation was because they*

followed Satan in the matter.

That is why the Bible states the matter very strongly and clearly:

- Trials come from the Lord, and the aim of these is to strengthen your faith. And in the case of the true believer, that is how it works.
- But there is something else that has many of the features of trials, and that is temptation.
 - Temptation is from the devil.
 - It is a means whereby he wishes to place a burden of guilt on the believer before the Lord.

People who do not wish to subject themselves to the will of the Lord, allow the devil to lead them into rebellion against the Lord.

- Then they declare that their sins are the fault of the Lord, because He tried them too sorely.
- But that has nothing to do with trials – that kind of thing is purely temptation, which you yourself must withstand.
- God does not tempt people (James 1:13).

It is only important for us to remember that Christ's temptation showed a particular pattern throughout.

- Throughout the entire episode, He always put the honour of God first.
- The devil made His temptation a crisis of belief, a crisis of faith – that is how all of us also experience trials.
- That is why the devil every time quoted the Bible in support of his suggestions. To this the Lord Jesus replied: *It is also written . . .*
 - Jesus put the honour of God first.
 - Under those extremely difficult circumstances He honoured the Lord by persevering in the truth.

That is precisely what we ourselves must do. In our trials we must continue to put our trust in our heavenly Father, and even in the most extreme circumstances put the honour of God first.

3. Jesus Christ and the believers

When the devil tempted Jesus, He overcame the devil. That depicts God's entire act of salvation:

- *He sent His Son to battle against the devil.*
- *It was His task to conquer the devil on behalf of the elect of God, and also to overcome death.*

Thereby Jesus became for the true believer the Guarantee that we will never perish in any temptation.

- We can trust in our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, because we are held safe in His power.
- You should remember always that Jesus is still involved in your affairs. He still, every moment, intercedes for you with the Father.

- Every moment Jesus' atonement remains effective for every one of us.

For that reason we can end our petitions with the word **Amen**.

- **Amen** is merely a little Greek word meaning: **definitely, certainly, assuredly**.
- But in our life of faith it has received a much stronger meaning through the revelation of the Lord.

The word means that the entire gospel on which our prayer rests, is true beyond all doubt.

- It also means that our trust in the Triune God is true.
- It also means that we indicate by using the word that we know that our prayers are being heard.

Let us now read what the Catechism for Sunday 52 teaches about temptation:

127. Q. What is the sixth petition?

A. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. That is: In ourselves we are so weak that we cannot stand even for a moment.[1] Moreover, our sworn enemies-- the devil,[2] the world,[3] and our own flesh[4]-- do not cease to attack us. Wilt Thou, therefore, uphold and strengthen us by the power of Thy Holy Spirit, so that in this spiritual war[5] we may not go down to defeat, but always firmly resist our enemies, until we finally obtain the complete victory.[6]

[1] Ps. 103:14-16; John 15:1-5. [2] II Cor. 11:14; Eph. 6:10-13; I Pet. 5:8. [3] John 15:18-21. [4] Rom. 7:23; Gal. 5:17. [5] Matt. 10:19, 20; 26:41; Mark 13:33; Rom. 5:3-5. [6] I Cor. 10:13; I Thess. 3:13; 5:23.

128. Q. How do you conclude your prayer?

A. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. That is: All this we ask of Thee because, as our King, having power over all things, Thou art both willing and able to give us all that is good,[1] and because not we but Thy holy Name should so receive all glory for ever.[2]

[1] Rom. 10:11-13; II Pet 2:9. [2] Ps. 115:1; Jer. 33:8, 9; John 14:13.

129. Q. What does the word Amen mean?

A. Amen means: It is true and certain. For God has much more certainly heard my prayer than I feel in my heart that I desire this of Him.[1]

[1] Is. 65:24; II Cor. 1:20; II Tim. 2:13.

Amen

Closing prayer

Closing hymn: Scripture hymn 10-2 (28B)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Amen

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