























School of Grace:

Reading: 2 Corinthians 6:1-13; Matthew 4:1-11

The temptations of Jesus summarise every temptation we have and will face.

That seems like a bold, and too general, statement, given all the various temptations we list as sins. But I'm going to stick by it.

The first temptation is seeking the things we need or think we need. This temptation grows the more things we have. In the last few days before writing this, I have been a little fearful. What if I lost the documents I've been working on if my computer crashed? What if there is some disaster in my flat, and I lose the CDs and DVDs I've accumulated? What about the books or clothes? It leaves me feeling very uneasy but, while I may be disappointed and have got over the initial shock, I would get up and begin again. I think that is true of all people. What we think we need is often found to be unnecessary, if only desirable.

The second temptation is asking God to do things that He won't do. We can put God to any test we like, as long as we are prepared to accept the answers He gives. We ponder why bad things happen to good people. Many suggestions have been given but none have ever answered the question satisfactorily. We almost expect God to do what we want Him to. We work on the principle that if A happens, B will follow. But sin doesn't work that way, so why should God?

The third temptation is seeking power. Every politician. Every business person. Every leader. All of them go in thinking that they are able to do something good for their followers, for the people they work for. They think once they have power things can be changed for the better. But the old saying is true power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. More people fall through the cracks, not because the leaders failed, but because of their inability to help large numbers of people at once. The greater the number the more people that miss out.

And there is danger once one has got to a position of power. It is at that point that one is always trying to defend what one has. That one asks God to keep them there. To endorse their policies. The trouble is God never does it. He rejects all our attempts in their futility. He strips us of power constantly. He lets us lose everything. For it is only then that we begin to actually see God. We see that the only option we have is God. We see that the only solution is forgiveness. We see that grace is all that we need. We see the power that mercy brings subtly. We see that God isn't interested in nations, empires or kingdoms. Rather He deals with one person at a time.

We are so focussed on trying not to sin, that we do the sin more often.

We are so determined to overcome our demons that we fight a losing battle.

We are so caught up in our abilities that we forget God.

We are so firm on stopping evil that we don't do good.

We can never defeat sin. We are unable to escape its presence. We can't reach perfection at any point.

Only Jesus can.

What do You want from me?
Forty days of nothing but praying
Are those stones of bread? Who will feed me?
I need food I could make myself something
End world hunger
But man does not live by bread alone
But on every word that comes from the mouth
of God

Put no stumbling block in my way No political agendas no religious paranoia No enforcing our beliefs No demanding of things our way No rewarding powerful friends No escaping human frailties No denying we can't save us No revenge for enemies No deciding facts we don't know No hiding behind our rightness No blame for errors of judgment No telling others what to do No imposing rules & burdens No stumbling blocks to hide mercy No stumbling blocks to shield grace No defending our positions No exerting force or pressure No proof is sufficient or enough So no stumbling blocks in my way
Cantata 22 S2010 Nigel Bruce www.nigelbruce.net

14

How can I endure? Weak with hunger Thirsty need a drink! Tired from the heat No more trouble please I can't take it It is just too hard hear my distress Trapped in this prison who will save me? Beaten constantly where can I hide? Can I sleep again? Endless working Riots rage around nowhere to turn Will I understand? Please tell me why Make me pure patient & kind Truthful with love living past death Merciful rejoice in sorrow poor to be rich Having nothing of my own revealing God's pow'r To bring honour in my disgrace To remain unknown but by You **Holy Spirit come** And I will worship You alone & bow down serving only You