

How to Face Temptation

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 May 2023

Preacher: Cory Brock

[0 : 00] Alright, this is the penultimate sermon in our series on Isaiah for now. We've been working our way through Book One of Isaiah, chapters one to thirty-nine.

And you know that you're getting to the end of a section partly because the entire book so far has been poetry and at the very end of section one it switches to narrative, the long narrative that we just read, a couple more chapters to go next week.

And the other reason this is the end of a section is because we have been talking pretty much every single week about how Isaiah has been prophesying about this moment. 701 BC, the moment when Assyria, King Sennacherib, would march on the gates of Jerusalem.

And this is exactly what we just read about. And you can see in verse one it says that Sennacherib came up against all the fortified cities of Judah. And so to get to Jerusalem, Hezekiah and some of the kings before him had set up all these cities that were meant to be fortresses.

So there were lots of towns where the civilians would live, but then there were fortified encampments with big walls. And to get to Jerusalem, which was its own, the great fortified encampment, you had to pass all these other ones.

[1 : 16] And so we know from extra biblical literature that Sennacherib has defeated, according to their own accounts, 46 fortified encampments in the region of Judah so far.

And Lachish, which is where he's camped just south of Jerusalem now, the archaeologist found a site there from about this time period that had 1500 dead bodies in it, a mass grave that many people think is from Sennacherib's invasion of Judah.

And so we've seen this verified in all sorts of extra biblical literature. There are lots of counts. There are even Babylonian accounts of the Sennacherib invasion of Judah. And now finally they've come to the gate of Jerusalem.

Hezekiah in chapter 37 verse 4 says, we're the remnant, meaning he's saying we're pretty much all that's left. It's just Jerusalem. All the other fortified cities have been taken down.

Now we as modern people, we think of our lives quite often through the lens of film and TV. So only 20th and 21st century people have ever been able to say this feels like a scene from a movie.

[2 : 25] And when you read a text like this, that's exactly the kind of thing that you can say. So the Robb Shackay is the cupbearer to the great king of Assyria. And you can imagine the Robb Shackay, he's clothed in unbelievable adornment, wearing all sorts of pagan paraphernalia probably on his face and around his neck.

And he comes to the great gate of Jerusalem and he says, people of Jerusalem, if you will bow the knee to the great king, Sennacherib, I will give you peace.

He will deliver you. He will be the king that you've always wanted. And if you don't, you're going to die. He even takes it all the way to the point of eating their own excrement at the middle of the passage because he's saying, we're going to siege you until you starve to death.

But if you'll bow the knee to me, I'll give you everything you've ever dreamed of, your own cistern, your own figs, your own vineyard. And that means that on the surface of the passage, it's about war and it's about colonization and it's about Jerusalem under attack and whether or not the people of God are going to get annihilated at this moment in history.

And underneath it, actually, this passage is just one passage that's part of a whole sequence of stories in the Bible where the people of God face overwhelming temptation to bow the knee to another king.

[3 : 55] And this is one of many, many moments throughout the Bible that this happens. It happens over and over and over again. And the rabshake asks exactly the right question. He says at the beginning, people of God, on what do you rest this trust of yours to stand against the great king?

What are you trusting in that gives you the confidence that you could stand against the great king, my king, the king of Assyria? Another way to ask this question is something like this.

Do you really trust that the God that you're chasing after is going to give you what you want? And though what you want here is, he says, deliverance or peace.

He's saying, in the face of the great king, do you really think that your God is actually going to give you the peace that you think he's going to give you? And that's the question. All right.

So three things to see. The nature of temptation, the way out, and then how to face it. Okay. The nature of temptation, the way out, how to face it.

[4 : 56] This is a passage about temptation. All right. So first, the nature of temptation, the rabshah, K is the emissary of the great king of Assyria, Sinakrim.

He's standing here just outside Jerusalem in the washers field. And the presumption is that Hezekiah has closed the gate.

So verse five, he says, what gives you the confidence to rebel against the great king? And what he's saying there is I came with my group and you closed the front gate. You didn't let me in.

And what gives you the confidence to do something like that? And Hezekiah in other words is saying, we're not going to open our gates to another king. And it's really important, the title that the rabshah K gives the king of Assyria, the great king.

And in Hebrew, this is like the New Testament equivalent of the king of kings. It's basically the same phrase. And so he says, the king of kings has come and said, I'll give you peace, but you've shut the gate.

[5 : 57] And Hezekiah is saying, we're not going to open our gates to a man who says he is the king of kings. And you realize very quickly that at the end of the passage when the rabshah K says, what gods have ever been able to stop the great king, king of Assyria, that you realize the king of Assyria takes himself to be not just a king, but a god.

He thinks of himself as a god. And so he calls himself the king of kings. And he's saying, I'm the king of kings. I'm the one that can actually deliver you. And the message is very clear. If you let the great king, the king of kings into your life, if you open the gate, then he'll give you peace.

And in the beginning of history, Adam and Eve were told by God, Genesis 2.15, to guard the Garden of Eden, the land of the true king, the Lord.

And they let the great king of this world into the garden. They opened the gate and they let him right in. And then right after that in Genesis chapter four, God said to Cain, sin is crouching at the gate translated your door.

Sin is standing right outside your gates and want temptations. The world, the flesh and the devil is standing right outside your gates and wants to come in and all you have to do is open it and it will come for you.

[7 : 16] Open the gate and it will come for you. You start to realize that the gates of Jerusalem here are both a historical reality, but they're also meant to show us something else. They're meant to help us understand that it's really talking underneath about the gate of the heart.

That temptation has always come to the people of God throughout history from the beginning to the middle all the way to now and knocked at the gate, the gate of your heart and said, the great king is here, the king of kings.

Assyria has come. Open the heart. It's a testament. It says that Judas looked at the money bags and when he looked at the money bags, Satan entered into him.

You see, Satan came right through the gate when Judas was at his weakest. And that's what the passage is actually about that in the early church, not long after Jesus ascended into heaven, Paul and the first couple centuries of Christians, they faced this in a really acute way, the imperial cult was the name that was given to the fact that in the Roman Empire, Christianity was tolerated from the beginning actually.

The Roman Empire was okay with Christianity, except for one thing. Once a year at least, you had to come and you had to say Caesar is either Lord, Soter, Savior or son of God.

[8 : 40] It was even printed on the coins. And they said, look, I know that you say that your Lord is Lord, but if you'll say the great king is Lord, Caesar, if he's Lord, if you'll just say it.

If you'll just let the great king into your life and into your heart, if you'll give your heart to him, then we'll let you worship whatever God you want to worship for free. And many Christians were burned alive or given to beast for saying Caesar is not Lord, only Jesus is Lord.

And you see, that's exactly it. The mainstay of the Christian life of the people of God throughout all the centuries has been that temptation comes and knocks out the door, the world to flesh and the devil and says, open the gate of your heart and let me in and I will give you peace.

I'll give you real deliverance. And that's exactly what the rabbi Shaquette says here. Now, the rabbi Shaquette tells the truth. So if you look at verse four, he says it like this.

He says on what do you rest this trust of yours and then down in verses 14 and 15, he ties trust directly to the word deliverance.

[9 : 45] So he says, do you trust that your God can deliver you? The king of Assyria, trust in him and he will deliver you. That means that in the Bible, trust, the nature of trust is when you give your life, you give your heart, you give your allegiance over to something, some God, some king, some object in order that it might deliver you.

See trust and deliverance are concepts that are completely well together. Trust or faith is giving your heart over so that you might find deliverance. And the deliverance that's being promised in this passage is in verse 16.

He says if you would give your trust, we will deliver you and that deliverance will be peace and that means you'll have your own sister and your own fig tree, your own vine. I'll give you all the things. I'll give you good circumstances.

I'll make you happy. I'll give you everything you could have always wanted out of life. One old Puritan writer talks about this as the bait and hook method, the golden cup and the poison.

In other words, the world, the flesh and the devil come outside the city gate, the gate of your heart and say here, take and drink from the golden cup. If you'll follow me, I'll give you deliverance. I'll give you your own sister and your own figs.

[10 : 58] Your own vineyards. And inside you can't see, but in the middle of it is actually poison. There's bait, but you can't see the hook. And that's exactly what the Robchak case says.

He actually tells the truth here. Let me quickly give you a couple ways the Robchak case tells the truth. He says in verse five, the first thing he says in verse five, do you think people of God, people of Jerusalem, Hezekiah and others, do you think that your words and your strategy are enough to deliver you?

And the Robchak case onto something, he's actually saying, do you think that Hezekiah's brain, his intelligence is enough to get you out of this? And another way of asking it is something like this.

Are you trusting in life? Are you putting in your trust for deliverance and your intelligence? Are you putting your trust in the fact that you can distinguish yourself in a room?

Are you putting your trust, are you building your life around being smart and being a person that can really make something of himself or herself? And Ernest Hemingway, the great 19th century novelist, he put it like this.

[12 : 05] He says, happiness and intelligence is the rarest thing I know. The most brilliant people are always the most in despair.

And the Robchak case says, look, you think that you can trust in your smarts and building a career around your intelligence and making a name for yourself. It's not going to work. It's not going to deliver you.

And then the second thing he says is verse six. He says, well, then you went to Egypt to try to find deliverance. In other words, he was talking about armament. He said, you went down to Egypt and you tried to make a treaty.

You wanted chariots and horses and weapons and men, mercenaries. And what he's saying, you know, you tried to actually look at a Syria, Sinakrib, and build the same thing that Sinakrib had built.

You thought, okay, we'll match power with power. And so you chased after power. And he's saying, do you think that you can accumulate stuff in your life, enough power, enough status, enough empire building in your life enough to truly make you happy, to deliver?

[13 : 09] Do you think that accumulation is going to get you out of this mess, that it's really going to deliver you? In some ways, the entire point of this passage is actually subtly Sinakrib.

Sinakrib had built the greatest empire the world had ever seen up to this point in human history. And at the end of the passage, God gives him just a slight quiet rumor into his ear that says, Kush is invading your homeland.

It wasn't true. And Sinakrib packs up, leaves the siege of Jerusalem, goes straight home because he's scared to death that everything he's ever built is about to fall.

And you see, he had built a great empire, but it was so fragile. The greatest, the most powerful man in the world had ever seen up to this point was scared to death that he would lose one of the lands that he had gained.

And he had taught his sons one thing. Life is not worth living unless you accumulate land, wealth, and power, unless you colonize, unless you build the biggest bank account you can possibly build.

[14 : 11] He said, in fact, life is so worth living for that that you should kill for it. You should kill, you should colonize, you should imprison anybody you need to. And that's exactly what they did.

You see, at the end of the passage, the point is that his sons in the middle of the temple stand up and stab him in the back. They kill him.

They kill him in exactly the way he taught them to do it. He had taught his sons, live for wealth, live for accumulation, live for stuff, and they turn around in the end and say, the only way we're really going to get it is to kill our own father, to stab him right in the back.

And so the rabshak'ah, without knowing it was right, he said, you know, do you think that you're smart, becoming a great person is going to deliver you in this life? Do you think that accumulating stuff, wealth, empire building is actually going to deliver you?

In 1929 and 2008, we've got the two great stock market crashes over the last century or so. And you can go read the literature on this.

[15 : 14] The data is unbelievably scary and fascinating at the same time. Inside the 1929 crash and the 2008 market crash because of the real estate investments, there is a nearly uncountable amount of people who committed suicide.

And among those were largely millionaires, the millionaires that lived in 1929 and the millionaires and billionaires that lost so much of their wealth in 2008.

And Alexis de Tocqueville, the century before that, the great political philosopher from France when he visited America, one of the things he wrote, he said, there's a strange melancholy that haunts those with abundance.

And in this story, this story is saying if you build your life around your name, around wealth, around power and prestige, if you teach like Sennacherib, your sons and your daughters that you can kill to make a great name for yourself, you'll get exactly that.

You'll lose it. You'll get the death that you taught another. You'll end up in despair. Even if your life ends and you build your life around something like that and your life ends in great circumstances, de Tocqueville was saying something.

[16 : 28] He was saying even then you'll find that you've been chasing after some it and when you finally get it, you'll just have melancholy. You realize that you chase after something your whole life and you'll finally get there and you'll say, was that it?

And it won't be the it that you thought it was the it, that you thought was the it. And the point of the passage is that anytime the king, the world, the flesh and the devil comes to your door and says, if you just bow down to this great king or this great king or this great king or this great king, they'll truly deliver you.

They'll give you the peace you've always been looking for. Some alternative God will come into your life, your name, your intelligence, your power, your prestige, your social media following, your publications, your job performance, the classic three sex money and power.

And what will happen at first is verse 16. The rabbi'shake, it will say to you, I'll give you a sister, I'll give you your own victory, I'll give you your own land.

I'll give you good circumstances. And then did you catch it in verse 17? It's so subtle. Then he says in verse 17, until I come and take you away to a land like your own land.

[17 : 41] He's trying to just slide it in there very quietly. I'm going to give you everything you ever dreamt of and then I'm going to take you away. And it'll be a good land too. But he's talking about enslavement.

And that's exactly the point of the passage that anytime you chase after some object in this life and make it your great king, your great God, the sonaker of itself, you will chase after it and for a moment maybe your circumstances will be good, but eventually you're going to lose it and you're going to find a spare.

It won't really deliver you. It's actually going to enslave you. Every single thing in this life that you chase after will end up dying, perishing, falling away or you will fall away before it.

And it will actually leave you enslaved. Thomas Boston wrote a really good book called Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices, which is exactly about this. And this is how he puts it.

He says, the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil have greater influence upon us than we think. Whatever sin, and here's the subtlety, whatever sin, the heart of a person is most prone towards chasing after, that is where temptation will particularly attack.

[18 : 55] So he says, if you are tempted by prosperity, then Satan will tempt you to deny your need of God. If you're tempted by your adverse circumstances to leave the faith, then Satan will tell you to distrust God.

If you're tempted because your conscience is really tender, you feel the weight of guilt and shame always in your life, Satan will tell you to be a legalist, that you can never do enough to actually get God to love you.

If you're tempted to laxity, you're not so concerned about sin, you're tempted towards freedom, then Satan will always tempt you with the classic sins of the flesh.

If you're tempted to anxiety, Satan will always tell you to despair. You see, the great king, the king of this world always comes and attacks you at exactly the place where you're prone to be weak.

That's the nature of temptation. Now let me close this point and we'll very quickly close with the last two by saying this. If you're strong, Christian friends, if you're strong tonight and you stand up against all the temptations of the devil, the world, the flesh and the devil come and you're not tempted by sex, money, and power, building a name for yourself, chasing after all sorts of gods that exist in this life.

[20 : 13] And maybe you've tried that, you've gone on and on to something else and you've built strength in your heart against these things. This is the last thing the great king will do.

Rapsha K, this is what he says in verse seven. He says, do you really think the Lord will deliver you? You see, he had said, do you think that your stuff is going to deliver you or your intelligence is going to deliver you or you're going to build a great name for yourself?

And if none of that works, the next and final thing he will do is say, what about the Lord himself? Have you really thought about him? Have you really thought about the God you follow? And he says, look, Hezekiah went and took all the altars off the high places.

How is your God going to hear you and respond to you? Now what he's saying there is that the Rapsha K thinks that the God of Israel, Yahweh, is like the pagan deities, like all the other pagan deities.

And the pagan deities live on tops of mountains and the more altars you can have, the more grain you can give, the better chance you have to get them to do what you want.

[21 : 16] It's a tit for tat relationship. You give and maybe they'll give back and forth. He thinks that the God of Israel is like that. What Hezekiah had actually done is cast down all these idolatrous altars and made only one place for true worship, which is the temple in Jerusalem, as God had commanded in the beginning.

But you see, here's the subtle thing. And this is what the Rapsha K is saying. You know, if you're not moved by the traditional idols, sex, money, and power, he comes in and says, do you really think that the God you say you follow actually hears you?

You haven't built enough altars. You haven't put the altars in the right places. You haven't done enough. You haven't done enough good works.

You haven't put away enough sin in your life. The reason that your circumstances are actually really bad, you've not gotten the things you wanted out of life is because you've never been the person God's demanded you to be.

And so you can't really know that your God actually hears you. You can't really know that He actually sees you, and you better know He doesn't care about you. And that's the final way that the Rapsha K, the great king, the king of this world comes and tries to say, open the gate of your heart to a different God.

[22 : 32] He says, you know, if it's not this, then He'll undermine. He'll say, did God really say, is God really good? Now, here's the way out, secondly, and very quickly.

The way out is found in verse 11. Here's what you do about it. And in verse 11, the Rapsha K stands and speaks out to the people on the walls of Jerusalem.

The advisors of Hezekiah say, please don't speak in Hebrew. We only want you to speak Aramaic. And the reason is because Aramaic was the lingua franca of the day. It was English, like English.

So anytime people were in treaties or diplomacy, they would speak Aramaic. But the Rapsha K knows Hebrew. So he shouts in Hebrew to the walls of the people so that everybody can hear exactly what he has to say.

And you see, here's the final thing he does. He doubles down and he attacks. He attacks in verse 14, the king of the city of God himself.

[23 : 36] He says, here's the last thing. I want you to hear soldiers on the walls. I want you to hear this because it's your life that's at stake. And he says this, do not listen to the king.

Do not listen to King Hezekiah. King Hezekiah says, trust in the Lord and you'll be delivered. You cannot trust this king. You see, he doubles down. He doesn't just say, can you really trust that the Lord hears you and that the Lord sees you in your life?

He says, no, the Lord's anointed man, this son of David, he's the one that doesn't know what he's doing.

You can't really believe that the son of David, the king of the city of God, the city of peace, is really the one that can deliver you. You can't believe that.

Don't believe that. He doesn't really have the power. And you see it, Christian friends, you see what it's saying? The great king of this world comes to the gate and says about another king, the son of David.

[24 : 41] He talks about him and he says, is your king really who he says he is? Is your king not just a first century lunatic? Is your king not just completely self-centered, going around creating a following?

Is he not just some revolutionary from the first century? Is it not the case? Is it not the case that the gospel writers were just trying to consolidate power around this narrative that they created?

Is it not the case that there are over 300 contradictions just in the gospels alone? Is it not the case that Jesus was just thought of himself as actually a moral man that never considered himself to actually be God?

Can you actually trust in a Jesus that you never saw, a king you never saw? You see, the Rav Shachay says, don't listen to the son of David, the king of the city of God, and that's exactly what the world, the flesh, and the devil finally come and say to you.

And maybe tonight, today, you've listened to that. And you have, you can think right now of the ways you've chased after kings in this life.

[25 : 52] You've chased after money and you've trusted in some political hope, some political party and creating a name for yourself and your own intelligence and your beauty and your health and your longevity.

Or you've gone after all those things, you found out they were not the it, and then you pacified that longing, that melancholy with some other addiction in this life.

You said yes. Every time the king of this world came knocking at the gate, you said, yes, come in. I want the peace that you're talking about. I want deliverance in some way that you're preaching to me about.

I want good circumstances and I don't have it. You've said yes. Here's the way out. And it's in Matthew chapter four. At the beginning of the gospel, the great king, the king of this world came to the son of David, Jesus Christ.

And he said, if you will bow to me, if you will open the gate of your heart to me, I will give you the world.

[26 : 57] I will give you peace. The king of this world said to the king, the son of David, you don't have to die. I will give you peace. I will give you the good circumstances that you've always wanted and all you have to do is bow to the need to the great king, the king of Assyria, Satan himself.

Here's the way out. At every moment in our lives, in some way, we have said yes to the king of Assyria. We have let the world to flesh and the devil come right through the gate into our hearts.

Jesus Christ didn't. He never did. Now Satan came right to his door and he never let him in. He never let him through the gates, not through the city, not through the city of his heart.

Adam and Eve let Satan into the Garden of Eden and he let them destroy, they let him destroy the world. Jesus Christ is the better Adam. He never did that.

God said to Cain, do not let the sin that's crotching out your door come in and grab you in the heart. You see, Jesus Christ, he is the better brother. He never did it.

[28 : 05] At the end of the gospel, you have to ask a question if you read carefully. Why would Jesus Christ die? If at every level he was tempted, he was tempted like we are, yet he never sinned.

Why is it that he had to die? There's only one answer and that's because he came to take on every moment from your life where you open the gate, where you said yes, where you said I'll follow the King of this world every single moment throughout your whole life.

He took that on in himself. He was righteous, but he took on our unrighteousness. He took on our idolatry. That's why he came and why he had to die. That means that the only way out tonight is exactly what the rabshak says.

He says, who do you put your trust in? It's incredibly simple. The way out of the problem of idolatry is simply this, put your trust in the only King who can actually deliver you.

That's Jesus Christ, the true Adam and the better brother. Adam will never dismiss anyone who comes looking for deliverance in Jesus Christ.

[29 : 17] No matter what kings you have followed in this life, no matter what idols you've chased after in your life, no matter what you have done, the true King will never dismiss you if you come seeking deliverance through Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together. Father, we ask now that you would help us to find the rest of our hope, our trust in Jesus Christ, the true King.

We ask forgiveness for all the ways we have opened the gate to the King of Assyria. If it wasn't Assyria, then it was Babylon. If it wasn't Babylon, then it was Persia.

Then it was Egypt. Then it was Rome. Every God that we could possibly chase after we've done it, Lord. We confess today our idolatry. We ask, Father, that you would show us what it means to trust in what we can't see tonight.

True deliverance, a hope that's not going to leave us, a God who does not change. We cast our idols before you now. I pray, Lord, for someone tonight who needs to, longs to lay down their idolatry before you, before the cross, and see it crucified in Christ and find deliverance in him.

[30 : 40] We ask now that the Holy Spirit would bring that blessing to people in this room. We pray this evening in Christ's name. Amen.