

2-26-12

GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER AND FROM OUR LORD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST. The text is Hb 4:15 WE DO NOT HAVE A HIGH PRIEST WHO IS UNABLE TO SYMPATHIZE WITH OUR WEAKNESSES, BUT WE HAVE ONE WHO HAS BEEN TEMPTED IN EVERY WAY, JUST AS WE ARE - YET WAS WITHOUT SIN.

We just sang, "If some lust or sharp temptation wounds me, Savior, and I fall" and I can relate. If you never feel tempted, it's because you're so easy you don't even have to be *asked*. Or worse: Satan doesn't bother people who are already safely in his pocket. If that's you, better start screaming; better start calling your Savior.

The rest of us know what temptation's like. But how can Christ SYMPATHIZE? What does He know about what it's like to have those pictures that pop into our minds; the suggestions we hear in our heads, the possibilities, sometimes really wretched possibilities, that occur to us? But it says, HE WAS TEMPTED IN EVERY WAY, JUST AS WE ARE. How do *you* get tempted? HE WAS TEMPTED IN that WAY.

In fact, He was tempted worse than any of us. Because He stood up to it. Who gets hurt in the boxing ring? Is it a guy like me? No sir. If I were in the ring facing some monster, he'd never lay a glove on me, because I'd give up too fast for him. As far as I'm concerned, they ring that bell, it means "Lie down NOW!" The problem with that game plan is that I *am* in the ring with a monster. I'm in the ring with the prince of darkness, the lord of the flies. And if I *don't* fight; if I give up and give in – if you lie down for the devil, you may not get hurt much, but if you lie down long enough, when the bell signals the end of the round, he eats you. And that hurts exactly like Hell.

But even if we put up a fight, you and I don't know how hard Satan can actually hit, because as Scripture says, with every TEMPTATION GOD has PROVIDED A MEANS OF ESCAPE, even to sending angels. He's never *LET US BE TEMPTED BEYOND WHAT WE* could BEAR. But Jesus was TEMPTED way BEYOND that, and with no privileges, no bread from stones, and no MEANS OF ESCAPE for Him.

And some times when we *have* stood firm against some temptation, thank God, what other temptation were we falling for in the meantime? Satan doesn't care what we fall for as long as we fall. I don't know, maybe he suggests adultery. And we go, "Adultery? Never!" So he says, "Alright, never mind adultery: how about dropping your

devotions?" And we go, "Oh, sure, alright," and lie right down, saying, "Okay, but no adultery." Or maybe we say, "I insist on staying both pure *and* praying! I only lie down for stinginess! Or laziness! Or lying! Or breaking the Sabbath! Or, okay, devil, I'll *judge* somebody - whoever you say."

It's only the one who won't go down who finds out how hard their opponent can punch. Jesus resisted and resisted and resisted long after I would have done anything rather than keep on fighting.

And it was worse for Him because He was really *good*. For Him, the whole idea of sin, any sin, was grotesque. You see Him tempted in the wilderness, and you feel like, "Lord, what are You doing there? Why should You even hear that stuff?" I saw a picture in a kids' magazine of a boy with his pet tarantulas crawling all over his head. Yes, I know that spiders are our friends, but the first time that kid had one of those things on his neck heading for his face - nobody's going to tell me it didn't take some getting used to. But apparently after a while, you can have them crawling all over your head and it doesn't bother you a bit. And some temptations do shock us - maybe while you're trying to pray and you hear these blasphemies. But by and large, we've gotten used to things crawling on our heads. Jesus never got used to it.

If only He hadn't loved us. But He did and so He chose to be one of us and now WE HAVE A HIGH PRIEST - that means one of us who who's fit to stand in front of God. We've got one of us who's got something fit to offer God in our name, something WITHOUT SIN and I mean His huge love unto death, so that when Satan says, "Look, God, none of them loves You, not with all their hearts!" The Father answers, "One of them does. Look."

Jesus was tempted to test how deep that love went. Temptation means testing. When Satan tempts us, he's always testing us. He's always saying, "Let's see how much you love that Lord of yours. Let's see how much you even love each other." Every temptation probes to see, "How deep is your love?" And Satan has been glad to show us our test results.

I guess the difference is that when we've been fighting temptation, we were only fighting for the Lord. But the Lord was fighting for us. And He was fighting for us *because* we've failed. When all of us were lost, He loved us and stepped into the ring for us and said, "Let us take it over! Test Me!"

He fought as one of us - JUST AS WE ARE: hounded and harassed by the lord of the flies. What pictures popped into His mind? What suggestions did He hear in His head? What wretched possibilities occurred to Him day after day, hour after hour? It's the fighter who won't go down who takes the real beating, and Jesus *wouldn't* go down. He was fighting so hard, that He didn't even think about His own *hunger* for FORTY DAYS.

Why not? He was thinking about you and me. While the serpent was saying, over and over, "Do You *want* to hurt? There's another way: I'll show You," over and over, Christ said, NO! Satan said, "Have You pictured what it'll be like when they actually pound the nails through? Or what it'll be like, alone in the dark when Your Father abandons You? Or right *now*: If your Father *loves* You, why'd He leave You here in this WILDERNESS with me?" Christ said, MY FATHER LOVES ME! Satan said, "You're hungry; You're tired; You've already done so much for them, but how deep is their love for *You*? How deep has it *ever* been? *Sin* once and be done with them." But Jesus Christ said, "NO" for forty days *and* for all His life *and* through all the last temptations on Good Friday.

He was with wild beasts in His Passion, with Satan the worst and Satan saying: "You know You can *stop* this at *any* time." But Jesus said, NO! through the beatings and the flogging until He was lying on His back on the ground on a cross with His arms stretched out and the point of the nail just on His hand and the hammer lifted to drill for core samples: "Jesus, how deep *is* Your love?" But *I* was on His mind and He fought for *you*. Hanging in the air, in agony and the dark air full of temptations:

Satan said, "COME DOWN FROM THE CROSS! This is too *much*. Oh, it must *hurt*, fool. Fool. If God loves You, why did He leave You *here*? Look how Your Mother is crying. You *know* You can *stop* this. You can stop this at any time. SAVE YOURSELF!" But Christ said, "No! No! NEITHER DEATH NOR LIFE, NOR ANGELS NOR *DEVILS*, NOR ANYTHING ELSE IN ALL CREATION WILL BE ABLE TO SEPARATE Me from them."

And that is why every last one of us who know Him, we really do want to fight for Him now. We want to be able to take a punch for Him, to endure a little the darkness without folding, to resist when it's not pleasant. If we must fall, we want to go down fighting. And if we fall? He's not ashamed of people who get hurt fighting by His side. Repent and He sets on our feet again as if we never fell. It's not that we can't fall. It's

that with Christ we don't stay down. Just as we sang, "if some lust or sharp temptation wounds me, Savior, and I fall" what then? Then, "Make me think about Your Passion, Lord, and You will heal it all." How?

When Jesus Christ stood in for you, to get tested for you, you know what the tests showed? Love to *infinity*. And if you add my shallow love to the love of Christ, how much is that? Infinite. And if you subtract all my lovelessness from the love of Christ, how much is His love now? Infinite.

And it doesn't just say, "There *is* a High Priest;" it says, WE HAVE Him. If we're His with all OUR WEAKNESS, then He's ours with all His might. And He insists that His huge love isn't just His. He says it's *our* love, His and ours together. Because He says we're together now and NOTHING's going to SEPARATE us. So, however I fall, "Let me think about His Passion." Let me see the love that I get the credit for. If you take all the times we've lain down and subtract it from the love that was found in Jesus, it's still *INFINITE*. And all the sins of Man – if you add *Christ* to us, how deep is the love that Man has offered up to God in Jesus? "O Depth of Love, to me revealing the sea where our sins disappear." It must drive the Tempter crazy, which is a blessing in itself.

In the meantime, WE HAVE A HIGH PRIEST WHO CAN SYMPATHIZE WITH OUR WEAKNESS now and who can *also* see the day of our power that's ahead, for WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM. In the meantime, until this round ends, RESIST THE DEVIL. Say, NO. And if he hits hard, don't tell him you don't want to sin; part of you does. Don't tell him you love Jesus; part of you doesn't. Whatever he offers, tell him, CHRIST HAS RECONCILED ME TO GOD, NOT CHARGING ME WITH ANY SINS. However he hits, tell him, THERE IS NO CONDEMNATION FOR THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS. Whatever he suggests, tell him, NOTHING SHALL BE ABLE TO SEPARATE me FROM THE LOVE OF GOD WHICH IS IN JESUS CHRIST my LORD. AND HE WILL FLEE FROM YOU. We're going to *win* some rounds, and tell me *that's* not worth a fight! And in the meantime, anybody who stands up will take a beating in the ring. But any time now, that bell is going to signal more than just the end of the round. Amen.