

Order of Worship for July 17, 2011

Pre-service Song

Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment: Missions (will this be the Weisners?)

Call to Worship: Psalm 119:65-80 and Prayer

Songs of Worship:

“We Bow Down”

Song # 154

“All Heaven Declares”

Overhead

“How Great Thou Art”

Song # 147

“Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart”

Song # 390

Offering and Offertory

Special Music:

Message: “**Tested, not Tempted, Delivered, not Abandoned**” (Matthew 6:5-13)

By Pastor Bronson

Closing Song:

“**Joy of My Desire**”

Song # 744

Parting Word of Grace

Sunday Evenings in God’s Word

5:30 to 7:00

The Henneker Music Building

“Heroes of the Faith: Hebrews II”

“The Prayer Closet”

July 10, 2011

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying for:

Richard and Kerry Nakamura: (Marjorie, contact the Hurts for this)

President Obama: the Lord will preserve his health of body, mind and emotions; the Lord will protect his marriage and children; the Spirit will bring home to his understanding the truth of the gospel and the truth of the righteousness of God’s kingdom as wisdom for our nation

OCS Board: the Lord will guide them in their search for a new administrator/principal for the school; the Lord will supply both teachers and students for a year of financial and educational growth; the constituent families will gain a new excitement and dedication to the school over the summer months

Military Personnel of the Week: SPC Rebecca Wagenaar (sister of Pam Cervantes):

Young Adult of the Week: Patti Ott at California State University, Chico (wife of Larry):

The title for today’s message is “Tried for True.” God tries us; He puts us through tests and trials. His intention, of course, is that we will come out shining like refined silver and gold. That is His intention, so we want to think about that as we reflect on the Word.

On one of His travels between Galilee in the north and Jerusalem in the south Jesus stopped by a well in Samaria. At that well He met with a Samaritan woman and He engaged in a remarkable

conversation. The heart of that conversation was these comments by Jesus to the woman (John 4:23-24). “...*the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.*” Now here is the key truth: “*For the Father is seeking such people to worship Him. God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*” So oftentimes we talk with one another about the fact that we must seek God. I have no argument with that at all. Of course we need to be seeking His face. The scriptures tell us that. But what Jesus tells us here is that the Father Himself is engaged in a search. What He is looking for are people who worship Him correctly. What that tells me, what it should say to all of us, is that simply to amble in, flop yourself down and assume that God is overwhelmed with the wonderful fact that you are present is to have entirely misunderstood the relationship between God and His creatures. He doesn't want us to amble in. He wants us to come in spirit and in truth. He wants to do business with us. Indeed He wants us to seek Him according to who He is.

One way of understanding what we go through in life is that God works on us to have us come to the place where we worship Him in spirit and in truth. That is one of the reasons why He subjects us to tests. The purpose of a test is to measure and strengthen our faith. God never tempts us, for to tempt is to draw a person toward evil. He never desires that we would go into evil. So when we pray these words, “...*lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil...*” what we are doing is we are agreeing with God. We are saying, “Yes, I do not want to fall into temptation. I do not want to fall into evil. I do not want to drop away from You. I do not want to lose sight of Your righteousness, Your truth, Your grace or Your glory. I do not want to be one who wanders away and into the shadow. That is not what I want. I want to stand in the light and I want to give praise to You, the holy God. That is what I want.” So we agree [with God].

I hope you understand that what I am doing when I work through the Lord's Prayer is that I don't want you to pray this prayer with a mumbling mouth and a silent heart that just rumbles through the words as if they were something you read on a can. These words were given to us by the Lord Jesus Christ in order that they would assist us to come into the presence of God. Therefore we should take them up with the intent of worshiping God in spirit and truth.

I do not want to be tempted: maybe. But that is not a given. The reality is we often do want to be tempted. [Of course) we don't want to fall, for to fall is disastrous, but we are open to the possibility of savoring just a little taste, to capture a brief reminder of those things that we know are forbidden. What do you think? The reason I indicate this is, number one, that I am positive it is true – I do not make things up for my amusement. The other [reason] is because my observation is that we tend to drastically underestimate what it means to be saved. I think that too often we see salvation as an improvement project rather than a whole life transformation. I liken it to what so often we do when we take up a weight loss program or an exercise regimen; it is a discipline for a season, it may even be in fact a commitment for life, but we do not tend to think of them as whole life transformation. We look at them as a coping technique, a means for moderating internal impulses, subduing various desires and controlling various thoughts, but the impulses are still there, and the desires remain and the thoughts are on file, and we like to check in with them now and then just to know we are still the same person we were, improved. But none of us, or hardly any of us, want to be so improved that we become an “obnoxious” presence to others, or to oneself. Now I do not propose that that line of thinking that I just laid out is openly and consciously done by anybody, but I do propose that something like it meanders through the half-thoughts that tend to flow through our minds when we are not paying attention to what we are thinking. For instance if we're walking along the street – and you all know for I have told you before I have to be very careful what I let my eyes look at because my eyes will get me into trouble really fast. So I can be walking down the street and if I am not being particularly thoughtful or mindful about my relationship with God or my walk of faith or the righteousness with which I need to conduct myself, and my eyes pass across a billboard that is

tempting to me, it is very easy for me to say, “O well. After all, I don’t want to appear like a fanatic.” When I am not being careful I am vulnerable to temptation.

Temptation is that which leads us into evil. There are three goals that God has for testing. One of the purposes for testing is to reveal to us, to make plain to us the ways in which we are vulnerable to being tempted. I need to know that; I should be alert to that. As I have said before, I have learned that I cannot let my eyes water when I am driving. I know that, and I remind myself of that on a constant basis: “John, remember who you are, what your weaknesses are, and what you need to do about it.” Do you?

I already talked about another couple of purposes that God has for our testing that arise out of our study of scripture. One is to simply measure and strengthen our faith: where do I stand strong, where do I know myself? I had a conversation one evening in the men’s Bible study that we have on Wednesday nights. I made this comment, and one of the guys rightly said, “You have got to be kidding; that is a dangerous thing to say!” I said, “I am not particularly vulnerable to pornography.” What, you can’t look at billboards but you are not vulnerable to pornography! No, I am fully armed. I cast myself on the mercies of God on a regular basis. I do not open magazines, I do not open books. I do not go anyplace on my computer, there is no evidence for there has been no action. I am committed before God. I stand fast upon His Word. I have occupied that ground and I am strong in that aspect of my life. Hallelujah! Right? The reason I can say that is because I know that I am weak unless I am in Christ. Where are you strong? The second part of the testing, you see, is to see if we are strong enough in faith to be obedient.

Those two purposes for testing we looked at before. It is by means of obedience that we grow in faith. God’s objective in subjecting us to testing is always that we will grow in faith and enjoy greater freedom in our obedience. God frees us so that we can grow in faith; He frees us from the power of temptation to grab us and pull us into its evil practices. He frees us so that we have the freedom to think of others and to serve them. That is the point. The tragedy of being vulnerable to sin is no different than the struggle, the sorrow that we experience when we are under the power of a terrible disease. How many of you have been really sick. What do you tend to think about when you’re really sick? “Me” of course: I ache, I can’t move. I am sore in every part of my body! Why doesn’t somebody come in here and help me? (Don’t ever do that for me; I am a terrible patient. It is best to close the door and pray for me in a far distant place!) But nevertheless, illness does that to us. It has the effect of terrifically narrowing our focus, our minds on ourselves. Nobody is surprised about that; we understand that is part of the consequence of illness. It is also the consequence of evil. If I am spending my days fighting like mad against temptation, I am not much good to anybody else. So I should be appealing to the Lord God to strengthen me so that I am able to stand fast and to set at rest and ease those issues and turn myself and say, “How can I help you, my brother or my sister?” That is the purpose. A little later on we will be looking at the life of Abraham and we will see how the Lord led him step by step to ever greater freedom.

But we need to be wise. Faithfulness is not secured simply by having clear instructions. “Thou shalt not steal.” Is there any ambiguity here? “Though shalt not gossip.” Any ambiguity? “Thou shalt love thy neighbor.” The problem with those statements is not the ambiguity or lack of clarity in the statement; the problem is in the heart of the one listening. “Do you mean all of my neighbors? Do you know my neighbors? You cannot be serious!” So said my neighbor regarding me.

Faithfulness is not secured by setting out sufficient rewards, nor by lots of encouragement along the way. Faithfulness comes by way of inner clarity regarding oneself as well as the character and purposes of God. It is clarity joined with conviction regarding the truth and commitment to

the truth Giver. I am married. I do not commit adultery. I am committed to my wife. I love her. She is precious to me. Beyond that, I love my children. They are precious to me. If I thought for a moment that I would dishonor them by any of my actions I would rather die, for they are precious to me. Here are three reasons for honoring God. I honor God because I am terrified He will catch me if I don't. I honor God because He will be disappointed with me if I don't. I honor God because others will laugh at Him and dishonor His name if I don't. Jesus said we are to love God.

One of the things we need clarity about is that temptation always begins with a lie: always. That is how it began with Eve and I encourage you to open your Bibles just so you can put your eyes across this extremely well – I hope it is extremely well-known passage (Genesis 3:1-7). It should be one that you virtually memorize because it lays out the fundamental pattern of temptation. You know that. Satan first misrepresents God's Word, he tells a lie about the word, and then he tells a lie about God. And Eve buys both. I call this the Serpent's Test, because it is so fundamental. The Serpent's Test: it is always a lie. There are two things that Eve discovered, if she took note, about herself in this process of testing: knowing things about the self is part of what God's tests are about. First, she discovered that she was liable, that she was open, she was willing to doubt God's word. Of course the best way, if you really want to get good at this, the best way to avoid God's Word is to just not read it. Consequently if you can look back over the last week or two and you have to admit, not before me, before God, "I have not been reading God's word," you are aiming directly at temptation. You are setting yourself up to be tempted. That is what you are doing. Eve was willing to doubt God's word. "Did God really say...? Is that really what He meant? Do I really have to return all the change? Is that what He meant by "Thou shalt not steal?" "I mean, should I really be concerned about all the inventory that I am taking home in my pockets? I mean, that is really pretty small potatoes! Surely "steal" is big, like felony, as opposed to [misdemeanor]." Hmm? It is safe for me to talk about that, but it is not safe to talk about other things.

The second [thing Eve learned], of course, is she was willing to listen to other voices. Silence God's voice; listen to other voices, particularly to other voices that encourage you to not pay attention to God. That follows, it simply follows. Notice in the sixth verse the topics that were up for grabs, the negotiable. What was the woman, in this case, willing to rethink? (By the way, this has nothing to do with gender: don't get that in your mind.) Well, she was willing to rethink what was physically nourishing; willing to rethink what was sensuously pleasing. And the last, [she was] willing to rethink the whole idea of being independent. "*So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was desired to make one wise...*" Erase the word of God, put in the word of the serpent, proceed.

Temptation, however, does not stop with simply doubting and setting aside the truth revealed by God, and indeed setting aside truth. Temptation goes on to suppress the knowledge of truth in unrighteousness. That is just Romans 1:18. Any statement that does not fit into the agenda of my desires and preferences I will simply shove it aside and do without. In the recently passed Senate Bill for the state of California signed by Jerry Brown the schools are now instructed that they are not at liberty to explain the negative effects or consequences of engaging in a homosexual lifestyle. Can't talk about it. The fact that homosexual activity leads to the highest incidence of HIV, without a doubt, is now erased. Gone! Scientists who know it is true agree to let it become nothing. Why? Because we don't want it [to be true]. Well, what about us? How often do we manage to forget God's word until after the fact?

The lesson to be gained here is our need to become aware of our own areas of vulnerability, our weakness to being tempted, to doubt God's word and to question the rationale and the motive behind His commands, and then to think through as well as act in ways that our contrary to what

we in our right minds know to be true. I am not intending to offend any person – I don't mind offending people, but I don't intend to offend anybody in particular. Let me just say this: I have two sons, both of whom I love profoundly, both of whom are upside down in their mortgages, so I understand this issue. But beloved, any person who took out a sub-prime mortgage loan, and knew they could not meet the financial obligation of that loan, they knew they were doing something they should not do. I do not care what the mortgage banker said to you, I don't care how much pressure was on you, you knew you shouldn't do that: but you did. We do that. When I spoke about the fact that our national debt and our California State debt and our Butte County debt are all out of control, I just wonder how many of us have out of control debt. And if the body of Christ, the people of God, if they have allowed themselves to be maneuvered into a position where their spending is way over their incoming, that is a shame to the name of God, and it undermines the testimony of the body of Christ, and it gives permission for the lost to simply plunge into sin. That is why I say that the church bears primary responsibility for the condition of the nation. We also bear primary responsibility for getting it out. How? Get out of debt! One. Two: clean up your life morally. Three, get serious about your faith.

Here is the issue: do I say "no" to what God wants me to be and "yes" to what He wants me to avoid. What I want you to do is just turn to Ephesians 5:3-16. I am going to read through this passage and I am going to invite you to do the same. This area which I have just spoken of, the willingness to act and speak and think in ways that are contrary to what we know are right and true, this includes, by the way, choosing evil in defiance of what is good, which is perversion, and it includes frivolity, the refusal to be serious or sober-minded. With those comments to introduce, join me in reading Ephesians 5:3-16:

"Sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you as proper among saints [Of course you can watch it on television if you want to! I added that part.] Let there be no filthiness or foolish talk or crude joking which are out of place. [Out of what place? Out of place in my heart! Out of place in my mouth! Out of place in my life: that stuff doesn't belong with me! It is not a case of whether or not I am with a bunch of other Christians. I am with Christ, Christ is with me! That is where it is at.] But instead, let there be thanksgiving, for you may be sure of this [this is what we know and suppress] you may be sure of this that everyone that is sexually immoral or impure or who is covetous (that is an idolater) has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ["But pastor, my cousin accepted Jesus when he was ten, and he's lived like hell ever since; but he did accept Jesus. Is he saved?" Is he saved? Excuse me! Run that by me again. Is he saved?] Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience, therefore do not associate with them. For at one time you were darkness and now you are light in the world. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret, but when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible, and anything that becomes visible becomes light. Therefore it says, 'Awake O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.' Look carefully then how you walk not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. "

We live in evil days. Therefore we needed to be exceedingly wise. Please pray with me. Our gracious Father, these are hard words in one sense, but in another they are the best words we can hear. You want us, Father, to be free. You want us to love righteousness and truth, that we would be a people full of grace and mercy. You want us to walk with circumspection, to be sober minded, to be careful and prudent so that we are wealthy and can lend with generosity to those whose lives are disordered. You are full of mercy. You test us because you know that we are weak and we need to be strengthened. You test us because you know that we lie to ourselves and

we need to tell the truth. You test us because you love us, and you will not let us fall into the grip of our own evil desires. Thank you Father. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. How closely do you associate being saved with being (becoming) morally good? Otherwise stated, do you see being born again or becoming a new creature in Christ as being a complete transformation of your character?
2. How well do you know your weaknesses or vulnerability to temptation? Have you found that temptations tend to distract you from thinking of and serving others?
3. What does it take to be or become faithful?
4. Under what conditions are you most likely to question God's word and doubt God's intentions, or simply to set all thoughts of God aside completely and go your own way?
5. What have been the more effective ways you have found for resisting and gaining strength to turn away from temptation?
6. Do you see being saved as being prepared to work for the good of others as well as for the glory of God?
7. Can you identify with Gideon?