



Mary Craig Ministries, Inc.

"Hope: The Last Temptation"

Good Friday message April 2014

In the movie, "Bonhoeffer: Agent of Grace," Dietrich Bonhoeffer was offered a way out of prison. He would stay alive, help himself, help his family, and help the people he cared about, if he would agree to aid the Germans in negotiations with the Allies. Bonhoeffer was not asked to deny Christ, or was he? Is denying the commandments of Christ denying Christ? And which commandment?

Jesus said, *"If you love Me, keep My commandments."* *"And you shall be witnesses unto Me, after that the Holy Spirit has come upon you, in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth."* (John 14:15; Acts 1:8)

The commandments given to a redeemed people in Exodus 20 begin with *"You shall have no other gods before me."* Make no graven images. Do not bow down to them or serve them. (Exodus 20:3,-5) Bonhoeffer understood that Christ bows to no man or earthly nation; that a nation and its ideology can itself become a false god.

Bonhoeffer's words and way of life were put to the test, especially in prison. Here are just a few of his quotes:

"Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate." (Bonhoeffer)

"When all is said and done, the life of faith is nothing if not an unending struggle of the spirit with every available weapon against the flesh." (Bonhoeffer)

"The messengers of Jesus will be hated to the end of time. They will be blamed for all the division which rend cities and homes. Jesus and his disciples will be condemned on all sides for undermining family life, and for leading the nation astray; they will be called crazy fanatics and

disturbers of the peace. The disciples will be sorely tempted to desert their Lord. But the end is also near, and they must hold on and persevere until it comes. Only he will be blessed who remains loyal to Jesus and his word until the end.”

— [Dietrich Bonhoeffer](#), *The Cost of Discipleship*

Bonhoeffer, horrified at what the Nazis were doing in Germany at that time, had joined in a conspiracy against Hitler.

“Being a Christian is less about cautiously avoiding sin than about courageously and actively doing God’s will.” (Bonhoeffer)



- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

With the Allies moving in on Berlin, Heinrich Himmler, acting on Hitler’s behalf, ordered Bonhoeffer executed. Bonhoeffer had refused to help the Nazis negotiate with the Allies. Bonhoeffer was led, naked, outside to the gallows. He was hanged in the prison camp less than a month before the war’s end.

“Things do exist that are worth standing up for without compromise. To me it seems that peace and social justice are such things, as is Christ himself.” (Bonhoeffer)

“When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

(Bonhoeffer)

Bonhoeffer died April 9, 1945. A doctor at the concentration camp said, “At the place of execution, he again said a short prayer and then climbed the steps to the gallows, brave and composed. His death ensued after a few seconds. In the almost fifty years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God.” Three weeks later, on April 30th, Hitler committed suicide. The Third Reich fell.

Bonhoeffer’s final known words: “This is the end; for me, the beginning of life.”

Is it possible that escape from temptation might come through death, in the total denial of self to the will of God? 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, *There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it.* The next verse says, *Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.*

What exactly was the temptation and the tactic? In Bonhoeffer’s case, it was to compromise beliefs for a possible greater good of which he would play a part. It was to appeal to selfish interest, to sensuality and desires. The Nazis had offered him little gifts while in prison; clean

blankets, to distribute his poems and words, etc., all to stir up gratitude to the evil one. Hadn't Bonhoeffer taught and preached many times about loving your enemy? Well...

The last temptation came, and it was hope. Hope that there was a way out. Hope that one could stay alive and do "good" in the process. Hope that there was an alternative to death. It was as if so much of what Bonhoeffer believed and taught was being tested. But isn't that what temptation is all about?

Bonhoeffer chose to die in living out his beliefs.

"I believe that God can and wants to create good out of everything, even evil...I believe that God provides us with as much strength to resist as we need. But he does not give it in advance... We trust Him alone. In such a trust, all anxiety about the future must be overcome."

I've thought about this a lot. In fact, thinking about hope as the last temptation has been where my mind runs when not crowded by other more pressing things. I think about Jesus on the Cross. Certainly, it would have been taxing to hear those reviling Him and wagging their heads.

Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, You that destroy the temple, and build it in three days, save yourself. If you be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. Matthew 27:38-44.

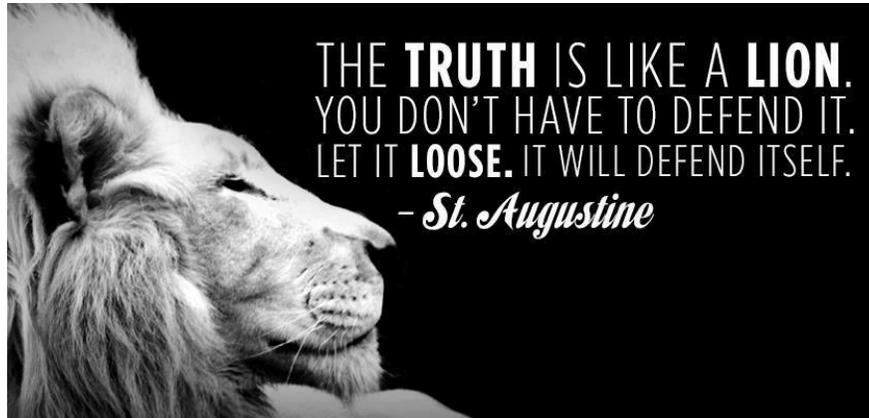
Temptation and testing come, especially when we are in a weakened state, physically, emotionally, or spiritually. Every believer can learn from the final temptations hurled against Jesus Christ by identifying the agent of temptation and its source.

1. **The people.** Here the temptation comes through passersby. Save Yourself. If You are the Son of God, come down from the Cross. Would Jesus prove Himself? Would He come down from the cross in hope that by doing so these folks would believe in Him? Would He submit to their whims and wishes in order to remove unbelief? No, because He had already responded, even going beyond the Cross to being raised from the dead.

And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And He said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead. Luke 16:30, 31

2. **The religious.** Again temptation/testing and taunting come.

Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in him. Matthew 27:41, 42.



Jesus came to bear witness to the truth. He came that those who believe in Him might have life abundantly. He was sent by the Father to save a people given to Him. Now the religious community leaders say they will believe in Him if he comes down from the cross. Is Jesus the King of Israel? Then let Him come down from the cross.

He trusted in God; let Him deliver him now, if He will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. (Matthew 27:43) This taunting was against the Father. If Jesus is the Son of God, then why hasn't His Father delivered Him from this terrible cross? Does His Father accept Him? Why hasn't His Father drawn Jesus to Himself? Would Jesus defend His relationship with the Father?

Did these religious leaders know they were fulfilling Psalm 22:7, 8?

All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.

Jesus is silent. He is bearing our sin and curse. He is propitiating the wrath of God. He is undaunted by this temptation to rebuke, to defend Himself, to "lose it," to defend the Father's love and delight in Him.

3. The Roman soldiers, representing the civil authorities. *"And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, and saying, If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." (Luke 23:36, 37)* [aorist imperative; without delay in a single act] This implies that Jesus is in this fix but didn't have to be here. If you are the king of the Jews, you would have saved yourself already.

4. The condemned already. *"And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed [speaking against Him and blaspheming Him] on Him, saying, [among other things] If you be Christ, save yourself and us." (Luke 23:39)* It's more like, Are you not indeed the Christ? Not only would you have saved yourself but us as well." The people were looking for a Messiah who would save

the nation. This man is questioning Jesus and blaspheming Him at the same time. He is passed by.

Here is the last temptation: hope. Could Jesus have saved Himself AND us? Could Jesus have come down from the Cross AND save us? And what kind of salvation did He come to bring? Did He have to die in order to effect a salvation for us that brings eternal life? But Jesus Himself had said to Peter when they came to arrest Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, the place of the oil press, “*Put up your sword into the sheath; the cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?*” (John 18:11)

As the prophets had said for centuries, peace would not come through the sword but through the LORD. “*I, even I, am the LORD; and beside Me, there is no Savior.*” Isaiah 43:11

The end came. It was finished. Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit.” Having said thus, He gave up the ghost.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer died, bearing witness to the truth of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, the Faithful and True Witness, died as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He died, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. Let us reflect on what He accomplished on our behalf, and let us pray that like Him, and by His grace, we might overcome temptation, even the last temptation, hope.

Your prayers and financial support are vital to the work to which God has called us. We thank God for all of you who hear and obey the Holy Spirit in giving gladly, generously, graciously, and as He guides. God has truly blessed this ministry and its many outreaches. He blesses those who give to MCM; we’ve seen it over the past 20 years now. You are much appreciated.

Living by His grace, for His glory,

Mary Craig

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If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he has testified of his Son. He that believes on the Son of God has the witness in himself: he that believes not God has made him a liar; because he believes not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record: that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that has the Son has life: and he that has not the Son of God has not life. 1 John 5:9-12.

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