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Christ the Rock Lutheran Church  
Farmington, New Mexico

<sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. <sup>6</sup> “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.””

<sup>7</sup> Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” - Matthew 4:5-7

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<sup>40</sup> Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. <sup>41</sup> “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” - Matthew 26:40,41

### **“Christ Is Our Strength When Our Trust in God Is Tested.”**

There is an expression we don’t hear much anymore, but some of you may remember the phrase, “He is a real brick.” It has been replaced today by a similar phrase, “solid as a rock.” Behind these expressions is a most interesting history that goes back 400 years before the birth of Jesus. In ancient Greece there was a city called Sparta that was known for its valor and strength. However, when an ambassador from Athens visited Sparta, he was surprised that the city had no massive walls and seemingly no fortifications to protect it. “Your highness,” he asked the king of Sparta, “have you no walls for defense?” The king assured his guest that they were quite safe. “Come,” he said, “I will show you the walls of Sparta.” So the king led the ambassador to a plain some distance from the city where an army was doing military exercises in full battle gear. Pointing to the soldiers, the king said proudly, “Behold the walls of Sparta! Ten thousand men and every man a brick!”

The disciple Peter would have felt quite comfortable with that phrase, for he was in his own mind a brick, solid as a rock. Had not Jesus even given him the name ‘Peter,’ which means ‘the rock?’ Peter was a man who could be counted on in an emergency. He was not afraid to speak his mind, and he would never be one to just go along with the crowd.

As we continue our study of temptations that the Father-of-lies, that is, the devil, throws at us, I am sorry to report that Peter was mistaken. He was not more powerful than a locomotive. He was not faster than a speeding bullet. He was not able to leap over tall buildings in a single bound. And he was certainly not “super-disciple.” For all of his bold words, Peter was more like play-dough than he was a brick. And this made Peter an easy target for Satan and his lie that we consider today: “Don’t worry. You’re strong. You are a brick!”

#### **I. The lie Satan would have us believe**

It is true that when Jesus asked the disciples who they thought He was, Peter gave a great response, saying, ***“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God”*** (Mt.16:16). But shortly after that confession, when Jesus announced that He had to go up to Jerusalem, Peter tried to prevent Jesus from doing so. And then there was that night when Peter tried to walk on the water as Jesus

was doing, but seeing the waves, he began to sink and had to be rescued by Jesus. He was certainly not a brick that night.

On the night in our text, Jesus washed the disciples' feet as they sat to eat the Passover meal. Remember Peter's response? "**Lord, ... you shall never wash my feet**" (Jn.13:6,8). Later that evening, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter tried to show his courage when he drew his sword to defend Jesus from those who came to arrest Him. He even got in a quick blow, cutting off a servant's ear. But in the end he runs away with the rest of the disciples. And the story continued. In the courtyard of the high priest's residence later that night, Peter folded like a deck of cards, denying he even knew Jesus. Peter, a brick? Solid as a rock? Only in his own mind.

How did Peter get himself into such situations, and why was it necessary for Jesus to warn him to watch and pray? The answer is a simple one. The Father-of-lies was at work. Satan sold Peter the line, "Don't worry. You are stronger than all the rest." It's quite possible that Peter was physically strong. Being a fisherman hauling in nets full of fish requires strength. Maybe Peter could hold his own in a fight or out-argue all others. Scripture doesn't tell us, but it is the picture we get of Peter from these various incidents. So it wasn't difficult for Satan to convince Peter that he was invincible, a real brick in a world of weaker men.

As we look through Scripture, we find others afflicted with this same over-confidence. Lot, the nephew of Abraham, thought he was strong enough to hold his own in the city of Sodom, the most immoral, wicked place in that age. Only with the help of God's angels did Lot escape the fiery destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Forgetting that his great strength was a special gift from God, Samson thought he could over-power Israel's enemy, the Philistines, on his own, only to discover that without God he was a weakling.

When Satan finds a tool that successfully separates people from God, he doesn't stop using it. Today this same lie, or versions of it, has convinced millions of people that they don't need God. They are doing very well on their own. The Father-of-lies tells them that all they need to do is tap into their own inner strength, believe in themselves. Book store shelves are full of titles that promote this idea that you can be a brick.

So successful has Satan been in promoting this doctrine of human invincibility, the power of self, he even dared to tempt Jesus with the same lie. Having been rebuffed in his first temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, Satan took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem. This was a roof-top corner where the outer walls of the temple met. From this peak it was a sheer drop of 450 feet into the canyon of the Kidron River valley. "**Throw yourself down,**" he suggests to Jesus, and then, as if to give him the courage to do so, Satan cleverly quotes part of a verse from the 91st Psalm: "**For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'**" (v. 6). "Show them — show them all that you really are God. Give them a demonstration of what you can do, Jesus." What better way to become an instant celebrity. The news of Jesus surviving a leap from the temple rooftop would be all over town before nightfall. Everyone would know that the Messiah had arrived!

## II. The answer Christ gives

How did Jesus reply? He said, **“It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”** (v. 7). Here we learn from Jesus that it is one thing to trust God, and it is something very different to test God.

We test God — we test His patience with us when we keep putting His call of us on hold. Do you have a friend or relative like that — you know, the person who says that there’ll be time for God down the road? Lots of folks test God like that. Marilyn Monroe was such a one. She had an appointment to talk with the Rev. Billy Graham just days before her overdose death. She cancelled that appointment, having no time just then for the things of God. So, we, too, test God when we put Him on hold while we do other, seemingly more important things.

We test God when we ignore His clear warnings or think ourselves too strong to fall. Again, Peter’s reply to Jesus illustrates this attitude. When warned that all the disciples would fall away that night of the Passover meal, Peter replied, “Not me! Lord, even if all these do so, I will never deny you!” But when you warm yourself by the fire of temptation, you get burned, as Peter learned.

Worst of all, we test God when we neglect His Word. Without His Word in our hearts, our walls are down; we have no army of defense against Satan’s attacks. How many proud parents haven’t stood before a baptismal font and promised that they would bring their child to church regularly, but now they lounge at home on Sunday mornings? Have they fallen for the lie that their children should be allowed to decide for themselves whether they want to go to church or not? Has the Father-of-lies wormed his way into their heads and made them believe that they could be a brick and stand alone without their Savior?

Jesus knew the Word of God. He knew the importance of trusting the One who gives us that Word. So He says to us today, **“Watch”** - which is to be ready, to be prepared. And to be prepared, you must be in the Word and so be connected to God. **“Watch and pray,”** He says (*Mt. 26:41*). In prayer we declare our dependency upon the Lord. When we pray, we are rejecting the message of Satan that we are strong enough by ourselves to stand firm in the faith and to direct our own lives. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, we repent of our hard-headed, self-sufficient egos. With the wisdom the Spirit gives us, we search the Scriptures and experience the Lord’s direction and His blessing on our lives. And day-by-day, our confidence in the Lord grows. We recognize that He is our strength.

And what a confidence we have in Jesus! Because of what He did for us throughout His life to His death on the cross, we no longer have to live in fear of the Father-of-lies. Because Jesus bore the shame and the guilt of our sins, we stand forgiven by God. Because Jesus refused kingdoms and crowns and the temptation to self-glorification, we will be glorified before Him in heaven.

Peter eventually caught on that he was not a brick, that he could not stand alone, no matter how strong he was. Listen to these words from his 1st Epistle: **“God opposes the proud, but shows favor to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you”** (*1 Pe.4:5-6*). Peter got it right. He found the Truth, and he learned to watch and pray.

That same Lord speaks to us in this word today. No matter how strong you think you are, whether you are in the prime of life and at the peak of your earning capacity, you are not a brick. You are not strong enough to deal with the trials of life alone. You are not brave enough to look death in the face without Jesus. When the Father-of-lies comes whispering, “You don’t need to worship; you’re too busy” ... when he suggests you can go it on your own, then it’s time to call on the Savior. Hear His truth and listen to His word, **“Watch and pray”** (v.41). Build your life on Jesus. He is the One who is our strength. He is truly our Brick!

Amen.