

February 29, 2004
Lent 1

“Lead Us Not into Temptation”

LUKE 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, ² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. ³ The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." ⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" ⁵ The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. ⁷ So if you worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" ⁹ The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. ¹⁰ For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; ¹¹ they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" ¹² Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ¹³ When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

There was an elderly lady I once visited whose name was Helen. She was very hard of hearing and refused to wear a hearing aid, so we had to sit next to her and speak loudly into her ear so she could hear the word of the Lord. As we ended our first devotion with her, we prayed the Lord's Prayer. When we came to the part, "And lead us not into temptation," she spoke these words so loudly and forcefully I thought something had happened to her. The next time she did the same thing again, and that happened a third time. Finally we asked her why she prayed that part of the Lord's Prayer so loudly, and she said that was how they always closed their family devotions on the farm in Nebraska.

"And lead us not into temptation." We need to pray that petition loudly in our daily lives, for Satan knows the end is drawing near and he has only a little time to lead us into temptation and pull us away from Jesus. Temptations will come our way, but they can be overcome as we pray, **"And lead us not into temptation."**

1) Temptations will come

Satan knows our lowest moments when we find ourselves alone in the desert. We are told, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil." Notice it says that Jesus was "led by the Spirit." This was not an evil spirit leading Jesus. This was the Holy Spirit, marching Jesus into the battle field of temptation and propelling him to the place where Jesus will prove that he has lived the only perfect life a human being has ever lived. The terrible whippings, beatings, and nailing to the cross paid the debt of your sin and mine. The perfect life of Jesus lived was then credited to that clean slate, a valuable part of this whole package of being declared righteous before God.

Satan knows how to push the right buttons when it comes to temptation. He came to Jesus after Jesus has been fasting for forty days. "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." With his power as God Jesus could have taken a stone like this and turn it into a roll, whole wheat, hard Durham wheat, raised on dry land from the high country of Colorado, baked to perfection, hot out of the oven, moist, fragrant, sweet, covered with melting butter. Still hungry. If you are really God you can make another one. This time add some sweet clover honey to the warm bread and melting butter, and how about a freshly ground and brewed cup of coffee to go with it.

Does Satan still do this today? You better believe it. Feeling down, how about a nice fresh, warm and toasty pity party for yourself, where you can give vent to your feelings and emotions, instead of turning to the Lord for help? How about a trip to the Mall or Costco where you can satisfy your craving and emptiness by indulging yourself with some material pleasure? How about beating up somebody in your family, kick the dog, say nasty things to your mom. That will make you feel better. Pour another glass. Pop another pill. Open another porno page. The pain will go away.

What did Jesus do with this temptation? He sent the devil packing by quoting from the Bible. "It is written; 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" The rest of that quote from Deuteronomy says, "But by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." God fed his people with manna in the desert, and provided them clothing and shoes that did not wear out. He wanted them to learn to trust in the word and turn to his promises for help. Satan loves to drive a wedge between you and the promises of the Lord. Remember what Ulysses did when they passed near the islands of the Sirens who called out to them in soothing tones. He put wax in the ears of his men and tied himself to the mast of the ship and they made it safely through. Don't listen to Satan's siren song, put wax in your ears, and tie yourselves to the promise of God found in his holy Word.

Satan does not give up easy. He leads Jesus up to a high place and shows him all the kingdoms of the world in an instant. Can Satan do that? He is not all powerful, he cannot be everywhere at once, and he does not know all things, but he does have the power to create a snapshot of all the kingdoms of the world and show them to Jesus. He seems so clumsy and so foolish as he proudly boasts and swaggers like a drunk in a bar, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will be all yours."

What appears to be a slobbering drunk talking foolishly is actually a clever snake, and if you listen carefully you can hear the hissing between the lines. When I hear obnoxious car salesman from Santa Maria yelling at me to buy a car, I think to myself, I would never ever get near that place and buy a car. But then maybe, just maybe in the back of my mind, I am thinking about it more than I realize. Now we hear the hissing sound. "Jesus, look at the kingdoms of the world. See all those people making a mess of their lives. Think of what you could do with your power as God to make this world a better place to live. No drugs. No guns. No divorces. No nursing homes. All the glory, all the power, all the people will be praising you without the pain and suffering. Think of it Jesus. The glory without the gall, the crown without the cross, the throne of victory without the throes of death. Unmovable, unshakeable, unflinching Jesus set the devil back on his haunches with Scripture," Worship the your God and serve him only."

Satan still challenges us: "Take up your cross and follow Jesus. Deny yourself. Is that what you really want in your life? Do you want your vocation in life to be one of tension, pain, and anguish living for Jesus?" Satan catches us off guard, and then he proposes an alternate life. He invites us to lay down our cross and forget about following Jesus closely and changing our lives out of love for him. Ah, Satan has a better plan. He suggests ever so gently that we will be much happier if we get involved in people and their lives with the goal that they might bestow glory on us and make our lives meaningful. Get the rewards and ribbons, the smiles and hugs, even glowing testimonies in church services, and forget about the cross and crucifying your flesh, and being buried with Christ and rising with a new life to follow him. Look for the kingdom of glory here on this earth and forget the kingdom of the cross. And then we hear God's word tell us, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus...He humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on the cross." We find strength in the wounds of Jesus.

Satan gives it more shot. He takes Jesus to the highest point of the temple and says, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here. For it is written; 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully, they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Satan is so good, so smooth, so deceitful, the father of lies. He quotes Scripture, even masquerades as an angel of light. Notice something is missing in this quote from Psalm 91. Satan has willfully and purposely left out the part that says the Lord will "keep us in all his ways."

I can ask God to take care of me, but I cannot expect him to be part of something that is contrary to his will for my life or something that I have devised that is evil. For example, if I stand in the middle of the freeway or jump from a building and ask God to send his angels to watch over me and keep me, I am asking God to be involved in something that is contrary to his will. For Jesus to stand at the top of the temple, jump down, be rescued by angels and receive the applause of the crowd was contrary to God's will and God's plan. Once again Jesus sends the devil packing with the words of Scripture, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

"What are you, a chicken?" The kids yelled to the young man as he stood high on the rocks along the river, and then plunged into the water below, snapping his neck. Satan sees us sitting on the ledge, shivering, afraid, looking for help, and then he yells, "Are you afraid to jump, you chicken?" We plunge ourselves into sin, justifying it with the thought, "God will protect me." We surround ourselves with bad company and fill ourselves with bad thoughts, tempting God, not wanting to climb down from the perch and get back into this Word. With Frank Sinatra we love to croon, "I'll do it my way" and we think we are so smart doing it our way. Then we receive strength from Jesus and say, "Lord do not let me put you to the test." We boldly and loudly pray the prayer, "Lead us not into temptation."

2) Temptations can be overcome

Temptations will come in your life, but they can also be overcome. Jesus won the battle. We are told, "When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time." The war was not over. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed so fervently the sweat fell to the ground as great drops of blood. Angels came and ministered to him. Jesus won the victory over Satan. "He was tempted in all parts as we are, yet he was without sin," the Scripture tells us. The victory Jesus won that day is your victory.

Someone who came from seeing the film, "The Passion of the Christ" said, "It makes you want to not sin." When we think of Jesus suffering, and this amazing defeat of Satan in the wilderness you realize that you have been declared righteous before God, you can escape the judgment to come, and have strength in time of temptation.

Then there is the power of prayer. The night he was tempted in the Garden Jesus said to his disciples, "Watch and pray, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." Then there is the blessing of your baptism. In time of temptation you can shout aloud if necessary, "I have been baptized, I have been baptized" not in the name of the sun, moon and stars, but in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." And we have the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit. Take the book with you in the field of battle. Use it against Satan and you will send him packing.

Helen was in the hospital. Her heart was failing. Her daughter called and said she did not have much longer to live. She was waiting to receive communion. She listened to the devotion. She prayed the Lord's Prayer one more time and prayed loudly, "Lead us not into temptation." Ten minutes later the Lord answered her prayer and took her home to glory. Amen.