

March 9, 2014
Lent 1

"Jesus Real Temptation and Our Real Victory"

MATTHEW 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." ⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" ⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ "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.'" ⁷ Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Last Sunday afternoon Susan and I were walking on the Bob Jones trail by Avila Beach. As we were walking back to the car, a man and woman approached us with their dog on a leash. The dog wanted to come toward us and the man said "heel" but the dog wouldn't listen. He approached again and the man said, "heel" but again the dog wouldn't listen. As we passed each other the woman said in frustration, "So much for heeling."

How many times have you failed your master this past week? Every day life is such a tough battle. We fight against bad thoughts that arise within us. We live in this world but do not want to be part of this world. The devil does not leave us alone. He is relentless. The evangelist Dwight Moody said he knew the devil was real because of what the Bible told him and what he experienced in his daily life.

This morning we see Jesus led by the Holy Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. I don't know first hand what temptations you faced this week. I cannot look into your heart and you cannot look into mine. Because of the Holy Spirit's words here in Matthew 4 we can actually see first hand the temptations Jesus experienced from the devil. We can also see first hand the victory he won. For us whose temptations are so real and even overwhelming, it is sure comforting to know that Jesus experienced a very real temptation and very real victory for us.

Stones to bread

The Holy Spirit wanted Jesus to be tempted by the devil and gain the victory as it says, "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil." This temptation happens immediately after Jesus was baptized and immediately after the Father said from heaven, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Do you want proof Jesus lived the perfect life you and I could never live? Then look at these

temptations he went through and the victories he won for us.

"After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry." Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights. Jesus allowed himself to become very hungry. His body was weak. He is tired. The book of Hebrews tells us he was tempted in all parts as we are, yet without sin. Jesus could have used his power as God to make his feelings of hunger go away but he did not. He could have used his power as God to deaden the pain he was experiencing on the cross but he did not. Jesus is going to go through a very real temptation and gain a very real victory for us.

Satan spots the opportunity to take advantage of Jesus when he was weak and hungry. "The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.'" There were lots of stones out in the desert. Jesus certainly had the power to take one of these stones and turn it into a freshly baked loaf of bread. When people are real hungry and starving all they can think about is food. They dream of warm bread out of the oven with rich Irish butter and sweet clover honey and a cup of coffee made with beans freshly ground.

The devil knows he has an uncanny ability to spot us when we are weak. He offers shortcuts instead of trusting in the Lord and the power of his promises that never fail us. He whispers to us: "You are going through a rough patch. Throw a pity party for yourself. Indulge yourself. This is much better than relying on the Lord and remembering how much he loves you cares about you. Pop another pill. Pour another drink. Indulge your fantasies on the internet. Buy something you don't need at Costco. It will make you feel better." Remember Job who lost all of his wealth, ten of his children and then his health. In the lowest time of his life, his dear wife told him to just give into his feelings and emotions. She told him to just "curse God and die."

Jesus emerges victorious. "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Moses spoke these words to the children of Israel when they were depending on the Lord to provide them with a daily provision of manna from heaven. Even more important than this amazing food called "manna" was the promise the Lord had given to provide them with that food. Jesus won the victory because Jesus trusted in the promises of his heavenly Father to care for him rather than satisfying his hunger with stones turned into bread.

For all the times I have failed to trust in the promises of the Lord for strength and help, Jesus has not failed. His perfect trust led to a perfect sacrifice on the cross. His forgiveness is real for all the times you and I have given into temptation. His promises found in his Word will not fail. They will help fight against every temptation. It was the Apostle Paul who said "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength."

The protection of angels

Satan does not walk away after being badly beaten and bruised by Jesus. "Then the devil took him up to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. '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.'"

Satan carries a Bible with him. He is good at quoting Scripture and using it to lead people into temptation. He is also good at leaving out certain parts of Scripture to serve his own evil purposes. If you read these verses from Psalm 91 carefully and in their context you will discover the devil left out the words "in all your ways." The Lord provides us with protection in all our ways which are also his ways. That is why we always pray as Jesus did, "Not my will but yours be done."

Notice how the devil tempts Jesus by twisting the truth about the protection of angels. He is suggesting to Jesus that he allow his heavenly Father to show how much he cared for him by sending angels to protect him after he jumped off the highest point of the temple.

Certainly we believe that God's angels protect us and keep us as Psalm 91 says, "He will command his angels concerning you." How could I ever forget that Sunday afternoon in Northern Wisconsin during my days at the seminary? I was returning from preaching at this country church in Pelican Lake. I didn't realize a major drop in temperature was turning rain to black ice. The car started fishtailing, and then spun around, a perfect 180 degrees. It slid backwards down the road as straight as an arrow with boulders and trees flying past my eyes. Satan can say, "Why bother to put new tires on your car, your heavenly Father will send his angels to protect you even if you can see the threads sticking out of the tires." The pastor in Oklahoma plays with poisonous snakes to prove the Lord is taking care of him. He is bitten and then dies. The Star of Bethlehem members stop reading God's Word in their personal lives because Satan has convinced them they can go out into the battles of life with the Word of God because God will protect them.

What does Jesus do? He quotes another verse of Scripture to defeat the devil. "'Jesus answered him, 'It is also written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Jesus did not pray "O Heavenly Father, let me do it my way. No, he prayed, "O Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from me, now my will but yours be done." Jesus stayed faithful to the task. He did not cut corners or take matters into his own hands when it came to being wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities." When he died he prayed, "Father into your hands I commit my spirit." His real victory is our real victory. His blood cleanses us for all the times we have tested our God by not relying on him as we should.

The kingdoms of this world

Satan keeps coming after Jesus just as he keeps coming after us. "Again the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.'" This temptation seems to be so clumsy, so foolish, almost a desperation shot from half court with only a second left in the game. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Satan shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in all their glory and splendor. Here is a panoramic, sweeping view of the great pyramids of Egypt, and the grandeur and splendor of Rome, and Mayan temples, the temples of ancient Greece and the Great Wall of China.

Behind the glory and splendor is unbelievable human pain and suffering. Jesus had the power to change the world and make it a better place to live. People wanted him to be their bread king and provide for all their earthly needs. We may have compassion for people who suffer pain, and even for animals that suffer pain, but no one cared more for people than Jesus. This past week in our Santa Maria Terrace Bible study we read about Jesus healing two blind men and it said, "He had compassion on them." Rodney King once said after the LA riots, "Can't we all just get along." Jesus had the power and compassion to help people get along. He could do this without the cross, without shame, without suffering for sin and without being forsaken by his heavenly Father.

Jesus set his heart on serving his heavenly Father faithfully. He did not listen to any alternate plans Satan had to offer. To give up the cross even for a split second would be tantamount to giving into Satan and worshipping him. "Jesus said to him, 'Away from me Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" Jesus won a real victory over real temptation. Angels came and ministered to him. Jesus' victory is your victory. He gives you the power and strength to say, "Away from me, Satan!" And so we pray, "Lead us not into temptation." Amen.