

Lent 1 –February 26, 2023

Text: Matt. 4:1-11

Theme: Don't Fall for his Old Tricks

The temptation of Christ is an important Biblical text with which to be familiar. It is important because what Satan does to Christ is exactly what he tries to do to us. It is an old trick that the deceiver has used on human beings since the Garden of Eden when he asked Eve, "Did God REALLY say..." He wants us to doubt God. Of course, it didn't work on Christ but he had to try.

"If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." Jesus was fully human and he was indeed very hungry after 40 days of fasting. He also knew that His Father loved Him and that He had the complete power to do as Satan suggested. But just because we can do something does not mean that we ought to do something. How often does Satan come to us trying to tempt us to do or believe something which we know is wrong but we have complete power to do it and believe it? Everybody else is doing it. Why shouldn't we? Doesn't God want us to have happiness and fun? Isn't He our loving Father? Doesn't He promise to forgive all our sin anyway? Jesus shows us what to do when Satan attacks us like this. He goes to Scripture, Deuteronomy 8:3, where Moses is explaining to the Israelites why God allowed them to suffer hunger and want on their journey.

"And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make

you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” It is the Word of God that feeds us, not just physical food. Physical food will only last a short time but the Word of the Lord endures forever. Satan switched tactics. He decided to fight Scripture with Scripture.

“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and

‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”

Yes, God did say these things, didn’t he? Well, sort of. The Devil left out the phrase “to guard you in all your ways” didn’t he? “He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.” The angels are not there to help us do whatever we want to do but to guard us as we serve God. If what you are doing is serving God, you can rest assured that the angelic host has your back. If you are going something for your own glory or perversion, beware, there may be no angels there for you. Jesus counters with Moses’ admonition, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.”

Satan uses that one on us as well. We are so often tempted to do things for our own glory, to get our own revenge, to use our standing as the children of God to be reckless and unheeding of God’s Law. It’s not new. Eve fell for it in The Garden. The fruit was pleasing to the eye after all. It must be good to eat. Never mind that God had said not to eat it. He

will protect us. Yes, He will protect our eternal souls because He loves us so much, but the earthly consequences of wanton sin can be deadly.

Finally, Satan goes for what seems to always work on humans: greed. Scores and scores of humans have fallen for this one. Worship him and he will give you all the kingdoms of the world. That is not a lie. If you will just abandon God, Satan will make your life on this earth more fun, more successful and more pleasurable, for as long as it suits him. Genghis Khan, Adolf Hitler, Mao Zedong, Steve Jobs, Ruth Bader Ginsburg: they all abandoned Jesus Christ and were rewarded handsomely in this life. But life on earth is only a short part of our existence. Jesus directs us to the reality of eternity. The full quote of Jesus' answer is again from Moses' sermon to his people in Deuteronomy as they prepare to enter a foreign land full of temptations to abandon God. Deuteronomy 6:13-15,

"It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you— for the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God—lest the anger of the LORD your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth." Jesus warns us that whatever Satan might offer us, it is the Lord our God who holds our eternal lives in His hands and it is only Him that we strive to serve.

Satan continues to tempt God's people. We are tempted to satisfy our earthly desires despite what God calls us to do. We are tempted to live our lives recklessly as though God is our servant instead of the other way

around and we are tempted to avail ourselves of the pleasures of this life as though this life were all that we had. The things Satan tempts us to do do not always even appear to be evil. If one promotes the pro-choice agenda, it is necessarily not because he is evil. It is because he is trying to find the best way forward in a bad situation but because Jesus tells us that we are called to love all living humans whether or not they have been born, we know that it is evil to kill them. If one defends gender dysphoria as a normal and healthy option, it is not because he is evil. It is because he loves someone who suffers from the condition. But Jesus tells us that our genders are a gifts from God and we are created exactly as He intends for us to be. Anything that tells us that God made a mistake is sin.

Rather than judging actions by what seems good or seems right, we would do well to judge everything only by God's Word to us because that is our touchstone, our plumbline the only solid, never changing thing we have in this world. We fight Satan the same way Jesus defeated him, with the Word of God. We are prepared to listen to Him and change our direction whenever we find ourselves on a different path. The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit and it will deftly slay Satan over and over again until we enter The Promised Land.