

Sermon: Jesus Resisting Temptation

During this season of Lent, we focus on all that our Lord Jesus has done for us. In our Gospel lessons today, we see Jesus' journey to the Jordan to be baptized, and then we see that Jesus left the Jordan to go into the wilderness. There he was tempted by Satan. Despite Satan's best-efforts Jesus resisted each temptation, not just for himself, but also for you.

The importance of the temptation scene in our Gospel reading today, cannot be overstated. This is a showdown between Jesus and Satan. This is a moment where everything is at stake. If Jesus fails, everything is lost, and Satan succeeds. If Jesus fails, the hope for humanity is lost because we need a Saviour to redeem us from our sins. At this moment, Satan is bringing a full force assault on Jesus because this is his best way to win his battle against God.

It starts with, "Tell this stone to become bread." In other words, "Jesus focus on yourself."

Such temptations of the flesh come to us as well. How often in our lives do we have legitimate needs, perhaps we need just a few more dollars to pay the gas bill, or some relief from this nagging pain, or a decent night's sleep, or peace within the family.

We ask for nothing extravagant, Lord, but can you really help us with the daily, physical necessities of life? It often seems like, in this area, we are on our own.

And we too are sometimes tempted from our own fleshly needs to question the love of God. Referring to such temptations of the flesh, it has been said, "My own worst enemy is closest to me, I am carrying him in my breast."

Therefore, if God does not help me with his Holy Spirit, I am lost. I cannot govern myself for a solitary hour.”

And so, the words of Jesus to Satan are also a good reminder for us. “Man does not live by bread alone” or, as Jesus would later explain further in his Sermon on the Mount, “Therefore, I tell you do not worry about what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?”

And why do you worry about clothes? See the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you,

O you of little faith? So do not worry saying ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows you that you need them”.

Then, “The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 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. So, if you worship me, it will be yours.”

Oh, the world had so much to offer. Of course, it had gold and riches beyond measure. But there was something more here as well—something that spoke to the compassionate heart of Jesus.

For when he looked out over the nations, he saw more than glory and power. He also saw the suffering, the anguish and the despair that filled the lives of so many people.

For that is why he had come into the world—to give hope to those who despair—to ease the pain of those who suffer—and to bring forgiveness and peace where there is sin and guilt. And now he could do it.

There need be no crucifixion, no humiliation, no thorny crown, no death—here was a tremendous shortcut to accomplish his mission—he could bring peace on earth, free the world of evil, and bypass the agony of the cross.

What a temptation that was! Would Jesus go for it? No, because that was not his father's plan. And Jesus knows that when you try to do things outside the father's plan—when you try to accomplish things your own way (regardless of how good your intentions might be) with no regard for God and his will—the result is always disaster.

What was Jesus' response to Satan? 'Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only'."

We do not worship on Sundays apart from Christ and his cross. We do not live the other 6 ½ days of the week apart from Christ and his cross. Because Christ and what he did for us through his suffering and death is the foundation of who we are and what we do.

Then, finally, "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. 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.”

Here we see the temptation to test God, which is an invitation to doubt God. The only reason we would test him—to see if he were there—or to see if he really cared—would be if we doubted him or his love. For that is the reason and purpose of Satan’s entire existence. He wants to do nothing else than to plant seeds of doubt in each believer’s heart, to pull us away from our gracious God, and to rob us of our salvation.

But Jesus would not fall for this temptation. Rather, “Jesus answered again, very clearly from Scripture, ‘It says, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Satan wants you to doubt God, he wants you to doubt your salvation, he wants you to doubt that Jesus cares for you and loves you and provides for you each and every day. Why? Because Christians are people who live by grace through faith. And every doubt we have works to undermine that faith by which we are saved. That is why it is so important that we hold onto the certainty of our salvation.

So, Satan failed in all his attempts to get Jesus to sin. Jesus remained the spotless Lamb of God. He conquered temptation for us so that we could apply his strength, his perseverance and his victory, we fight those same battles against the devil, the world and our flesh each and every day.

So, what did we learn from our reading today?

Satan can rationalize, justify, and misuse the scriptures to tempt us to sin. Know the scriptures to be able to defeat him.

The temptations are questions of our loyalty. Will we be loyal to God, even if we do not have material wealth and physical health? Will we be loyal to God even if we must suffer? Will we be loyal to God and put away our idols? Will we be loyal and not test God to conform to our will?

Temptations reveal our lack of trust in God. Do I trust God to get me through this? Do I seek after God above all else, knowing that this is true living?

Or do I think that God is not going to provide for me, so I must take shortcuts, rely upon myself, and do what I want to get what I need?

Satan is testing our loyalty, revealing where we are lacking trust. Learning from your weak points, the places where we fall to temptation, and grow going forward. Understand that this weakness reveals the need to develop trust in God in our lives, forever. Amen.