

UNEDITED DRAFT

Dear Friends in Christ,

Today we are talking about the biggest problem that every Christian must face. The problem is temptation. If we could somehow eliminate temptation we would eliminate all sin. But as Jesus says, "Temptations are bound to come." Living in the world in which we live, and with Satan still prowling around seeking whom he may devour, we will be tempted. In fact, you can count on being tempted daily.

What exactly is a temptation? It is simply anyone, or any situation, or any thought that we face that attempts to pull us away from what is right in God's sight. God is the absolute when it comes to right and wrong. Satan desires that we violate that will of God... that we don't yield to what God wants. When he tries to pull us away, that is a temptation.

The consequences of yielding to temptation should not be underestimated. We like to categorize sins. But all sin is damaging to our relationship with God. James 1:13-15 says: "**When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.**"

So to say that temptations are a matter of life and death is not an overstatement. How can we triumph over temptation?

We'll answer the question by looking at Jesus' temptation. It's recorded for us in the beginning of Matthew 4.

The first thing we need to do is look at the setting for these temptations.

1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.

"Then" means after Jesus' baptism. So Jesus is baptized by John, the Spirit descends on him like a dove, the Father calls out from heaven, that this is beloved son in whom he is well pleased. Jesus is inaugurated as the Christ, the Savior of the world. He is empowered and gifted by the Holy Spirit to accomplish the rescue mission the Father sent him on. Jesus is ready!

And what happens next? TEMPTATION.

Friends, have you noticed this pattern in your life as well? Have you noticed that your spiritual highs are quickly followed by temptation? More than one couple in our congregation endured some marital problems in our church during or shortly after our "Retreat to Marriage" course. Coincidence? You spend time in the word and prayer, and temptation soon follows. You have a new spiritual insight, and a temptation soon follows. Satan is cunning. He won't let us bask in spiritual victories for long before he viciously attacks. If you have a great spiritual victory, you can expect a great temptation to follow shortly.

But don't miss what's happening here. At Jesus' baptism, he was set apart as our great Substitute and Savior. He came to defeat Satan... to crush him. He came to annul the power of sin. He came to do battle. And no sooner is he set apart for this, than the fight begins with a mighty battle!

2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

So Jesus was hungry, he was weak. And this is when Satan attacks. So not only will Satan attack after a spiritual high point. He will also attack you when you are physically weak. If you haven't had enough sleep. You're hungry. You're stressed for time. You're sick. You can expect Satan to attack.

TEMPTATION

3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

- 1) Stones to bread. Jesus is literally starving, and Satan tempts him to turn stones to bread. But what is the nature of this temptation?
 - a. Temptation for Jesus:
 - i. To eat? No. Nothing wrong with that. Food is a gift from God. Soon after this, Jesus turns water into wine. Surely he is able to turn stones into bread. So why was this a temptation?
 - ii. The temptation was first of all **to doubt God's love and care**. He said you were his beloved Son. But look how you hunger! Look how you suffer! He must have left you!
 - iii. In fact, Deeper than it first looks: Challenge to **identity**. *If you are the Son of God!* You must not be because of your present suffering! The temptation of self-rejection. Lose hope that you are of any value to God or anyone else.
 - iv. A challenge of **selfishness**: Use your power, influence, resources, abilities for self... as you see fit... as you want. "He won't provide for you, so you must do it yourself! And you're worth it!"
 - b. Temptation for you. Satan tempts you in the same way. He doesn't tempt you to turn rocks to bread because you can't do that. He tempts you in line with your abilities.
 - i. If you struggle in a **basic need**, you are tempted to **doubt God's love and care**. Health, food and clothes, shelter, transportation, relationships.
 - ii. Physical trials are a temptation to **doubt your spiritual identity**.
 - iii. He tempts you to **selfishness**. Abandon God and take care of yourself! You're on your own. Use your time, talents and abilities for yourself!
 - c. We have succumbed. What's your track record on such temptations? Have you doubted? Wondered if God cares? Doubted who you are? Been selfish? We have failed.
 - d. But Jesus triumphed!

4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Quoting Scripture: They physical isn't as important as the spiritual. God Word assures me of his love, my identity and empowers me to live selflessly! I have God's Word, so that's all I need!

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.'"

- 2) Throw yourself down. "God has promised to protect you. So prove it!"
 - a. Temptation for Jesus.
 - i. **Putting God to the test**. There is a difference between God keeping his promise in his way and his timetable, and us forcing his hand. Jesus had come in humility to fulfill the Father's will. He submitted to the Father. To "push" God to rescue him from what would be a leap from a fatal height would be to put God to the

test.

God has given promises. But how and when he keeps them is up to him.

- ii. Fast track to fame and popularity.
- b. Temptation for us.
 - i. We have no right to demand that God make good on his promises when and where we demand. Have you ever put God to the test? Have you ever demanded that God do for you what you want, when you want it?
Alone – “give me this weekend. Money – “Job now. Lottery.” Problem of any kind: Resolve it today. Resolve in this way.
Or even: Give me a sign today.
We’re putting God to the test. We have sinned. WE haven’t resisted this temptation.
- c. Jesus triumphed!
7 Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Again, quoted Scripture. I don’t call the shots. The Father is in control, and he will do as he sees fit. I will trust.

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.”

- 3) Bow and I’ll give you the kingdoms of the earth
 - a. Temptation for Jesus.
 - i. Sacrifice heavenly gain for earthly glory. Fast track to glory and power. Bypass the cross. Cost? Worship Satan. Result? The world not saved.
 - b. Temptation for us.
 - i. Sacrifice heavenly gain for earthly glory. What evidence can you find in your life present and past of a focus on earthly glory: a striving after money, a desire to get rich, a yearning for more earthly stuff, a desire for recognition in the eyes of people, a desire to be able to control more people, a passion for a certain earthly pleasure. (Not that earthly pleasures are sinful. It’s just that they not the goal.)
ILL: This would be like planning a three week vacation to the Colorado Rocky Mountains. But you decide on the way you decide to pass through Cawker City, Kansas to see the world’s largest ball of twine. When you see it, you are so enthralled by it and how big it is, you decide to spend all three weeks of vacation in Cawker City. Now I’m not saying it wouldn’t be cool to see the world’s largest ball of twine. But compared to three weeks in Colorado Rockies?! Is the spectacular majesty of those mountains any comparison to a big ball of twine? Yet just as foolishly, we so often choose to focus on earthly glory, and riches, and power, and convenience and comfort. And we greatly risk not reaching the much greater majesty and glory of heaven.
We have yielded to the temptation! But Jesus did not...
 - c. Jesus triumphed
10 Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” Quoted Scripture. I will not let desire anything more than God! I will not serve anyone but God! God will remain first in my heart and life!

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Jesus said “Away. And Satan left. Jesus has all power over Satan. Jesus resisted all temptation.

Do you see the pattern? Jesus was tempted like we are, but he resisted. We have succumbed.

So how can we say “Triumph over temptation?”

Only in Christ Jesus can we triumph. Because Jesus already has.

In him, you triumph over temptation vicariously. This is why he came. To do what we have not and cannot. And he did it perfectly! In Christ we are perfect in God’s sight!

With a victory that is already ours in Christ, we can also triumph over temptation in our daily lives with his power. You can triumph really when you tap into his power and strength. HOW?L

Keep your focus on Jesus.

A man trained his dog not to eat a treat placed on the dog’s nose until the command was given. After repeated failures, the man realized he didn’t need to teach the dog not to eat the treat, he needed to teach the dog to keep full focus and attention on the master. When he finally did that, the dog barely noticed the treat. He instead awaited the master’s command.

We must keep our focus entirely on Jesus. We give in to temptation when we focus on the problems before us, the pleasures before us, the deceptions before us. Stop looking at those! Focus on Jesus. What is he saying? Listen to him and obey his commands. What he says is always right.

And how do you keep your focus on Jesus?

WORD AND SACRAMENT. Worship. Bible class. Bible study.

The encouragement of fellow believers. Time together!

The way to overcome temptation is to prepare ahead of time. If you don’t have Scripture in mind and heart before it comes, it won’t be there when you need it.

Dear friends, in Christ Jesus, there is triumph over temptation. Keep your focus on him, and his victory will be yours! Amen.

Matthew 4:1-11

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