

UNEDITED DRAFT

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today we're going to talk about something vitally important. It's something every last one of us deals with every single day. And it's something that profoundly impacts our daily lives. There is no one that can say this topic doesn't really speak to them, or that this just isn't something they are confronted with in their daily lives. What we're talking about is: temptation. When was the last time you were tempted? For some of you it's now. Right this very moment you are being tempted to do something wrong. Maybe it was earlier today. Maybe it was yesterday. Maybe the temptation was something you frequently struggle with. Maybe it's an addiction. The problem with temptation is not the temptation itself... it's that we often succumb to temptation and we sin. Sin is a big problem. Sin is anything say or do... or even think... that is contrary to the will of our Creator. Sin is a problem because God hates it. Because it's offense to him. Because it separates us from him. Because sin for which we remain responsible until death will result in our eternal death. We need to learn how to resist temptation. And we need to learn what happens with the guilt when we've failed.

One author explained temptation in this way: **Temptation is nothing more than bait and hook.**¹ It works to catch fish, and it works with Satan to catch people. He puts something before you that is enticing: food, sex, fame, money, power, glory, security, achievement, a high. Whatever you desire he will use as bait so you will bite. When you do, you get caught on the hook. The with the bait he catches you on the hook that is sin. And once on the hook, he reels you in toward death.

That's just how he operates. He doesn't tempt you by saying, "I want you to destroy the relationships that mean most to you through alcoholism. I want you to enjoy a divorce. Greed is good! Why don't give obesity a try? I'd like you never be there for your children as they're growing up." None of these things are good. Those things are the hook... and who wants those things? So he baits the hook. He entices you with things that are pleasant, so he can hook you with what will destroy your relationship with God.

We need to become masters of temptation. More important, we must first find and believe in one who masters temptation and resists all sin for us. We need one who can take our place on the battlefield with Satan, who can be **tempted, but remain without sin**. We don't just need a professor to teach us how, we need a champion who can win the victory for us. Shall we see if Jesus fits the bill?

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.**

When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan by John, this was his anointing for his work of saving us. It was his inauguration... his official beginning of the work of our salvation. And the very first thing that happened was that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. Our champion gets right to work fighting Satan as he was tempted for 40 days by the devil. Please keep that fact in mind. What we're about to see are just three of the temptations, but there were many, many more.

Do you see what's happening here? Jesus is picking up where Adam left off. God put Adam in paradise with choice food everywhere. There he was tempted, and he sinned. When Adam rebelled against God, he was cast out of the garden and into the wilderness. Jesus comes to fix what

¹ Thomas Brooks, "Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices"

Adam broke, so he starts where Adam left off... in the wilderness, being tempted. He must do what Adam failed to do. He must fix what Adam broke. Our champion goes into the desert to remove the curse of sin, so we can be returned to paradise!

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.’”

So the first temptation: Jesus was hungry. Satan suggests he turns stones into bread. Was Jesus able to do that? Absolutely, and Satan knew it. If he was unable, there would be no bait. “Yeah, go away, I can’t do that anyway” would have been the response. But Jesus was able (remember how he turned water into wine?), so the temptation was real...the bait was set on the hook.

But what would the sin have been in turning a rock into bread? Three things: 1) It’s Satan telling him to do it, and any time you do what Satan suggests you’re automatically sinning. 2) Jesus humbly set aside his divine power and authority in order to rescue us. He came to serve, not be served. By turning a rock into bread, he would have been serving himself. He would have been using his power for his own benefit. Jesus never did that. And he didn’t give in to the temptation here either, even though he hasn’t eaten for 40 days!

3) But let’s not miss what was perhaps the biggest temptation: Satan challenges Jesus identity and tempts him to doubt who he really is. “If you are the Son of God...” “Maybe you’re not who you say you are or think you are,” Satan says. He actually will say this in connection with another temptation as well. But Jesus knows his identity without testing God on this. We’ll see in a moment why it’s so important for us to know our identity if we are going to resist Satan’s temptations.

But our champion wins the battle. He resists the temptation. He does so by quoting the fifth book of the Bible, Deuteronomy. Note that Jesus has this verse memorized and ready. Jesus could have rebuke Satan using his own words, but given the choice, Jesus chose to use the inspired Words of Scripture. Jesus knew the Old Testament well, and not only did he have it memorized, he was able to apply when starving in the wilderness and faced with a real life situation. He knew what it meant, and he knew this was the moment it would be useful.

We’re going to talk about this more soon, but I have to stress it now. Know your Bible. You simply have to be committed to reading your Bible. More than that, you need to meditate on it. More than that you need to memorize it. More than that, you need to be thinking how it applies to your life, and when and how you will actually use Scripture. “I don’t know how to read the Bible!” I’m taking that excuse away, because right now we are going through a Bible class that answers that exact question. If you don’t know how to read the Bible and benefit from it, then I look forward to seeing you Sunday morning at 9:15am. For the sake of your eternal soul, be there!

Jesus resisted the devil by quoting Scripture. So we’re done? No. Satan rebaited the hook and he tried again. And he’ll do the same with you, by the way. If he tempts you and you resist, don’t think he’s done. He’s going to keep coming after you. If you are not being tempted severely by something right now, you better believe that you will. Now is not the time to sit back and relax. Now is the time to prepare for the next battle. Now is the time to sharpen the sword – the Word of God – so you are ready when the next attack comes. When... not “if.”

5 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. [I don’t know how he did that. Was it a vivid description, or a supernatural vision? Did the glimpse of those kingdoms transcend time as well as space? Did Jesus get a glimpse of modern day America, and did Satan say, “Yes, that amazing kingdom can be yours too?” We’re not told exactly

how this happened. **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.”**

The temptation here is simply this: prosperity. Worship me and you will have a life of ease in this world. You will live in luxury and you will be served by others. Forget the cross and enjoy pleasures now! The promise of earthly prosperity is a bait Satan still uses on you and I today. It’s even something he’s been able to get into some churches. He wants us to focus on this world and it’s corroding, decaying, passing pleasures while we forfeit things eternal. We often take the bait. Did Jesus?

8 Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”

Loving the things of this world is ultimately an idolatry issues. Loving stuff instead of God. Jesus worships neither Satan nor stuff. Again he quotes Deuteronomy. Jesus doesn’t take the bait, and he avoids the hook.

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.’”

When I have asked the question, “How do you get to heaven?” I have had people answer, “Believe in God and know the Bible.” And I answer: “Satan believes in God and knows the Bible. That won’t get you to heaven.” Satan absolutely believes in the existence. He hates God with every bit of his being, but he believes God is. And he knows Scripture too. In fact, I bet the demons have Bible study clubs where they sit around a table and study Scriptures intently. Because they know if they can pull Scripture out of context and quote it to people who don’t know the rest, they can cause all sorts of spiritual harm.

Knowing the Bible and quoting the Bible does not mean a person is proclaiming the truth of God. If we are sloppy with Scripture, Satan will destroy us. So here he quotes Psalm 91:11-12 to bait Jesus into casting himself off the temple so angels would swoop him up.

But Jesus resists the bait once again:

12 Jesus answered, “It says: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

We don’t get to boss God around or issue him commands. “God, I’m jumping. You will now send angels to keep me from hitting the ground!” God doesn’t work like that. He is very upset if we, his creation, test him... which essential means we force him to do what he has promised he will do.

13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Finally, after almost a month and a half of tempting Satan left Jesus. But not for good! Oh, no. He only left for a while. He left to regroup and strike again when the time came. Surely we can expect the same. Sometimes we go through the ringer of temptation... one after another. And sometimes not. Sometimes there’s no bait within sight. But make no mistake, Satan will be back, and he will find bait that you find enticing.

So what does God teach us about temptation here?

1. **Satan is a real enemy.** He does exist. And he does really tempt you. And he wants nothing more than for you to think he’s not there and temptations aren’t real. You have a real enemy. He’s really powerful. And the damage he can do can be eternal. Take seriously the fact that Satan is real and he hates God and you.
2. **Jesus is the real victor.** You are not the real victor. You do not have the power to resist Satan. Just look at your track record. You’ve fallen victim again and again and again. But God has

come to your rescue. Colossians 2:13-15 **“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”** All of the times we took the bait and bit hard into the hook. You can’t get the hook out. In fact, you can’t even successfully stop taking the bait. We say, “Yeah, that’s bait. Yeah, it’s going to hurt when I bite it because of the hook I know is underneath.” Then, “BITE.” We do it anyway.

Christ has won the victory for you. He did not just come to show you how to deal with temptation. He came to conquer the Tempter. Through his death on the cross, he forgave all of our sins. Ultimate victory over Satan comes from Christ not from us. And that means you have a new identity.

- 3. Christ is your identity.** Just as Satan led Jesus to doubt whether he was the Son of God, Satan will tempt you to doubt that you are a child of God. “Look at your life! Look at your failures! You are not a child of God!” This is a lie! Your worth and identity are now tied up in Christ and not in you or your performance. Who are you? Child of God! If you will remember who you are, you will aspire to become who God has made you.

That said, now that we are in Christ, we want to stop taking the bait. We need strength against the tempter. And here is what we learn about temptation so we become more like our victor.

- 4. Satan strikes at opportune times. Be ready and be strong.** Expect the hardest temptations to come when you are *physically weak*. Hungry. Sick. Tired. Unhealthy. When your body is weak, you are more prone to spiritual temptations. Satan will strike when you are *emotionally weak*. If you are isolated, lonely or idle, expect temptations to come. Satan picks off the isolated stragglers. You need to close to fellow believers. We need to support and encourage each other, and that will happen when we spend time together! When you by yourself you are too busy and stressed out, you are emotionally drained and temptations will come. Take time for needed rest. Take whatever measures you can take to take care of yourself, physically and emotionally, because these affect the spiritual.

Grow in strength spiritually. You are strong when you are connected to Christ. You grow in your connection to Christ through Scripture. Learn it. Read it. Memorize it. Meditate on it. The Holy Spirit will strengthen your connection to Jesus in you will find that with Christ in you and his Spirit, you will resist temptations better and better.

- 5. Escape is always possible.** 1 Corinthians 10:13-14 **“God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”** Always look for the door! It’s there. Fleeing is always a good option.
- 6. When you bite the hook, repent.** Turn to Jesus. Admit your failure. Rely upon your Substitute for full and free forgiveness. At the foot of the cross, repent, rejoice, recharge. There will be many more rounds.

Temptation is real. It’s dangerous. The bait is dangled all around. The hook is deadly. You need to be near the Victor who doesn’t just show you how to resist temptation, but who won the victory over the one tempting you. He understands the battle you face. Be connected to him, and you will find strength to resist! Lord, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One. Amen.