

What was your first temptation this morning....? Gotcha! I don't want to know! But that's what we're going to talk about this morning as we reflect on Jesus' temptations in the wilderness.

OPENING PRAYER

READ Matthew 4:1—11

Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4 But he answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. "'5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple 6 and said to him, "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. "' 7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall 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 glory. 9 And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve. "' 11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

First, we're going to set the stage for the temptations. Then we're going to look at the temptations, each one in turn, and then we'll talk about what this all means for us in our day to day walk with the Lord.

First, the setting: Jesus had just been baptized by John the Baptist. As He immersed from the Jordan River His Father in Heaven declared, "This is My Beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." And then "Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."

Have you ever thought about this before, that the Spirit of God Himself led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted? I think this is important, for we know from the Scriptures that God tempts no one according to James 1:13-14!

On the other hand, we know about several instances in the Scriptures where God ALLOWS people to be tempted, such as Adam and Eve in the Garden, and Job whom God permitted Satan to tempt upon request.

But God Himself doesn't tempt us. However, He can lead us to the door of temptation to test our faith. That's why we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." We pray for protection from temptation, and when it comes, and it will, we pray for deliverance from it.

So Jesus was BAPTIZED, and then God the Father affirmed Him as His Son, and THEN He was tempted.

I believe that with His baptism, the Father painted a bull's eye on Jesus' chest! In other words, God identified Jesus as His Son, and the devil then knew who his enemy was.

And that brings us to our baptism. St. Paul wrote in **Galatians 3:27-29**, "**For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.**"

With the waters of Holy Baptism you wear Jesus like clothing, like a garment. And so you too have a bull's eye painted on your chest, just like Christ! Indeed, the devil sees you as his enemy. With His baptism Jesus entered into the war of good against evil, light against darkness. And so too we were inducted into God's army for this same war.

Jesus was baptized and He went into the wilderness, led by the Spirit of God, in order to be tempted, to demonstrate that His baptism meant something, that He was who He claimed He was, and that God's Kingdom was present in the world and that it would prevail.

Consider Jesus' physical condition during this time. He had been fasting for almost 6 weeks: Perhaps you know that during a long fast, while the body weakens, the spirit is made strong. Things which were unclear to us before the fast become clear; spiritual truths which were hard to grasp, become self-evident. In other words, Jesus was spiritually at the top of His game at this time!

With this in mind, let's consider each one of the temptations in turn. The devil appealed to a hungry Jesus: Here "command these stones to become loaves of bread," he said. I can imagine Jesus thinking to Himself: "You're joking right? Break my relationship with My Father in heaven NOW, after everything I've been through for a piece of bread? Really?"

And we shouldn't overlook this teaching: Spiritual strength, especially that which comes through fasting and prayer is a weapon we can use against the devil.

So instead of creating and eating some fresh baked bread there in the wilderness, Jesus turned to God's Word. I'm reminded of the first Psalm and how it teaches us the importance and the power of the Word of God in our lives.

Psalm 1:1-3

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; ² but his delight is in the Law of the Lord, and on His Law he meditates day and night. ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

It is easy to overlook the power of God's Word, for we take it for granted. I think Martin Luther had the best, most straight-forward advice about how to use the Word of God. He said we should pray for the Lord to open it up to us, to reveal His wisdom. Then after we pray, we should read a portion of the Scripture, being mindful that the Lord may choose to speak to us through it. And finally, we should take that Word with us wherever we go in our hearts, and we should **LIVE** it. 1-2-3: **Pray, Read, and Live God's Word**. That's what it means to delight in and meditate on God's Word day and night.

Consider how with the first temptation Jesus placed the Word of God before everything else. His bodily needs were entirely secondary.

And then we have Jesus' second temptation: "The devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple⁶ and said to him, '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.'"

The devil quoted verses from the Bible about the Messiah, but they're out of context. He tempted Jesus to claim the Messianic promises BEFORE the Cross. We're so thankful Jesus chose to wait. For if He hadn't, no one would've been saved.

Jesus responded to the devil, saying, "it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Notice the words, "it is written." Again, Jesus appealed to the Word of God.

I think we often face temptations like this, that is those which challenge God's lordship in our lives, things we might do which would be like saying, "Since God loves forgiving me,

and since I love sinning, we have a perfect partnership!" But that is not what it means to walk with God, is it.

Then Jesus faced His third temptation: "the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.⁹ And he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.'"

Jesus was already prepared to receive the kingdoms of the world as His possession, but not until after the Cross. Indeed, the devil's goal was to prevent the Cross, to even offer Jesus glory in this life that He might forsake our salvation. I hate the devil.

This is about waiting on God, waiting for Him to bring everything to fruition in His own time. We're to pray the promises and then wait on the Lord to fulfill them. This is empowering for you and me. For it's not our job to fix God's timetable, to hurry up the process which He has under His command. This is about trust. Do you trust God to fulfill His promises? I do. And it gives me peace. I pray that you find this same peace.

Jesus said to the devil, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"

Everything about the devil, the world, and that part of our mind that is contrary to the will of God would have us do ANYTHING but worship the One Holy and True God! That's really what this is all about, isn't it. But being filled up with God's Word, we are armed for the battle at hand, we are clothed with the armor of God, we have the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and we will not fall. And we are free to worship the Lord God Almighty just as He has invited us to do so.

So how can you and I use what we've learned here to combat temptation? For example, if we have problem with anger or lust we might proceed like this:

First we read, pray and live the Scriptures. God's Word is filled with inspired advice:

Jesus said, **Matthew 11:28-30, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."**

Ponder how this simple passage might relieve you of anger or lust or whatever is on your heart. Come to Jesus – Remember His Cross – Give thanks – And Rest.

Second, we can remind ourselves of God's lordship in our lives: He is always present, and He's promised to hear our prayers, and He longs for our worship.

And third, be patient: We can follow after Jesus, immersing ourselves in God's Word, praying, and worshipping only Him, and then wait patiently for Him to do His part in our lives. This includes our relationships one with another, our work, the future of our church, and everything else which lies on our heart. Be patient. Wait on the Lord.

I want to close with a reflection on the last sentence in our Scripture here. We read that, "the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to Him."

The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted, to be tested, to demonstrate to the devil and the world that His baptism meant something. So too are we tested, and we discover, indeed, that our baptism means everything! We have a bull's eye painted on our chest that the devil is aiming at, but with that same baptism the Lord gave us His Spirit, and He claimed us as His own, and He filled us with confidence, and He gave us everything we need to fight until the end!

So Jesus was tempted, but He prevailed, for the Word of God is greater than anything the devil could throw at Him. So too we're tempted, but God's Word is no less a tool in our hands than it was in the hands of our Lord Jesus.

Again, "the angels came and were ministering to Him." Friends in Christ, there are angels watching over us too, as we read in Hebrews 1:14: **"Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"**

We belong to the Lord and He sends us His angels to protect and lead us. Whether hungry or full, in the wilderness or on the hilltop, God lives among us and He's given us His angels as a guarantee of His protection and presence forever.

This is our comfort, our confidence, and our strength. Baptized in the Spirit with water, led by the Spirit into and through temptations with faith, ministered to by the Spirit through His angels with grace, God is with you.

Friends in Christ, this week may you take up God's Word, commit it to your hearts, and be armed for the battle at hand, overcoming temptation.

May you be encouraged, knowing that God's angels are watching over you.

And may you have the courage and presence of mind to share this Good News with another person who needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.