

What was your first temptation this morning? Just kidding. I don't want to know! This morning we're going to talk about Jesus' temptations in the wilderness and what this has to do with our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

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.

In the Gospel, Jesus had just been baptized by John the Baptist. As he emerged 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.”**

So Jesus was baptized, God the Father affirmed him as his Son, and then he was tempted. I believe that upon his baptism, when God made the proclamation that he was his Son, Satan was put on notice. **“Your days are numbered.”** And that's when he started his full on attack of the Christ. With his baptism, Jesus had a bull's eye painted on his chest.

So it is for us, brothers and sisters, for when we were baptized we “**put on Christ,**” as St. Paul wrote in Galatians 3:27. We were clothed in the righteousness of Jesus. Indeed, the devil sees each one of us as his enemy just as he saw Jesus on that fateful day.

When I was in business school one of my most difficult classes was managerial accounting. I couldn't wish a worse fate on anyone! I wanted to be anywhere but in that class. But I couldn't wish it away. I couldn't pretend that I wasn't enrolled. If I wanted to graduate I had to pass that class. So too we cannot wish away the fact that we were baptized into the army of God, and the devil and his minions have set their sights on us.

So Jesus was baptized and he went into the wilderness, led by the Spirit of God to be tempted. This was the first of many skirmishes between Jesus and the devil, which would come to a head on the Cross three years later.

Now when Jesus entered the wilderness he had been fasting for almost 6-weeks. We read, “**he was hungry.**” Thus we are to understand he was weak in his body as anyone would be after so long without food. However, he's about to show the devil and us just how strong his spirit is.

Jesus was in the desert, and the devil appealed to his hunger. He said, “**command these stones to become loaves of bread.**” But Jesus, instead of creating and eating some fresh baked bread, turned to God's Word and said, “**Man shall not live by bread alone but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God.**”

I'm reminded of Psalm One. The first few verses read, “**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; but his delight is in the Law of the Lord, and on His Law he meditates day and night. 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.**”

I think Martin Luther had the best advice about how to use the Word of God devotionally. He said we should pray that the Lord would open it up to us, and having done so, we should read a portion of it, being mindful that the Lord may

choose to speak to us through it. And when we come upon a passage which speaks to our heart we should stop reading, meditate on that verse for a time, and then we should take it with us for the rest of the day, letting it settle into our spirits. That's a good way to "**delight**" in God's Word, as the Psalmist wrote.

Then there was Jesus' second temptation. We read, "**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 were out of context. He tempted Jesus to claim the Messianic promises BEFORE the Cross. I'm so thankful Jesus chose to wait. For if he hadn't, no one would've been saved.

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

I think we often face temptations like this, those which challenge God's lordship in our lives, things we might do which would be like saying, God can forgive anything, so what's one more time? But that is not what it means to walk by faith.

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.' "**

The devil offered Jesus glory in this life that he might forgo the Cross, but for our sake he chose to wait for his glory.

This is about waiting on God, waiting for him to bring everything to fruition in his own time. In prayer we lift up our petitions to the Lord, and then we wait. This is empowering for us, for when we realize that waiting is a part of our discipleship, we see that we are not in control but in fact we are truly servants of God and he will accomplish everything according to his will in due time. When I trust God like this, I experience peace in my mind and heart.

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 minds and hearts 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 how often we Christians have turned away from serving God for the glory of this world. But 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.

So how can you and I use what we've learned here to combat temptation? First we can pray, read God's Word, and then commit that Word to our hearts. Here's one of my favorite passages: 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."**

Friends in Christ, let us come to him, find rest, and give thanks.

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

And third, we can be patient, waiting on the Lord in peace for him to do his part in our lives.

I want to close with a reflection on the last sentence in the Gospel. 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 we are tested, and we discover, indeed, that our baptism means everything! We have a bull's eye painted on our chests that the devil is aiming at, but with that same baptism the Lord gave us his Spirit, he claimed us as his own, 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 his.

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 we take up God's Word, commit it to our hearts, and be armed for the battle at hand, overcoming temptation.

May we be encouraged, knowing that God's angels watch over us.

And may we have the opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.