

SUNDAY, MARCH 6, 2022 – LENT I – MARCH 6, 2022

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen.

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry....Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, ‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.’ 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.”’ Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.” Thus far our text.

Have you ever seen what is called a mirage while driving in the desert? It is when the air and ground are so dry, with no water in sight for hundreds of miles, that there appears to be a lake sitting right in front of you. It is only a little bit farther, and then you will be at the end of the desert, sitting by the side of the lake, drinking the water and cooling your parched skin with the precious water. If you could just make it a little bit farther, you would be there, and things would be all right once again. However, because it is a mirage, and not a real lake, it always seems to be just a little bit farther. Our mind plays tricks on us, and makes us think that there is a lake just ahead of us, when there really isn't. In the same way, the devil plays tricks on our minds, and makes us believe in things that aren't really true. He plants mirages in our minds, and tries to get us to

believe that there are more gods than the Triune God, or that we can save ourselves from sin without the death and resurrection of Christ, or that we have complete control over our entire destiny, or any of a host of other temptations that make us believe things contrary to the Word of God. He is so good at tempting us to believe things that are false, that he has earned the name of the “tempter”, for that is what he does. We cannot, based upon our own strength, refute the flaming arrows of the devil that would have us deny the truth of God’s Word, and believe in falsity and lies. However, the Holy Spirit works in us every day to cause us to believe the truth, and sustains us in the true faith. The reason that the Holy Spirit works in us is because Christ came to earth, and was tempted in every way that we are, yet didn’t sin once! The devil thought that he could dissuade Jesus from taking His appointed road to the cross, by causing Him to believe things that were not true. He tempted Jesus in every way, and the three most believable and damaging temptations are recorded in this chapter of St. Matthew’s Gospel. We can draw strength from this account and courage, because Jesus’ obedience to the Father and His sinless life give us the hope of life to come in heaven with God. It isn’t up to us to refute and withstand the temptations of the devil on our own; God does it for us and within us. This account, then, rather than pointing out the difference between God and man, which it does, also has the effect of illustrating very clearly for us the wonderful benefits that Jesus wrought for us by His earthly life, death and resurrection.

Why were the temptations that Jesus withstood so tempting in the first place? Since He had been in the desert for forty days and forty nights, He was hungry. I’ll bet He was! I’m hungry the next morning if I didn’t eat much for dinner the preceding night. Hunger does strange things to the human body. It makes people desperate for food and

will cause them to do things they wouldn't ordinarily do. Some will even think of crimes such as stealing and murder, in order to satisfy their bodies' lack of food. In the case of Jesus, He had gone without food for the better part of six weeks. He was beyond the point at which most of us would have already given in.

Turning those stones into bread would have been so tempting for Him to do, and because He is God, He would have been able to do it. It would have just taken His word, and they would have indeed become bread. God's Word is creative, and does what it says. Since Jesus was there with the Father, and participated with Him in creation, it is undeniable that His word is creative, too. He said, "Let there be light", and there was light. It would have been nothing at all for the stones to become bread, if He had willed them to. But, this would have illustrated that His power was ebbing, and that the strength God gave Him wasn't enough to sustain Him. Therefore, He did not succumb to the temptation – He trusted in God above all things, that the Father would provide for His sustenance.

The devil continued to tempt Jesus by saying, "Throw yourself down from the temple, and prove that you are God." All three of the temptations try to shed doubt upon the Word of God. "IF" you are the Son of God...? This also parallels how the devil worked in the Garden of Eden. "Did God REALLY say..." If the devil can make the words of God seem extreme, or unbelievable to our minds, then he can steer us away from the truth. If the Word of God is in question, then every doctrine of the Christian church is up for grabs. Unfortunately, many churches out there deny that the entire Bible is the Word of God. This opens the door for many heresies and false teachings – the free-

for-all can then begin. We must hold fast to the clear teaching that the Word of God means what it says, and that all of the Scriptures are true.

The devil becomes very inventive in this passage, and quotes Scriptures to prove his point. Some people think that as long as someone has a lot of Bible quotes, what they are saying is automatically true. This is NOT the case! The Bible can easily be misinterpreted, and quoted out of context, sometimes with disastrous results. I'm sure some of you have heard the story about the man who was determined to "find out what the Scripture was trying to say to him," without paying any attention to the surrounding context of the words. He opened the Bible to the passage where it reads, "Judas went and hanged himself." "That can't be right," the man exclaimed. "Let's try this again – the second time must be the charm." On the second try, he opened the Bible to the passage which reads, "Go and do likewise!" This illustrates for us one of the many ways in which the Bible can be used in ways that are not consistent with the way that God works. That's why we have the principles of Biblical interpretation, whereby Scripture interprets Scripture, and clear passages interpret less clear passages. The Bible is a unit, and it always agrees with itself, even if it doesn't always make sense to us sinful men. Jesus shows the mistake that the devil makes, and quotes a much clearer passage. "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test." This second passage talks about exactly what the devil was trying to do!

The devil was really getting desperate. He tried to tempt Jesus with control and power over the entire world. "All this I will give to you, if you will bow down and worship me." Unfortunately, many of us would do this, to gain the entire world, with all of its power and belongings. Some people are willing to forsake worship in God's house

in order to make more money in the secular sphere. Some are willing to not go to church at all, because they don't want to offend those whom they do business with who don't go to church. It all boils down to the same thing – worship of false gods is less important than the things of this world. Jesus sees what this temptation of the devil is at its face – an attempt to swerve His worship and allegiance away from the Father and toward Himself and His bodily need for power and glory. Jesus is the suffering servant, not the conquering hero – He came in humility, not in bravado. The one act of declaration that Jesus makes here is to banish Satan away from Himself. Only God can do this, after being tempted so artfully. He could have done this in the beginning, but didn't because He wanted to be tempted in every way, yet not sin. However, He did this at the end to demonstrate His power in an appropriate way – not in selfish, self-serving power, but in God-pleasing and holy power.

What does all of this mean for us today? Because Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, by succumbing to the devil's temptations, the sinful nature has been passed along through the generations to you and me. We sin every day, and the devil works among us every day to do the things that God wants us to avoid. We believe the empty promises of the devil, and do not do the things that God wants us to do. Without the salvific work of God in Christ Jesus, we would be without hope, and would remain in this sinful condition of being tempted and giving in to the temptation every day.

However, because Jesus did not give in to the temptation, and lived a sinless life, and was crucified and died in our place, we have the hope of being rescued from this sinful world, and having our sins of falling into temptation forgiven and forgotten by God. Our lack of steadfastness was put onto Christ, when He was crucified on the cross

of Calvary, and His lack of falling into sin was placed upon us, at the last judgment. When God look at us on the last day, He will see the perfect life of Jesus, instead of our sinful indiscretions. Our actions won't count – they were buried with Christ in His death and resurrection 2000 years ago. He can also sympathize with us in our weakness, and is able to strengthen us with the temptations that we are given in this life – He has “been there, done that” for our salvation.

In addition, He gives us the “sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God”, so that we can withstand the flaming arrows of the devil, and do God's will in a world that is completely corrupted by sin. He urges us by the Holy Spirit to read and study the Word of God, and become familiar with it, so that we know when the devil is trying to mislead us by quoting it out of context. He strengthens our faith through the Word and Sacraments, so that we won't doubt His love for us, nor His salvation wrought through Christ. He doesn't leave us defenseless – He is fighting for us every day!

The temptation of Jesus is an instructive section of the Scriptures for us to read and study as we enter the season of Lent. This is the time in the church year when we focus on our complete and utter need for a Savior, and how much His salvific work is needed in this dark and sin-filled world. Only by studying these depressing facts can we fully appreciate the wonderful joy that awaits us in just a few short weeks – when we celebrate His Resurrection, where He won the victory over the devil, and gave to us the hope of everlasting life. Because He was tempted in every way, yet did not sin, we too have the peace of knowing that our sins will not be held against us in heaven. The temptations that are recounted in Matthew's Gospel are just the tip of the iceberg of the ways in which Jesus was tempted by the devil to abandon the Word of God; however, the

outcome to all the temptations, even those not recorded, was the same – He resisted them. We can draw strength from knowing that even though we would have succumbed to the temptations at the first opportunity, He didn't, and His victory is passed along to us today through the Holy Spirit's working among us. Thanks be to God that He came and lived among us, and died and rose again so that the devil wouldn't have the last word on our salvation. The sins of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden would have condemned all of us to eternal death, but God's love wouldn't let this happen. He came and dwelt among us, lived a sinless life, was tempted in every way, yet didn't sin. Because of His sacrificial death, we have the hope of life to come, and we have a Savior who can sympathize with us in our weakness, because He went through it, too. He gives us the sword that He used, the Word of God, and teaches us every day how to use it against the wily foe that would work His woe among us. He has done it all for our salvation – He endured temptation, and gave us the victory through Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.