Lent Week #1: Overcoming Temptation Like Jesus

Luke 4:1-13

 Good morning to you all. Today we are beginning our journey through this season of lent as we approach holy week and celebrate both the sacrifice of Christ who through His death has paid the penalty for our sins and then through His resurrection from the dead has defeated the sting of death. For this first week of lent we will be discussing temptation, what it is and how we can overcome temptation in our lives by following the example given to us by Jesus. We read our passage together during the call to worship, so if you could please open your bulletin to the passage we will begin today by looking at three ways that Satan works to tempt us in our lives and how we can follow the example of Jesus to overcome them.

 Before we begin looking at the passage, we need to first provide some context. In the previous chapter of the Gospel of Luke Jesus has just been baptized by John the Baptist. Jesus asked John to do this so that they would fulfill all righteousness. The Holy Spirit came down from heaven in the form of a dove and landed on Jesus, which showed that God approved of Him and was now equipping Him to begin His ministry. What we also know from the previous chapter is that Jesus has been born of a virgin and was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit meaning that He is both human and divine. Since Jesus Christ has a dual nature of being both human and divine this means that He identifies with us in the fact that he experienced pain, sadness, rejection and temptation just like we do in our lives. The major difference between Jesus Christ and every other human being that has ever lived is that He faced temptations just like we do, but He was able to face them without ever giving in to them. He lived a perfect life free from sin, which allowed Him to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Therefore, after His baptism Jesus is sent by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days to be tempted by Satan.

 As the passage begins, we read in vv. 1-2 **“Now Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness 2 for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He was hungry.”** These verses provide us with the setting of this account. The Holy Spirit led Him to the wilderness so that He could be tempted. What this shows us is that temptation is not just a random part of life, rather is a part of life that fits in God’s plan for both the life of Jesus and for us as well. Now, in what way is temptation a part of God’s plan? The answer to this question is our first application today. Just like Jesus was led into the wilderness, there will be times in our lives when God will allow us to face trials and temptations that will allow us to experience spiritual growth. To grow in the knowledge and fear of the Lord requires that we be challenged in our faith. It is through adversity and challenge that God equips His people and prepares them for the challenges they will face later in life. As we all know, Jesus would be facing some very large obstacles during His ministry and then ultimately, He would be murdered by His enemies. Even though they might not have known it, those enemies were doing the will of God by allowing the sacrifice of Christ to take place. God used the challenges and temptations Jesus faced in His life to prepare Him for the trial that would take place at the end of His earthly life. So, let us remember that temptations and trials in this life are ways that God works to help us grow in our faith and prepare us for future challenges we will face.

 In verse 2 we read that Jesus fasted for forty days. Fasting is a spiritual discipline that is practiced for someone place their focus on God alone and rely on Him for all their needs. We read that Jesus had been fasting for a long time, therefore He was very hungry. As we look very closely, we see the way that Satan likes to operate. Satan waited until Jesus was at His most vulnerable before He began to tempt Him. As well will see in a few moments, the way He tempted Jesus during that time shows us that he will try to tempt us with the very thing that we are trying to avoid. Satan does know our weaknesses and he will do what he can to use them against us. Our second application today from verse 2 is that it is during the times when we are most vulnerable that we can rely on the strength and power of the Holy Spirit to face those challenges Just like Jesus did. When you experience temptation and feel that you are all alone, do not forget that as a follower of Christ you have the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide you during those times of challenge.

 Now we begin to look specifically at the three ways recorded in Scripture that Satan tempts Jesus during those forty days. Each temptation is attacking a particular weakness that humans have which Satan is trying to exploit. Please read with me vv. 3-4 **“3 And the devil said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.’ 4 And Jesus answered him, ‘It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’”** Since Jesus was hungry Satan chose to first attach His human nature by addressing His hunger. Satan wants Jesus to use His power to create for Himself bread to eat. One thing that it is important to mention at this time is that when we read the gospels, we never see Jesus use His powers to benefit Himself personally. He never asked God to send angels down to deliver Him from the cross or to rescue Him from the attacks of the crowd. Jesus always used the power He had to help others by providing healing or to help them come back to God after living in a state of sin. Jesus was tempted to use the power God had given Him to address a basic human need. Rather than giving in to that temptation Jesus quotes Scripture from the book of Deuteronomy where Moses tells the people that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God **(Deuteronomy 8:3).** The NASB translation does not include that last line, which I find to be disappointing. Rather than focus on His physical needs, Jesus chose to rely on the spiritual nourishment of His Father. What we learn from this first temptation is that the world will continually try to tell is that we need to rely on the things of this world to satisfy us. This is a lie that comes directly from Satan who wants us to look for satisfaction in anything other than God. If you really stop to think about it, what is there in this world that is every going to completely give us all we need to be satisfied? Possessions and even other people let us down. Only God never fails and is always there. When we need Him, we can call on Him and ask him to guide us during all the seasons of life. Just as Jesus told Satan, only the Word of God can bring us what we need to be complete.

 The second temptation is in vv. 5-8 **“5 And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6 And the devil said to Him, “I will give You all this domain and its glory, for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I want. 7 Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours.” 8 Jesus replied to him, “It is written: ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.’”** This second temptation is another area of life that causes many to stumble. Satan is asking Jesus to give up His status as the Son of God to worship him and in exchange he will give to Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. This is one of the most awkward ways for Satan to tempt Jesus. This is the case because Satan is offering Jesus what already belongs to Him. Jesus is the Son of God; therefore, He has authority over all the earth. Every person living and every kingdom that has ever existed are already under the authority of God. Satan is really desiring the worship to himself that belongs to God alone. While it is true that God allows Satan to roam freely over the earth and tempt those who trust in God, it is not true that all the kingdoms of this world belong to him. He cannot give away what does not belong to him.

 The reply of Jesus follows the same format that we saw previously. He overcomes the temptation by using the Word of God. His response comes from **Deuteronomy** when Moses instructs the nation of Israel that they are to only worship God alone. **In 6:13 Moses says “13 You shall fear only the Lord your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name.”** When the people swore an oath, they were to only do so using the name of the Lord to honor the oath. Only God is to be feared and no other god created by man has that authority or deserves such praise. Satan wanted to take the place of God and take from Him the praise that He alone deserves. Jesus is reminding Satan that God is in control of all things and that to offer praise to anyone else other than Him is not appropriate. Satan may think that he has control over the kingdoms of man because he continually tries to deceive them, but God owns all things because He is the creator and sustainer of the universe.

 What we can take from this temptation is the reminder that no matter what this world wants us to do so that we can attain success it is not worth the price it will cost us. There is always a desire to attain wealth, power, influence, or status in a culture that is continually looking for something to worship. We have been created to worship, but unfortunately, we have a natural inclination to become lovers of self and prideful. When we allow God to be in control and remember our rightful place under His protection it will give us a solid foundation upon which to stand. We must keep God in His rightful place so that we can experience the life that He has created for us to enjoy in Him.

 The third, and final, temptation Satan uses against Jesus deals with putting God to the test. In vv. 9-12 we read **“9 And he brought Him into Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; 10 for it is written: ‘He will give His angels orders concerning You, to protect You,’ 11 and, ‘On their hands they will lift You up, So that You do not strike Your foot against a stone.’” 12 And Jesus answered and said to him, “It has been stated, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”** Satan is using a quotation from Psalm 91, but is horribly twisting the words of Scripture and trying to use it against Jesus. In Psalm 91 the Psalmist is praising God that He blesses those who are faithful to Him and lifts them up when they are facing times of trial. Satan is trying to say that if Jesus jumps off of the high place that God will save Him. He wants Jesus to do this to see if God will really step in to save Him. Satan is the master manipulator. He will twist the words of God around to make them fit his own agenda. His very first temptation on man was getting man to question the word of God. When man begins to question God’s Word then this leads to confusion, heartache, and chaos. We must rely on God’s Word to lead us and give us the direction we are to go.

 In what ways can we apply the lesson of this third temptation to our lives? We live in a culture that is constantly wanting to see physical proof for God’s existence. We will hear people say that if God would only appear and show them, He exists then they would be happy to believe in Him. In this manner those people are putting God to the test. There is no reason that humanity should ever put God to the test or require Him to show proof of His existence. We have the gift of creation around us every day that speaks of God’s handiwork. The beauty of this world and the complexity of the human body is proof enough that we are the result of His creation. Putting God to the test really means that someone does not believe that God will do as he says in His Word. Jesus being the Son of God knows that every Word God speaks is the truth and it is trustworthy. Putting God to the test in this silly way would not do anything but show that God is not to be trusted. Rather than asking God to continually prove Himself, we need to follow His Word and know that when we do it will bring needed clarity to our lives.

 Now that Satan has tried these three ways to get Jesus to sin against God and has failed, what does he do now? Scripture tells us in verse 13 that Satan departed Jesus waited to come back at a more opportune time. Once again, we see the way that the devil likes to work. He attacks when someone is desperate and vulnerable to sin. We know that he will return in the Garden of Gethsemane the night Jesus will face trial. As He was praying for the strength to face the passion ahead of Him Jesus had to endure the constant temptations of Satan as well as the human fear of facing this without His Father being with Him. When Jesus died on the cross and then rose from the dead, He defeated any power that Satan may have over man. Satan cannot do anything to those who have been sealed with the blood of Christ. No matter when he may attack, we can stand firm in Christ knowing that the war over sin has already been won. We may still face several battles, but we can stand in confidence knowing that our Lord has already won!

 One more point that we need to make before we conclude is that after Jesus endured those forty days in the wilderness and overcame the temptations of Satan, He went back to be among men and begin His earthly ministry. This shows us that after we face times of temptation in our lives, we can decide to either use those experiences to defeat us or we can use those times to strengthen us. Jesus was strengthened by this experience, and He will use that time of solace and spiritual nourishment to help Him carry out His ministry. When you and I face times of trial we can choose to allow those trials to defeat us, or we can use those times as a way to help us develop endurance in our lives. May we follow the example of Christ who used this experience to be stronger in the Lord and face the difficulties of the future.

 As we conclude our time together today let us review the applications from the account of Jesus facing the temptations in the wilderness. First, we must remember that no matter how Satan tries to manipulate us we can never allow the treasures of needs of this world be our only source of satisfaction. Only the Word of God can sustain us and give us all we need to be complete. Second, earthly success and power are not worth the eternal reward and joy we will have then we follow God’s Word. Satan wants us to worship Him, but when we do we are really only deceiving ourselves and trying to find hope in our own deeds. The only hope we have is through God’s Word and allowing Him to be the authority in our lives. Finally, may we never feel the need to put God to the test. Everything we see around us and the people who have been put in our lives are the creation of God. Asking for a miracle or a sign is what those who did not believe in Jesus always asked for. Even after several miracles He did in their presence they still did not believe in Him. God has given us all we need to be secure in Him, therefore He does not need to prove Himself.

 In the Epistle of Hebrews, the writer gives us these words **“14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let’s hold firmly to our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things just as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let’s approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace for help at the time of our need” (Hebrews 4:14-16).** Our Lord understands our struggles and therefore will help us when we face temptations. He is with us and through the power of the Holy Spirit we can overcome any temptation with the Word of God. Amen.