

Series: Finding Jesus
Sermon: The Devil

Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. 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 shall not live on bread alone.’”

5 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And he said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. 7 If you worship me, it will all be yours.”

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

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.’”

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

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

Sermon

It was about time for some military personnel to have a four day weekend off base and with their families. And the commander would give a pep talk to the folks about to enter the civilian world again: It went something like this: Don’t drink and drive. If you drink, call a cab or have a designated driver. Don’t bounce checks. If you get angry with your spouse or loved one, walk out of the house. When you drive, don’t go over the speed limit on the military base. Stay out of night clubs that have been put off limits.

If you drive off a military base, what do you see? Night clubs. Bars. Payday loan places. If legal, pot supplies, casinos. You get the idea. Temptations come in all forms, for each and every one of us.

My first recollection of the dangers of temptation actually came from Pinocchio. If you remember, the animated puppet finds a fox who wants to take advantage, he finds a friend who likes the night life, and in the end, it’s a trap and they all get turned into donkeys. Looking back, that’s one weird movie. But its true. As believers in God, we need to be alert to the temptations that come our way. Or we end up looking like . . .donkeys. Or

worse.

This Lenten season, we're examining the people who find Jesus out of the Gospel of Luke. And so far, we've looked at regular folk with their own issues and needs. This time, we run into someone a little more sinister. This was the time when Jesus was tempted in the desert. Today I want us to notice that the devil's tactics with Jesus are similar to what he does to us.

Several years ago, Discipleship magazine conducted a survey and asked its readers to list those sins or things that they struggle with. Here are the top 9 results: Just count how many hit you:

Materialism

Pride

Self-centeredness

Laziness

Anger

Sexual Lust

Envy

Gluttony

Lying

Anyone have one of these? (If not, look at the lying one again). Two? Three? "Pastor Mike, I'm a go-getter, I got a perfect score".

Most of our temptations come when we are either alone or physically and emotionally tired. They often come to us when we have neglected our time with God or if we have been away from church for any period of time. The temptations that Jesus faced and what we face have many similarities and there are many ways to analyze them - but here are the ways that I look at them.

Number 1: The gratification of the body-that is when we let physical urges get out of control and take precedence over the Kingdom of God. Ever notice that God cares about your body? God cares about your body, not just your soul. If only we cared about our bodies as God cares about them. Your body is a temple. Treat it as such! If something isn't good for the body, knock it off! That could be the shortest sermon ever: If its bad for you, knock it off! It could be anything. I go up the family tree and notice that guys in my family don't live into their 70's. Just doesn't happen. Freaks me out a little. But I also notice that they all had habits that kinda didn't do the body good. Some of you remember when my father passed away just a few years ago at age 62. Lung cancer. I tell my kids to not be stupid - don't smoke. You know how grandpa died? Cancer. Yes, cancer, but what did the cancer do that made him die? He coughed up parts of lung tissue and choked on it. That part freaks them out. Good. Don't be stupid. I have a sermon on drugs and sobriety coming up in the first week of May, so I won't harp on it here a whole lot, but you know what this town needs? Another marijuana shop. Apparently we don't have enough. Kids, don't be stupid. There's a reason its called Dope. The devil told Jesus - you're hungry, just turn the rocks into bread. If you think I'm fat now, just what if I had the power to turn stones into corn dogs. Or rocks into Reeses peanut butter cups. Eat to live, don't live to eat. Pastor Mike, don't be stupid.

Number 2: Another temptation trick that the devil shares is taking the easy way out-that is when we avoid difficult situations, take unhealthy short cuts or cut corners. My sister in law teaches at a private college, and every class, someone flunks out because of plagiarism. She just had a facebook post about a kid, a smart college kid, who turned in a paper but forgot to take out the link to the website where he lifted the paper. Its

easy not to recycle. It's easy to throw your trash out the window. It's easy to not get involved in problems. It's easier to let someone else parent your kid. I'm guilty of this: If there's a problem, maybe it'll go away on its own. The devil told Jesus, all this can be yours if you worship me. You don't have to go the cross. You don't even have to love these people - just tell them that you're in charge and they do what want or else. That'd be the easy way. But that's not how God works. To get to anywhere good, there's challenge. Suffering. Pain. You get a medal for doing nothing, you know what that medal's worth? Nothing. The thing that makes men and rivers crooked is following the line of least resistance.

And Number 3: Putting God to the test - or to see how much we can get away with. Jesus, just throw yourself off the pinnacle, you'll be fine. Don't put God to the test. You know, I can sin just a little bit, it's not that big of deal. Well, it's a big deal. I just cheated on my taxes just a tiny bit. I just cheated on golf score just a little bit. I just cheated on my spouse a tiny bit. OH NOW IT'S A BIG DEAL? As in the story goes, there was a sophisticated gentleman and a respectable lady at a party. "Well," says the gentleman, "suppose I offered you \$10,000—would you spend the night with me?" The lady, surprising herself said, "Who knows—I might very well!" The gentleman: "Now suppose I offer you \$10 for the night?" The lady: "But what do you think I am?" The gentleman: "We've already established that. Now we're just haggling over the price." We all have our price.

So what do you do when temptation comes our way? One sure-fire method to deal with temptation is to avoid the places where temptations occur. Just go to Fred Meyer and you see the check-out lanes that say, Family Friendly. In other words, no candy. As for believers in God, if we know if there is something that is not good for us, we would do well to stay away or avoid it. Let me give you some bumper sticker quotations on this.

He who avoids the temptation avoids the sin.
It is better to shun the bait than to struggle on the hook.
If God bolts the door, do not climb through the window.
Each sin has its door of entrance, keep that door locked.
Pheasants are fools if they invite the hawk to dinner.
He who would not eat forbidden fruit must stay away from forbidden tree.

I think many are prone to test boundaries: to see how close we can get or what we can get away with. Jesus said, "Men and women do not live on bread alone" which means all of us need physical food to survive, but we also need spiritual food to feed our souls. Simply put, if we are to master temptation, then we need to let Christ master us. Martin Luther, the great Protestant reformer once asked how he overcame the devil and he said. "When the devil comes knocking upon the door of my heart and asks 'Who lives here?' The dear Lord Jesus goes to the door and says, 'Martin Luther used to live here, but he has moved out. Now I live here.' The devil who sees the nail prints in the hands and the pierced side, takes flight immediately." And that is how Martin Luther dealt with temptation. When we invite the Lord into our hearts, we are given spiritual strength, to deal with the temptation; however there are other spiritual disciplines that will help us.

Prayer, Personal Devotions, Worship in Church, Communion, Service, Witness to our faith. We call these things Means of Grace. How grace gets into us.

When we do these things, it doesn't make the temptation go away, but we become stronger, and often times it gets our minds off the thing that tempts us. The Apostle Paul in Ephesians tells us to "Be Strong in the Lord." James tells us to "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you" If temptation is too strong for us to handle, we would do well to find a friend to help us or join one of the anonymous organizations such as Alcoholics, Overeaters, Gamblers, Narcotics, Family or Alanon. What these groups do is provide strength and group

accountability. Margaret Thatcher, the first prime minister of England said “You might have to fight a battle more than once to win it.” In other words, when we resist temptation, we need to be ready for another day. Temptations will always be there especially when we feel weak and vulnerable. Even though Jesus was tempted in the desert, the devil never really went away. He was around to bother Jesus throughout his ministry.

Let me bring this to a close: Temptation is a life time struggle. Best thing is to stay strong and close to God. Avoid those things that would make you fall. If you do stumble get up, receive forgiveness and go on. Or as it was said in Pinocchio, “Now, remember, Pinocchio: be a good boy. And always let your conscience be your guide.” And the family of God said, AMEN.