

**JESUS CHANGES EVERYTHING:  
The Temptation of Christ  
Genesis 3:1-7 and Matthew 4:1-11  
Sunday, March 5, 2017**

Matthew 4:1-11 reads:

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. <sup>3</sup> The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." <sup>4</sup> But he answered, "It is written,*

*'One does not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'*"

<sup>5</sup> *Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup> saying 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,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'*"

<sup>7</sup> *Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'*"

<sup>8</sup> *Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; <sup>9</sup> and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written,*

*'Worship the Lord your God,  
and serve only him.'*"

<sup>11</sup> *Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.*

Jesus changes everything!

I love the Old Testament reading that was read this morning. For over 1000 years this Genesis text has been referred to as the "Fall." A true story about how the first human beings were tempted to turn away from their Creator.

The serpent raises the all-important question about the amount of freedom God has given to us. We are tempted to make choices and sometimes these choices have no simple answers. We sometimes exaggerate the Word of God, and then have the audacity to either blame God, the devil, or other people.

Joke Break:

Adam blamed Eve...Eve blamed the snake...and the snake didn't have a leg to stand on!

We see in this Old Testament lesson that the so called “Fall” occurred because of our lack of trust or faith in knowing that we have a God that knows things we don’t know. Yet, even in our fallen state God still chooses to relate to us not from a distance, but comes and walks in the garden, talking to Adam and Eve.

Example: The movie The Shack. God is so far beyond what our little brains can comprehend. When we talk about seeing the big picture, we are really only seeing a miniscule amount compared the big picture God is looking out.

The gospel lesson for today takes up where Genesis left off, and requires us again to take a serious look at our lives. Notice how Jesus, comes to our garden of weeds and handles the same temptations of Adam and Eve, of you and I.

But, Jesus changes everything.

The problem with today’s texts are they sound so supernatural, or unreal, so far removed from our experiences of today. Evil ole Satan does not appear to us and transport us from place to place, and the temptations that we experience are often not so clear. However, we of course are all tempted on a daily basis and when we are finished here this morning you will see how real and natural the forces of evil are, and how this story is not at all removed from our experiences of today.

This morning’s message may seem like maybe it’s missing the love and forgiveness so often associated with the gospel. But the fact is, sometimes Jesus challenges us to rethink our position, because of the fact that he does love us so very much and wants us so badly to become more and more Christ like. If you doubt this absolute truth, simply turn, look at the cross and focus on the empty tomb.

First things first, Jesus was a full and a real human being just like Adam and Eve, just like you and me. Think about it. Had Jesus not been tempted, he would not really have been human. Jesus knew exactly what it meant to face the forces of evil, to be tempted, a universal human experience, and yet he was the only human being ever to be able to defeat these forces. How?

There is something else very important I want you to notice right off the bat, before I go into the details of Christ’s three temptations. In the verses right before today’s text Jesus has just been baptized and we hear the words, “This is my Son.” In the very first verse of today’s reading, it says Jesus was led up by the Spirit.

You see, once Jesus has been baptized, once Jesus has allowed the Holy Spirit to guide his life, now begin the times of testing. Now begin the times of temptation. Too many people believe once they have been baptized, and begin to attend church, their life should become easier, more relaxed, less trouble and problems. But as one can see that is not the case in today’s story. Jesus is baptized, he allows God to rule his decisions, and Bam! Now this! Let the temptations begin.

OK! Pull out your bulletins and let's examine the story. In the first temptation, Satan, the Devil, the Tempter or the Evil One, the same force from the story of Adam and Eve, challenges Jesus to use his God given talents for his own selfish desires. The Evil One says to Jesus, "If or since you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." Now remember, Jesus hasn't eaten in forty days. Me, I'm hungry if I miss a single meal. Come on, what harm could it be if Jesus simply uses these special gifts and powers he's been given by God, for something to eat?

Because Jesus knew that God had given him these special abilities specifically to use for humankind and all of creation. Not for his own satisfaction or benefit. Ten chapters later we see that Jesus does use his talents to command a few loaves of bread to become enough to feed 5000, but now it for the benefit of others.

What special powers or gifts had God given to you? I know, maybe you can't raise the dead, or feed 5000, but let me assure you, God has given each of you a special gift or power. Maybe you haven't discovered that special gift or power, I know I still wonder about mine sometimes, but it is there.

Is it that God gave you a beautiful voice? Not me. Or maybe God gave you a way with numbers. Did God give you athletic abilities, or the gift of gab? Or maybe God gave you the power to listen, or the power to work with the youth, the elderly. Maybe God gave you the gift and power to organize, maybe run a company, raise a family, drive a truck, cook, sell, build, teach or heal. We have all been given a gift or special powers by God. But what do we do when we discover that talent? The temptation from the Evil One in this story becomes, "How do we use it?" Do we use it solely for pleasure and our own benefit or the benefit of others and the benefit of God's kingdom?

We learn from Jesus in that he combats this first temptation by applying a "timeless truth" from Deuteronomy, the word of God. "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Something Adam and Eve could not apply.

Sure we are hungry. We too want that apple, and want to turn our stones into bread. We have this Hunger of the heart and the soul. In this day in age we are starving.

But still we have not learned that material things will not cure this type of hunger. Only the Living Word of God can ease this type of craving. A Living Word that can and will change your lives and the lives of those around us. Giving meaning and purpose, a true sense of being full. A Living Word that works through the gifts and powers God has given to each of you.

In the second temptation of Jesus, I think it is absolutely brilliant how Satan tempts Jesus by misquoting scripture. Even more ironic that Satan misquotes this scripture at the temple. Wow! Talk about scary! What a fitting scene to create a work of disaster, by the abuse of religious ideas and in God's house. We would never do anything like that, or would we?

How many times have we personally, or as a community, or as a nation used Scripture to justify our evil action. Has not the church used God's Holy Word to launch the Crusades, or justify

slavery? Have we not used these some words to oppress and keep female disciples out of the pulpit? Think about it! These words are still very relevant!

But the Evil One will use this tactic and then goes one step further by placing Jesus in an extremely dangerous position, on the pinnacle, or top of the temple, and tempts Jesus to ask God to bail him out. Satan quotes from Psalm 91 and says, "For God will command his angels concerning you to protect you." But the tempter fails to mention the balance of that passage where it says, God will protect when one follows God's path.

God will guide, direct, and protect us, but we must resist the temptation of putting ourselves in such dangerous situations, and then constantly expecting God to bail us out. And the response Jesus gives is again from Deut, once again the word of God. "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

It is senseless for any of us to deliberately place oneself into a threatening situation and then expect God to rescue us. Yes, God promises protection, not in the paths of our own choosing, but where God has sent us. Do not test the Lord you God. Perhaps you can think of ways that you test the Lord?

Finally in the third temptation, Satan tempts Jesus with authority and praise from the things of this world, in an instant. Authority and praise that Jesus would eventually possess anyway. All Jesus must do is take a short cut, compromise just a little. It is a temptation of bowing down to the system, of taking our short cuts, and worshiping the things that give us the instant gratification.

But Jesus isn't buying into this universal concept. Instead Jesus turns to scripture, once again from Deuteronomy, once again another timeless truth, once again the Word of God. "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only God." Are we tempted to fall down and give worship to the material things of this world so we can gain what we think is authority and praise?

What do we worship? Or better put, what is the most important thing in your life? Money? Job? Status? Free Time? Or God? Do we accept what society has deemed as moral and acceptable, in order not to rock the boat and make sure to get ahead in this life. Try to remember my friends that Jesus has promised us all the glory and authority we could ever imagine. Worship God, and serve Only God.

Temptations, temptations and more temptations. Temptations that happened to Adam and Eve, temptations that happen to you and me. Temptations that happen to all the baptized. Temptations that follow us for the rest of our lives. Temptations, temptations, temptations. Temptations taken together, with the responses of Jesus, declare that we are to make life more than just the pursuit of our physical needs.

Through our gifts and powers given to us by God, we live for God and one another. We learn it is not for us to test God, by either perverting God's Holy Words to suit our needs, or by placing ourselves in positions we know we should not be in, and then challenging God to rescue. And

finally we are to Worship and Serve God only, because it is God alone who gives us true authority and the glory to live forever.

This beautiful text screams at the top of its lungs that the supreme purpose of all life is the worship and praise of God and the service of God's glorious creation. Any pursuit, priority, or preoccupation that diverts us from these purposes should be seen for what it really is: The Serpent, the Devil, The Tempter or Satan's Temptation!

But remember the same God that walked with Adam and Eve in the garden, even after they had fallen to temptation, is the same God through Jesus Christ that walks with us daily in our garden. Teaching us to combat evil temptations with God's Holy Word, and teaching us the true meaning of life. Worship God! Serve Others!

Jesus changes everything!