

“When Temptation Comes”

Luke 4:1-13

March 6, 2022

I was ordering something online last week and as I was completing the “checkout” process on my computer, my order did not initially go through because I forgot to check that all important “Terms and Conditions” box. Below that box it will usually say, “By checking the box it means that you have read and agree with all of the terms and conditions.” Now, let’s be honest, do we really read all of the terms and conditions? I’m sure we’ve all tried in the past, but they are so long or the print is so tiny that we usually say to ourselves, “Oh, forget it. Hopefully I’m not being cheated or schemed, and I’ll just check the box and move on.” Or sometimes the words or phrases in the conditions do not make any sense, so we think, “I don’t know what this means; I’m just going to check the box so I can place my order.” Or, these days we say things like, “I’m not reading those terms and conditions” and we just check the box so our order will go through.

In our Gospel lesson for today we find Jesus in the wilderness, soon after He was baptized, being tempted by Satan. And the temptations that Satan offers to Jesus seem, on the surface, to be rather harmless. They’re not necessarily temptations to do evil. The devil is simply encouraging Jesus to take the easy road, in order to show the world that He really is the Son of God. In other words, it’s like Satan is saying to Jesus, “Don’t worry about the terms and conditions of what God says about the cross, trust me.” We see this especially with the first temptation.

Jesus has been out in the wilderness for 40 days. He hadn’t eaten anything, and Satan says to Him, “Jesus, if you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread,” meaning, “Jesus, you need to eat.” Now what’s wrong with eating? Eating food is not sinful. We need food to survive. But this is how Satan operates. He will take things that are innocent on their own and twists them around in ways which would have been sinful for Jesus.

Jesus wasn't just hanging out in the wilderness because He wanted to, God had sent Him out there and Jesus trusted that God would care for Him. If He had turned that stone into bread, He would have demonstrated a lack of trust in God, which would have been a sin for Jesus. Notice, as well, how Satan begins this temptation by saying, "If you are the Son of God," almost like He is saying, "If you are the Son of God, then show me, do something that only God could do." When people question us about our faith or other things, many times we want to prove them wrong. So imagine if Jesus thought, "If I'm the Son of God? Well, I'll show you" and then went ahead and turned a stone into bread. Satan was not going to be converted into a Christian by Jesus doing miraculous things, so if Jesus had turned that stone into bread He would have been misusing His power. He resisted Satan's temptation using the same human abilities that we have, namely He trusted God and used the power of His Word by saying, "Man shall not live on bread alone."

When Jesus refuses to give in to Satan's first temptation, Satan tries again by showing Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and says, "If you worship me, I will give you all authority over all the kingdoms of the world." Now this seems obviously sinful. Devil worship? Why would this ever appeal to Jesus? Actually it might have been very appealing. This was Satan saying, "Jesus, if you want people to follow you this is an easy way to do it. Worship me and you can avoid that horrible cross, suffering, and death, and still use your power over the world." But Jesus again resists Satan's temptation with the Word of God by saying, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve." Jesus' love for His Heavenly Father and His love for us was far greater than His desire to avoid the suffering and death that God would require of Him in order to save us. Jesus trusted God His Father completely, even when God's plans included excruciating suffering and death.

Satan, knowing that Jesus is not going to give in to this temptation then comes along with a third one. He takes Jesus to the highest point of the temple and says, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus quoted the Bible twice in resisting Satan, so I'm sure Satan thought, "OK, two can play at that game" and he quotes the Bible himself in this temptation. In essence what Satan says to Jesus is, "Hasn't God promised to protect you? So if you trust God, then prove it. Jump and let's see if God will really send His angels to protect you." Think of the consequences, though, if Jesus had done this. If Jesus had jumped it would have demonstrated that God could be manipulated to do whatever we want and whenever we need it. This would have made following Jesus very easy, as there would have been no demands made of us and we could be in control of our lives at all times. So Jesus says, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Just think, even after fasting for 40 days and facing some appealing temptations, Jesus did not give in for even one second. He was perfect down to the very last detail in all of the terms and conditions of what God the Father required of Him to save us. The temptation of Jesus was to choose a way other than the cross, and maybe that is our temptation as well, because the temptation of Jesus clearly says that life is a struggle; it is a wilderness experience. We will often be tempted by Satan just like Jesus, as the last verse of our text says that Satan was not finished, but would return at a more opportune time. And in the Bible we see how Jesus was often tempted, and often the temptations were very subtle.

For example, last week we saw how Jesus was tempted to stay on top of a mountain with some of His disciples. It was nice on top of the mountain – no hassles, no worries, and no cross. Peter even tried to persuade Him by saying, "Lord, you don't have to go back down." I'm sure it

was tempting to stay on that mountain, because that would have been the easy way out, but that was not the mission for which Jesus came to this earth.

Later, when Jesus hung on the cross the Bible says that people came by and taunted Him by saying, “If you are the Son of God, then come down from that cross and save yourself.” That scene actually sounds similar to our text for today when Satan challenges Jesus to jump. Sometimes it seems like the more we try to live our lives by faith, the more temptation plagues us. I remember hearing someone say many years ago that opportunity knocks only once, but it’s temptation that keeps banging on your door. Jesus certainly knew this and I think that’s one reason why He taught His disciples to pray, “Lead us not into temptation.”

Many of you have probably heard me say in the past that the word “evil” is the word “live” spelled backwards. Temptation is Satan’s way of turning things around, of leading us away from life with God. That’s why Jesus tells us that the first step in dealing with temptation is to pray. So whenever life seems to be a wilderness and you’re trying to find your way through, remember that when temptation comes and offers you the wrong answer, the wrong choice, or the wrong use of power, Jesus was tempted in the same way as well, but through God’s Word He was able to resist Satan every time. In fact, in a famous hymn written by Martin Luther titled, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God,” the last line of verse 3 says, “One little word subdues him” (“him” meaning “Satan”). While that one word is certainly, “Jesus,” it could also be the word, “liar,” because every time Satan comes to us he lies and he seeks to destroy. But when you point that out to yourself and to him, you win.

However, to do so, we need to know the truth of God’s Word. So let us learn it, study it, and live by it. Even though we may struggle and be tempted every day to turn away from Jesus, we are assured of the final victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil, because God’s Word tells us in the final

verse of our second lesson for today, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” May that Word be a part of our daily lives so that we are always prepared to use it when temptation comes.