

Sermon Invocatio
February 14, 2016
Matthew 4:1-11
Temptation of Jesus
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My little boy is a baptized child of God. God has washed away his sins through the water and the Spirit. Thomas David Preus has been joined to his Lord Jesus and his baptism. Yet, when our Lord climbed the bank of the Jordan after being baptized by John, he endured temptation. So also, for Thomas, he must endure temptation, just like each and every one of us. Yet, just as Christ's baptism is of incredible value to all of us who are baptized into his name, so Christ's temptation by the devil is of great advantage to us who are tempted even today.

The author to the Hebrews declares, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Heb. 4:15) So it stands to reason that the temptations by which Satan tested Jesus are also employed against us. So we would do well to see how our Lord overcomes them, so that we might also overcome these poisoned darts of the evil foe.

In the first temptation Satan tries to trick Jesus into believing that earthly bread is more valuable than heavenly bread. "If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread." It's ironic that he wants Jesus to prove he is the Son of Heaven, by pointing him to the earthly meat. Yet Christ does not prove himself to be God's Son by selfishly providing bread for himself. He proves he is God's Son by fulfilling Holy Scripture through his suffering, death, and resurrection, not by satisfying his own hunger.

The Tempter employs a common trick. You're hungry. Food is your priority. Who knows if God will provide for you? He'll be there when you get back. Seek ye first the bread of this earth and God's kingdom can wait. The Jews fell for this same temptation of Satan when they sought bread from Jesus, yet Christ responds, "Do not labor for food that perishes, but for food that endures to eternal life" (John 6:27). By answering Satan, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'" Christ teaches us not to strive for food that perishes, for treasures that breakdown, rather strive to hear and believe God's *Word*. Christ wants us to value his Word more than life, yes, to cherish God's Word as if it *is* eternal life itself, because it is through *faith* in God's Word that one receives life everlasting.

After being countered by God's Word, Satan says, "Fine, you know the Scriptures. I know them too! Check this out." So the devil tells Jesus to throw himself off the pinnacle of the temple citing Psalm 91 "He will command his angels concerning you and on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone." Yet Satan *purposefully* leaves out an important part of that passage. "For he will command his angels concerning you *to guard you in all your ways.*" Satan purposefully misapplies the text to say that Christ can go wild and do whatever he feels recklessly. But that's not what the text says. The text says that God will guard you in all your ways. That means, God intends for each of us to walk according to his Word. Christ was given no command from God to throw himself to his death. There was no promise of deliverance there. Rather, it was a blasphemous testing of God. Again, Christ wields God's Word and knocks Satan on his rear.

Satan used this same technique in the book of Numbers, chapter 14. God promised to give Israel victory of the Canaanites, despite the fact they were bigger, stronger, and more numerous than the Hebrews. Yet, out of fear, God's people refused to go into battle. So when Moses declared that God would not permit their generation to enter into the Promised Land, the people declared that God was on their side and marched to their own deaths to battle, blocking their ears to Moses' warning. Claiming to follow God's Command, they marched to their own drum, ultimately to their own deaths.

Satan uses this same tactic against us. He uses a little bit of Scripture, a little bit of truth to lead us astray. Many have been deceived by this trickery and as a result have wandered from the true faith. They think, "Well, since I'm saved by grace without my works, then I can go on and sin without any consequences. I don't have to be sorry or repair my ways." They ignore St. Paul's proclamation, "How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Rom. 6:2). Many, after hearing that we are saved by *faith* alone, conclude that they no longer have to hear God's Word or receive his Sacraments, despite our Lord's statement, "My sheep *hear* my voice" and "Do this in remembrance of me." As a result, many who have starved themselves of God's Word lose their faith entirely, and with it eternal life. And many, taking hold of a little bit of Scripture, go on preaching in Jesus' name, while leading people down the wrong path. Some use it to make money with book and television deals, while others, themselves deceived, march to commands never given by our Savior and often in contradiction to God's clear Word. Our Lord teaches us to look at the *whole* word of God and not to twist and hack at it to fit our own ideas.

Satan boosts his boldness with his final temptation aimed at our Lord. He demands that Jesus worship *him* in exchange for earthly power. This temptation resembles the first one as it focuses attention on this earth while ignoring God's eternal kingdom. Yet, while the first temptation dealt with temporary food for the belly, this temptation deals with temporary *power*. While it seems that this is the easiest temptation to overcome as Jesus says, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve'" this is Satan's most effective strike. It seems obnoxious to bow down to Satan himself in exchange for the kingdoms of the world, yet many have done just that for a lot less. Sure, you won't see people prostrated with their faces in the ground before the serpent of Eden, but people do serve false gods in exchange for earthly power.

What is more alluring, going to church or making a few hundred bucks? What's more enjoyable, saying you're sorry or advancing your career? Your priorities will tell you pretty quickly who your master is. And when God won't promise you power or money or advancement here on earth, Satan's shortsighted promises can seem mighty attractive.

Satan tempts Christ three times and in each round Christ defeats the tempter with God's Word. So he teaches us to wield God's Word, a powerful sword against temptation. God's Word is Christ's weapon of choice to battle the devil's wiles, and it is our only sure defense against them. It is why the hymnist writes, "Wield God's Word, the weapon glorious; Against all foes be thus victorious." This is why it is good to recite the Ten Commandments often, so that you have them at the ready to stave off the devils attacks.

Yet, Christ's temptation was not recorded for us simply to give us an example how to overcome temptation. If that were true, it would be more an indictment than a source of comfort. Do you diligently use God's Word to resist temptation? Have you ever failed when tempted? To the guilty conscience, Christ's example shows how far you've missed the mark. But our Lord was not tempted for his own sake. Jesus is God. Satan could not come into his presence without permission much less could he tempt him. Jesus willingly endured the devil's test *for us*, for *you*. Jesus did what Adam and all his children failed to do, overcome Satan's temptation, and he gives them the credit.

Christ's temptation does us much good. In Jesus' baptism he joined himself to baptism and thereby joined himself to us sinners. The author to the Hebrews states that Christ was tempted *like* us in everyway, except without sin. Having been joined to Christ in baptism you are joined to his *entire* work. Has Christ overcome temptation? So have you, by virtue of your baptism. Christ has defeated Satan *for you*. Jesus entered the ring *for you* and beat Satan against the ropes. And though you've been beaten down time and again, falling to the blows of Satan's wiles, you emerge the victor. Because Baptism isn't a once and done washing. It doesn't simply wash away your sins that day, while leaving you to deal with the rest thereafter. Baptism is a daily washing and renewal.

St. Paul writes, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." (Rom. 6:4) This newness of life involves continued repentance and forgiveness. Martin Luther writes in our Small Catechism. "What does such baptizing with water indicate? It indicates that the old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a

new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” Your baptism does you good everyday. Not only does the Spirit you received in it draw you to repentance each day, but also to daily forgiveness.

Thomas will deal with temptation in his life. Not even our baptized Lord was spared the temptation of Satan. My son will battle sin in this life. Yet I rejoice and do not despair, because Thomas is baptized into Christ. And being baptized into Christ, he is baptized into all his works. That means he is joined to Christ’s suffering and death and resurrection. He’s also joined to Christ’s sinless temptation. So when the final cards are read, it won’t matter how many times he’s been beaten down, Thomas will be the victor, because Jesus gives him the victory.

So you, my baptized brothers and sisters, have the same promise. And because of your baptism, you have a more powerful word than even the Ten Commandments to wield against Satan. When the devil accuses you of your sins and proclaims victory for himself, you can deride him and say, “Satan hear this proclamation, I am baptized into Christ! Drop your ugly accusation; I am not so soon enticed. Now that to the font I’ve traveled, all your might has come unraveled. And against your tyranny, God my Lord unites with me.” Satan tempted Jesus and failed. So we baptized Christians can mock Satan for his failure and boldly claim the victory, because Jesus gives it to us freely through faith. As St. Paul confidently proclaims, “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Amen.