

Christ's Temptation, Our Salvation

A few years ago in Southern California, a biker was killed by a mountain lion; and a few days later, another man was attacked in a separate attack. The stories were all over the news, and people were terrified of these lions. But within a week the lions were found and killed. And people stopped talking about mountain lions, or even thinking about them.

The Bible tells us that there is a lion who attacks mankind every day. People don't think about him unless something gruesome happens like a vicious murder or a war breaking out; but most of the time we live our lives not thinking about the danger. Yet this lion is out there, ready to pounce on us. In our Gospel, we read about this lion attacking Jesus. Yes, the lion is the devil. Scripture says he is waiting outside your door to tempt you to sin. He even went after our Savior, to derail his ministry at its beginning.

But our Lord resisted Satan's temptation, and thereby he defeated the devil. He did this in order to save us. Today we'll study Christ's Temptation, which is Our Salvation.

Our Gospel picks up when Jesus was 30 years old, right after his Baptism. **“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.”**

Some people say, How could that be a real temptation? Jesus was the Son of God. He couldn't sin. How could he be tempted? But they forget that Jesus, God himself, became a real human being. He was born as a baby. He grew up, in a real family. He did the things we do; he had the same needs we had. The Gospel notes, in an incredible understatement, that after 40 days of eating nothing, **“he was hungry.”**

Jesus felt what we feel—think of his disappointment at his disciples; or think of how he cried at the grave of his friend Lazarus. Our Second Reading says, **“We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are.”** But as we'll see, he did not sin.

Before we look at what he accomplished, let's talk about what temptation is. Being tempted is not a sin. A temptation is a suggestion or thought that comes into your life, enters your mind—but that's not the sin. What matters is how you respond. It's a sin if you give in. Satan places something before you that seems appealing—do you shut it out, or do you delight in it?

For example—on Ash Wednesday we heard the story of David, who saw a woman bathing and felt lust for her—so much that he had her brought to him and he had sex with her. On seeing the woman, David could have looked away, put it out of his mind—and he would not have sinned. The temptation isn't the sin. It's how we respond to it.

With our sinful natures we so often give in. But Jesus never responded positively to a temptation.

We see that even when Satan himself comes in the wilderness and offers Jesus the easy way out. You're hungry, Jesus—turn this stone into bread! Use your power to take care of

yourself! You came to win a kingdom—well, bow down to me and I'll give you all the kingdoms on earth.

But Jesus had come to earth to win our salvation, not have power handed to him. He came here to suffer first, and only after he suffered for us to receive glory. Satan was offering shortcuts. No need to be hungry. No need to follow all of God's demands. No need for a cross. But this was not God's will. And as a perfect man, this was not Jesus' will. He would do exactly as the Father had asked him.

Satan tempts us like he tempted Jesus. You can have it now. No need to work hard for years to save up the money to buy that car; by cheating others you can get it today.

Remember how Jesus overcame Satan—by going back to the Bible. It was not God's will for him to turn a stone into bread; after all, God had promised, **“Man does not live on bread alone,”** but on every word from God. Bow down to Satan? No, **“Worship the Lord and serve him only.”** Test God by throwing himself off the temple tower? **“Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”**

How can you be prepared to answer Satan? By being in God's Word. Read it on your own. And come to Bible class at church, where we talk about what the Word means and how it applies to our lives.

Jesus, of course, is God. And he could have used his divine power to send Satan away. He could have changed that stone to a rock. He didn't need to bow to Satan, he could have seized power all by himself. But Jesus had come to this earth live in humility. He set aside the full use of his authority. When he did use his power, it was to refute the lies of men, or to heal those who were afflicted.

Jesus did not use his power to crush Satan physically, just as later he did not use his might to destroy the soldiers who would beat him. Jesus came to serve us, to obey God's commands to love all people, even his enemies, and to quietly accept the suffering that our sins had earned.

One more thing about these temptations. Satan tempted Jesus with lies.

“If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” Note that “if” at the beginning. Certainly the Son of God would do this—make bread rather than starve. But that was a lie, because that wasn't God's plan.

Then a bigger lie: **“I will give you all the authority and splendor”** of earth's kingdoms, **“it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.”** Satan may be the prince of this world, but not because God gave him that position. Whatever authority Satan has he stole, by convincing people to follow him. When we see evil in our world, whether that is Russia attacking Ukraine, or different countries allowing millions of abortions, that shows Satan is at work; but God did not put him in the position to do that. Satan used the sinful weaknesses of people to bring his evil on our planet. He did it by spreading his lie, that you can have a better life if you follow evil.

Satan even distorts the Bible. He quoted, or mis-quoted, Psalm 91. The Psalm says that God's angels will guard you *“in all of your ways,”* that is, as you do your job. But Satan wants you to forget how God is blessing you in your life, so you're not content, and instead you lust for more. And then the rationalizations start. “Everybody else is doing it.” “I'm not really stealing if

I take this little bit.” “God wants me to be happy, so it’s okay to live together outside of marriage.”

Think of Abraham. He was 75, and his wife 65, when God told him that he’d have a son, in fact, he’d have descendants as numerous as the stars. But after 10 years, Abe and Sarah had no children, and Sarah was well past the age for it. So they figured God must have meant for Abram to have a child by their servant Hagar. Which led to all sorts of problems.

We believers can distort the Bible to excuse our sinful ideas. We fall into one temptation after another.

But Jesus did not. When Satan tried to twist the words of that Psalm, Jesus went back to a clear command of Scripture: **“Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”**

It’s interesting, throughout these tests Jesus quoted from the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses’ final sermon to Israel after the 40 years of wandering in the desert. Israel had broken God’s law again and again in those 40 years. But Jesus never sinned in the 40 days of temptation under Satan.

Jesus did this as their Substitute, and as our Substitute. We often say that we are saved by the blood of Jesus, and that is true. His blood covers our sin. But we can be saved by his blood because it is the blood of a man who led a completely innocent life. If Jesus had given in to even one temptation, then his suffering and death would do us no good. In other words, Jesus saved us not only on Mt. Calvary, but also in the desert of temptation, and throughout his life. God removes our sins and replaces them with the perfect life of Jesus Christ.

When Satan attacks us, we can trust in Jesus and his active obedience of God’s law. When we are dragged down by guilt, we know the One who kept the Law in our place. Martin Luther put it this way: “Christ fulfilled the Law perfectly, for he loved God with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength and with all his mind, and he loved his neighbor as himself. Therefore, when the Law comes and accuses you of not having kept it, tell it to go to Christ. Say: This is the Man who has kept the Law; I cling to him; he fulfilled it for me, and he gave his fulfillment to me.”

And then, when I am tempted to sin, I remember that I am covered with the robe of Jesus’ righteousness, so I don’t want to sin. I don’t need to sin, since God will provide everything for me. Instead, I want to thank my God for that perfect righteousness by obeying him.

And when I worry about death, I know that with the righteousness of Christ I have the clothes that will get me into my heavenly home.

Our Savior knows what it is to be tempted. He willingly faced Satan, the prowling lion; and he did it for our redemption. He won the battle, and gained for us the victory. His temptation is our salvation. Amen.