

MARCH 6, 2022 -THE DEVIL

Our Gospel comes from Luke 4:1-13

Today we celebrate the first Sunday of Lent, and every year as we celebrate the first Sunday of Lent, we revisit the Temptations in the Desert.

Today we're in the Gospel of Luke, and as you know this gospel was written to a mysterious man named Theophilus.

That is a Greek word, it means friend of God.

But today we're gonna talk about the enemy of God, a force that very much wants to keep you from God. Of course, I'm talking about the devil.

Satan, Lucifer, Prince of the World, Father of Lies.

And it's interesting that although Jesus refers to Satan throughout the scriptures, and of course he's front and center in our gospel today, you don't hear too much about Satan these days.

Of course, I'm sure there's exceptions, but the Church seems to be largely quiet, avoiding the subject, which of course plays right into the playbook, because the more we pretend he's not there, the more he can operate freely with impunity. So today I wanna talk about Satan.

I wanna talk about how he works in the world.

I wanna talk about sin, I wanna talk about the nature of sin and how we can defeat Satan.

Because make no mistake about it, we are in a battle, whether you wanna believe that or not, we're at war, and it's always helpful to know your enemy. So, Temptations in the Desert. Appearing in all three synoptic Gospels.

Of course, I'm talking about Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Today we are in Luke, let's go.

"Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for 40 days, to be tempted by the devil."

So, let's begin with the 40 days.

You know, that number 40 is highly symbolic, appearing **157** times in the Bible, always associated with a time of testing.

Jesus fasted for 40 days.

The Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years.

King Saul, King David, and King Solomon all ruled for 40 years.

Goliath taunted Israel for 40 days before David took him out.

God flooded the earth for 40 days with rain.

Jesus appears for 40 days after His resurrection before He ascends into heaven, just to name a few.

Consequently, it's a symbolic number and theologians wanna play around with this because they say, well, He wasn't really in the desert for 40

days, this was just picked to, well, symbolize a prolonged period of testing.

Others say no, 40 is 40, but who knows, who knows. One thing's for sure, we can all relate to a time of trial.

We can all relate to a time of having a desert experience where God feels far away.

Who knows, maybe you're feeling that way right now. If so, hold on.

Often our greatest trials come just before our greatest blessings.

So, who knows, God might be preparing a blessing for you right around the corner.

"Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for 40 days, to be tempted by the devil."

Now I've always found this a bit curious that the same Spirit that comes down at the bank of the Jordan as a dove, and of course we always associate dove with peace, this same Spirit is now leading Jesus into the desert to be tempted by Satan.

It seems to be the exact opposite of what we pray for in the Lord's Prayer.

"Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

But then again, the whole idea of Jesus being tempted by anything is a bit odd.

Adding to the confusion is that that Greek word for temptation that's used here is peirasmos, and it's used interchangeably, that word often for another word, which is test.

And of course, temptation and test are completely different things.

A **temptation** is seduction to do evil, while a **test** seeks to discover your character.

So, a **temptation seeks to destroy, a test seeks to build up.**

Ultimately in the end what determines whether something is a temptation or a test is really you. How you respond to each and every situation in the end determines whether it was a temptation or a test.

This is our daily battle because of course we're sinners with a fallen nature, meaning we have distorted desires which is precisely where Satan comes to us, in these **distorted desires.**

Promising that if we act upon these distorted desires, we'll be happy.

And understand that is the power of all sin, because sin, which is defined as anything outside of God's will, is always connected to the promise of pleasure, that we'll be happy.

That's where it gets its power, sin.
If not, nobody would ever sin.
Sin always presents itself as attractive.
The fruit is pleasing to the eye.
But it is a lie, it is a trap, because sin ultimately leads to misery every time.
"He ate nothing during those days, and when those days were over, He was hungry."

So here we have Jesus, been in the desert for a long time and so He's very hungry, but I'm sure He's exhausted.

Probably hadn't bathed so He's dirty, He's tired, He's weak.

Which is precisely where Satan makes his move, because that's how Satan rolls, okay?

He comes to us while we are weak.

I mean, consider the Seven Deadlies.

Anger, gluttony, pride, lust, jealousy, greed, sloth.

I've heard it said and I believe it's true that the gateway to the **Seven Deadly Sins** is gluttony.

Which surprised me at first when I thought about that, but, you know, it makes sense because when you over-eat, when you over-drink, when you're lying on the couch like a beached whale, any defenses that you had, they're not just down, they're gone, leaving you very open to the other Deadly Sins.

And this is precisely where Satan goes when we are weak.

"If you are the Son of God, turn this stone to bread."

Did you notice that word if?

You can see that Satan is clearly baiting Jesus.

"If you're the Son of God", meaning you might not be.

Again, this is how Satan operates.

He comes to us **while we are weak and walks through the door of doubt**.

Because **doubt** is the taproot of sin, along with his close cousin **fear**.

Fear that maybe God won't provide for me. Fear that maybe I need a backup plan.

Fear for the fact that maybe God's holding out, maybe I need to make my own provisions.

"If you're the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."

In other words, if you're the Son of God, prove it, feed yourself, **create your own provision**.

There are many things in this world that we can trace back to the fall of humanity.

And one of those things is that we have been led through toil and labor to create our own provisions.

This was not part of the original game plan. This is not how we were originally designed.

In the beginning, God placed Adam and Eve in the garden, and that garden provided for all their needs. It was only after the fall they were left to create their own provisions.

And through the years we've learned first how to **hunt and gather**, and then to **farm and cultivate** the land, then to **divert water and fertilize** our fields, all in an effort to provide provisions for ourselves.

And in the last 100 years, that learning curve has exploded exponentially to the point where we've put a man on the Moon and I've got a computer masking as a phone in my pocket with the computing power that just 50 years ago would have filled a large room.

And all of this has one goal.

To improve our **self-sufficiency**.

To improve our quality of life, as it satisfies every need and desire.

So, I have a question.

How is that working out for you?

Now we are talking about humanity now, since the fall, is that we have been left to create our own provisions.

When the devil says, "If you're the Son of God, command this stone to become bread," we can think of this bread as representing all that we create, as we navigate the branches of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Sometimes what we create is good, sometimes what we create is evil, and sometimes it's hard to tell the difference.

"If you're the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." And Jesus answered, "It is written, one does not live on bread alone," Deuteronomy 8:3.

So let me ask you a question.

If the second person of the Blessed Trinity, God himself, when confronted by evil, answers each and every one of the devil's temptations with the same three words, "**It is written**," talking about God now, choosing the Word as his weapon to bring to the fight, wouldn't it make sense that we would do the same?

And if we're going to bring the Word to the fight against evil, it would make sense that we would become at least mildly acquainted with what the Word says.

Yet the number one best-selling book year after year sits on a shelf unread.

Now don't you find that a bit odd?

It's almost like there's a force in this world that wants to keep you from reading it, because, guess what, there is.

Don't believe that?

Sit down and read your Bible and watch the thousand different things that will come to your mind of all the other things you could be doing besides that.

We are at war, and his Word will equip you for that war because his Word has power over Satan.

Can I say that again?

His Word has power over Satan.

"It is written, one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God."

I've met many people in this world that have been very successful in life when it comes to making provisions for themselves.

They have gathered their grain, ground it, baked their bread and eaten to their heart's content, but they have no peace.

Why?

Because "one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God."

Let's move to that **second temptation**.

Then he took Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in an instant. And the devil said to Him, "I shall give to you all this glory and power, for it has been handed over to me and I may give it to whomever I wish. All of this will be yours if you worship me."

First of all, "for it has been handed over to me and I may give it to whomever I wish."

Who gave Satan the world?

Well, may I suggest that you and I give him a little piece every time we walk away from the quiet voice and fall for his lies.

"All of this will be yours if you worship me."

Now I'm thinking this one stuck.

I'm thinking that this harassed our Lord like a fly all the way to Calvary, because while that first temptation was all about **fear**, fear that God would somehow not provide, that second temptation seems to be all about **frustration**.

Think about how many times Jesus would have been frustrated during His ministry.

The Jewish leadership was out to get Him.

The people didn't get it, they just wanted a miracle show.

His own disciples didn't understand him.

And I'm thinking the whole time in the back of His mind He's thinking, "all this could be yours."

You don't gotta mess with all these people.

You don't gotta mess with the Romans.

You don't have to go through all this persecution.

You don't have to suffer; you don't have to die.

Don't you think that might have been rattling around the back of His head when He was sweating blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, begging, "Father, if this is possible, let this cup pass from me."

Or how about Peter's confession, remember that?

First time Jesus ever revealed that He had to go to Jerusalem to suffer and to die at the hands of the Romans.

But what did Peter say?

"We don't have to go. Let's skip it, you don't have to die."

What did Jesus say?

"Get behind me, Satan."

Let me ask you, do you really think that Jesus thought that Peter was Satan?

No, but can you see how Peter was very much, and I'm sure by accident, channeling this second temptation.

But Jesus said to the devil, "It is written, you shall worship the Lord, your God, and Him alone you shall serve." Deuteronomy 6:13.

Let's move to that **third** temptation.

"Then he led Him to Jerusalem and made Him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to Him: "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, He will command His angels concerning you, and with their hands they will support you, **lest you dash your foot against a stone**."

That's **Psalms 91**.

I guess Satan knows scripture too.

Now a parapet is a steeple, you'll see it on churches. And in the ancient world, every town would build their temple on the highest grounds so that that parapet could be seen for miles.

And the first thing that really jumps out at me when I read this, "Then he led Him to Jerusalem and made him stand on the parapet of the temple" is, I'm thinking if Satan has the power to take Jesus anywhere, think of all the places he could take you. "If you're the Son of God, throw yourself down."

Again, you see that word if.

That first temptation rooted in **fear**, second temptation rooted in **frustration**, this temptation rooted in **fantasy** 'cause think about it.

Wouldn't Jesus wanna fantasize about the idea "oh devil I'll show you," but He doesn't, no.

He responds with what?

The Word.

"You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."
Deuteronomy 6:16.

Again, Satan is saying, "If you're the Son of God, prove it," which is something that Jesus would hear throughout His life.

Even as He hung on the cross, bleeding and dying, what did they shout?

"If He's the King of Israel, let him come down from that cross and then we'll believe."

But let me tell you, my friends.

It is never God's will for you to prove anything to anybody.

"When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from Him for a time."

Did you notice it said "**for a time**,"?

'Cause he'll be back.

Jesus walked out one side of that desert to a small fishing community called Capernaum to begin His ministry.

Meanwhile, the devil walked out the other side of the desert and developed a new strategy.

A **three-point** plan.

Number one, we need to convince this world that, well, the devil **doesn't exist**.

Let them paint me red and give me a tail and a pitchfork.

Let them think that I'm just some childhood nightmare that only an ignorant fool would believe in.

Just something a bunch of old men dreamed up just trying to control me.

Number two, let's convince this world that the **Holy Spirit doesn't exist**.

Let them sing their songs, let them waive their hands in the air, let them follow the rubrics of liturgy and bow at all the right times but do not let them have a conscious contact with God through His Holy Spirit.

Number three, we need to **kill that man**.

And while he was pretty effective with those first two and he did manage to manipulate man to kill Jesus, he was not counting on the fact that three days later Jesus would walk out of that tomb, put his boot heel on the neck of death and say, "Oh death, you lose.

Oh death, **where is your sting?**"

What can we learn from the temptations in the desert? How can we apply this to life?

Well, let's start by getting back to this idea that temptation derives its power from the promise that we'll be happy.

Remember, that's the appeal of all sin, the idea that sin will bring us pleasure.

This is a door through which Satan enters.

Casting **seeds of fear, frustration, and fantasy** as he plants doubt and fear with this idea that God's not good enough.

I mean, this is what he did with Eve.

Satan convinced Eve that she was not satisfied in Eden.

This is the seed of all sin, this idea that we're missing something, this idea that God's somehow holding back, this idea that somehow, we're not gonna be happy if we don't succumb to this sin.

That is a lie, my friend.

Because all sin leads to misery.

We live in a world that is full of anxiety. We live in a world that is full of fear.

There are many reasons for this, but one of the big reasons is because this is not our home and while we are here, we are yearning to be home with God.

And it is precisely this yearning, precisely this anxiety, this feeling of missing something, that is Satan's playground.

Planting the fear in us that somehow, we're not gonna get there.

Sowing the fear in us that somehow, **we're missing something**.

Trying to convince us that if we follow him, we'll be satisfied.

Don't believe him, he's a liar.

Never forget, we're in a battle, and our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the spiritual forces of evil.

Let us put on the armor of God, which is the Word.

Do not be afraid, for God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, why?

So that He could bring you through the battles of this life and ultimately take you home.

So, the other day I was sitting at the table, working, looking out the window and the bird feeder was filled with little birds.

Then all of a sudden, this large hawk swooped in. A predator.

And immediately all those birds flew away, but there was this one bird.

This one, lone bird came outta nowhere. Wasn't a big bird, small bird.

But it kept dive bombing the hawk.

I mean, it was crazy.

That bird had no fear.

And amazingly, that little bird ran that hawk off the feeder.

Ephesians tells us that we need to “put on the full armor of God so that we may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil.”

I wonder where that bird learned of its armor. I imagine its teacher.

I imagine its source.

What is your source today?

And who is your teacher?