

Week of January 3, 2020

Matthew 4:1-11

⁴ Then the Spirit led Jesus up into the wilderness so that the devil might tempt him. ² After Jesus had fasted for forty days and forty nights, he was starving. ³ The tempter came to him and said, "Since you are God's Son, command these stones to become bread."

⁴ Jesus replied, "It's written, People won't live only by bread, but by every word spoken by God."

⁵ After that the devil brought him into the holy city and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, ⁶ "Since you are God's Son, throw yourself down; for it is written, I will command my angels concerning you, and they will take you up in their hands so that you won't hit your foot on a stone."

⁷ Jesus replied, "Again it's written, Don't test the Lord your God."

⁸ Then the devil brought him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ He said, "I'll give you all these if you bow down and worship me."

¹⁰ Jesus responded, "Go away, Satan, because it's written, You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him." ¹¹ The devil left him, and angels came and took care of him.

Temptation

Temptations abound in our lives - food, drinks, entertainment, power, sex, et cetera. Some temptations are given into quite easily, things like dessert after a big meal. Such temptations are simple and harmless, not really affecting anyone or anything, except maybe our waistlines. Others are fraught decisions, given into out of necessity, like a parent tempted to steal food because their child is hungry and they cannot afford a meal. These are clearly given into not because of a lack of morals, but because survival itself is at stake and the wrong seems less bad than the alternative. Then there are temptations that occur out of chance: you're having drinks with friends at a bar and you're hit on by an attractive person which leads to an affair you'd never thought yourself capable of committing, or you're given a job that seems too good to be true, making money you'd never thought you'd be capable of until you realize that the company you work for is engaging in illegal activities, but don't want to tell anyone for fear of ruining your financial security. These are things we all say we'd never be tempted to do until we find ourselves in the situation and then realize it's much more complicated than we thought. And there's the temptation to control and seize or gain more power. These are the temptations that lead politicians to seek illegal campaign contributions so they can influence people/events or win reelection, or rapists who hurt vulnerable people out of sick desires for control and power. Temptation is everywhere in various degrees, some relatively tame, some life altering. The only constant is that we all face them to one degree or another, even Jesus did.

Who is Jesus? That's what his temptation in the desert following his baptism strives to show. Jesus went into the desert directly after John baptized him and the Holy Spirit descended upon him proclaiming that Christ is God's beloved son. Everything that Jesus was tempted to do was something that the Israelites gave into during their own time in the wilderness. Jesus was told to turn a stone into bread to ease his hunger, but he refused the temptation. When the Israelites complained about their hunger and God provided them food, they hoarded it, not trusting that God would continue to provide for them (Exodus 16). Jesus was tempted to throw himself off the highest point trusting that God was with him and would protect him from danger, but he refused the temptation. When the Israelites found themselves thirsty, they questioned whether or not God was really with them until Moses could prove it with a sign (Exodus 17).

Jesus was tempted to give into the devil in exchange for all worldly power, and again he refused the temptation. The Israelites thought Moses had left them when he had been on God's mountain for too long, so they created an idol out of gold to replace God (Exodus 32).

What Jesus refused, humanity has given into. So, who is Jesus? He is the one who can do all that we have failed to live into. He is God and he is human. He is our savior, offering a redemption we've never been capable of.

Beloved Savior - we have been tempted in many ways, with food, pleasure, and power, and we have given in too often. But you, God's Son, have resisted all temptation on our behalf, that our giving in wouldn't have to be our eternal downfall. Save us from our times of trial, that we may be reconciled with you in your perfect unity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.