

Goal: That the hearers would more faithfully trust in Jesus when they are tempted.

“I can resist anything, but temptation.” Those are the famous words of Oscar Wilde and on this first Sunday of Lent we find Jesus in the wilderness being tempted by Satan. Jesus temptation in the dessert lasted for 40 days, so our season of Lent is also 40 days, which gives us the opportunity to consider temptation in our own lives. But let’s not overlook the context that temptation occurs.

Jesus is baptized in the Jordan by John, and immediately He is led out into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Then following His temptation, Jesus went to Galilee, proclaiming the Gospel, saying, ***“Repent and believe in the Gospel.”*** (Mark 1: 15) So, what does this tell us about the context of temptation? First, it happens to those who have been chosen by God and set apart as His own. Therefore, those who are baptized will encounter temptation, but those who have not been baptized won’t face that challenge.

So how are we to endure temptation so that we might be led through it to proclaim the Gospel of God? (***“The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.”***) (Mark 1: 12 – 13) Well, Mark’s account doesn’t give us a lot to work with. Mark doesn’t include the specific temptations Jesus faced. He says nothing about the temptation of turning stones into bread or about Jesus throwing Himself off the temple or about Him bowing down before the devil. Mark doesn’t describe how Jesus quotes scripture and how Satan twists scripture. What does Mark tell us? He tells us about the wild animals, which shows that Jesus was in physical danger, and also about the angels ministering to Jesus, which emphasizes the spiritual fight that we face.

Let’s be clear on something, temptation is not from God. God tests us, to assess our faith, to grow in our trust in Him. James is clear, (***“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But) each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.”***) (James 1: 13 – 14) Bill was a below average student when it came to spelling. One day, during a spelling test, he was stumped by many words that were unfamiliar. Softly the Tempter whispered, *“Look at Kim’s paper; she always gets A’s!”* Bill heeded the suggestion and copied several of her answers. The teacher noticed what

he was doing and was surprised, because she'd thought of Bill as an honest person. When it came time to collect the tests, she saw that Bill seemed to be having an inner struggle. Then, after bowing his head for a moment, he ripped up his paper. Although at first, he had given into temptation, he finally decided to take a zero rather than be dishonest. Calling him to her desk, the teacher said, *"I was watching you, Bill, and I want you to know that I'm very proud of you for what you did just now. Today you passed a much greater examination than your spelling test."*

Temptation and testing are not the same. God uses tests to assess where our faith and trust lies. But Satan, our own sinful flesh, and the world around us will entice us to not remain faithful to God but to trust our own desires. When the Pharisees came to Jesus with a question about taxes their goal was to trap Him, and the word translated "to trap" is the same word used to describe Jesus temptation in the wilderness. (***"And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk. And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?" (Mark 12: 13 – 14)***) So testing is of God and temptation comes from within us and from all around us. If that's the case, then why was Jesus driven out into the desert, by the Spirit? So that He would face temptation for us.

Satan tempts us while God tests us. Satan entices us to evil, to forsake God. God tests us, challenges us, and gives us the opportunity to do good and grow. Satan wants to emphasize the bad. God wants to bring out the good. Satan leads us to look at God and others with suspicion. God gives us the eyes to see hope and reconciliation. Consider the horrible tragedy that left 17 dead at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High school this past week. We grieve for the families who have lost loved ones and pray that evil will not prevail. But it is here that the Satan, the world, and even our own sinful flesh can work to lead us to temptation, to want vengeance and justice against the shooter, the gun manufactures, gun owners, the FBI, school administration and the list can go on. Instead of giving into temptation, we should be considering what God desires and what His path through this tragedy may be? In the Lord's prayer we pray, "lead us not into temptation." Remember, temptations don't come from God, but God does test us. And if God is the

one administering the test, trust that He's in control and that He will bring us to success.

The point of our lesson today is that Jesus experienced temptation, and overcame it. Hebrews encourages us, ***“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 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. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*** (Hebrews 4: 14 – 16) Jesus intercedes to God for us so that even when we face temptation and give into our desires, He shows us mercy and grace. When you are tempted, cling to Jesus. And here's a bit of warning, if you don't feel that you are being tempted, maybe you're in greater peril for Satan has led you to His ways.

The point of studying Jesus' temptation is not to give us specific steps on how to resist temptation. Although, we can learn some important tactics, such as knowing God's Word, being honest with ourselves, and trusting in Jesus alone. If we do that, we'll have some victories. But no matter how hard we try to resist temptation, we're going to fail. Don't let failure discourage you from trying. Jesus was tempted and He didn't fail. So, trust in the mercy and grace of the One who was victorious over temptation.

Jesus resisted temptation in the desert and later He resisted temptation in Gethsemane as He prayed, ***“Yet not what I will, but what you will.”*** (***“And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”***) (Mark 14: 35 – 36) And He resisted temptation on a hill called Golgotha as Satan tempted Him to doubt, ***“If you are the Son of God, save yourself and come off that cross.”***

Temptations will continue to accost us because Satan wants to destroy us, the world wants to separate us from its Creator, and our own desires want us to be self-sufficient. Jesus repeatedly encountered temptations, He repeatedly battled Satan, but He never succumbed. And because Jesus overcame all temptations, all of the way to the cross, He saved you and He saved me. So, in your struggles with temptation, don't look inside yourself for strength, don't point fingers at others and blame them, and don't ever forget that we face a spiritual enemy who wants to destroy us. Always look to Jesus, your Savior, and your victorious Lord. Amen.