

"It Is Written!"

- I. The temptation to doubt God's saving love.
- II. The temptation to doubt God's saving ways.
- III. The temptation to doubt God's faithfulness.

Dear Christian friends,

Looking today at Jesus being tempted by the devil we can't help but think back to the FIRST TIME we meet the devil – the fall into sin. You remember the details – the devil taking over a serpent – stringing Eve along with his lies – HALF-TRUTHS and EMPTY PROMISES. Eve took the bait and Adam followed her lead. Those who want to argue that sin is NO BIG DEAL need to take another look at that first sin. Eating that forbidden fruit looks SO HARMLESS but we are still dealing with the consequences of that ONE sin today.

The word temptation literally means a TEST – whether good or bad. Some tests are OUT-AND-OUT temptations to sin – to disobey our parents – to cheat on our taxes or homework – to break the speed limit. Some tests/temptations come IN THE FORM of problems – pains – setbacks – illnesses, etc. HOW will we handle them? Grumbling and complaining or TRUSTING God's ways and promises? Some tests/temptations come from the OPPOSITE DIRECTION – enjoying a good life – good – health – a good job, etc. HOW will we handle that? Forgetting God or DAILY THANKING God?

Our comfort is Jesus here CONQUERING the devil's temptations and later CRUSHING him at the cross. Jesus' temptations also show us how to overcome temptations. Jesus didn't defeat the devil using His ALMIGHTY POWER but by using the weapon He has given to each one of us – Gods WRITTEN Word. Jesus overcame each temptation with an "IT IS WRITTEN!" Now, let's look closer at each temptation.

### I. The temptation to doubt God's loving care.

Before we go any farther there is something we don't want to overlook – the REALITY of the devil. According to God's Word the devil is a good angel gone bad – the leader of a group of angels who rebelled against God. We're NOT TOLD what their exact sin was or when it happened – EXCEPT that it was after the 7<sup>th</sup> day of creation week and obviously before he tempted Eve. God condemned the devil to eternal punishment in hell. The devil is now HELL-BENT to get as many people as possible to spend eternity with him in hell.

ON to Jesus' first temptation – the temptation to doubt God's LOVING CARE. There's such a contrast between this and the fall into sin! Adam and Eve were living in the "Garden of Eden" – a real heaven on earth. Everything was perfect. Everything was telling them HOW GOOD their Creator had been to them. Everything was saying that EXCEPT the devil!

Now here's Jesus. Jesus didn't foolishly expose Himself to UNNECESSARY temptations. The Holy Spirit led Jesus into this one. Jesus is in "the wilderness." Jesus is all by Himself out IN THE MIDDLE of nowhere. For "forty days and nights" Jesus had "not eaten anything" and was now obviously "hungry." Perhaps STARVING would be more like it!

All during those 40 days Jesus "was tempted by the devil." Luke records three of the temptations. The FIRST one – "the devil said to Jesus, 'If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.'" "Jesus, the 'Son of God' shouldn't be living like this. Think of all those people who are defying God with their lives yet they're enjoying a GOOD LIFE! They're eating tasty food – living in nice homes – sleeping in comfortable beds – having a GOOD TIME. They're not stuck in this wasteland with

nothing to eat. Jesus, this ISN'T FAIR. You deserve better than this. You can do something about this. Just use Your **almighty power** to change things." It was a temptation to doubt God's LOVING CARE – a **temptation** for Jesus to BE SELFISH and put Himself first.

That's still a powerful – and **often successful** temptation. We see how God blesses OTHER people – giving them what WE WANT but **we don't get**. Maybe it's BETTER HEALTH – a better job – better **home**, etc. The devil feeds the ENVY and JEALOUSY. Bitterness – **anger** – **resentment** – build. Instead of THANKING GOD for being so good to those people we wallow in self-pity. Instead of being grateful and **content** with WHAT GOD HAS given us we grumble and **complain**.

That's a powerful temptation because it APPEALS to our **proud, selfish** sinful natures. The only weapon to beat it off is, **"It is written!"** **"It is written: 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'"** Bread alone can't KEEP US ALIVE. We can have frigs stuffed with food but when God says, "THAT'S IT!" – that's it for us!

We may not have it AS GOOD or as EASY **as we want** but that's not what life is **all about**. We have our God and His **promises**. We trust His LOVING CARE. Listen to what **"is written."** **"Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink ...or what you will wear. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well."** **"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. My God will meet all your needs."** There are plenty more passages just like those!

The second temptation was...

## II. The temptation to doubt God's saving ways.

**"The Devil led Jesus up to a high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. The Devil told Him, 'I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms, because it has been entrusted to me, and I can give it to anyone I want.'" Look at that – the devil has guts enough to lie to Jesus Himself! **"So if You worship me, it will all be Yours."****

This temptation is a good reminder of WHAT'S BEHIND **every** temptation and why sin is **really so bad**. **Every** temptation is a CHOICE to **be made** – a question to be answered. Will I listen TO GOD or to the devil? Will I do what God wants or the devil wants? Will I believe what **God says** or what the **devil is telling** me? Eve believed the devil OVER GOD. She did WHAT THE DEVIL wanted – **she ate** the forbidden fruit – the EXACT OPPOSITE of **what God** wanted. Behind every sin is IDOLATRY – putting something/someone AHEAD OF GOD in our hearts and lives. That's what makes sin SO SERIOUS. Sin is a slap in God's face. It's rebellion and rejection of **God's authority** over us.

This temptation went directly at God's SAVING PLANS. It was a **temptation** for Jesus to take the EASY WAY out. God's **saving plans** gave Jesus TWO BASIC JOBS. The first was to live a **perfect life** for us – to always give God PERFECT love – obedience – trust. **Then** Jesus was to suffer the punishment for the world's sin – the HELL of the cross. This temptation offered Jesus a WAY TO AVOID the cross. **"Skip the cross, Jesus and go directly to the crown. Avoid the GORY and claim the glory."** This was a REAL temptation for Jesus! Recall Him praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, **"Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me."** In John 12 Jesus says, **"Now My heart is trouble, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour?' No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name!"**

The temptation to doubt God's SAVING WAYS – to go for the EASY WAY out – is still powerful and **often successful**. We are called to **"deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus."** **"Don't deny yourself,"** the devil says, "INDULGE yourself! Don't crucify your sinful nature, CUDDLE UP to it – CATER to it! Hide our **faith** – don't share it. Then people won't think you're WEIRD."

The only way to overcome that temptation is, ***“It is written!” “It is written: Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.”*** It is also written: ***“Christ’s love compels us. He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised to life again.”***

The third temptation was...

### III. The temptation to doubt God’s faithfulness.

The devil leads Jesus to Jerusalem and has Him ***“stand on the pinnacle of the temple”*** and then challenges Jesus to **jump**. He backs up his challenge WITH A QUOTE from Psalm 91, ***“He will command His angels ...to keep you in all your ways.”*** The devil KNOWS HOW to twist God’s Word into **saying things** GOD NEVER SAID. God has promised to **watch over** us but He never gave us a BLANK CHECK to act like idiots!

Satan was challenging Jesus’ TRUST – His confidence – in His heavenly **Father’s promises**. “Jesus, PROVE You trust God’s Word **by jumping** off this building. Make God prove that He CAN BE **trusted.**”

That’s still a powerful – and **often successful** – temptation. How we want to WALK BY SIGHT and not by faith. **Often what we see** and **feel** SEEM TO CONTRADICT God’s promises. **“IF”** God is SO GOOD and LOVING then why does my life stink so badly?

The only way to overcome that temptation is by ***“It is written!”*** Indeed, what “is written” is a RECORD of God’s faithfulness! Isn’t that what the OT is – a WRITTEN RECORD of **Israel’s repeated unfaithfulness** to God and God’s AMAZING FAITHFULNESS to **Israel** and **His promises?** Isn’t that what the gospels are – a WRITTEN RECORD of God keeping His promise to send us Jesus as our Savior? As you read the gospels – as we hear the **Passion History** in our Lenten services – notice how often we hear, ***“This happened in order to fulfill...”***

Jesus Himself is the ULTIMATE PROOF of **God’s faithfulness**. AS PROMISED the Son of God was born of a **virgin** in **Bethlehem**. **As promised** Jesus lived for us that perfect life we owed God. **As promised** Jesus suffered and died on the cross to PERSONALLY PAY for all our sins in full. **As promised** Jesus rose triumphant from the dead on Easter morning. What “is written” PROVES we can confidently trust ALL of God’s promises – and especially His promise of **eternal life** in heaven when we die.

***“When the Devil had finished every temptation, he left (Jesus) until an opportune time.”*** That has an OMINOUS RING to it, doesn’t it? The devil would be back. He’s NO QUITTER. The devil may get knocked down but he keeps coming back. ***“Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour,”*** Peter tells us. The only way we can SUCCESSFULLY resist the devil’s **relentless attacks** is to USE THE WEAPON God has given us – His ***“written”*** Word. Amen.

APOSTLES’ CREED