

“SATAN’S ATTACK ON JESUS: FIRST TEMPTATION.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Matthew 4:1-4

Prayer: Holy Father, thank you for your Holy Word, for its truth and testimony of you, for its commands and promises, for its wisdom and power, its light and help. By your Spirit and grace help us to profit from you Word now for the sake of your glory and our souls. Amen.

Introduction.

For several weeks now we have considered Satan’s attack on what God has said in His Word. Satan started his attack in the garden and has been relentlessly doing so ever since. So, it comes as no surprise when the second Adam comes to earth Satan is right there ready to attack again.

This morning we start our Lenten series of sermons considering Satan’s greatest attack of all, his attack against Jesus and we begin with three sermons on the three temptations of Jesus and how they apply to us.

I will draw a number of observations from our text and then show how it applies to our coming to the Lord’s table this morning.

The temptation of Jesus.

First, notice the startling fact that the Holy Spirit of God led Jesus into the wilderness. In Mark’s Gospel he writes, “The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness” (Mark 1:12).

Jesus didn’t just wander into the wilderness, He was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. God is providentially in control of everything, even wildernesses.

Second, the Spirit drove Jesus into wilderness to be tempted and tested by Satan. This was God’s plan and appointment. Jesus is the new Adam, the new representative man. He must be put to the same test Adam was put to.

This temptation of Jesus is a cosmic struggle. This is the most famous duel in history, the prince of darkness verses the prince of peace, the seed of woman against the seed of the serpent, actually the serpent himself.

Satan is the sworn enemy of God, he bitterly opposes God at every opportunity. Satan hates Jesus, Satan hates the salvation of mankind and the means to it.

This is the beginning of the long-awaited battle promised in Genesis.

Genesis 3:15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

What's at stake? Everything. Heaven and earth and the soul of man. Salvation and eternity. If Jesus fails this test everything is lost, we are without hope. If Jesus passes the test then He will show He is the new Adam, the new representative of the human race, the one sent from God, from heaven, to undo what the first Adam did.

Jesus was hungry.

Satan waits for the 40 days to pass, Jesus is at His absolute weakest point, and the weakness is real because Jesus is 100% human. Satan is the kind who kicks a man when he is down, at his very lowest.

Satan is an opportunist; he exploits whatever our weakness is. He doesn't use liver and onions, or okra or tofu with me. No need when chocolate chip cookies will do the trick.

There is an old flying fishing rule of match the hatch. Use flies that match whatever bugs are hatching and the fish are going after.

Satan watches us, knows our disposition, our condition, when we are weak, where we are vulnerable. He knows that lures we are biting. We should know that about ourselves and take steps to avoid those times or places or be extra vigilant when we know we might fall.

Satan will take advantage of our weaknesses and our points of greatest perceived need. Satan pretends to help us or have our best interest in mind, to improve our lives. So, he did with Eve, and with Jesus.

Turn this stone into bread.

This is a most subtle and devious temptation because on the surface it's hard to see where the sin is. Jesus would certainly do other miracles like this. He turned water into wine, He multiplied the loaves of bread and fish.

He is hungry, you can't accuse someone who has not eaten for 40 days of gluttony if he eats a loaf of bread. It is a simple necessity of life. Bread seemed for Christ's good, and for Christ's honor and glory and power, showing He is the Son of God.

So where is the sin? There are several.

First, the sin is in who is commanding Christ, that Satan is telling Him when and how to break His fast. What a reversal. A created fallen angel willfully taking on the Son of God, he has no fear or shame. Satan should be submitting to the Son of God.

Satan no doubt must have thought he had a real shot at this. He got the first Adam, why not the second. He spoiled Paradise, why not the whole kingdom of God.

Second, Satan is casting doubt about Jesus identity. This temptation text comes right after Jesus' baptism when a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Soon after Jesus heard the words of His father, Satan was there casting doubt. Did God say? Are you really the Son of God? If you are, then prove it. Satan raises doubt where God has spoken clearly.

Satan was as ruthless with Jesus as with Eve. Soon after she knew there was a tree not to be eaten from, Satan was there casting doubt. Satan will make every effort to get us to question our adoption, our salvation, our belonging to God.

How many people do we know who sometime after making profession of their faith, wander from the faith and into Satan's temptations and the world's ways and into sin? Are you really a Christian, are you really adopted as a child of God, do you really believe what you said you do?

This is one of Satan's go-to temptations, to put question marks where God has put periods. To get us to question and doubt God and His Word. Trace your doubts and see if they don't all point to Satan and his lies.

Third, this is a subtle suggestion to distrust God's love, care, provision, and fatherly providence. "Jesus look around, you're out in a wilderness, no food in sight, hasn't God failed you, why not take matters into His own hands.

This is an attack on Jesus to doubt and distrust His Father's providential care for Him. Why wait any longer, why deprive yourself anymore, why sit around and go without, why not do something? Make some bread. Doesn't the Son of God have a right to food? And the power to make it?

This is an appeal to fleshly appetite as was the temptation of Eve. A temptation to eat unlawfully. Take and eat.

Do you feel your lack of certain creature comforts or good health, are a sign of God's unfaithfulness or lack of love for you? Is this also an attack on the human desire to avoid all suffering and discomfort, like hunger? Certainly, why should Jesus ever suffer, after all He is the Christ, the Son of the living God?

This is another go-to temptation of Satan, to stir up worry, what if we don't have what we need, or we don't have enough. He is trying to create a spirit of worry, fear of the future.

Fourth, there is a subtle temptation for Jesus to show off His power before Satan, an appeal to pride.

Here is another go-to temptation, pride, show off, brag, boost, let others know how good we are.

These are Satan's temptations, question authority, doubt, worry and pride. So, for all those reasons, there is great danger in heeding Satan's subtle command.

It is written, not by bread alone.

Jesus' first line of defense is the Word of God. Our only defense is the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, the sound faith in God as the one who is all-sufficient.

Ephesians 6:16-17 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

If we don't have God's Word in our heart, if we don't know God's Word, if we don't love God's Word, we are defenseless. How will we stand and fight if we are unarmed?

If we are apathetic about God's Word, if we are casual or even hold it in contempt, then don't be surprised when you can't resist, and Satan doesn't flee from you and you fall into all manner of harmful temptations.

Jesus ignores Satan's comments about if He is the Son of God. Some questions don't need to be dignified with a response. Rather Jesus refutes Satan's temptation to turn stones into bread.

His answer is not given for Satan's sake but for ours, so we can know how to stand up to similar temptations.

We are not sustained by bread alone, it is not just food that sustains our bodies, but the grace of God. It is by God's grace that we are provided for and sustained and kept alive.

What do we trust in, depend on, think we can't live without? Man does not live by bread alone applies to money, paychecks, physical health, the stock market, smartphones. They might be necessities, but they are not the only necessity or the most important necessity.

God is the source of life and all blessings and sustenance. Our daily bread comes from His hand, not ours. We are to trust Him, not ourselves. We put it right there on our money to remind us.

Jesus is saying, "I would rather die of starvation than trust anything more than God. I would rather die than sin against God or put my desires above God.

What good thing is causing you to sin or the pursuit of it is causing you to neglect God or not wait on God?

God Himself is enough for us, even if we have nothing to eat. Countless people have testified to this who have found themselves starving in prison.

Lord's Supper.

There are in a sense two temptation stories in the Bible, the temptation of the first man and the temptation of the second man, the second Adam. In the first man falls, in the second Satan falls. In the first the tempter overcame Adam; in the second temptation the second Adam overcame the tempter.

We were ruined by the first Adam; we are restored by the second Adam. Jesus does for us what Adam could not do.

Satan comes to Jesus at His absolutely weakest point, after fasting 40 days and says quite sympathetically, "Look, Jesus, you're hungry. Jesus, you can do miracles, you can turn

stones into bread. God has forgotten you, so just take matters into your own hands. Why don't You just turn that stone into bread and take and eat?"

As we have seen it is a temptation to question the love and provision and goodness of God His Father, to doubt God for His needs. This is how Satan tempts us, to doubt, to distrust, to grow impatient with waiting, to say God isn't good enough, He isn't providing, so we need to take what we need for ourselves.

Think back to the garden of Eden and how Satan got Eve to question what did God really say. Satan was stirring up doubts. "Why did God say to not eat of all the trees? Why is He withholding something so good? Maybe He doesn't care about you, maybe He isn't providing for you? Maybe God isn't good, maybe you should just go ahead and take and eat."

In both temptations Satan said take and eat. Satan meant take and eat as a temptation to not trust God and depend on ourselves. It leads to death. Jesus turns take and eat into our salvation, to lead to life. He reverses the curse, turns Satan's words on their head, He turns them to good.

Jesus' "take and eat" in the Lord's Supper as a final blow to Satan's "take and eat" in Eden.

"Take, eat; this is My body which is given for you." This is God's provision for you, everything you need, take and eat freely. Look at this table and never doubt God gracious and generous and perfect provision, His goodness and love. Whenever we face temptation, we can go one of two directions, in our flesh, in our old nature, like Adam, we fall, or in the Spirit, in our new nature, we can like Christ resist and Satan falls.

Not by bread alone, but by the Word who became flesh for us and our salvation. This table wipes away fear, doubt, worry, pride, sin and death. In Christ we take and eat.

Father, deliver from sin and evil and temptation every man and woman and child here, every husband and wife, every father and mother and son and daughter, every widow, every single, every student, every employee and employer. Turn every heart here to you, to prayerful dependence on you, to seeking your strong help every day. Deliver us as congregation from temptation, from falling into sin against you and each other.