

Sermon Notes – February 21, 2020
“Jesus’ Battle With Temptation... And Ours”
(Matthew 4:1-11)

I read an interesting story about a sheriff who was interviewing candidates to be a deputy. One of the guys that was being interviewed was not known to be academically bright, but the sheriff interviewed him anyway. The first question was, “What is one and one?” The guy said, “Eleven.” The sheriff said, “Well that wasn’t exactly what I was asking, but okay. Second question: What two days begin with the letter ‘T’?” He thought about it for a minute and he said, “Today and tomorrow.” The sheriff said, “Well that wasn’t exactly what I was thinking, but okay. Now I have one more question for you and I want you to think really hard about it... Who murdered Abraham Lincoln?” He rubbed his chin and thought about it for a few minutes. Then he said, “I don’t know!” The sheriff said, “Son, I want you to go home and think about that for a while.” He left the sheriff’s office and he went across the street to a restaurant to join three of his friends for dinner. He said, “Boys, the job is mine! The interview went great! First day on the job and I’ve already been assigned a murder case to solve!”

Well, he was on his first day on the job. I wonder if Jesus felt like it was a hard day at work and a first day? Jesus had just experienced his baptism. He had had the Holy Spirit come upon him in the bodily form of a dove on his shoulder, and he heard a voice from heaven that said, “You are my Son whom I love. With you I am well pleased.” He’s just had a peak experience – a mountaintop experience. He has been affirmed that he is God’s Son; God loves him, and God has chosen him to do something special. He’s feeling good. But then in each of the gospels it says that he was led into the wilderness. He had to go fight a battle – and guess what that battle was? ... ***You see, the devil wanted to tempt him to take a shortcut to the crown and glory. He didn’t want him to go to the cross. He didn’t want him to fulfill God’s plan.*** Satan gave Jesus three temptations.

Satan tempted Jesus to misuse His divine power and take a shortcut to glory without the suffering and the cross. The first temptation was “to turn stones into bread” - to use His divine power for His own immediate need of hunger. But, Jesus knew God’s plan was bigger and involved him being the “Bread of Life” and filling the spiritual hunger of the world. In the second temptation Satan tempted Jesus to throw himself off the highest point of the Temple in Jerusalem - to use His divine power and gain “Hero worship” from the Jews by a spectacular event. In the third temptation Satan tempts Jesus to bow down and worship him (Satan) and all the power and kingdoms of the world would belong to Jesus. In each of these temptations Jesus had to make a choice - obedience to God or to his immediate impulses (needs) and the popular expectations of the Jewish populace. Jesus chose to obey God and God’s mission for Him to go to the cross for us. In this story Jesus shows his humanity, is tempted as we are, but without sin, and he shows us that there is hope for us to overcome temptations, too - with the Word of God and the help of the Holy Spirit. Let’s look in more depth to what Jesus is saying in this Gospel story and how it can apply to us.

Keep in mind at this point, Jesus has laid aside some of his divine power to take on our humanity and know what it’s like for us to be a human. He’s being tempted by the devil. He’s spent forty days and forty nights praying and communing with God, reflecting on what God wants him to do, and how’s he to be the suffering servant and the Messiah and the Savior of the world. He’s hungry. The devil thinks, “I’ll get him where he’s most weak and vulnerable” - when he’s hungry. **Sometimes temptations come to us when we’re weak and vulnerable - physically or emotionally - overwhelmed and stressed out.**

Have you ever watched a football game and seen on TV when the star quarterback is injured and taken off the field, and they put in a rookie quarterback - somebody that’s not as near experienced or as good as the star quarterback? What does the opposing team try to do? ... They’re going to hit where that team’s weakness is, and if it’s in the quarterback position, they are going to oppose and hit where the weakness is. The devil comes to us where we’re weak and where we’re vulnerable, and

that's where we're often hit. But we are also tempted sometimes after we've experienced some big success or victory. Jesus had just been baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. Elijah -- if you remember in 1 Kings, it tells a story of how Elijah confronted 450 prophets of Baal and had to prove who the God of Israel was. He won that battle on the mountain, but then he was tempted and he wanted to give up. He wanted to run because Jezebel, King Ahab's wife said, "I'm going to kill you, Elijah." He took off running right after he had just had a victory with God. ***Sometimes our temptations come after we've had a big success or victory. Sometimes it comes when we are at our weakest and most vulnerable.***

Some of us are tempted at our weakness - at our times of vulnerability. For some of us, it may be clothing or shopping; it may be gambling; maybe alcohol or drugs; sex or lust; it can be all kinds of things - money and power. I heard an interesting story about a woman who said her weakness was clothing and shopping. She said that she loved designer clothes. Her husband had a conversation with her one night after dinner and said, "Honey, you cannot spend any more money on dresses and clothes! The charge cards are maxed out! I need you to stop this!" She replied, "I know, honey. I know I have a weakness. I love designer clothing." He said, "Honey, you got more dresses in that closet now than you can wear. You don't need any more clothing. You've maxed out the cards. Please promise me that you won't do any more buying of clothing for a while." "Okay, honey. I promise." Well every time she would get tempted to go to the mall, she'd say, "Get thee behind me, Satan. I can't do this." And she'd hear her husband, John's voice in the back of her mind, "Don't buy any clothes. We don't have the money." Well, after about six weeks she had done really well, and one day she went to the mall, she started walking around and she started seeing all those department stores with all the clothing in the windows. She was tempted by one of those beautiful, red designer dresses. She said, "I just got to try that on. I won't buy it! I won't buy it! Listen, I have to hear John's voice. Get thee behind me, Satan. I'll just go try it on, but I won't buy it." She went into the department store and she tried on the dress and it looked so good, she said, "My husband will love this. It looks so good on

me. Why just look at me.” She pranced around with that dress on. All of a sudden, she looks at the back of her dress in the mirror and she heard a voice, “Honey it looks as good in the back as it does in the front.” She said, “I got to have it,” and she bought that dress. She went home with that \$350 dress and her husband said, “Honey, you promised me that you wouldn’t do this again.” She said, “I know it, honey - but the devil got the best of me.”

Then I want you to notice something else. In Matthew’s gospel, the end of the story said, “The devil left him and the angels ministered to him.” In Luke’s gospel, it ends by saying, “The devil left him until a more opportune time.” *I want you to hear something - your temptation will not last forever, but temptations won’t leave you forever.* Did you hear that? Your temptation will not last forever, but temptations will not leave you forever. Think about Jesus: You remember that Jesus told the disciples later on in the gospels, “Listen I am going to suffer, be betrayed, be killed, and I’m going to rise in three days.” After the disciples heard that, Peter pulled Jesus aside and said, “Jesus, listen. You can’t do that! You can’t suffer and die.” The disciples and the Jewish people were expecting a political, military Messiah to take over, overthrow the Romans, and put the Israelites back in power. Jesus knew that they had a false expectation of the Messiah. Peter says, “Listen, Lord you can’t suffer. You can’t die.” And Jesus said to him, “Get behind me, Satan for you don’t know the ways of God.”

And then do you remember when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane? At one point, he was sweating drops of blood and he prayed, “If it be your will, let this cup pass from me.” In the movie, “The Passion of the Christ” (Mel Gibson’s movie), you see the Garden of Gethsemane and Jesus is praying, “Father if it be your will, let this cup pass from me.” In that movie, it has an embodiment - the movement of a human being (that portrays the part of the devil) and he’s passing by as Jesus is praying. Jesus was still tempted. Do you remember when Jesus was on the cross and what one of the thieves said? One of them said, “Remember me in paradise’ - but what did the other one say? ... “If you’re the Son of God, then jump down off here and save yourself and

us.” *You see, Jesus had to deal with temptation all through life, just like us.*

What I want you to hear is that Jesus was tempted, but without sin. There’s a verse in Hebrews 4:15, the Apostle Paul says this, “We do not have a high priest who is not able to sympathize with our weakness, but he’s been tempted in every way as we have, yet without sin.” Therefore we can approach the throne of mercy knowing that the Lord of Mercy will give us grace in our time of need. Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, but without sin. Expect temptation. Know that it’s not going to last forever, but it’s not going to leave us forever.

How did Jesus attack sin? He attacked it with the Word of God and with the strength of God. You know many times we lose the battle with the temptations we face because we try to face them with our own strength. “Oh I’m strong enough. I can deal with this.” But we can’t. We need the Word of God; we need Christian friends around us; we need to go in the strength of God and know that we can’t do it by ourselves. We fight too many battles by ourselves. Jesus was depending on the strength of God and the scripture (the Word of God). You can say, “Ms. Peggy, I can quote scripture all day but it doesn’t help me resist my temptation.” Guess what? ... Sometimes it’s because we don’t obey that scripture. We don’t apply it to our lives. Remember that verse that says, “Resist the devil and he’ll flee from you”? **Sometimes you can’t just say that – it means that you and I have to resist and make a move. God’s given us his word, but we have to obey it. We have to apply it in our lives and we have to lean on his strength and not our own.**

Any of you ever watch the show, “Survivor” on TV? TV host, Greg Laurie interviewed a woman who was a former contestant on the “Survivor” TV show. When she was approved to go on location for the filming, she said they told each candidate that they could take five things with them, but it had to be five different things from what the other candidates had already brought. She said, “I want to take my Bible with me” – and they said, “No. Somebody has already done that before. It has to be five different things.” So she said, “I went without my Bible.” I want you to

know what happened. She told Greg Laurie, “I’m sorry to say that I didn’t have my Bible with me and I didn’t have one Christian friend with me. I want you to know that in all those six to eight weeks of being there, my attitude changed. My language got pretty bad. My attitude was bad; I was jealous; I was vindictive; I was envious; I was hateful. My attitude and my character changed because I didn’t have my Bible and I didn’t have one Christian friend to confront me or encourage me or support me during those eight weeks. It was bad.” **Sometimes we need Christian friends around us. Sometimes we need God’s Word – we need to have it in our heart and in our mind.**

I have a good friend named Frankie (in First Baptist, Concord) who was an alcoholic and a drug addict. He was sent to prison when he was about 20-years of age. He was in college and he got caught for breaking and entering homes and businesses to steal money for drugs. Then he started selling drugs and he got caught. He went to prison for about three years. He was supposed to have ten or fifteen years, but he got out in three. While he was in there, he started going to AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) and NA (Narcotics Anonymous) meetings. He became a follower of Jesus. When he came out, he stayed in AA and he still goes once a week. One of the things I’ll never forget that he told me was that he, his dad, and his brother owned a business together. He said it was a landscaping business, and they did yard work for a lot of banks and business companies. He said, “Every year at Christmas, we’d get invited to the big Christmas parties at all these nice homes. They have booze just flowing – all you want. My temptation every day is to go back to drinking. I have to go to those parties to make an appearance, but I made sure I took one of four people with me: my wife, my best friend, my only brother, or my dad -- because they know how hard that struggle is for me. *I can’t do it without God and the support of friends.*”

So when Jesus faced temptation, he attacked it in the strength of God the Father and he quoted the scriptures. We need to not just quote scriptures, but know how to apply them in our lives, obey them and do something with them. But, we also need to know that we can’t face it by ourselves – we need each other and the strength of God. God loves us

and he wants us to know that there is hope for us to overcome temptation too. Jesus was human, like us. He was tempted, but he never sinned. He is not a high priest who doesn't identify and empathize with us, because he knows what it is like. He showed us that we can have power over temptation, just as he did. He took on our humanity; he feels with us and for us.

I want to share one more story with you: Three mountain hikers were in the mountains and they ran across a woodsman carrying an axe across his back. He had a sled that he was pulling behind him. They asked him what he was doing, and he said, "I'm going up in the mountains to get some timber to repair my cabin." They said, "Man, there are trees all around. Can't you just use some of these trees?" He said, "No. **The higher you go up in the mountains, the stronger the timber because that timber has been tested and toughened by the weather.** That's the kind of timber that I want to repair my home."

The higher the mountain, the stronger the timber. ***The more we walk with God, and we are tested and tried, the stronger we become, and the better we are able to encourage others and to serve him, and to know the peace and strength he can give us.***

Hear this today: Jesus is human. He was tempted as you and me, but without sin. Aren't there all temptations that come to you and me, no matter what our age? And aren't there times when we have to say, "No"? I wonder how many kids, if I asked them, "Are you tempted to not go to school today and not to get online?" - how many of them would say, "I'm tired of getting online?" I wonder how many of us when the weather is bad are tempted to just turn over in the bed and stay at home? "I don't need to go to church. I don't need to spend time with God." We ALL face temptations, don't we? God wants us to learn to say, "No" in the power and strength of him and the Word of God - and to count on having Christian friends around us. May we grow stronger in dealing with temptations. May we learn to rely on the strength of God and his Word. Amen.