

Sermon Lent 1 2019

March 10, 2019

Luke 4:1-13

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate upon temptation.

Temptation. Temptation is everywhere. James says it so well, **“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”**

Temptation. It comes in manifold forms, it comes by manifold means, it comes to break us down when we are the strongest, and it crushes us when we are at our weakest. Yes temptation.

As I was sitting with my dad a few weeks ago, and I was struck by a temptation. I don't mean the I was tempted personally, temptation is so rampant for me as sinner it would be odd for me to have a temptation so unique I could remember it. No, it wasn't a personal temptation, but one I realized for the church. And it was very interesting.

Of all places, I realized this as I was reading a book for our study of Islam on Sunday mornings called The Cross in the Shadow of the Crescent. Now this is a book about Islam and how we in America should relate to it in light of the history between Islam and Christians. But what the author made the point about—sort of as a theme—was how the earliest spread of Islam was right in the midst of where the earliest Christian Churches were. In particular he pointed out how the seven churches to whom Jesus spoke letters in the book of Revelation were all in areas now under the rule of Muslim governments. However, he made the point that as Islam spread, a part of what perhaps aided that spread was the willingness by the Christians to acquiesce to the Muslim rulers and give up their own faith.

In view of that, his encouragement was for us to watch for our own compromise. He said that we must not compromise to consumerism, to a weakened Gospel, nor to an institutionalized church. What did he mean by that? He meant that we must to kowtow to what our culture thinks we should do in order to attract the attention of the world. He meant that we must not sacrifice the truth that we are all so broken and sinful there is no hope of our eternal life apart from the life, death, and resurrection in Christ, and trust in that work He has done for us; that is salvation by grace alone through faith in Christ alone. Lastly, he meant that we shouldn't trust in the church as she is wedded to political structures.

As I reflected on this, I thought it made so much sense. It's so easy for us to fall into that temptation of the devil, for us to expect as the Church that we will be able to obtain the kingdoms of the world. After all, look at what he says to Jesus as he shows Him the kingdoms of the world, **"To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."** Of course that's insightful for us isn't it? And I don't mean just in relation to the temptation of the church, but in relation to the world altogether. How often do we remember that the devil has the authority and the glory of this world? How often do we forget that God intended in the beginning for the dominion, the authority of this world to belong to man, that He gave to Adam that dominion, showing it by Adam's naming of the animals? And as we forget that, how often do we forget that the world will always be opposed to the pure Word of the cross. Paul says it in letter to the Corinthians. The cross is folly to those who are perishing. To the Greeks—the Greeks who love wisdom—it's foolishness; foolishness that God would enter into creation and care that much for His people. To the Jews—the Jews who love signs and wonder—it's weakness; weakness that the God who has the power to create the universe out of nothing would suffer death in the midst of that universe at the hands of weak and sinful men.

Yes, the world will always oppose this word. And yet what does she tell us? "Oh Church, if you would just get with the times, we'd like you more. Oh Church, if you would just make your music like ours; oh Church, if you would just look more like us; oh Church, if you would just soften your views on sex outside of marriage, or sex between people of the same sex, or what gender really is; oh Church if you would just say that other religions are really the same thing, then we would like you." And as I say that, I am saying what I have heard in my lifetime. When I was younger it was getting rid of that drab music, as I got older it was wanting the Church to look and act more like the world—to date myself, I guess more like MTV—then as I became an adult it was these issues of gender and of religions. And we have to see it, the world is never going to like the Church when she is speaking what Scripture speaks. We have to be prepared for that. We have to be prepared to stand firm against that temptation because the Lord promises that our glory is with Him and not in this world.

But there's always that draw isn't there? And to be sure from our perspective, it's so well intentioned. Of course we love people, of course we want them to love Jesus as we do. We should! We should want these pews packed so that we're like sardines in here! But who does it? Do we, by our great ideas and our methods? No it's always the Lord! In fact as we think about it, what is the success of a church? Where is the strength

of the Church found? Always in her faithfulness. Always in the adherence to the Word and the Promises of God in Christ. In fact, this book made the point with relation in particular to the Church in Muslim ruled countries—and to be clear as I say this I am not telling us to hate Muslims, we must always love our neighbor. What does Jesus tell us? Love even our enemies. So, this isn't about us hating anyone, but as we look at Muslim countries and the Church we see often that Church is destroyed because they are faithful. In other words, the author says, "faithfulness does not guarantee a church will survive," but I would add it guarantees she will be successful. I would also add to that the opposite as well: unfaithfulness guarantees it will not survive. Thankfully the existence of the Church is in the hands of her Lord.

Now as I say all of that, I have been speaking of the Church, I think it's also good to relate this to personal temptation as well. It's easy for us to assume as the kingdoms of the world are promised, that we will also be liked by the world personally. We have to understand that we won't. We'll be mocked for our beliefs, we'll be ostracized at times. We'll be called bigots, haters, and every other name in the book. We'll be called this even when we are as loving and winsome as can be. We have to understand that.

We also have to understand that this temptation will come to us in relation to our success, our ease, our lack of suffering in the world. As I mentioned Wednesday, it's good for us to discipline ourselves at times—and I spoke of the disciplines of prayer, of giving, and I think I spent the most time talking about fasting. These are good because they remind us who our Lord is, that we can live without being comfortable. That we can know that our hope isn't in our things, in our careers, in our worldly success and comfort. Can it be OK to have those things? It can but we have to cling to that word that reminds us not to trust that these are our saviors—and the more we lean on them, the easier that becomes to trust in them.

Now, as I bring all of these things up, I could easily go on for hours and days on the various temptations we have, but as we look at this glimpse of those temptations, we should ask, what's the antidote to this? I mean, as we look at all of this, at our own frailty, how do we have strength in temptation?

We look where we must always look: to our Lord Jesus. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross scorning its shame. Look at the cross. On the cross all of your failing in temptation was crucified. This Jesus who did not fail in His temptation, but remained faithful, He bore that sin, bled for it, died for it and rose again that you would see its acquittal in the

courtroom of our Heavenly Father. Look at the cross, and see the One who bled for temptation.

Look also at how Jesus dealt with this temptation. Hopefully you always hear me make clear the sacrifice of Jesus over the example of Jesus, but this is a time where the example is also quite helpful. Look at what He does. How does He combat the temptation? By the Word of God. Christians, make sure you are knowing that Word. It's hard, but even memorize it at times. I often say that one of the things I learned from Navigators—the Non-Denomination Group I was connected with in college—was memorizing Scripture. Learn it, hide it in your heart that it might become a part of you. This is the Word through which the Lord speaks to you, through which He even sanctifies you and makes you Holy.

And lastly, look at what Jesus does for you now. He has baptized you, He has absolved you, He gives you His body and blood that you would know that you are His, that He has in fact retained you as His own as He has forgiven and still forgives you. Look at that for your identity. And I make this point in view of how the devil tempted Jesus. Did you see that? What did he attack first? Jesus had just been baptized, and the Father had said, **“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”** But what did the devil say? “If you are the Son of God.”

Christians, what has God said to you? “I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” And what does that mean? He put His Name on you. I know I've used that example before, but it's like the toys in Toy Story. Woody in particular in Toy Story 2. He is taken from the boy to whom he belongs. He's ready to go to the museum, and Buzz tells him, “You belong to a boy.” Woody looks down at his foot. It's been painted over, but he knows the name's there. He scrapes the paint off, but there it is, “ANDY.” That's you. Not with Andy, but with God's name. He has written it on you in baptism. You are his. By the way those of you who don't commune, that's why I make that sign on your forehead, that you would remember this. You belong to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. When you know this, when you know whose you are, then when the devil attacks that identity, when he says to you, “If you are a son of God,” you can say, “I am and I don't have to prove it by sinning. I am because He made me so.”

Christians, it's only in this in the midst of temptation that we have strength. It's only in our identity in Christ, only in His cross, only in His Word. But in these are the shelter in every temptation and every fall in temptation. By the grace of our Lord Jesus. Amen.