### “The Temptation” Steve Finlan for The First Church, Mar. 6, 2022

**Romans 10:8–12**

8But what does it say? “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); 9because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. 11The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” 12For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.

**Luke 4:1–13**

1Since on Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days . . . 3The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” 4Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”

5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” 8Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ 11and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” 12Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” 13When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

It is interesting to study just what the specific temptations were. Hundreds of Christians have investigated this in the past, so it is not likely that I am going to say anything original, but I *might* say something interesting. The first temptation was to miraculously create some food for himself. I think this is a temptation to use his miraculous power to serve himself. We know that Jesus performed many miracles, but they were always for other people. This would be a very different thing. It would open up the door to his using miracles to gain power or to do other things to serve himself. Let’s call it a temptation to selfish miracle. Jesus rejected that offer, and told the devil that food is not everything.

The next temptation, to use the devil’s own words, was for “glory and all this authority,” which had been given to the devil, and which he will pass on if Jesus will just worship him. Of course Jesus rejected this, and made it clear he would follow the command to worship God, and to serve only him (4:8). This was the seduction of worldly power, but it came with a terrible price, the worst idolatry: to worship the devil.

The third temptation was another one concerning miracle, but I think the angle was different. Throwing himself off the peak of the temple, and not being hurt would have been a showy miracle that would win lots of attention. It was the temptation to use miracle for show or fame. That had to be rejected, too. It was an impious testing of God.

So the temptations are to perform a selfish miracle, to assume worldly power, and to demonstrate a fame-grabbing miracle.

Now we don’t face exactly the same temptations. Regarding miracle, we are not faced with those temptations. But the general principle still applies. We can be tempted to selfishness, power, and lust for fame. The righteous response to each is devotion to God, worshiping God, and not treating your spiritual loyalties lightly or frivolously. We frequently can face temptations to shallowness or selfishness or the lure of power. How do we answer those temptations? With a re-affirmation of our spiritual loyalty.

Paul gives us some words of faith-confirmation. He says “if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom 10:9). And it is not hard, for “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (Rom 10:8). Whatever your own faith-confirmation is, I think you know it. You know what you could say if someone asked you, “what do you believe?” It may be something different from what Paul said, but you will have something that you could say. It might have to do with Jesus’ resurrection, or his teaching, or it might have to do with right and wrong. Job says “according to their deeds he will repay them” (34:11). Paul says “he will repay according to each one’s deeds: to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life” (Rom 2:6–7).

You have some choices, when it comes to choosing what your basic faith affirmation will be. Your fundamental values can act as a rebuke to any temptations you meet. It’s like a dialogue that goes on within you, your own personal temptation in the wilderness. You may feel the conflict intensely, or you may not. If you are not conflicted inwardly, there is no reason to feel an intense inner battle. You can trust your faith to guide you when temptations arise.

It might be a good practice to write out what your fundamental values and loyalties are, and then to back them up with a few Bible sayings. It may be difficult to do, because they are so close to home that you often don’t think about them. But it would be a good practice to go ahead and think about your values and write something in a journal. What would be your rebuke to temptations that could present themselves to you? Notice in the story how firm is Jesus’ confidence in each of those Bible passages he uses to refute the devil. Those are principles he easily calls to mind. He stands on each one, like standing on a firm rock. It doesn’t have to be a Bible passage, but you could stand confidently on your deepest beliefs.

There are all kinds of temptation. How about the temptation toward conformity? Or the temptation to just go along with what others say, even if someone is aggressively badmouthing a third party, or a whole group of people? We may not feel moved to argue with or debate such a person, but we can at least refrain from expressing approval or agreement. Sometimes we can express a principle or a belief that offers another way of looking at things. It is important to not feel intimidated, bullied, or pressured. It takes practice and experience to resist the temptations that come in social situations.

Other temptations are more appealing ones, and then we may have to leave certain situations and to seek out positive activities that raise our minds. It may help to seek the presence of a friend, especially if the friend is aware of your particular temptations.

To summarize: Jesus resisted the temptation to perform selfish miracle, worldly power, and grasping at fame. We might face temptations to selfishness, power, and popularity. We can answer these temptations by re-affirming our spiritual loyalty, by remembering our values or recalling Scripture passages. We could undertake a journal exercise of writing out our fundamental values and loyalties. Some things that can help in resisting temptation are prayer or talking with a friend. Love is involved in all of this: love of truth, loving God, and even loving our best friends. Worship God and take delight in the divine virtues. How’s that for a life plan?