

INTRODUCTION

I can recall one of the first times I recognized temptation – and lost the battle. I was probably in the first or second grade and I had accompanied my mother to Staggers Grocery Store in Paxton, Florida. As she pushed her buggy down the produce section, I saw clusters of white grapes displayed (this was before they started putting them in plastic bags). Now, I have always loved grapes and I watched as my mother passed them by. I remember the thought came into my mind, "Why don't you just pluck one of those luscious grapes and eat it?" I knew it was stealing, and I knew it was wrong; but I looked to the left and I looked to the right – no one was around, so I did it. I plucked one of those grapes and plopped it in my mouth. There is a verse in Proverbs 20 that says, "The bread of deceit is sweet;" that applies to grapes too. It sure was. In fact it was so good I took another one. Yumm. This was easy. No one would ever know. The third grape was my downfall. At the very moment I transferred the grape to my mouth my mother turned around and caught me. She said, "David, did you just eat one of those grapes?" I looked at her with that un-swallowed grape in my mouth and shook my head and said, "No ma'am." (Because I had actually eaten three, not just one). Mothers usually know when you are lying so she was pretty upset. She bought the cluster of grapes I had been picking from and when we checked out she called Mr. Staggers over and made me tell him what I had done and tell him that I was sorry. Suddenly those grapes didn't taste as sweet as before! The second part of that verse in Proverbs 20 that speaks of stolen bread says, "but a man ends up with a mouth full of gravel." (Proverbs 20:17) I still steer clear of the grape section of the grocery store!

Since that time, I have had many battles with temptation. I've won some and I've lost a few, too. But I'll be the first to admit I still struggle with temptation. Am I the only one here who struggles with temptation? If temptation is not your problem, you can stop reading right now. But if you still struggle with temptation, this message is for you.

Last week we observed how John baptized Jesus and the Holy Spirit descended on Him like a dove. Then the voice of the Father was heard saying, "This is my Son whom I love. In Him I am well pleased. In Luke 4 we see that before Jesus began his public ministry the Holy Spirit led him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. In this text we not only are given a great insight into the character of Jesus, as well as Satan and the ever present "spiritual warfare" all of us face, but we are also given the secret for resisting temptation. All of us are faced with any number of temptations to steal, lie, deceive, murder, commit adultery or fornication; do drugs, have an abortion, abuse our children or spouse; or engage in pornography, drunkenness, or to lose our tempers, or to express bitterness or resentment. As we look at Luke 4:1-13 we will find the answer to the question: How can you overcome temptation?

(Luke 4:1-13) Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" (Deuteronomy 8:3)

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has

been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours.” Jesus answered, “It is written: Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.” (Deuteronomy 6:3)

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” Jesus answered, “It says: Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” (Deuteronomy 6:16) When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

For forty days Jesus wandered in the wilderness surrounding Jericho - it is one of the bleakest, most desolate places on earth. It is the lowest place on the planet, almost 1300 feet below sea level. Luke tells us that Satan tempted Him throughout these forty days, but we are only informed of three of these temptations.

Before we discuss how to overcome temptation, we need to arrive at a definition of temptation. What is it? The word in the Bible for “tempted” literally means to be “enticed” or “attracted.” Temptation, then, is an enticement to evil. It is a suggestion to sin. It is an invitation to trespass beyond God’s moral boundary line. Satan is not the only tempter. We are also tempted by the world. Our own flesh also entices us to sin as well. So we are fighting against temptation on three fronts: The world, the flesh, and the devil. In this context, we will look at the nature of temptation that comes from the devil.

Satan is a liar but he is very subtle in the way he deceives. He doesn’t get in our faces like a mean Marine drill sergeant and try to intimidate us into sin. Instead, the Bible says he disguises himself as an angel of light. Let’s look at what I call

SATAN’S SUBTLE, SINISTER WHISPER:

1. “You have physical needs – satisfy them the way I suggest.”

This first temptation was to turn stones into bread. I’ve never seen stones turned into bread, but I have seen bread turned into stones. Every time I read this section of scripture I always think about my mother. She was a nurse who never claimed to be a great cook. Whenever her brother, my Uncle Charles, would come to visit she would try to fix a nice meal but it seemed like she always messed up with the bread. Either she would burn the rolls or forget to put them in the oven or forget them all together. It became a sort of running joke. Any time Uncle Charles came, the bread would be bad. One year my mother got a family recipe to make homemade rolls. She must have left something out of the recipe because they didn’t rise or something. What came out of the oven were sad looking rock-hard chunks. She served them anyway. My Uncle Charles picked up one of them and tapped it on the table and said, “Like Jesus said, (I thought he was going to say) “man does not live by bread alone.” Instead, he said, “Like Jesus said, ‘let him who is without sin cast the first stone!’”

The first temptation was on the level of physical needs. Jesus was hungry. In fact, He had to be starving to a degree none of us have ever experienced. Satan said, “*If* you are the son of God, turn these stones to bread.” I’ve been in that wilderness area, and there is a profusion of stones in all shapes and sizes. Many of them actually resemble loaves of bread. Jesus could have easily transformed them into bread but He never performed a miracle for His own benefit. So, He refuted Satan’s temptation by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3. “Man does not live by bread alone . . .” and the rest of the verse says, “but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” Jesus knew His Father had spoken and He would take care of Him.

IS HE WHISPERING THE SAME THING TO YOU? “Go ahead, steal the grape, you’re hungry.” We all have physical needs and the devil wants us to fulfill them in the wrong way. You have a need to eat. Satan says “Overeat.” Or he says, “Eat or drink the wrong thing.” He wants you to live by your physical needs. In Philippians 3:19, Paul talks about people “whose god is their stomach.” What does that mean? They live by their appetites. Their physical needs dictate their lives. Does your stomach tell you what to do? Or are you the master of your appetite? When was the last time you were willing to miss a meal or two or three to show your dependence is on God rather than food?

You have a sex drive. Satan says, “That’s natural. Go ahead. You don’t have to be married to that person.” God’s Word says clearly that sex is to be reserved for a husband and a wife within the bonds of marriage. *Any* other practice of sex is an abuse of God’s plan.

Let’s look at the second temptation. Satan’s subtle, sinister whisper says:

2. “You deserve the best and the most – you can get it quicker by doing it my way.”

The first temptation was in the physical realm; this one goes a little deeper. It is an emotional temptation. If the first one is on the level of the body, this temptation is an attack at the very soul of Jesus. Somehow Jesus is shown a supernatural panorama of the splendor of the world’s greatest kingdoms. I imagine that it was like an IMAX movie showing the glory of Rome, Egypt, China and the Incas – all the richest and finest of the world at that time.

Now notice the words of Satan – remember, he is a liar – but he isn’t what we call in Texas “a bald-faced liar.” He is the master of the half-truth. He tells Jesus all those kingdoms belong to him and he has the authority to give them to whomever he chooses. Wrong. He *is* called the prince of this world and he could have been influencing the individuals who led these kingdoms. There is ample historical and archaeological evidence of evil and occultist practices of some the ancient kingdoms. But Satan did not “own” the kingdoms of the world in the truest sense of the word. The Bible says, “The earth is the Lord’s – and the fullness thereof.” God owns it all. Satan just had a short time when he was controlling a portion of it but it’s only temporary management, not permanent ownership.

Satan was shrewd enough to know Jesus came to establish a kingdom. The title “Messiah” means “anointed King.” He was trying to get Jesus to take a “shortcut” to glory. The devil boasted he could give Jesus all these things right *now*. He was saying, “You can have the crown without the cross.” You can have the riches – NOW – without the suffering. That must have been an intense

temptation, because Jesus *knew* what awaited Him three years down the road, an agonizing, tortuous death on the cross. In His humanity, Jesus dreaded it, to the point where on the night before the cross, He prayed, “Father, let this cup pass from me – but not my will, but yours be done.”

That’s the temptation. Satan was saying, “God’s plan is full of pain. Go ahead and worship me. You can have more riches than you could ever imagine. You only have one life to live. Live it up! Life is too short to miss all the fun!”

Notice Jesus didn’t debate or negotiate with the devil (good advice). He simply resisted Satan again by quoting from Deuteronomy: “Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.” Did you notice Jesus added the word “serve” to the word “worship?” Satan didn’t say anything about *serv*ing him. He just asked Jesus to bow down and *worship* him. There is a tremendous truth here: YOU DON’T TRULY WORSHIP—UNLESS YOU SERVE. Jesus knew that whomever or whatever you worship, you become the servant of that person or thing.

How does Satan communicate that same temptation to you today? He makes you think only of yourself. He whispers, “Forget others. Look out for #1! Hey, you deserve the best. I can help you get it. Forget God and His plan for your life. It has a cross in it. I can give you the pain-free version. And I can give it to you *now!*” That’s quite a temptation. Everyone wants it all and they want it now. Do you know what “deferred gratification” is? I didn’t think you did. That’s what Satan was saying, “Take the shortcut. Avoid the cross. Don’t obey God. You don’t have to wait for the fame and glory.”

These days, he has plenty of marketing experts for his lifestyle. Just turn on your television. Have you ever seen the program called “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous?” The host invites us to lust for some of the most beautiful island, mountain, and desert homes of the rich and famous. Not once, however, are you given the true story of the many ruined lives behind those riches.

Have you made a pact with the devil? Oh, you didn’t know it was the devil; he’s smarter than that. You just decided that you didn’t really need God. You don’t need a Savior on a bloody cross. Religion is nothing but a crutch. Instead, you have made the goal of your life to acquire more and more and more. You aren’t really happy unless you have some new little toy. There is nothing wrong with having possessions but you need to be sure your possessions don’t possess you.

Let’s take a look at the third temptation. The first temptation attacked Jesus on the level of His physical needs (body); the second one was attack in the area of the soul; this third attack was aimed at the realm of the spirit. Satan’s subtle, sinister whisper is:

3. “It’s somewhere in the Bible – go ahead and test God – live dangerously.”

When I was a child and first heard the phrase “the pinnacle of the temple” I pictured a church steeple and I wondered how Jesus and Satan could stand up there at the point of a steeple. Actually, the temple didn’t have a steeple. The phrase “pinnacle of the temple” refers to the southeastern corner of the wall that surrounded the temple mount. You can see it today. It is a

sheer drop into the Kidron Valley of almost 500 feet. History records that several people have been thrown to their deaths from this very spot. This is where Satan launched his third temptation. By now, Satan has adapted to the strategy of Jesus. Since Jesus quoted scripture, Satan does the same. He quoted a passage from Psalm 91 but when you compare these words to the actual words of the Psalm, you see Satan made two mistakes: He misquoted the scripture *and* he took it out of its proper context. There have been and still are thousands of people who have been deceived because they were fed a misquotation that was taken out of its proper scriptural context.

Satan said in essence, "Listen, Jesus, I've got a plan that will win you to the hearts of the Jewish people. They will be overwhelmed by your ability to jump from this high pinnacle and land unharmed. Others who have jumped from this height have been killed instantly. The people will embrace you as their Messiah immediately. Just place your faith in God for protection. And since you have been using the scriptures let me quote a familiar passage to encourage you that you are on secure grounds to jump."

In citing Psalm 91, he did not refer to the first verses: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust!" The context of Psalm 91 is God's protection of those who trust Him.

Again, Jesus resisted this temptation by quoting scripture. The passage Jesus chose reveals to us the true nature of this temptation. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:16 "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test." And Matthew adds these words, "Get behind me, Satan." This third temptation is a spiritual one. Do we have the right to test God, to make a demand of God? "I'm going to jump, Lord. You promised in Your Word to catch me. Here goes."

Some groups of Christians today call that faith and right now you can turn on your television and hear preachers who fill civic auditoriums preaching that same doctrine. "The Word says it. Now claim it by *faith!*" It's sometimes called the "name it and claim it" movement. You want healing? Claim it! You want prosperity? Claim it! You want blessing? Claim it!

How many people do you think have been deceived into sending their life in as a "seed faith" offering to these ministries and then expect God to come through for them?

Now don't misunderstand me here. The only place I've found in the Bible where God invites us to put Him to the test is in the area of tithing. That's found in Malachi 3. Read it for yourself. I really believe there are some people today who have been so misled by partial truth taken out of context that someone really could take them to a tall tower, quote Psalm 91:11 and they would jump off. They would call it faith. Jesus called it the sin of testing God.

A lot of people have tried that and they didn't get rich or they didn't get cured. And they end up as spiritual casualties, bitter and disillusioned. Or worse, they feel terrible because they were told it was their fault. They didn't have enough faith. Did you know there are lots of wounded Christians out there who have been hurt by partial scriptures taken out of context?

That’s why we are people of the Book. That’s why we bring our Bibles to church. That’s why we expect every one of you to be involved in a small group Bible Study. That’s why I challenge you to study the Word of God personally on a daily basis. If you don’t know the Word of God you can easily be misled, because even Satan quotes scripture! Paul writes, “Study to show yourself approved – a workman who doesn’t need to be ashamed.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

After Jesus overcame these three areas of temptation, Matthew and Mark tell us angels came and ministered unto Him. The word “ministered” literally means to “serve food.” So the angels came and fed him, probably angel food cake. Folks, don’t ever be satisfied with the devil’s stony bread when you can wait on God’s angel food!

Now, as I conclude this message I want to give you six practical tips about temptation, which can help you meet it and beat it on a consistent basis. Although this is not one of the tips, don’t ignore what we read in verse 1, “Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit.” The *only* way you can overcome temptation is in the power of the Holy Spirit. You cannot be successful in the strength of your flesh, because your flesh, your sinful nature, is the very part of you that says, “Sin, come on in!” So all six of these truths must be couched in the context of being constantly filled with the Holy Spirit of God. I don’t have time to develop all of them, but they are so simple you don’t need a lot of explanation. Here they are:

PRACTICAL TRUTH ABOUT TEMPTATION:

1. It is not a sin to be tempted

Sometimes Christians feel dirty because they even have thoughts about the possibility of sin. They feel guilty because they think, “If I was really right with God I wouldn’t even have these sinful thoughts.” A sinful thought *can* develop into a desire that becomes a fantasy that can be sinful. Jesus said that it is possible for a man to look at a woman with lust and commit adultery in his heart. But the very first enticement or attraction to sin is temptation, not sin.

You’re a Christian husband (or wife) and you love your spouse. But frankly there are times when the marriage is sort of “blah.” The schedule is so hectic there isn’t much time for real romance, just dirty laundry and TV dinners and maybe a Little League game squeezed in here or there. But there is that nice person at work who is genuinely friendly who is always ready to smile and listen, and occasionally there is lunch, and . . . When the mind begins to wander, and the will begins to toy with the “What if?” At that point, *recognize it*. That is temptation! Recognize it. Refuse it. You haven’t sinned by thinking those thoughts.

Temptation is like the bait a fisherman uses for the fish. The fisherman uses bait that looks attractive and tasty but if the fish doesn’t bite, he won’t be reeled in. The devil disguises sin in some attractive forms but if you don’t take the bait, you won’t be reeled in either.

Did you know Jesus was tempted in many more ways than these three examples in our text? In fact, Jesus faced every temptation we will face in our entire lives. Hebrews 4:15 says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who is has been tempted in every way, just as we are- yet was without sin.” The same power He utilized

to overcome temptation is available to us today: The power of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

2. No temptation is new or irresistible

Perhaps the best verse in the New Testament about temptation is 1 Corinthians 10:13: "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

When you are in the heat of temptation, you may think you are the first one to ever face that particular temptation. You aren't. You may think you are tempted beyond your ability to resist. You aren't. Look at the word "way" in that verse. Temptation is where the devil, your flesh, or the world says, "Here's a way you can sin." Think of it as a doorway; the lights are flashing, arrows are pointing, the bait is laid out in front of you. But every single time there is a doorway to sin there is another doorway as well. This verse says, "God makes a way to escape." God's doorway to holiness and pure living is there as well. It's not as flashy as the doorway to sin. In fact, God's door is built out of the rough, rugged timbers of a cross but remember the way of the cross leads home. So when you are tempted, walk through the right door.

3. The best weapon against temptation is to quote the Word of God

Now, some people wonder why Jesus even allowed the old devil to tempt Him. Didn't Jesus have power and authority to banish Satan from His presence? I believe He did. Just as Jesus cast out a thousand demons from one man, I think Jesus could have kicked Satan right out of the desert too. Why then, did He endure this temptation? I believe He did it to teach us how to overcome temptation. Just as He refused to call on His Divine Authority to turn the stones into bread, I believe He refused to zap Satan. Instead He met him and defeated him with exactly the same resources we have available today: The Power of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. That's why Jesus quoted three verses from Deuteronomy. To show us *how to do it*.

Folks, that is why it is essential for you to memorize the Word of God. Psalm 119:11 says, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." Just think, if Jesus defeated Satan with three verses from Deuteronomy, what do you think we can do with Romans, or John, or Philippians? We have the entire New Testament and a weapon Jesus didn't have at that time!

In Ephesians 6, we are told we must put on the whole armor of God. The well-dressed Christian soldier carries two things in his hands: In one hand will be the Shield of Faith, to quench the fiery darts of the devil. In the First Century, armies had their archers dip their arrows in pitch, ignite them and then shoot them with a high arc toward the enemy. That's a good description of temptation and satanic attack. He lobbs those temptations at you but you shouldn't be surprised. You've got plenty of time to see and recognize them for what they are and put up your shield. But you can't win a battle with a shield alone. In the other hand of a Christian soldier is the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Every time you read, study, memorize and quote scripture, it's like swinging that sword of the Spirit against your enemy.

What if I told you I would give you \$1 for every scripture verse you could quote this morning? Okay, you get a buck for John 3:16, good for you but some of you wouldn't make enough money to buy your lunch at Luby's. And why are you surprised when you don't seem to be able to resist temptation?

4. The best strategy is to avoid tempting situations and spend time with godly people

One of the best ways to overcome temptation is to run from sin and run toward righteousness. It is a matter of desire and direction. You can accomplish this by making sure you don't find yourself in tempting situations where it will be easier to compromise your Christian convictions. You have heard the old expression, “there is safety in numbers.” Well, you have to make sure you hang out with the numbers. Sam Jones used to say, “If you lie down with dogs, you will always get up with fleas.”

If you are man who is struggling with the temptation of pornography, don't go to those web sites. Put a content blocker on your computer which can't be bypassed. If you have a weakness for alcohol, don't go to places where it will be served. If you are a teenager struggling with the temptation of drinking or drugs, just don't go to those parties where the kids are doing it. If you find yourself at one, run away as fast as you can. It's more difficult to resist temptation when everyone around you is participating.

2 Timothy 2:22 has some good advice for young people and for people of all ages: “Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”

5. You never become immune to temptation

The last verse in our text doesn't say Satan left Jesus for good. It says he left Him until a more opportune time. Satan and his tempting demons never give up on you. If you ever think you've gotten to the point where you aren't tempted anymore: Think again. Temptations just change, as you get older. When you are younger, the sins of the flesh seem to be more prominent but as you get older, Satan uses different bait. He uses bait that will attract you to fear, worry, anger, bitterness, pride, or greed. As long as you are breathing, you will have to deal with temptation.

6. The closer you are to God, the easier it is to resist temptation

Here's the final word on how to overcome temptation. James 4:7 says, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” If you want the second part of that verse to be true, resist the devil so he runs from you. Then the first part of the verse must be observed: Submit to God. You can't have the second part without the first part.

There are two sides to temptation, one is negative, the other is positive. On the negative side, you focus on sin or the source of the temptation. The negative approach to temptation says, “Resist the devil! Don't sin! Don't do that! Don't think that!” The positive side of temptation focuses on God and His powerful provision for you. Most temptation begins in the mind. The human brain is an amazing instrument. It starts working the moment you are born and doesn't stop until you

stand up in front of a crowd to speak! Seriously, your mind is an amazing computer, much more intricate than the most sophisticated computer built by man but your mind can only focus on one thing at a time. There can be thousands of thoughts simmering below the surface but only one thought at time can be on the surface. In other words, if you are really listening to this message and processing what I am saying, you cannot at the same moment be thinking about a fat polar bear holding a bottle of Coca Cola™. But now that I planted that image, you can probably see that polar bear now but unless you leave that picture and come back to what I’m saying about temptation, you can’t process what I’m saying. Get the point?

Once you understand this peculiarity about your mind and you realize that most temptation takes place within your mind, then you are ready to do what the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 10:5 to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” Here’s how I do it. When I am tempted to sin, I see the opportunity to sin before me. If I keep focusing on that potential sin, I am losing the battle. Even if I think about *not* doing it, I’m in trouble. “Don’t steal the grape. Don’t steal that delicious grape. Don’t eat that little, inexpensive grape your mother is too cheap to buy for you.” Get the point?

Instead, do as it says and “take captive every thought to the obedience of Christ.” *Replace* that tempting thought with a pure, holy thought. Do you know what works for me? When I am faced with temptation, I try to imagine Jesus hanging on the cross, bleeding and dying for me. I flash that image on the screen of my consciousness and I think, “Jesus died for my sin and this sin would be like taking another nail and pounding it into His hand. It would be like taking the spear in His side and twisting it.” And most of the time, it works. Go ahead and quote scripture aloud. Tell the devil “Get behind me!” But it all starts with submitting to God, bringing your thoughts under the control of the cross. Try that next time you are tempted and see if it doesn’t help.

CONCLUSION

Martin Luther used to overcome temptation in a very graphic way. He said, “When the devil comes knocking on my door and asks, ‘does Martin Luther live here?’ I just get as close to Jesus as I can and I find that when I am surrendered to Him that Jesus, Himself, answers the door, saying, ‘no, Martin Luther used to live here, but he has surrendered control of this residence to Me.’” Martin Luther said, “when Satan sees the face of Jesus and sees the nail-prints in His hands, he turns and runs saying, “Whoops, I must have the wrong address!”

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes