

Title: Into the Wilderness
Text: Matthew 4.1-11
Theme: The Temptation of Jesus
Series: Matthew #9
Prop Stmt: Christ believed His Father's promises in the face of Satan's lies like no one else.

Read text:

We enjoy eating. We expect to eat. We plan to eat. We think about eating. We anticipate eating. We get hungry and think about what it is going to be like when our hunger is matched with food. We are concerned with eating. We are concerned about others eating. Even if we do not eat too much, we generally like to push food on to others to the point where they will. If we do not eat what we think we are going to eat, the way we think we are going to eat it, and when we think we are going to eat, we tend to become cranky, irritable, surly, and even nasty.

We are not alone. Following the baptism of Israel in the Red Sea, they went into the wilderness to be tested by God. It lasted 40 years. God had just rescued them from Egypt, and now just performed one of the greatest miracles in history by rescuing them from the Egyptian army. In Ex. 15, they sang and danced and celebrated their deliverance. Then, at the end of Ex. 15, they went into the wilderness of Shur and when they did not find water, instead of turning to God, instead of assuming upon the goodness of God, instead of believing God's promises to provide for them, they complained. What made matters worse, was they did eventually find water, but it was bitter. So, now, things are starting to get ugly. But, God comes through and not only remedies the bitterness, but then leads them to Elim, where there were 12 springs of water. Lesson learned, right? That was Ex. 15. In Ex. 16, the people accuse of Moses of bringing them "out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." It is almost beyond belief, as if Moses is going to say, "Alright, you got me. You are right, I have done all of this so that we will just die, right here, right now, end of story." This time, God provides manna for them. Every morning these wafer-like pieces of bread appeared on the ground for them. They appeared every morning, except the Sabbath. But, there was enough on Friday for them to gather double so they would have enough for the next day. So, now, lesson learned, right? That was Ex. 16. In Ex. 17, they are whining about water again. It does not end. In Num. 11, they complain about food. In Num. 20 they complain about water. In Num. 21 they complain about food and water. When we get hungry or thirsty, or sick, or diseased we can easily become very demanding because we focus so much upon ourselves.

So, when "Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness" he was continuing to retrace the history of Israel, by experiencing their lives, with this huge difference. Where they complained, he trusted. Where they rebelled, he obeyed. Where they failed, he was faithful. Even after fasting alone for almost 6 weeks. You cannot accuse him of not being able to identify with your plight. It does not matter what you have faced or will face. He has been there, even deeper.

Now, if you have just presented yourself as the long awaited king to your people, why on earth would you disappear for about six weeks? Those days are critical for developing your strategy, your message, your team, and your organization. What kind of a king is this? Obviously, he is a king with a kingdom that is unlike anything that we have ever seen. He is a king who is hungry but feeds others. He refuses to perform a miracle for his own comfort, but feeds thousands with a lunch for their comfort. He is a king who grows weary but gives others rest. He is a king who owns the world but pays taxes, so as not to offend others. He is a king who is called a devil, though he casts out demons. He is the resurrection and the life though he dies. He is perfectly righteous, but is counted as being despicably sinful. He is sold for 30 pieces of silver but gives his life as a ransom for many. And here, he refuses to turn stones into bread that he might eat, but instead will give his own body as the bread of life. He is a king unlike you have ever known. He is one of us, but not one of us. He is a king like us who is tempted, really tempted, but unlike us never succumbed to the temptation. This was not the only temptation that he would face. It was just the beginning. This temptation was in fulfillment of his role as the representative of Israel and in preparation for the day when He would face the worst hell on earth ever. Each aspect of this temptation was designed to offer him a shortcut from the path of suffering and rejection that He was called to take. He had the most to gain by avoiding the cross because the cross would take everything from him. He also had the most to lose because his Father would exalt him above all.

Next Sunday, we will celebrate with unbridled joy the victory of the ages. The Resurrection of Christ served notice to all other kingdoms that they are expiring and fading into the dustbin of history. But the resurrection day was made possible because in the garden of Gethsemane, Christ drank the cup of wrath. On the cross he received the wrath of the Father for our sins and poured out his life for us. He did by faith what his entire being wanted to revolt against. His surrender in Gethsemane was fueled in part, by his preparation here in the wilderness.

I. What is temptation? (1-2)

In our language we use the word temptation to describe what happens when someone is enticed to sin. Related to this is the word trial. A trial is designed to strengthen a person. A temptation is designed to weaken a person. A trial is designed to build a person up in character and soul, whereas a temptation is designed to break a person down and cause one to fall into evil. In the language of the Bible, the word that translated as tempted can also be translated as trial.

This is very helpful to know. The difference between a trial and temptation is from the perspective of the person who is bringing it upon you. Your father may leave a \$10 bill on the counter to test your character. He is not hoping that you will sin. He is hoping that you will learn to say no to taking something that does not belong to you. Your friend may offer you some pornography or gossip. Your friend is hoping that you will participate and does not care about your character, or your soul. Got it? So, keep this in mind. God will never tempt you. God will never entice you to do evil, but God will test you. At the same time, Satan will never test you. Satan will never try to build you up. Satan will tempt you

because he wants to destroy you. The temptation of Jesus is a great example. God, the Father is using this event to test Jesus, to prepare Jesus, and to help Jesus fulfill all that he was called to do. It was not a solicitation to evil from God's perspective. But, it was a solicitation to do evil from Satan's perspective.

Matthew says that Jesus was "led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." From Satan's perspective, this was his opportunity to derail the ministry of Christ and render him unfit for the cross. I believe that in this temptation, Satan brought to bear upon Christ, every weapon in his arsenal. Since fasting was commonly done to increase prayer time and spiritual sensitivity, I am assuming that Jesus spent considerable time talking with his Father. It also appears from Luke 4.2, that Satan tempted him throughout these 40 days as well. And I would guess, that Satan did so, as he so often does, by pretending to care, asking subtle questions that challenge the fairness of this, by acting interested in what Jesus was doing, etc. All of which led up to and culminated in the three specific temptations that are recorded. This was war. Christ was at his most vulnerable moment, humanly speaking, and yet, while he was impoverished physically his fellowship with his Father was rich and so sweet. These were real temptations. Jesus was tempted like you are tempted, and beyond what you are tempted. But these temptations were not effective because Christ knew too much. He knew the Father's love. He knew the Father's goal. He knew the Word and He knew how to use it!

II. How was Jesus tempted? (3-10)

A. **He was tempted to believe that physical needs are more important than spiritual ones.** (3-4)

When Satan said, "If you are the Son of God" Satan did not doubt the fact that Jesus was God. He was not questioning the position of Christ. The word "if" also has the idea of "since". Satan was pretending to muse on this. He is making an argument that the Son of God obviously has power, rights, authority, expectations, and abilities to do things that others cannot. After all, if you are the Son of God, does it make any sense for you to be hungry? Really? What is wrong with using your power to create some bread for yourself? What could possibly be wrong with eating a little bit of bread?

The way that Jesus responded to the temptation reveals what the temptation was really trying to accomplish. By the way, it is important to note that Jesus believed the Bible. "It is written" means it stands true! Jesus used Deut. 8 in response, so we need to ask ourselves – why? What was going on in Deut. 8 that fit this? In this chapter, Moses is recounting the history of Israel. He tells the nation, that "*the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you, let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.*" God let Israel hunger so that she would realize how much she needed God. But, she needed more than bread; she needed the words of God. She needed to believe God, more than she needed to eat.

Every time she got hungry, she was being tempted to see whether or not she would believe that believing God's word and trusting in his goodness was more important than getting food. Now, Jesus is put into the same position as Israel. (He is also tempted in a similar way as Adam was.) Will he be more concerned about eating bread when he is hungry, or will he consider the promises of God to be more important? Satan was trying to get Christ to use his position for something that in itself may not have been wrong. The problem was, it would have been a denial, on the part of Christ, of his mission and purpose to be completely relying upon the bread of God, and not the bread of the world. In other words, Satan was tempting him to rely upon the wrong source of strength. This is what happens, when you lose sight of the goal. God's goal for your life is not to be comfortable, to be wealthy and to enjoy a life of ease. His goal for your life is to conform you into the image of Jesus Christ. If you consider physical needs are more important than spiritual ones, you are playing right into the lies of Satan.

What is behind the motivation of taking care of physical needs? My body is important. My life is important. My comfort is important. My image is important. The success of my children is important. Some of those things are true, to a point. But, when they are more important than spiritual needs, then you have lost sight of who you are and why God has you on this earth. This is one of the reasons why I so implore parents to step up and be parents and make godly decisions regarding their children. When you sign your children up for leagues, clubs, and programs that will take them away from the hearing of the Word of God on Sundays, you are saying that their development in this athletic skill, or these other things are more important to their development than the Word of God. I know that we do not think this way, because we do not realize that we are in a war, and that our enemy is relentless and that our capacity to fight him on our own is nil. You are not up for this challenge on your own. We try to live by bread alone when we consider physical nourishment or the values of this world to be more important than the promises of God. When we consider the pleasures and promises of this life to be more precious than the promises of God, we are trying to live by bread alone.

B. He was tempted to presume upon God. (5-7)

Well, here is a shocker! Satan quotes the Bible. It appears that he has memorized portions of it, perhaps all of it. Just because someone quotes the Bible does not mean that he believes it, or that he is using it correctly. Here Satan quotes from Psalm 91, which speaks of one who trusts in the Lord. Satan points out that God will command his angels to bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone. So, what is the temptation? Satan is saying, "Ok, let's test-drive this. Let's see if you really believe this and if this is really true. Jump off this high point and let's watch and see if the angels come, like it says."

Whoa! Hold the phone. Do you see what Satan just did? Psalm 91 is talking about the person who believes in God, who is seeking to live faithfully before God. If and when this person stumbles, God will pick him up. There is a big difference between stumbling in life and intentionally jumping off a high building to see if God is going to catch you. Satan takes a statement from the Bible and he puts his own spin on it.

A dad, whose high school child had died from cancer, told me of his disappointment with God. He had read the accounts of Jesus healing people. He believed that Jesus could and therefore, would heal his child. When it did not happen, it was like the worst kick in the gut you could imagine. What happened here? Did God fail him? Is that what Jesus promised? Did Jesus promise that he would heal all cancer to every person who believed him? This is why it is so very important that we do not read into the Bible what we want it to say. All of the accounts of Jesus healing were not done so that all sickness would be banned from the borders of Israel, nor that every person who really believed in Jesus would never get sick again. That is NOT what those texts are saying. But, when people use those texts and make claims upon them that they were never intended to make, it can be disastrous because we are presuming that God is going to do something that He never obligated himself to. Jesus knew what the text was really saying, and he did not let Satan get away with bad hermeneutics, that is bad interpretation. The Bible is not yours to do with however you want. Again, Jesus responds from Deuteronomy and goes for the heart of the matter. *“You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.”* (Deut. 6.16)

We are tempted to do the same. We can take a promise of forgiveness from the Bible and use it as an excuse to sin assuming that God will not really be concerned. We can also take a warning from the Bible and use it to crush someone, and fail to explain grace for the humble. But, the big issue really is this: We presume upon God when we act like God is the one who is on trial. We are not in a position to cross our arms like an Olympic judge waiting for God to perform so that we can rate his actions. That is what is going on here. Jesus responded to the temptation by quoting from Deut. 6.16, where Moses is recalling the scene from Exodus 17, when the children of Israel were thirsty and were saying “Is the Lord among us or not?” Like judges, they were saying, God, if you do not give us water, right now, then we are going to declare that you do not care for us. God was angered by that, and rightfully so. We are not the ones who sit in judgment upon God. He has his ways and he does not answer to us. We are, however, like the excited audience member at the magician’s show, who cannot wait to see how God is going to surprise us with an amazing demonstration of skill and power.

C. He was tempted to betray God for a shortcut to glory. (8-11)

In this third temptation, Satan, offers to Jesus the kingdoms of the world in exchange for Jesus falling down and worshipping him. There are several things that are stunning about how bold they are, which is why I believe that instead of responding with an argument that answers the temptation, Christ orders Satan to leave followed by the reason (v.10). What is so stunning about this? 1) Satan does not have the authority to give anyone the kingdoms of the world. 2) The kingdoms of the world may have some “glory” but they are broken, sinful, falling, ugly, violent and wicked. The only glory that they have is like a temporary coat of paint over the rust, or a Band-Aid on infection. As we saw from his baptism, Jesus was both Messiah and Suffering Servant. Those could not be separated. If he had avoided the suffering in order to gain the glory, there would be no kingdom.

This is so critical for us to understand. Again, do you see what Satan is doing and how Christ exposed him? Satan was making promises that he could not keep, even while

claiming that God made promises that God would not keep. Satan promises you glory and gives you despair. He promises you freedom and gives you bondage. He promises you satisfaction and gives you addiction. He promises you excitement and gives you internal violence. He cannot keep his promises because he is a liar and he does not have the authority to do what he claims. On the other hand, God calls you to weakness and gives you strength. He calls you to humility and shares power with you. He calls you to brokenness and makes you whole. And here (v.11), we see how this played out for Christ in an immediate sense which points to an ultimate sense.

He refused to supernaturally turn stones into bread, but instead, he was given food supernaturally by the angels who came to minister to him and refresh him. He refused to tempt God by casting himself off the pinnacle of the temple to see if the angels would come and rescue him, only to have them come and minister to him. And now, he refuses to betray his Father in an attempt to take a shortcut to glory, which fulfills the OT promises that the true King has come with a kingdom that can never die.

III. What are to do with this?

Know this:

- a. Trials often follow times of triumph. Do not be surprised by trials.
- b. After facing your trial, you are not done with all trials.
- c. The love of the Father does not mean the avoidance of deep trial.
- d. You are in a war and will be until the day that you die.
- e. God is Sovereign, even over temptation.

The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. There are two things that we must remember. God is not the one who will tempt you, Satan will. However, Satan cannot function independently of God. Satan is on a leash.

- f. God uses testing to develop perseverance that will lead to glory.
- g. The Bible is dangerous when it is misused. There is a severe warning upon those who misuse the Bible.
- h. Satan is incredibly subtle. We are no match for him. Our only hope is the Word of God. Satan is no match for God's Word.
- i. Temptation must be fought through dependence upon God.
- j. Jesus used the Bible to address temptation.
- k. You have an incredible Savior!

He knows your temptation. He is not distant, nor distracted, nor disconnected. He knows. The enemy of your soul is telling you lies. He is telling you that God cannot be trusted, that he, Satan, really is the one who cares for you. He will give you what you really want. What a liar! But, he tells us things that our hearts are inclined to believe. This is why I need God's Word in my heart. This is why I need to look to Jesus. But note this: Christ not only resisted in a manner that provides a perfect example for us, Christ resisted in a manner that was in our place. He resisted for me (as a substitute) even as he resisted for me (as an example). Christ was tempted, but triumphant. He did what you could not do,

so that you could be like him. He fought alone, so that you would never fight alone. This led him to die alone, in your place, as your sin-bearer, as your wrath-receiver, as your substitute. He died alone so that you would live. That's our King.