

Matthew 4:1-11 Temptations are coming! Are we ready like Jesus? Lent 1 March 1, 2020

By Pastor Kenneth Mellon, Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Pleasant Valley Rd., West Bend, WI

Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior who overcame Satan. Amen.
God's Word of Jesus' temptations and victory is written in Matthew 4:1-11

These are your words heavenly Father. Help us to use them to fight against temptation. Your Word is truth.

Dear Friends, in Christ,

What do think regarding the devil? Many people don't believe that he is real. Others have actually put their trust in him and worshipped him in twisted ways like in harming animals. The Bible describes him as the enemy of all people. He is as intent to destroy us as a lion that seeks its prey to devour it. He hates everyone and will lie or deceive or lure us away from God so we can suffer with him forever. With our ruin as his goal, he sends temptations, which are not always gross but sometimes appear very pleasant. Think of the temptations that Jesus experienced while He lived on earth! Martin Luther wrote, "It's impossible to keep the devil from shooting evil thoughts and lusts into your heart. But see to it that you do not let such arrows stick there and take root, but tear them out and throw them away. Do what one of the ancient fathers counseled long ago: 'I cannot' he said, 'keep a bird from flying over my head. But I can certainly keep it from nesting in my hair....' So it is not in our power to prevent ... temptation. Just be sure that you let it go at that and do not let them in...." (What Luther Says, page 1344)

Temptations are coming! Are we ready like Jesus?

What kinds of temptations were there? The devil can use anything to tempt us. We see that with the three temptations of Jesus. The first one was to act because of selfish needs rather than on selfless trust when turning stones into bread. Why was this a temptation? Jesus hadn't eaten for 40 days. At the end of that time He was starving. But God has taken care of Jesus for 40 days without food. Surely he could go a short time longer He just needed to trust in God. If God the Father had wanted Him to have bread, He would have given it to Him. This was much like Judas who couldn't wait for Jesus to reward him, so he was tempted to betray him.

The second temptation was for Jesus to throw Himself off a high part of the temple roof and safely land below. The devil said, Surely the angels will catch you since you are God's Son. This was an appeal to self-glory. The devil misused God's promise of protection in the Bible. Jesus would have been tempting God by foolishly harming Himself if He had jumped. Samson had that same false confidence and lost his strength!

The third type of temptation was for Jesus fall down and worship the devil instead of God. Jesus was shown the kingdoms and riches of the world. It would all be His, the devil said, if he would just make a deal. Jesus would have become the greatest world leader of all time, but not the Savior. The devil lied and really could not produce all authority. Jesus knew God's way of humility would lead to lasting victory.

What kinds of temptations get to us? Does the devil get us to question God's ways when He doesn't provide what we think we need? Does the devil make us envious of people who have more than us and tempt us to complain? Does he tempt us to do things our way instead of God's way! Remember King Saul. God once commanded him to kill all the animals of a captured town, but Saul saved the best animals for himself, saying he would later sacrifice them to God.

Sometimes the devil tempts us to commit outright sins: like what happened to young Joseph who was tempted to commit adultery in Egypt. But, most of the time the devil is more subtle and uses things like illness or tragedy to get us to doubt God's goodness. At other times, he uses things that make us successful like great talent, wealth, or power that we trust in instead of God.

It's been said, wherever the Lord builds a church, the devil builds a chapel next door. The devil has two points of attack. One is to get people to believe lies instead of God's truth. Some churches are deceived, teaching false ideas about Christ. They say that Jesus isn't God's Son or that He doesn't provide a way to be saved or that neither He nor we will rise from death. If he can convince people that there is no hell, they don't have to worry about sin or about having a Savior. If the devil keeps people from thinking about heaven, he can get them to focus only on daily needs in life. How sad! It's certainly not bad to have groups like Habitat for Humanity. But, if that work keeps people from having an eternal life in heaven, the devil has won.

His other temptation is against churches who do have the truth about Jesus and focus on heaven. The devil will try to divide Christians through personal offenses. We read in many of Paul's letters to the churches that he pleaded with the people to forgive each other. He told them not be jealous of each other, but to consider each person as part of the body of Christ. We must be watchful of temptations that seek to divide us!

Second, we can overcome temptations as Jesus did! Right after Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit led Him into to the wilderness so He could be tempted. What a way to begin His work! He went right to the fire. Later Jesus said, *"How can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man?"* (Matthew 12:29). Jesus invaded the world which the devil had claimed as his own. The rescue of the world depended on Jesus never falling to the devil's temptations. He remained sinless when suffering temptations even on the cross. His innocent death brought us life. His shed blood forgives us. His perfect life becomes ours through faith in Him so we will inherit eternal life. In heaven, there is no evil. Jesus will change us and make us holy. We'll be at total peace in eternal paradise.

But until then, we have a battle on our hands. If the devil was bold enough to tempt Jesus, he will attack us. The Bible states, *"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him..."* (1 Peter 5:8-9). How can we resist him? We can't overpower him! But Jesus did. He used the same weapon we have: God's Word! Paul wrote, *"Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God"* (Ephesians 6:16-18).

As our Savior, Jesus had a perfect faith in God, which would not allow the devil to cause Him to sin. The stronger our faith in Jesus, the less affective the devil's temptations will be against us. But when we are tempted and sin, we must flee to Christ. In the promises of Christ we will be strengthened. God said, *"There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ* (Romans 8:1) The Bible promises, *"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"* (1 Corinthians 10:13). Ask Joseph or Daniel. They will tell you God is faithful!

Every time we hear His Word, God provides His strength. He also provides help against temptation through our baptisms, since the Bible states that those who are baptized should consider themselves dead to sin and alive in Christ. God will provide strength for those who commune at His table today. The devil will not give up his attacks against people, especially against Christians on their way to heaven. But, we have the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us daily take God's warning and promise to heart so that we will not be overcome! May this hymn be prayed for us: *"Arm these Thy soldiers, mighty Lord, With Shield of Faith and Spirit's Sword. Forth to the battle may they go and boldly fight against the foe"* Amen.