

Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The narrative of the temptation of Jesus is recorded in three gospels; Matthew, Mark, and Luke and takes place just after His baptism and just prior to the beginning of His ministry. Jesus is alone in the wilderness and yet this event is recorded in Holy Scripture; a sign that the apostles would come to the ‘full knowledge’ and record the events of Jesus life for all time and all people.

Three temptations are identified in the bible, which are not coincidental in their structure or form. The first miracle deals with the most basic human element needed for survival; food. Jesus is fasting for 40 days as a sign of His complete faith in God. His trust in God to sustain and provide for his very existence is identified and established. The second temptation is to challenge God’s love. The third temptation is to test the very Word (the prophetic voice) of God.

Each of the temptations takes place in the wilderness where there are no witnesses, no observers, and no bystanders present to testify to the events. With the exception of a few prayers Jesus prayed to the Father, every other event, miracle, and word is witnessed and recorded by one or more individuals to be passed down. However, the wilderness temptation is an event that Jesus endures alone and the Holy Spirit brings to the memory of the gospel writers.

I share again, we have heard this narrative many times, so what can we ask of this passage that might give new meaning and insight to what God is doing in the world? Let’s ask some questions my friends. Why food? Why does Satan tempt Jesus with something as plain and simple as food? Jesus is engaging with a forty day fast; why would food be the first obstacle?

Here is where we must understand that our Lord Jesus Christ is both fully human and fully divine. Jesus can and does get hungry, Jesus can and does get hurt, feel pain, and is emotionally devastated. Satan first tests the human character of Christ, knowing the flesh is weak and the most vulnerable element of our existence. However, Jesus has His sights set on a much higher calling and sees the human body as the means to accomplish the task the Father has placed before Him.

When Satan fails to exploit the weakness of the body, he next attacks the obedience of Jesus and offers Him all the kingdoms of the world in exchange for his loyalty, obedience, and worship. Obedience was the weakness of Israel as they failed to keep the Law that was handed down from God through Moses. Jesus is fully human and fully divine and Satan knows human weakness better than anyone or anything.

When Satan fails to break the weakness of the flesh, he aims to break the weakness of the spirit, to which he again fails. Now the third temptation is one that has far more to it than meets the eye (or the ear for that matter). As human beings, we can completely understand and relate to hunger and disobedience for the sake of our survival – if not our personal gain. But the third temptation goes much farther than the human weakness; this is a full assault and attack on the full divinity of God that has nothing to do with human weakness.

In setting up the meaning of the final of the three temptations, consider the words that Christ spoke to us in person; “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”¹ My friends, this is a promise that the Word of God will remain forever; nothing will ever add or take away from that which has been written, spoken, or given from the mouth of God.

¹ Matt. 24:35

The Psalmist records the very words that Satan uses to tempt Jesus for the third time; Satan uses God's own Word against Jesus in an effort to get Jesus to act 'against' the very righteousness and holiness of the Word of God.

You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High – God will give His angels charge over you and guard you in all your ways. You who abide in the shadow of the Almighty – God will guard you in all your ways: Upon their hands they will bear you up lest your strike your foot against a stone.²

My very dear friends in Christ, Satan uses God's Word against Jesus to test the very righteousness of God and His faithfulness to His own word. This is not just an opportunity to betray God, but a temptation to betray God promise to redeem humankind! And the day will NOT be lost to sin or temptation. Satan is tempting the very creator of life, love, and our salvation and will NOT win the day because God has spoken through the prophets that we, indeed, will be holy through the saving grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

So where is the Good News in the gospel text that reveals the temptation of Christ? What questions have we failed to ask? You will hear different versions of the temptations, all are similar and all reveal the human and divine nature of Christ. Any faithful preacher will share the will and Word of God is absolute and cannot be altered. Any repenting human life will see the love of God through Jesus Christ that secures our eternal salvation – with a loving Father.

Before I share the words of peace, allow yourself to hear – the rest of the story.

What questions have we not asked? If you love the mystery of God's word coming to life and light in your life – what is the question to ask?

Why did Jesus fast in the wilderness for 40 days? My friends, there is speculation and symbolism to the forty days, but there is also a greater truth that I did not know until a few days ago. There are only two faithful servants of God who were recorded that fasted for 40 days. Their fast commenced prior to their service to God, prior to their encounter with God. One of the two servants of God fasted for 40 days twice.

The only recorded servants of God in the Old Testament who fasted for 40 days were: Moses and Elijah. The same people who wanted to see the face of God, the same people who were witnessed on the Mount of Transfiguration, the same people who share in God glory today.

And there is still the matter of the Good News – you see my friends, we are human with the divine Holy Spirit of God within us. We have been made holy before God because of Jesus Christ. So the words of the Psalmist become a real and present comfort for us today knowing that we do indeed dwell in the shelter of the Most High and abide in the shadow of the Almighty. God has given His angels charge over us and when we are tempted – WHEN WE ARE WEAK and fail the test – “upon their hands they will bear us up, lest we strike our foot against a stone.”

The Word of God endures forever my friends and we have been lifted up to a place where temptation and sin can no longer harm, hurt, or destroy. We have indeed received the Word of God that provides the peace that passes all understanding to keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

² c.f. Psalm 91:1-12