

Jesus' Third Temptation

Matthew 4:8-11

This Advent season we're studying a specific aspect of the incarnation: Jesus' experience of being tempted. We're taking three weeks to study each of Jesus' three temptations in the wilderness before His public ministry. The fourth Sunday (next week) we'll study a portion of Hebrews 4 that reflects on Jesus' entire experience of being tempted while on earth. That passage explains how His being tempted equips Him to come to our aid when we're tempted.

Today we consider Jesus' third temptation in the wilderness. We will again notice what His response to temptation tells us about Jesus (His identity and His calling). We will also notice how Jesus is an example for us to imitate when we are tempted.

Jesus' Third Temptation: “. . .fall down and worship me.” (Matthew 4:8-11, Deuteronomy 6:4-15)

The first two temptations involved a bit of subtlety/nuance, but this third temptation is a very bold, frontal assault on Jesus' mission as the Suffering Servant. Having resisted his suggestion that Jesus turn stones to bread and that Jesus throw Himself down off the temple, Satan made a very direct appeal that Jesus fall down and worship him.

8 Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.”

As with the second temptation, we can't be sure exactly how Jesus experienced what is described in verse 8. It was probably some type of visionary experience because there's no mountain from which you can physically see all the kingdoms of this world. Interestingly, the devil showed Jesus “all the kingdoms of the world ***and their glory***.” He didn't show Him the oppression and institutionalized sin in the kingdoms of this world; he only showed Him their glory.

Jesus didn't challenge the devil's ability to give Him “all these things.” In a limited but real sense, Satan does have authority over the kingdoms of this world. The offer was, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.”

Robert Stein points out that the devil was offering Jesus “a political solution to the world's problems . . . a crossless solution . . . with no need of great suffering on [Jesus'] part” (*Jesus the Messiah*, p. 109). R.T. France writes that this was a temptation “to achieve power by worship of God's rival” (*Jesus*, p. 52).

All Jesus had to do was bow the knee to Satan. He could have gained the whole world, but it would have been at the cost of His own soul (see Matthew 16:26).

But Jesus' mission wasn't merely to reign over the kingdoms of the world. There would come a day when Jesus would conquer every enemy (see 1 Corinthians 15:25-28). But

the devil's shortcut to being king over all the kingdoms of this world would have meant abandoning His mission of "seeking and saving that which was lost" and "giving His life as a ransom for many." As we saw in the first two temptations, the devil was tempting Jesus to abandon His calling and mission as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 42 and 53.

We get the sense that this last temptation was just too blasphemous and crass for Jesus to entertain more than a second. Jesus very decisively dismissed the devil.

10 Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.' "

For the third time Jesus quotes from the book of Deuteronomy and the second time from Deuteronomy 6. In that chapter Moses is giving the children of Israel a charge to be faithful once they enter into the Land. He was concerned about passing on the faith to their children and grandchildren. And so he advocates a devotion to God and His word that is comprehensive and compelling.

I want to read several verses from Deuteronomy 6 so that we can see the context of Jesus' quotation. Verses 4 and 5 are called the *shema* because the Hebrew word *shema* is the word for "hear," the first word in verse 4.

4 "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!

We'll take a good, long look at these verses when we study Deuteronomy after the first of the year. But at the very least, the statement "The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!" means that YHWH/Jehovah was the God of Israel and that He was the **only** God of Israel. He wasn't merely one of several deities. He alone had rescued them from slavery in Egypt. Therefore, He alone should be loved and worshiped.

5 "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

This is a command to love God whole-heartedly (not half-heartedly), to love God with everything you are (soul) and everything you have (might - substance or possessions). Since the Lord alone was Israel's God, Israel should love the Lord in a very comprehensive sense.

One of the specific ways they were to love their God was by hanging on His every word. The words of God was to be "on their heart." They were to teach God's word to their children, having conversations at the table, on walks, when they got up, and when they went to bed. They were to have reminders everywhere - on their bodies and on their possessions. You get the picture: their love for God should mirror His great love for them. He had rescued them from slavery in Egypt, therefore they (and future generations) should love Him comprehensively.

At this point, nobody raised their hand and said, "Moses, do you think God would mind if we also worship the gods of the Canaanites?" But Moses knew that once they got into

the Land and experienced abundance, they would be tempted to do so. When they lived in houses they didn't build and ate from vineyards they didn't plant, they would be tempted to forget the Lord who had brought them out of Egypt. Affluence can do that. And so Moses gives this warning beginning in verse 13 (the verse Jesus referenced after His third temptation):

13 "You shall fear only the Lord your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name. 14 "You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you,

This is a logical implication of the *shema*. If they were going to love God with all of their heart, soul, and strength, they couldn't worship and follow other gods. If they worshiped other gods, their children and grandchildren wouldn't be faithful to the Lord. Notice how Moses continues in verse 15.

15 for the Lord your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise the anger of the Lord your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth.

There is an appropriate type of jealousy when you're in an exclusive relationship. God's jealousy is an expression of His fierce, fierce love. Since He was "in the midst of" them, they needed to know that He cared and noticed whether or not they worshiped and served other gods.

Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6 (again!) because He understood what was at stake.

10 Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.' "

He would never bow the knee to Satan because He loved the Lord His God with **all** His heart, soul, and strength. He would love God comprehensively and exclusively, even though it meant drinking the cup of suffering. He would be the obedient Son of God. He would be the true Israel that was faithful in the wilderness. He wouldn't take any shortcuts: He would give His life as a ransom for many.

We read in verse 11 this:

11 Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.

In the second temptation the devil told Jesus to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple because it was written that God deploys angels to protect His people. Jesus rejected that suggestion, pointing out that you shouldn't force God's hand in that way. God does send angels on behalf of His people, but we shouldn't unnecessarily place ourselves in situations that "put God to the test."

But after Jesus had been tempted and had proven His loyalty to the Father, God did send angels to minister to Him. In all likelihood this involved strengthening Him and giving Him food.

Three Lessons from Jesus' Third Temptation:

First, ***We all face the temptation to worship and serve other "gods."*** Satan doesn't often manifest himself and stand before a person as he did with Jesus. But in very tangible ways, he tries to lure us away from exclusive devotion to God. You may be able to identify "God-substitutes" in your life - things you trust and things to which you look instead of God for comfort and security and relief.

In light of Deuteronomy 6, another way to ask the question is, "Are there ways I ***don't*** love the Lord my God with ***all*** of my heart, soul, and might?" How well do you understand your own temptations and your own sins? Sometimes it is easier to identify ways that ***other*** people are tempted (or at least the way we think they are tempted). But I'm encouraging you to identify your own temptations.

John Owen makes an analogy that I find helpful. He writes that as a Christian you should view your sin the same way you would view a fire in your home. In other words, our sin - whether sloth or pride or greed or lust or whatever - isn't some minor annoyance. Our sin threatens everything that we love and cherish in this life. Our sin can destroy relationships (friendships, marriages, fellowship in the Church, etc.) and lives. As Owen suggests, we should deal with our sin with the same intensity we'd have if we noticed a fire in the kitchen.

We need to identify and name our specific sins. We need to understand the things that tempt us to love God half-heartedly.

The second lesson we learn from Jesus' temptation goes hand-in-hand with the first, fueling and informing our response to temptation.

Second, ***We need a broad, deep working knowledge of Scripture to battle temptation.*** As we've seen the past two weeks, Jesus recognized that He was in a situation analogous to that of the children of Israel in the wilderness. Because He immersed Himself in Scripture and prayer (fellowship with the Father), He recognized when the devil took Scripture out of context and when he suggested that He do something incompatible with God's will. He didn't merely memorize a few random Bible verses. He had a broad, deep working knowledge of Scripture that allowed Him to battle temptation ***skillfully and decisively.***

Of course the same thing needs to be true of us. Sometimes we don't even recognize temptation because we don't know the Scriptures well enough. I've recognized this in myself recently. A couple of weeks ago I was in a Bible study in which we discussed 2 Timothy 2:24 which reads, "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, ***patient when wronged.*** . . ." I'd read that Scripture plenty of times; but this time it had fresh relevance for me.

The basic idea is that when we are wronged, we should respond with patience. My most natural response is anger or irritation or pride ("How dare you say/do something I don't like. . .") The term patience is sometimes translated "long-suffering": you suffer a long time before you get angry. You have a long fuse instead of a short fuse. This response mirrors God's response to us because He is "slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness" (Exodus 34:6). Since God has a long fuse, we should too!

The past couple of weeks, when I've been wronged (or when I've felt like I've been wronged) and had a flash of irritation or anger, I've recognized, "This is a temptation. The Lord's bondservant **must be** patient when wronged." Having that Scripture on my mind has helped me identify and deal with the temptation to have a short fuse.

I would encourage you to take the long view when it comes to Scripture. Sometimes we are very much aware of the issues we need to understand from Scripture. But we all have blindspots: we don't know what we don't know; we don't have the categories to understand ourselves and our temptations. And so **we need a broad, deep working knowledge of Scripture**. You might study Scriptures this week that you will need weeks or months from now.

As you probably know, we've provided reading guides to go along with this sermon series. We have stacks of them on each side of the foyer as you leave. Each week we provide five Scriptures that reinforce the sermon from the previous Sunday. This week we've listed Scriptures such as Jeremiah 2 where God tells the people how they've "Forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water." That is an image that can help us interpret the temptations we face. If you don't have a reading guide, I hope you pick one up as you leave.

Third, **Jesus would not be dissuaded from going to the cross**. Think of the most agonizing thing you've experienced in the past. Think of the most agonizing thing that might happen to you in the future: illness, divorce, loss of a loved one, rejection, ridicule, financial ruin. If Satan appeared to each of us and said, "All you have to do to avoid this loss and pain is bow down and worship me," it's hard to say what we would do. But we know what Jesus did. When Satan said, "You can avoid the cross if you bow down and worship me," Jesus said, "Begone, Satan!" Nothing could dissuade Jesus from going to the cross. Jesus refused to bow the knee to Satan for Himself (He simply wouldn't worship and serve anyone but His Father) **and** for us.

Jesus' experience with temptation wasn't trivial or incidental; His experience of being tempted was integral to His mission as the Suffering Servant. His experience of being tempted was also integral to His role as our great High Priest. His earthly temptation in some way equipped Him to rescue us when we are tempted. That's what we'll be discussing next week from Hebrews 4.

But today, will we worship Jesus because of His fierce commitment to go to the cross for **us**? Jesus became a man **for us**. Jesus was baptized for us. Jesus went into the

wilderness to be tempted **for us**. Jesus humbled Himself to the point of death, even death on a cross **for us**. He is worthy of our worship here and now. If we don't worship and serve Him when we gather, it's unlikely we will worship and serve Him when we leave this place. Will you worship the triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) here today?