

Sermon for February 14, 2016 – Lent 1

Luke 4:1-13 (NIV84)

Theme: “It is Written”

- 1) The answer Jesus gave to win our righteousness.
- 2) The answer we give to live in that righteousness.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, ² 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. ³ The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." ⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.' " ⁵ The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ 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. ⁷ So if you worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.' " ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ For it is written: " 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; ¹¹ they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' " ¹² Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' " ¹³ When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Water is a powerful thing. It doesn't take all that big of a wave to knock a man down and drag him away. The same can also be said of temptation. We all have experienced it, haven't we: temptation so strong that it felt like we were being hit by a tsunami – overwhelming and dragging us away, leaving us to drown in our sin and guilt? How can we stand up against such a powerful force?

The answer to that question is found in our sermon text for today. Let us consider what it is, under the theme: **“It is written.”** 1) *This is the answer Jesus gave the devil to win our righteousness.* 2) *This is the answer we give the devil to live in that righteousness.*

Part One: The answer Jesus gave to win our righteousness.

Our sermon text takes place immediately after Jesus' baptism, when the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove, and a voice from heaven said: *"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."* (Luke 3:22 NIV84).

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, ² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.

Just as a wartime soldier doesn't have the luxury of wasting time after receiving his orders, neither did Jesus after his baptism. The Holy Spirit immediately compelled him to go into the desert in order to do battle with the devil.

And in what form did this battle take place? The form of continuous temptation. I know: we see only three examples in our text. But make no mistake: Jesus was constantly tempted – just as we are. He had to be in order to win our righteousness.

And this leads me to answer a question some of you might be wondering about: “What exactly is “righteousness?” Simply put, it is the state of “being right” - having no wrong in us at all. To be righteous is to be pure, sinless and holy.

None of us are righteous in and of ourselves. We constantly break God's commandments and sin. And, because the Bible says that God will only accept the righteous into his kingdom, we are hopelessly lost.

But God didn't want us lost forever in hell. This is why He sent His Son to win for us the righteousness we could never attain on our own. Jesus had to be tempted in every way – just as we are. In order to be righteous, he also had to perfectly master each temptation: that is, be completely free from sin in thought, word and deed.

Just as a mother may work hard at knitting a precious sweater to give to her daughter, so Jesus labor was for us – to clothe us with his precious righteousness by faith. With his righteousness covering us, we no longer offend God with our spiritual nakedness. When the LORD sees a believer, he sees his Son, and welcomes that person into his kingdom.

The account of Jesus in the wilderness is the account of him winning our righteousness. And, as we will see, he did it all with the one little Greek word which, translated into English is: “It is written.”

Our sermon text continues: [Jesus] *ate nothing during those [40] days, and at the end of them he was hungry.* ³ *The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."*

We all know that hunger can drive a man wild. I don't think any of us can begin to imagine how Jesus felt after 40 days of it! The devil tried using Jesus' suffering and want to get him to doubt His Father's will. He was in effect saying: “Come on Jesus, prove that you're the “beloved Son” of God. Feed yourself. Why should you hunger – waiting on “God” to feed you.”

But for Jesus to “prove” himself to be the Son of God would be a sin. How so? It would show both a lack of faith in the declaration God made at his baptism and a lack of faith in the LORD to provide for his bodily needs.

Strengthened by the promises of the Scriptures, ⁴ *Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.' "*

The Bible clearly promises that God watches over his own. He is the one who keeps us alive and gives us every good thing. Even though outward experience was telling him to give up his faith, Jesus held firm to God's promise recorded in Scripture, and for this reason Satan had to find a new tactic.

So the devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ 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. ⁷ So if you worship me, it will all be yours."

Oh, who of us wouldn't have fallen for this temptation! The desire for wealth, power, prestige – isn't this the power behind the world's economy? So many have sold their soul for this lie of the devil – trading in their faith in Christ for the pleasures and glories of this world.

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.' " The Bible is clear: everything belongs to the LORD - including our worship and praise. Bowing down to the devil would mean denying God. Notice that Jesus does not debate the devil, arguing that he is lying and could not possibly have authority over everything. He simply quotes God's Word and puts his faith in it – causing Satan to resort to some other tactic.

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Take special note of this temptation because it is an especially dangerous one. The devil placed a tricky “either — or” dilemma in front of Jesus and even quoted Scripture to back it up. If Jesus doesn't jump, it looks like he doesn't really believe God's promise. If he does jump, then Jesus would be falling into false belief – trusting in something God did not promise. Sure, on the basis of how the devil uses the Scriptures, it seems as if God promised to protect Jesus if he jumped. The problem is that the devil took that promise out of its proper context – making the Bible say something God hasn't promised.

Jesus' faith is in God's pure Word and not a twisted version of it. He overcomes this temptation by quoting a simple passage in context. This is what Bible really says: *'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'* "

When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

“It is written.” With this answer Jesus overcame the devil's temptations to sin – not just in the wilderness, but throughout his earthly life. Jesus remained righteous by trusting God's Word. And because Jesus is righteous, so are we. How so? Because God offers Jesus' perfect record of never sinning as a free gift to everyone who believes in him. God's Word promises it, dear Christian; believe it and receive it!

And when we, through repentance and faith, have this righteousness applied to us, we also stand victorious over the devil. The flood of Satan's temptations can't drown us. Why not? Because

we find ourselves standing on the mountain of Christ where those waters can't reach. With Jesus we can say: "It is written," and live in the righteousness God freely gives us.

Part Two: *The answer we give to live in that righteousness.*

As the devil tempted Jesus, so he continues to tempt us, trying to use every trick he can to remove us from Christ so that we drown in his flood of sin and guilt

For example, when we are struggling to make ends meet, the devil will come with temptations like: "It's more important to feed and clothe your family than go to worship. Take that better paying job, even if it keeps you from church. Why suffer needlessly?"

When this happens, say with a firm conviction in God's Word: "*It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'*" (Mat 4:4 NIV84) And then, having said those words, believe what they say – fully convinced that God will keep his promise.

Or if the devil tempts you to lust after the things of this world, like money, wealth, entertainment and power – promising that you will have a more fulfilled life if you pursue these things for yourself rather than pursuing the LORD – then remind both the devil and your sinful flesh: "*It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'*"

Then again, if the devil comes at you with Scripture – twisting its meaning in order to get you to believe that God is okay with you doing things that are otherwise against his Word – quote the clear passages of Scripture that speak the truth. Why? Because the devil can't stand the words "It is written" when they are spoken by someone who firmly believes the truth. God's Word stands as an impenetrable fortress – not allowing the devil's flaming arrows of sin to harm the person who, by faith, sits securely inside.

Yes, "It is written" is your rock, your tower, and your high mountain against the floods of temptation. Jesus' perfect keeping of the law has made you righteous by faith. Remain in that righteousness by remaining in the Word, and the devil will have to flee from you in frustration – just as he fled from Christ.

"But," someone might say, "what if I forget what God's Word says? What if I sin?"

Well here is the truth, dear friend: none of us will ever be perfect in this life. We all sin! But that is exactly why Christ came, and why our sermon text is so important: Jesus lived the perfect life we all failed to live. He did this so that, through faith in him, we might have eternal life.

So even if we do fall into great sin, we still have Jesus' righteousness covering us – as St. John so eloquently says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.* (1Jo 2:1-2 NIV84)

It is written! When tempted, Jesus gave this answer to the devil in order to win our righteousness. This is also the answer that keeps us in that righteousness. Let us, therefore, take every opportunity to read, study and meditate on God's Word so that we will have a ready refuge to flee to when the waters of temptation flow against us. Amen.