

Sermon for March 9, 2014 – Lent 1

Matthew 4:1-11 (NKJV)

Theme: See Jesus win our righteousness.

- 1) *By overcoming our mistrust.*
- 2) *By overcoming our false trust.*
- 3) *By overcoming our vain trust.*

¹ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. ³ Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” ⁴ But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” ⁵ Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’” ⁷ Jesus said to him, “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’” ⁸ Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly 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 will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’” ¹¹ Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him. (NKJV)

Some people like watching old championship football games. Why? I can think of two reasons. One might be to learn a certain tactic or maneuver to use at the next game with their friends. Most people, however, watch those old games primarily to re-live their favorite team’s victory.

Reading our sermon text is much like watching a favorite, old football game. While it is true that you can learn a lot from the account as to how to overcome temptation, the main reason God wants us to read this account is to bask in the victory Jesus won for us against the devil – a victory we could have never won without him. Let us, then, **see Jesus win our righteousness.** 1) *By overcoming our mistrust.* 2) *By overcoming our false trust.* 3) *By overcoming our vain trust.*

Part One: By overcoming our mistrust.

If you ask a Christian how Jesus saved them, they would probably answer: “By dying on the cross for my sins.” Although true, this answer only tells half the story. Jesus not only had to take away our sins, he also had to earn the righteousness we need to stand before God. How? By keeping all of God’s commandments perfectly.

This is why, right after His baptism, *Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.* Notice, that the temptations of Jesus didn’t just “happen”, they were God’s will to happen.

Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights. He was obviously hungry, and it was during this time of weakness that the devil tempted him. Now, make no mistake: these are not the only temptations Jesus faced. Jesus was tempted his whole life! What follows are merely 3 examples of Jesus overcoming temptation for us.

The thing to note is that all these temptations deal with the matter of trust. And why is that important? Because if we trusted God as we ought, we would never sin. The fact that we, by nature, lack trust in God is the heart and core of our problem – a truth that is sadly illustrated in our Old Testament lesson for today.¹

³ Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”

When I was a child, I often wondered why it would be sinful for Jesus to turn stones into bread. There is no passage in the Bible that says: “Thou shalt not turn stones into bread.”

The answer to my question is in the phrase: “**If You are the Son of God.**” In other words, the devil is trying to get Jesus to doubt who he is. It’s like he is saying: “Hey Jesus, if you are really the Son of God, why did your Father abandon you in this wilderness. Can’t you feel the hunger? **If** you are God’s Son, then do yourself a favor and prove it.”

If Jesus turned stones into bread in order to **prove** that he is the Son of God, He would not be showing trust in His Father who declared at his baptism just 40 days earlier: “You are my Son.”

On top of this, Jesus would cease to be our substitute. In order to win our righteousness, He had to face temptation like any man. Men can’t avoid hunger by creating bread for themselves. They have to trust that the LORD will provide for them. So also, Jesus had to simply trust that the LORD would take care of Him, that He most certainly was God’s dearly loved Son.

How did Jesus overcome this temptation? Quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, *He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’*

We live and breathe by the will of God alone. The LORD could simply command: “Stay alive without food” and we would be able to stay alive without food. Jesus, with his answer, shows the complete trust He has in God. He does the exact opposite of what Adam and Eve did in the garden when they were tempted to eat something they shouldn’t: Jesus believed God’s Word.

How often haven’t we failed at this very point: trusting that God will provide all we need in life? We worry and doubt. We think we have to hoard money and goods for ourselves, that we can’t be happy or have peace and security without all the stuff we acquire. But “stuff” doesn’t give peace, security and happiness. The LORD gives these blessings to those who trust in him – regardless of how little or much they have. God promises this in his Word – the very Word we neglect in order to chase after things the devil convinces us will make us happy.

Yes, when it comes to listening and trusting in all the LORD promises, we have failed miserably. But look at Jesus: in order to win righteousness for us, he showed perfect trust in his Father to provide for his needs. Covered with this righteousness and inspired by Jesus’ example, let us also learn to trust God’s promises, even when facing great want.

Part Two: By overcoming our false trust

Since Jesus showed such complete trust in his Father’s promises, *the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, “In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’ ”*

Take special note of this temptation, brothers and sisters in Christ, because it is an especially dangerous one. The devil is placing a tricky “either — or” dilemma in front of Jesus and is even quoting Scripture to back his claim. If Jesus doesn’t jump, it looks like he doesn’t really believe. 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** quotes Psalm 91, it seems as if God would protect Jesus if he jumped. The problem is that he is not quoting this promise in its proper context.

Jesus said to him, “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’ ” When tempted into a false trust, Jesus uses Scripture to explain Scripture. He does not take passages out of the greater context of the rest of Scripture to get the Bible to say whatever he wants it to say. He properly views the Bible as a unit, a whole. Yes, the LORD promises protection, but He also forbids testing. And so Jesus wins the victory over the devil’s temptation into false belief.

Note well, dear Christian, how Jesus deals with the devil – for we often fall prey to false belief. For example some people think that, since we are saved by grace through faith, we don’t have to worry too much about avoiding sin. Is it true that Christ forgives all sin? Yes, but the Scriptures also clearly warn about using this forgiveness as a license to sin – and that those who do so will be damned.ⁱⁱ Jesus saved us for the purpose of glorifying his name through good works, not so that we could continue sinning.ⁱⁱⁱ

We often fall victim to false belief, but thankfully Jesus didn’t. For our salvation he won this victory over the devil. Let us learn from his victory how important it is to constantly study God’s Word so we, too, can avoid this deadly temptation.

Part Three: By overcoming our vain trust.

Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly 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 will fall down and worship me.”

The devil was trying to tempt Jesus with power, wealth and fame. Why did he think these things would work on Jesus? Because they have worked on every human being ever since Adam and Eve were duped into thinking that believing the devil would make them gods. All too often we have been willing to give up worship for work or leisure, pursue our careers with greater fortitude than building our faith, and find greater security in what we have than in the LORD. All people often fall into vain trust, so why not tempt Jesus with it?

Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’ ”

No matter how difficult, no matter what crosses lay ahead, Jesus would worship and trust the LORD alone. And the LORD did not disappoint this trust. We read: *Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.*

When we read this account, we primarily read it to see our champion soundly defeat the devil and win the righteousness we need to stand before God. Whenever the devil tempts you into thinking that you are too sinful to be saved, you can think about our sermon text and say: “Yes, I am sinful, but my Savior is not. He perfectly trusted in God and kept His law for me. When God looks at me, he now sees the righteousness Jesus won. I am forgiven and free.”

But, just as high school football players can learn a lot from watching NFL tapes, so we too also find in this account an example to follow when we are tempted. And what is that example? Study the Word and use it against the devil. This is your sure defense from falling into sin. And if you do fall? Then remember Jesus, who is the atoning sacrifice for your sins^{iv}. Let his forgiveness and righteousness refresh you as you

face your daily battles against temptation. He has already won the war. Follow him home to victory, using His Word as your shield and sword against all the devil's attacks. Amen.

ⁱ Genesis 2:7-9, 15-17, 3:1-7

ⁱⁱ c.f. Romans 3:8; Hebrew 10:26-27

ⁱⁱⁱ c.f. Ephesians 2:8-10; 5:1-2

^{iv} 1 John 2:1,2