

Children's Talk and Sermon Notes
for Sunday, 30 October

Children's Talk: The Word's from God's Mouth

The story for today is about a time when the Lord was fighting against the Devil. If you were going to fight the Devil, what kinds of weapons would you need?

Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil.

And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry.

And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."

But Jesus answered him, saying, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'" (Luke 4:1-4)

What weapon did Jesus have? He didn't have a sword or a shield. But He did have a powerful weapon: the things that were written in the Word.

He quoted the Word at the Devil. Two more times the Devil came to Him, and two more times the Lord quoted the Word to defeat him.

The Word is one of our greatest weapons against the Devil. This is what it means to live by the words of God's mouth: we take the things that He has said and use them to chase away evil.

The voice inside you says, "Take your friends toys." You can say back, "The Lord says, 'do not steal'"

The voice inside you says, "No one loves you." You can say back, "The Lord says, 'I have loved you with an everlasting love.'"

The voice inside you says, "I'm better than everyone else." You can say back, "The Lord says, 'love your neighbour as yourself.'"

The Lord gives us weapons in His Word, weapons we use to fight against evil. We fight with the things we learn, and the teachings of His mouth.

Tempted in the Wilderness, Part 1: Hungering for Pleasure

A sermon by Pastor Joel Christian Glenn
30 October, 2022

Where is the Lord when we face spiritual struggles, or temptations? It is easy to feel the Lord's presence when we are joyful and celebrating, but it can feel that as soon as things take a turn for the worse, the Lord is nowhere to be found. Over the next few weeks we are going to look at various spiritual struggles we face and how we can stay connected to the Lord through trying times. This Sunday we will begin a three-part series on spiritual battles, or temptation. The template for entering these spiritual struggles can be found in the Lord's temptations: before He began His ministry the Lord was tempted by the devil in the wilderness for forty days. The three main temptations that He faced and in which He was victorious encapsulate all of the temptations that we also grapple with: the craving for pleasure, the compulsion to twist the truth, and the drive to elevate ourselves above all others.

When we hear the word "temptation" we usually think that it means to be enticed to do some evil: we are tempted to do something. But spiritually the term temptation has a broader meaning: a temptation is any spiritual battle or struggle. Certainly that would include when enticed to do evil: we battle against the inclinations to lie, cheat, and steal. Equally though doubt, fear, anxiety, faithlessness, apathy, and a whole host of other spiritual challenges can be classed as temptations. In all of these God can seem distant and absent.

In the Lord's life the temptations we are going to look at took place immediately following His baptism in the Jordan River:

Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the

devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry. (Luke 4:1-2)

Having publicly embarked on His ministry Jesus was driven into the wilderness, alone, to fast and contend with the forces of hell. It is not, apparently, a picture of glory and great success, but rather one of hardship and loneliness. In short, it is a picture of our own temptations.

Spiritually we go through this same cycle. We have times when we feel the joyful, innocent presence of the Lord. And yet with time that sense of the Lord's presence fades, and we can be left wondering if what we had was ever real to begin with. Is it really worth it to keep doing the right thing? Does it really make a difference if I go the extra mile for the people around me? Would anyone notice if I stopped? Can I work through things, or am I just going to give up on people? It feels like we are powerless and the Lord is absent. We read,

As long as temptation lasts, a person assumes that the Lord is not present, for he is being harassed by evil genii, so harassed in fact that sometimes he has so great a feeling of hopelessness as scarcely to believe in the existence of any God at all. Yet at such times the Lord is more present than that person can possibly believe. (*Secrets of Heaven* §840)

In all our temptations the Lord feels absent; and yet even in the worst of temptations, and in fact, especially in the worst temptations, the Lord is more intimately present with us than at any other time. With that in mind we will turn to the first of Jesus' three temptations the temptation to turn a stone into bread.

Part I: Hungering for Goodness [Don't get distracted by short-term pleasure]

With that in mind we will turn to the first of Jesus' three temptations the temptation to turn a stone into bread. This temptation has to do with times when we desperately want something good and satisfying, but are willing to settle for something lesser to satisfy our cravings.

And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry.

And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."

But Jesus answered him, saying, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'" (Luke 4:3-4)

First the devil tempts the Lord through the Lord's hunger. Now we don't enjoy the feeling of hunger, but in fact hunger is necessary for us. It is hunger that tells us to seek the food that will nourish our bodies. Likewise, spiritual hunger prompts us to seek what is good. We feel temptations as a struggle because we want that goodness and love that will feed us and we don't have it. We read,

All temptation is an attack against the love present in a person, the degree of temptation depending on the degree of that love. If love is not attacked there is no temptation. Destroying another person's love is destroying his very life, for his love is his life. The Lord's life was love towards the whole human race; indeed it was so great and of such a nature as to be nothing other than pure love (*Secrets of Heaven* §1690:3)

In other words, it is because we love and want something good that we are discouraged when we seem about to fail. We are hungry for that goodness.

In the Lord's case, His hunger, or His love, was for the salvation of the entire human race. He desperately wanted and wants to be able to bless each and every one of us (AC 1690:3). The temptation was to give up on that love, and to settle for something lesser. The devil taunts Him, saying, "If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread" (Luke 4:3). This temptation is a bit perplexing: Jesus performed many miracles throughout His life, including the miracle of feeding thousands and turning water into wine. On the surface it seems like the devil was just offering sound advice.

As with everything in the Word there is a spiritual meaning to these things. Hunger can stand for a deep desire for goodness and truth. It can also stand for a craving for what is evil and false. The stones would represent falsity, and turning

those into bread to eat would be to satisfy the wrong hunger (cf. John 6:26-27). To change the stone into physical bread would be to send the message that our deepest desires for love can be satisfied by shallow and cheap material things. Falsity cannot actually satisfy our hearts.

It does seem like there are falsities that we can substitute for the real truth; shortcuts that can seemingly supply the pleasure and good feelings we crave. The Lord's hunger of course was not for physical bread, but for something much deeper. The temptation was to satisfy that deep yearning for goodness with mere external pleasure.

There are plenty of false ideas that appear deeply satisfying, and when spiritual and true ideas leave us feeling empty and unsatisfied, those falsities become hard to resist. To give an example, the idea that not caring about people will keep us from getting hurt is false. And yet, if we have recently been hurt by someone we love, it is extraordinarily tempting to wall off our hearts from the world and refuse to care. It feels so much better to be hard-hearted than to be heart-broken. When we do this we have taken a stone and tried to convert it into something that will feed our hunger; in other words, a false idea that we have tried to use to satisfy the yearning of our hearts for love.

We feel this when we desire something good, yet settle for things that only make us feel good in the short term. For example, we want real human connections, but settle for mockery and gossip. Or when we feel a need to be useful, and settle instead for wasting our time. Or when we want satisfaction, and settle for laziness. Or we want companionship, but fuel lust instead. Or want purpose but grasp at material things Or lie instead of working through an issue we have with someone. Some of the excuses we use to justify this substitution of pleasure for true goodness

are also falsities, falsities that appeal to us: If it feels good it is good; it isn't hurting anyone else; I am powerless against my desires; I need to indulge in order to make the temptation go away. Yet in spite of all these falsities, we cannot satisfy a spiritual yearning with something false.

The Lord shows us how to respond in this struggle: He says, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Luke 4:4). Before we dig into what this phrase means we should first notice that it is a quote from the Word. In fact, in all three temptations the Lord combated the devil's temptations through quoting the Word. The Word is the source of the truth that will strengthen and sustain us when the Lord seems distant.

This is also the meaning of this particular quote from the Word, that we shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. The truth is that living the Lord's Word is what will truly make us happy. When we forsake mere pleasure and continue to lean on the Lord's truth then we will be on the path to that which will truly satisfy. When we are in temptation, we need to focus on what are we truly hungering for, and how the Lord can feed that deeper need. We need to remember that when we struggle, it is because we care deeply about something good; and it is in persevering in pursuit of that good thing, not allowing ourselves to be turned aside by the distractions of mere pleasure, that we can find true joy and happiness.

That being said we should also remember that just because we are unhappy or find no fulfillment in our lives that does not mean that we are in the wrong place or have done something wrong. Sometimes that experience of unhappiness and pain is part of the Lord's process of leading us somewhere better. After all, even Jesus, out of the love He had for the entire human race, suffered despair in His human. This is also the broader context of the quote from the Word that He used; it is taken from

Deuteronomy, and recounts how the Lord allowed the Children of Israel to hunger so that they might learn to rely on the Lord:

So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of Jehovah. (Deuteronomy 8:3)

Although the Children of Israel were suffering from hunger, they were on a path that would lead them to true happiness. Likewise, even if we find spiritual things stale and boring, and feel unfulfilled, we may still be on a good path, learning the lessons we need to be able to enter into real joy. It's not that we will forever be unhappy, or even that the Lord wants us to be unhappy; but it is part of the process that we should expect. It's all too easy to believe that if we were better people, more spiritual people, we wouldn't face these unhappy times. That's just not the case: it is the nature of loving and desiring something deeply to be unhappy over being deprived or distant from it, and to desire it all the more for that reason.

When we face any temptation, any spiritual struggle, we can take comfort in the truth that the Lord has overcome in that temptation, and will give us the power to do the same. It is the power of turning to His Word and taking to heart the Teachings we find there. Some of the hardest times to do this are when love and goodness seem absent and the desire for pleasure overpowers all else. But even this can be overcome: resist, endure, run the race that is set before you; and you will be on the path to eternal happiness, a happiness that can sustain and fulfil you to eternity.

Amen.