

## Temptation

Matthew 4:1-11

---

"What would it profit a man if he gained the whole world and lost his soul?" Perhaps when He made that statement Jesus was addressing both those who heard Him, himself as he faced the decision in His own life.

While Jesus is the answer to all our struggles, in our passage this morning we watch Him struggle with what lies ahead of Him. And, as He finds the way forward for Himself, He charts the way forward for us as well.

We sense this from the very beginning of His ministry. He left his home in beautiful Galilee and went to the Jordan Valley where His cousin John baptized Him. After hearing a voice from Heaven say, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

There he faces temptation. The issue was not whether He would rule the world, but how He would do so.

Sometimes we don't take his temptation very seriously. We're not convinced that the Son of God could be tempted at all. But the New Testament is very clear saying that Jesus didn't wonder, imagine, or fabricate this in his mind. Matthew tells us He was tempted, Mark tells us He was tempted, Luke tells us He was tempted. Even the book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus "was in all points tempted like as we are."

Jesus was tempted by the wrong use of power. "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." Here He was in a time of fasting, and Satan tells Him to use His power to get feed himself. But Jesus knew He must not use His power to care for Himself.

We often face the same temptation: wrongly use who we are and what we have to meet our own needs rather than the needs of others. God has blessed us abundantly, and so often we take what we have and hoard it for ourselves.

It is said that General Stonewall Jackson once made this statement: "Do the best you can with what you have where you are." Jesus asks no more of us than He has done Himself. It has to do with the right and best use of the power we possess, who we are, and what we have.

Jesus was also tempted by the wrong way to popularity. Satan came to Jesus, showed Him a view from the pinnacle of the Temple and said, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down..." The temptation here was to do something spectacular, amaze the people, and gather a following from it.

But Jesus knew He that would be wrong, and replied, "It is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" Jesus knew that there are no shortcuts to easy popularity. Popularity and acceptance weren't even what He sought. He sought to serve His Father and establish His Father's kingdom on earth.

This, too, is a temptation we face: striving to win popularity and acceptance. Sometimes it seems we'll do almost anything to obtain it. Young people face it all the time. We call it peer pressure. They call it "life as they experience it". Adults face it, too. We call it keeping up.

But the call of God is to live amidst that temptation and rise above it. We are called to be faithful followers who seek to serve God and establish His kingdom.

One of the leaders of the early church was Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna. Brought to trial by the authorities and told to renounce his Christian faith, he replied, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?"<sup>i</sup>

He was put to death. Later, writing the history of that period, it was written, "Polycarp was martyred, Statius Quadratus being proconsul of Asia, and Jesus Christ being King forever!"

We are called today to be people who are faithful, who seek not to be popular, but to serve God and His kingdom.

Finally, Jesus was tempted by the wrong kind of partnership. Matthew tells us that Satan came to Jesus and showed Him all the kingdoms of the earth, saying, "All these things I will give you if you will fall down and worship me." But Jesus answered, "' You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve!'"

Once again, we face that same kind of temptation, too: the temptation to establish the wrong kind of partnership with the wrong kind of people and compromise who we are. We seem to seek a partnership when we should be live in a covenant already established for us.

When we're tempted by the lure of partnerships we need to remember our covenant with God. We need to hear God's call to live in covenant with Him and be His children.

I believe that Jesus made it through those temptations primarily because He knew who He was and never forgot it. During the dark time, and through the lonely time, and in the bleakest of times, I believe that Jesus thought back to the moment just after His baptism when he heard the voice of His Father saying: "This is my Son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased." And Jesus, remembering that moment, would do anything to avoid tarnishing who he was.

Harry Emerson Fosdick was one of the greatest American preachers this country has known. He described his preaching as counseling on a large scale. Few people knew that as a young seminary student he reached the breaking point after working one summer in a New York Bowery mission.

He went home and was overcome by deep depression. One day he stood in the bathroom with a straight razor to his throat and thought about taking his own life. And then -- he heard his earthly father in the other room calling his name, "Harry! Harry!"<sup>ii</sup> Like the voice of God calling him, it stopped him, called him back, and brought him home.

This morning we need to be reminded that during those times when we find ourselves in the wilderness, searching for a way through; when temptation comes our way and offers us the wrong answers and the wrong choices -of power, of popularity, of partnership – we need to remember that God has called our name: "This is my son, my daughter, my beloved, in whom I am well pleased."

And know that because God has called our name, God will see us through.

---

<sup>i</sup> <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0102.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> Robert Moats Miller, Harry Emerson Fosdick (Oxford University Press: New York and Oxford, 1985), p. 44.