

## Sermon for Lent I Invocabit – Matthew 4:1-11

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The serpent said to Eve, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” “And the tempter came and said to [Jesus], ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’”

As it was with Eve, so it was with our Lord. Satan’s first line of attack is eating. After air and water, this seems to be our most basic need. The Lord had provided bread for His people in the desert. And, to be sure, God was at the very moment when Jesus was being tempted by the devil, providing for the food needs of humanity all over the world. Why should Jesus go hungry? Why shouldn’t He have what He provides for everyone else? How would it be a sin to take what is His if He is the Son of God?

It would have been a sin because the Holy Spirit took Him there to fast. The point of our Lord being the Son is not that He gets the inheritance, power, or rights, but that He is obedient to His Father. He waits for His Father to provide. He does not make His own way. He trusts that His Father will see Him through.

This is precisely what happens on the cross. The Father forsakes the Son. He leaves Him in hell, under the devil’s torture and power. The Son becomes guilt, sin, a curse. But in the midst of it, even though He has been forsaken, He commits His spirit to His Father. He never loses faith. He never gives up hope. He is the perfect Son. He waits on the Father. He is obedient. “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Next, the devil goes after our Lord’s piety: “Prove that you trust God, prove that you believe in His Word!” The devil even quotes Scripture: “He will command his angels concerning you.” The angels are there to serve, no? Don’t the Scriptures say the angels will intervene for God’s children? Why, O why Jesus, do you not show that you believe it? Or why not show it to convince the devil that God’s Word is true? If you are a child of God, won’t the angels save you? Jesus said, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Then it was Satan’s final appeal: “Bow down to me. Receive the glory and kingdoms of this world.” This seems to be a most ridiculous request. But it shows what all sin is: All sin is devil worship. All sin steals from God what rightly belongs to Him. So Jesus responds, “...it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve.’”

All temptations show us something of the character of sin and the character of our God who overcomes sin. Our Lord’s response to temptation shows us the best weapon we have against temptation in our lives and the only weapon we need: He says again and again, “It is written.”

The strategy of the devil against our first parents, and then against our Savior, was to cause doubt. He wants us to place ourselves into the role of judge. We will decide what is good for food, pleasing to the eye, and capable of making us wise. We will decide if He is worthy of being our God. This is what we do when we declare, “My God wouldn’t do this or my God wouldn’t say that.” But, in fact, we don’t get to decide who God is or what He should do. He tells us who He is and what He does in His Word.

And that’s why the answer to temptation and doubt is God’s Word. “It is written.” It’s not fleeting, corruptible, or changing. It’s solid, lasting, and eternal. All things pass away, but

the Word of God does not pass away. It is written, in the first place, on the page, not in our hearts. Even our Lord Himself, in the desert, submits to the written Word. It is the written, objective, unchanging Word. That's why the first Law was written on tablets of stone. That's why Job longs for an iron pen, lead, and rock to engrave eternal hope: "I know that my Redeemer lives..." and "... in my flesh I shall see God..."

It is written. It is trustworthy. God's Word is not subject to the wavering opinions of men. It cannot be changed or forgotten. It endures.

But for all that, we don't face the devil the same way that our Lord did. We can't. We are always complicit in temptation because of the sin that infects us. The Lord can hear temptation and not sin. He doesn't have any desire for evil. He doesn't imagine it. He simply rejects it because it is outside the Word of God.

But when we hear temptation—no matter how vile, stupid, or evil it is—there is a part of us that participates. We consider it. We imagine it. We are dirtied by it, corrupted by it, and then confused. Our passions place sinful thoughts in our heads directly. We're not in control. We're not strong. We don't really resist. If we have staved off one temptation, it's only momentary. For another one is already laying siege. Then another comes at us and another and we can't defeat them.

We can only be saved by grace. Thanks be to God, He is gracious. For all our corroboration with Satan and his temptations, for all our vile selfishness and perversions, we have a great strength: The Lord is man and He is on our side. Everything that Jesus did, He did for us, in our place, as our substitute, as our Champion. Everything. He did nothing that wasn't for us.

So also every temptation. He defeated the devil. He endured those trials for our sake, so that we would not have to, so that we would not be held accountable for our sins, so that the devil could not have us.

The temptation of Jesus shows us the right way to respond to temptation in our lives: fasting, prayer, and a steadfast trust in the Word of God, when He said, "It is written..." Jesus is the example, the most excellent and perfect example, of a truly God-pleasing life. But more than that—and here is what almost nobody gets—in His temptation, Jesus stands in our place. We don't have to overcome the devil. We don't have to suffer for our sins. We don't even have to die. The Holy Spirit did this to Jesus on purpose, in our stead, for us, so that we would be spared. We are the prize that Jesus desires, His inheritance, the plunder from hell, a bride worthy of God Himself. He overcame all temptation and died for us.

One more thing to note: Adam and Eve fell into sin by eating. Our first parents were bested by the serpent who enticed them to eat of the tree. However, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ accomplished our salvation by the tree of the cross, so that where death arose, life also arose, and the serpent who overcame by the tree in the garden is overcome by the tree of the cross. The devil who fooled Adam and Eve by eating is defeated by our Savior hidden in bread and wine, given for us to eat and drink. No longer do we stand before the accuser, but we live as God's own holy children. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠

*This sermon (with only minor alterations) was preached by the Rev. D. H. Petersen, pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Ft. Wayne, IN and can be found in his book Thy Kingdom Come, Emmanuel Press, 2012.*