

“TEMPTED AS WE ARE, YET WITHOUT SIN”

I. Introduction

- A. We face an assortment of temptations every day.
 - 1. We are tempted to sin against God in our thoughts, our words, and our actions.
 - 2. We are tempted to do things that God forbids, and we are tempted not to do things that God requires.
 - 3. And the fact of the matter is that none of us successfully navigates all the temptations that we face.
 - 4. Even the most faithful Christians yield to some temptations to sin.

- B. The fact that Jesus never gave in to temptation might cause us to have doubts about his ability to sympathize with us in our struggle against temptation.
 - 1. Yet the Scriptures explicitly tell us that “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” (Heb. 4:15)
 - 2. It is actually Jesus’ sinlessness that enables him to sympathize with us.
 - 3. As the biblical scholar B.F. Westcott once explained, “Sympathy with the sinner in his trial does not depend on the experience of sin, but on the experience of the strength of the temptation to sin, which only the sinless can know in its full intensity. He who falls yields before the last strain.”

4. Jesus knows the strength of temptation better than anyone who has ever lived.
5. And Jesus can do far more than just sympathize with us.
6. He can deliver us from temptation, from sin, and from the judgment that our sin deserves.
7. His perfect faithfulness in the face of temptation gives us the confidence to draw near to the throne of grace, trusting that we will receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

II. In the Wilderness

- A. Our text begins by saying that Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness for this period of trial.
 1. This makes it clear that it was God's plan to allow Jesus to face these assaults from the devil.
 2. This was the start of Jesus' public ministry as the last Adam, the new covenant head for all whom the Father gave to him.
 3. Jesus entered into this work by recapitulating what took place with the first Adam in the Garden of Eden, only Jesus had it much harder.
 4. Our first parents were tempted while living in a lush garden where nothing except the fruit of one tree was forbidden them.
 5. Jesus, on the other hand, was tempted in the wilderness while enduring a forty day fast.
- B. God brought Jesus into this circumstance in order to test him, to see if he would be faithful to the stipulations set forth in the law.
 1. There are numerous connections between our text and Israel's period of wandering in the wilderness, which took place before they entered into the Promised Land under the terms of the Sinai

covenant.

2. The forty days of Jesus' fast recalls the forty years that Israel spent in the wilderness, as well as Moses' forty days of fasting on Mount Sinai.
3. Moreover, all of the Scripture passages that Jesus cited to refute the devil's temptations came from the book of Deuteronomy, which was written during Israel's wilderness period.
4. Deuteronomy sets forth the stipulations of the Sinai covenant.
5. Luke is telling us that Jesus' temptation in the wilderness was about keeping the requirements of God's law.
6. Though he was entitled to all glory and power, he submitted to the will of his Father and faithfully endured this trial.

III. The Temptation of Distrust

- A. Satan's first temptation took aim at Jesus' weakness after being without food for such a long period of time.
 1. Hunger is a powerful impulse.
 2. Most of us don't really know how powerful it can be, since we have never experienced intense hunger.
 3. After fasting for forty days, Jesus' body would have been in a desperate condition.
 4. The devil came to him when he was weak and weary and exhausted.
- B. Satan prefaces his temptation with the words, "If you are the Son of God."
 1. Satan is calling into question what God had just declared about Jesus at his baptism.

2. How could Jesus be the beloved Son of God when God led him out into the wilderness to starve to death?
 3. If he really is the Son of God, then he should prove it.
 4. Why go through all this agony?
 5. If he is the Son of God, then it would take no effort at all to turn a stone into a loaf of bread.
 6. Even the mention of the word "bread" would have been torturous to Jesus at this point.
 7. You can be sure that he felt the pull of this temptation.
- C. Nevertheless, Jesus knew that it would be wrong for him to do this.
1. It would be wrong because he would be using his powers for his own sake.
 2. Satan was tempting him to use illegitimate means to meet his needs.
 3. It was the Spirit of God who had led him out to endure this period of privation in the wilderness.
 4. To give in to Satan's temptation would be to distrust God.
- D. There are times when we too are tempted to use to illegitimate means to satisfy our desires.
1. We find ourselves in a situation where we really want something, where we feel that we really must have that thing, and then we envision a path that will allow us to satisfy our longing.
 2. Even though the path stands in conflict with God's revealed will, it is all too easy for us to find ways to justify taking it anyway.

3. That is the kind of situation Jesus was facing when Satan urged him to turn that stone into bread.
 4. We sometimes give in to such temptations, but Jesus did not.
- E. One of the important lessons that we can learn from this text has to do with the fact that our Lord used Scripture in his battle against temptation.
1. This reminds us of the immense importance of knowing God's Word.
 2. The Bible is the sword of the Spirit.
 3. It is the weapon with which we need to arm ourselves to prepare for our spiritual warfare with the devil.
 4. If we fail to do so, it is like going into deadly combat unarmed.
- F. The Scripture that Jesus cited in response to the devil's first temptation is a verse from Deuteronomy that says, "Man shall not live by bread alone."
1. Matthew includes the next part of the verse in his Gospel, which says, "but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matt 4:4)
 2. Jesus understood that true life is not found in eating.
 3. As important as it is for us to eat in order to live, there is something else that is more important and more fundamental.
 4. Submitting to God's Word and God's will is more important than eating.
 5. It is more important than having any of our needs or desires met.

IV. The Temptation of Glory

- A. The devil's second temptation focused on earthly glory.

1. He showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and said, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will."
 2. As we should expect, the claims that Satan makes here are a mixture of truth and falsehood.
 3. It is true that the Bible sometimes refers to Satan as "the ruler of this world." (see Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Eph. 2:2; 1 Jn. 5:19)
 4. Nevertheless, the reigns of power always remain in God's hands in the ultimate sense.
 5. We see this so clearly in the book of Job, where Satan has to ask for the Lord's permission before he can afflict Job.
 6. Satan cannot claim absolute authority over this world.
 7. Nor is it entirely true that he can give worldly power to whomever he chooses.
 8. God is the one who ultimately decides who is given earthly power.
 9. As Jesus said to Pontius Pilate, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above." (Jn. 19:11)
 10. And as Paul says in his letter to the Romans, "there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God." (Rom. 13:1)
- B. In this second temptation, Satan was offering Jesus the opportunity to attain glory without facing the suffering that God had ordained for him.
1. Jesus was being enticed to take a shortcut to glory.
 2. The reason why this would be wrong is because it was God's plan for Jesus to suffer first and then enter into his glory.

3. That is what Jesus says at the end of this Gospel when he is walking with two of his followers on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection. (Lk. 24:26)
 4. As the writer of Hebrews puts it, "it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering." (Heb 2:10)
 5. Jesus had to suffer before entering into his glory because it was only through his suffering that he accomplished his task of bringing many sons to glory.
- C. No one likes to suffer.
1. Whenever suffering comes into our lives, our immediate response is to ask God to take it away.
 2. Jesus knew that feeling.
 3. He was a real human being.
 4. He did not like it when he thought about the suffering that lay in store for him.
 5. This is why we know that he felt the allure of this temptation.
 6. He felt the attraction of Satan's suggestion that he could have his best life now.
 7. But Jesus knew that this was not his Father's will.
 8. As so, for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and afterward he was seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:2)
- D. Jesus responded to this second temptation by citing a verse from Deuteronomy 6 that says, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him

only shall you serve.”

1. This verse reminds us that man was not created to be an autonomous being, ruled by his impulses, his desires, or even his sense of identity.
2. Man is a creature, and as such he is meant to conform his life to the service of his Creator.
3. Whenever we put anything above the duty and devotion that we owe to God, we are transgressing this basic command.
4. As the Heidelberg Catechism explains in its treatment of the first commandment, we should be willing to give up anything rather than go against God’s will in any way.
5. Jesus kept that law, even when the kingdoms of the world were being dangled before his eyes.
6. He was entitled to reign over those kingdoms in glory.
7. But he knew that there could be no shortcut to glory.
8. He had to take up his cross and suffer before he could reign in majesty.

V. The Temptation of Power

- A. This brings us to the third temptation, where we see that the devil adjusts his strategy.
 1. Having seen Jesus resist the first two temptations by citing Scripture, Satan decides to cite Scripture himself.
 2. He tells Jesus to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple in order to prove that he is the Son of God.
 3. Then he quotes the portion of Psalm 91 that says, “He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,” and “On their

hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.”

4. Satan was misapplying Scripture here.
 5. Psalm 91 does not command God’s people to throw themselves off of buildings in order to prove that God is watching over them.
 6. Instead, it promises that the Lord will always keep his children under his protection and care.
 7. This does not mean that God will always keep us from trials, but it assures us that he will always preserve us through the trials that he ordains for us.
 8. Satan’s misuse of Scripture reminds us that the fact that Scripture is cited in support of something does not mean that that thing is really supported by Scripture.
 9. As someone has said, every heretic has his texts.
 10. We always have to examine how Scripture is being used before we accept any claim that is supposedly based upon it.
- B. In this temptation, Jesus was being urged to put his life at risk arbitrarily in order to provoke God to display his power.
1. Performing such a feat certainly would have gotten people’s attention.
 2. But it would have been a matter of doing something spectacular for its own sake.
 3. It would have been like the atheist professor who challenged a Christian student in his class by saying, ‘If God really exists, then he can stop this piece of chalk from hitting the floor.’

4. Then, after the professor drops the chalk and it hits the floor, the professor says, 'See. I have just proven that God does not exist.'
 5. In fact, the only thing this proves is that God does not perform on demand.
 6. It is not our place to insist that God pull off spectacular feats in order to prove himself to us.
 7. Jesus understood this, and he once again cited God's Word in the face of temptation, saying, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"
- C. After this third failed attempt, Satan departed from Jesus.
1. The intense assaults of the evil one abated, for a time.
 2. But this was merely a lull in the storm.
 3. As Luke explains, the devil only departed from Jesus "until an opportune time."
 4. Our Lord was granted a period of respite, but the tempter kept on the lookout for a new opportunity.
 5. The same is true for us.
 6. As Peter reminds us in his first epistle, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." (1 Pet. 5:8)

VI. Conclusion

- A. The contest that Luke describes in these verses took place for our sake.
1. Jesus put himself under the law of God and perfectly kept that law in order to redeem us from the curse that hangs over us for our breaking of the law.

2. This is why there is no true deliverance from temptation apart from faith in Jesus Christ.
 3. In the words of John Owen, “none shall ever be delivered from perplexing temptations unto the glory of God and their own spiritual advantage, but by the acting and exercising of faith on Christ Jesus, and the sufficiency of his grace for our deliverance.” [*The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually-Minded*, 90]
- B. We cannot overcome temptation merely by mourning over our failures and resolving to do better in the future.
1. This is why we sing,

*Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right man on our side,
The man of God's own choosing.*
 2. The way to fight temptation is to persevere in believing what the Scriptures tell us about the deliverance that God has provided for us in Christ.
 3. The Lion of the tribe of Judah has conquered, and if we are in him we are more than conquerors.
- C. On one occasion, as Jesus saw the cross drawing ever nearer, he said to his disciples, “the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, but I do as the Father has commanded me”. (Jn. 14:30-31)
1. Can you say that Satan has no claim on you?
 2. If you trust in Jesus Christ you can.
 3. For the Bible tells us that God “has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Col. 1:13-14)