Deuteronomy 8:1-3, Matthew 4:1-11

“Lead me not into temptation”

I want to take the time to again thank you for your text messages, phone calls, and concerned emails last Sunday evening as my Cowboys decided not to show up. I was tempted to preach on humility this Sunday. We find ourselves in the busiest time of the church year as we prepare for Advent and Christmas and line up programs and pageants. It is always in this time of year that one of the Bronkema family’s favorite memories comes to mind. Rachel and Naomi and the fountain. Lead me not into temptation.

We continue to walk in the footsteps of our Savior. We find ourselves chronologically at the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry when before he begins his work our Scripture states that the Holy Spirit led him away to be tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Today we have a very simple 3 point sermon, the type they teach you to preach at Princeton. It should be about 18 minutes long, you make three points, and you get out.

The three points we are going to look at deal with the 3 temptations that Jesus faced as he was face to face with Satan in the wilderness. We are going to look at his responses and see how he was able to overcome those temptations. Our take, what we can apply to our lives is that our temptations often revolve around three aspects of our life: 1) We tend to treat God as less than God and ourselves as something close to God, 2) We trust God to be God, and we worship other gods as God.

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Probably the most shocking part of both of these passages are the words that we find in Deuteronomy where it states that God humbled the Israelites in order to teach them a lesson that our lives depend on God. The same thought is expressed in Matthew where it states that Jesus was led away by the Holy Spirit so that he could be tested by Satan.

Every Sunday we pray the prayer that our Savior taught us and that the choir led us in this morning. This prayer contains the statement from which I received the title of my sermon: lead us not into temptation. Have you ever found that statement to be a bit jarring? Why would God ever lead us into temptation?

Well, in Deuteronomy the answer we have is that Israel was tested to see if they really were able to, vs. 2 states, to keep the commandments of God. This testing allows us to live reliant upon God and, this is key, aware that we are completely reliant upon God. There is a huge difference between being aware that you are reliant upon God for everything, and the rest of us who are reliant upon God but just don’t want to acknowledge it. Eventually we ought to come to the realization that it is only by the grace of God that we are able to live on this earth at all.

This past Thursday at men’s breakfast we looked at II Corinthians 12 and once we arrived at verse 9 I realized the importance of this Scripture as I studied and prepared for you. It states: my grace is sufficient for you. That is all we need, God’s grace. Moses and Israel were given miraculous bread to prove that God’s Word, His promises are sufficient. God didn’t give them this bread just to feed them and provide them with one more meal. He gave them this physical manna in order to show that God is our provider for all things be they physical or spiritual.

This quotation that we read in Deuteronomy that man does not live by bread alone takes us to Matthew and what is called Jesus’ temptation. When we say lead us not into temptation we can understand that and read that as sin. Don’t entrap me God to sin, or as my grandfather used to tell me, and for some reason he would only tell me out of the 4 boys, it is easier to stay out of trouble than to get out of trouble. When you match that with it is better to ask for forgiveness than permission you get a real doozy.

But Jesus’ temptation scene is split into three separate temptations. Commentators and scholars better than I have looked at them and dissected them. My take on them is simply that when we say lead us not into temptation we really mean: it is easier to stay out of trouble than get out of trouble. Let’s look at the three temptations, or tests, that Jesus faces.

The Scripture states that Jesus was taken out to the wilderness so that he could be tempted or, the Greek could also mean tested. He fasted for 40 days and fortunately for us Scripture tells us that he was hungry. After that time Satan comes and says: turn this stone to bread. This brings us to our first temptation that we face in our life as well and that is to think that God is less than God. The way that is manifested in our lives is a compartmentalizing of our lives with God’s areas and my areas. He can provide for my spiritual needs but I’ll take care of my physical needs.

When we separate what God can and cannot do then we perceive him as less than God. Jesus’ response is that our very lives rely upon the Word of God for all things. When was the last time that we came to the realization that our very lives rely upon the Word of God? Our inability to treat God as the one who created us so we can live our lives knowing and trusting he will provide is critical to our life.

The second temptation finds the devil asking Jesus in some way to prove that God is actually present, especially in light of the fasting that he had just been a part of. Throw yourself off this pinnacle and he will bear you up. After all the words of Psalm 91 provide us with an incredible assurance that God will never allow us to be hurt. You are, after all, the Son of Man. Do you notice that. Each temptation also puts in doubt Jesus’ status as God’s chosen Son. If you don’t do this then somehow you are negating your divinity.

If you are who you say you are, come down off the cross. You say you are a Christian and yet you are facing such difficult times. Just do things on your own without trying to rely upon God’s guidance and direction. The temptation to not trust God to be God but interject our desires and our way of doing things is one of my personal temptations that I know I struggle with and that maybe you can relate to as well. God is God, and there is no need to prove it. But when we find ourselves face to face with a familiar foe, we feel as if we know better and go forward with our own plans and our own way of doing things. Jesus responds to Satan by saying, don’t put God to the test. Allow God to be God in your lives. Don’t try to take his place.

Finally, Jesus is taken and shown all of the kingdoms of the world. Now, all this wealth can be yours. You know, I think Satan totally misunderstood what motivated and what drove Jesus. Some people are motivated by wealth and that would be a real temptation. Daily we read about those who have sold their soul to Satan in order to make a dollar.

But what if Satan had said, if you pay homage to me, I will bring about a cure for cancer, and solve the issue of hunger in the world. For some of us that would be much more tempting. If money isn’t your thing, then in what other way are your weaknesses exposed? In reality what this temptation of Satan tells us is: the ends really do justify the means, and God says No. You will do things my way or you won’t do them at all.

If our Savior tells us to rely upon him for all things and we don’t give Him space to reveal himself to us because we have everything so perfectly in place, then how are we doing things for God’s glory and how is that not for our own glory and understanding?

What gods do we worship that are not God? Now, this isn’t meant to be a kill joy, but rather it tries to identify what exactly is it that we worship? This word pay homage or worship in vs. 10 is repeated 4 other times in Matthew. Three times in relationship with the wise men as they came to worship the newborn baby. The last time when Jesus is raised from the dead. What in our lives has become as important to us as our Savior.

Was Jesus tempted? Yes, but not in the Martin Scorcese type of way. Hebrews tells us that Jesus in every respect has been tested as we are, and yet without sin. But today when we think of temptation we wonder what did Jesus know in the face of temptation of the lonely divorcee, the high school athlete, the struggling business owner, the alcoholic, the small town teenager. Can Jesus really relate to my temptation and is the message of it is easier to stay out of trouble than to get out of trouble enough for them?

These temptations or tests in our lives serve a purpose in God’s plan. The Scripture tells us that their purpose is to hone our faith. Our life is defined by how much we rely upon God for all things. Or as James 1:2-4 states: “My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

What was the worst experience in your life, the time you were tested the most? The death of a spouse, a public scandal, you name it. That experience was not a good experience, but are you now after all these years, able to see how you have matured and grown as a result. Has God revealed Himself to you through that testing? Are you able to look back and give thanks?

Our challenge today is to be able to see in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ a redemption that could only come about by suffering and death and be able to apply that to our lives as we ask God not to lead us into temptation, or testing, but deliver us so we can live completely devoted to him, knowing that his grace is indeed sufficient for us. Amen.