

# Sermon Text for February 5, 2023

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***Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7 Matthew 4:1-11***

***“When we are led into temptation”***

I guess we better address the elephant in the room before we go any further. Since it was on Facebook I believe it was public knowledge. I was went over to the house of a member of a church and we were talking about things and life and the topic of the Eagles came up and he knew that I was a big Eagles fan and he asked me who I was going to be rooting for. He assumed that I would say Chiefs, but I said the Eagles which really surprised him. He shared with me that if he was in my place he could never root for the Cowboys. I looked at him square in the face and I said very convincingly: That’s why I’m the pastor. So go Eagles, as much as I hate to say it.

Okay, now that we got that out of the way, let’s draw ourselves back to the reason why we are here. We are in the midst of a sermon series on the Gospel of Matthew that we have defined as the Gospel of righteousness. We have then gone on to define righteousness as acting according to the will of God. Acting according to the will of God. Temptation draws us away from righteousness, temptation draws us away, tries to draw us away from acting according to the will of God. Temptation, we will find out today, comes in all shapes and sizes, what is tempting to me might not be tempting to you and vice versa.

Both of our Scriptures today are the most classic of the temptation narratives in all of Scripture. We know both of these stories and we define them as times of temptation for the characters in the Bible. What we find in these Scriptures is that where Adam and Eve fail, Jesus instead passes every test. It would be what you expect from the Son of God, right? What we find is that a desire to be righteous is the greatest antidote when we are led into temptation. Let me say that again, when we desire to be righteous, when what drives us is a life of freedom and choices and joy as we strive toward righteousness, well, this is the greatest medicine against temptation. Let’s read.

## **READ**

We know the story of Adam and Eve. One common presence in the temptation of Adam and Eve and the temptation of Jesus is the presence of the devil. Trust me I know the scholarship that attributes the serpent as being the devil only back to John Milton’s 17<sup>th</sup> century paradise lost, but we are going to stick with the populist approach of Adam and Eve being tempted by the

devil. So the devil serves, in some sense, in both with Adam and Eve and with Jesus as this secondary character who carries out a role that in some ways was allowed by God.

We begin with Adam and Eve in chapter 2 with Adam being given freedom and life and opportunity and relationship. Anything and everything that he could ever hope for. God doesn't begin by giving Adam a set of rules, he begins by telling him enjoy life in my garden, you can do anything and everything that you want. That is very different from seeing God placing Adam in the garden and the only thing he tells him is don't touch or eat that fruit. No, that was a secondary commandment: live life and enjoy it was his primary.

This is our lot as well. Think of where you are and who you are and your current reality. We have been given the opportunity to live in the breadbasket of the US, the most beautiful place this side of the rockies, and yet at some level we don't focus on the primary rule that God provides, enjoy your life, live it to fullest in relationship with me. We focus on that which we don't have and what we can't do which is so much smaller than what we do have and what God has provided.

For Adam and Eve, and for us, all that we would ever need and really all that we would ever want we are given. But that does not deter us from being attracted, tempted, by that which we think we don't have, or what we think we want and even fool ourselves into thinking that we actually need. Look at vs.6 and we see the temptation here boils down to three elements that Eve saw that she wanted that she thought she didn't have, or at least wanted to have in this time and in this place.

The tree was good for food. She already had that, but this was attractive to her. It was a delight to the eyes, she also had this, but this was also attractive as a component to temptation. It made you wise when it was eaten. This was something that she did not have and she thought she wanted and she thought would be of benefit to her even though she had never experienced it before. It is different, it is exciting, it is forbidden. All of these things leads her to be tempted and that is a familiar road, a very familiar road to our temptations. It is different, it is exciting, it is forbidden, but I have no idea what it is and I have no idea what impact on my life it will have. It leads me away from God, but I want it anyway.

Sound familiar? On face value it doesn't prove to be better, just different which makes us think that it is better. You know, we are not all attracted by the same things. Not all temptations are the same. Adam and Eve's temptations are theirs and Jesus' temptations are his and our temptations are ours. But while Adam and Eve and we fail when faced with these

temptations, Jesus, well, he is righteous and he shows us the way to righteousness even in the midst of these temptations.

Did Jesus know the temptation of a recovering alcoholic or drug user, the lonely divorcee or single young adult, the struggling business owner, the teenager who only wants to be accepted? The sins in which we might be tempted are different for each of us. Greed could lead to sin, lust could lead to sin, pride could lead to sin, power could lead to sin. The basic temptation boils down to treating God as less than God. We are tempted to mistrust God's readiness to empower us to face our temptations.

Let's look at Jesus' temptation. This Scripture follows directly after Jesus' baptism which we saw a few weeks ago on the Sunday that we celebrate the baptism of Jesus. At the end of his baptism the presence of God was felt as God proclaimed for everyone to hear: this is my son with whom I am well pleased. As God's son he is led into the wilderness by the Spirit in order to be tempted. We can spend a lot of time trying to figure out why is God sending his son out into the wilderness to be tempted. Is it a test, is it a witness to us. What is going on with this? It is a really difficult question, so we are going to skip it and avoid it and move onto the temptations which are much easier to quantify and explain.

The first thing that Jesus does as he prepares himself for his temptations is to take on a spiritual discipline. He fasts for 40 days. He doesn't create a program or gather a staff around him in order to overcome what comes next, he simply takes part in a time of solitude and fasting and prayer and just is. He doesn't do anything, he just *bees*. Two weekends ago we had our officer retreat and normally on these retreats I fill it with activity so that we can vision our future and pull together ad-hoc committees in order to address whatever programs we want to institute for the future of this church.

I love doing things to make this church a better reflection of the kingdom of God. But this year I was convicted to stop trying to do something and just *be*. As Carole Turano told us we are not human doings, we are human beings but we have such a hard time in just being. This goes to when we are faced with temptations, sometimes we try to do something when really I believe God calls us just to be in his presence, just be still and know that he is God. That is certainly what Jesus did in these spiritual disciplines to prepare for his temptation.

When we are faced with temptation, or even when we are overwhelmed which is a temptation to fall into fear and anxiety, we are called to do less and be more. It was a hard lesson for me to learn over this retreat, because I am so used to doing more and more and more.

I could go into Jesus temptation being a direct parallel to the time of the 40 years that the Israelites spent in the wilderness, but I don't think time will allow. Instead, I want to go the truth of Scripture that speaks to temptation in order to equip us to choose righteousness when we are tempted. Look at James 1:13 where we read we are not tempted by God. This is to discourage us from blaming the devil for our sin. When we are tempted it is not anyone else's fault but our own. The devil didn't make you do it, or your wife, or anyone else. We have been given everything that could lead us to act, if we chose, according to the will of God, but we choose something else because we can.

I Corinthians 10:13 we find a promise that we are able to handle the temptations in which we find ourselves. The reason why we are able to handle these temptations we find in II Corinthians 12:9 which tells us that God's grace is sufficient for each and every one of us. We don't need anything more because God desires us to live a life that is free, full of joy. Finally in Hebrews 4:15 we read that Jesus was tempted as we have been, he understands our current situation, whatever that may be, and he is our greatest ally and cheerleader as we look to live lives of righteousness in the midst of a tempting world.

We have life not because we eat, but because God wills that we have life and that life is bound only by freedom. Every week we pray in the Lord's prayer that we would not be led into temptation. This week let's live our lives as if we mean it. Amen.