

Temptation

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Preacher: Rev. Thomas Hinson

[0 : 00] Good morning. Welcome to Church of the Advent. If you are new here, my name is Dan Bielman. I'm an associate pastor here.

Our senior pastor, Tommy Hinson, is in town this weekend, but he is somewhere else. He and two other members of our congregation belong to the Institute for Cross-Cultural Ministry.

They belong to a cohort which is exploring ways to better welcome our neighbor, to love those different than us. So you can be praying for the three of them this weekend. They're hard at work. This morning, we are continuing in the book of Luke. Did you know we were in the book of Luke? We're in the book of Luke. We started actually at the Lessons in Carol service with the nativity passages from the book of Luke.

And we're continuing through the life of Jesus according to St. Luke. And we come to quite the epic passage.

[1 : 01] And before we dive into this passage that depicts the battle, that recounts the battle between Jesus and our great enemy, Satan, in the wilderness, I'd like to prepare us in two ways.

The first thing I'd like to do is to show you an icon. This icon is called the Christ Pantocrator, or Christ Almighty.

It is one of those common religious images in Orthodox Christianity. And it's one of the oldest. And this particular painting, this particular version of this icon, is the oldest surviving example of the Christ Pantocrator.

It's found at St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai Desert. You'll notice the Gospels in his left hand, and the sign of teaching made by his right.

Now, a curious feature of this icon is the face, which we can zoom in to. You'll notice the asymmetry there. One half representing the divine nature of Jesus, and the other half the human nature.

[2 : 09] Now, icons are meant to teach, to instill virtue, and to remind people looking at them of various things. This icon reminds us of Christ's two natures.

He is both fully God and fully man. We must remember this when we read about this epic battle between Satan and Jesus that we heard about in the book of Luke.

Now, it's easy to write off these temptations as really being temptations. I mean, they couldn't have been all that difficult. Jesus is fully God, after all. There's no way he was going to sin.

But he's also and completely, fully man. The writer of Hebrews states that he had to be made like his brothers in every way.

He didn't merely resemble humankind. He was, in every way, in all things, in all respects, fully human. With a fully human mind, and a fully human body, and fully human desires.

[3 : 16] Yet, without sin. So, when we read that he was tempted, he really was. Truly. Tempted. The second thing I'd like to do is some imaginative work.

Not imagine, like, things that aren't, like, fairy tales and fantasies and such. But the kind of imagination you use when you try and remember what color is your mother's eyes, right?

Human beings have the gift of imagination. Being able to see things with our mind's eye that we can't with our physical eyes. So, let's do that. Because Jesus was fully man, the writer to the Hebrews writes that we do not have a high priest who was unable to sympathize with our weaknesses.

But one who, in every respect, has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. So, if he can sympathize with us, I'd like to suggest that because he was fully human, we can sympathize with him, too.

In other words, because he was fully human, he probably stubbed his toe or banged his shin. He definitely got hungry. We can sympathize with those things.

[4 : 30] We can sympathize with missing a meal, right? Or missing a day of meals. That's reasonable. We can sympathize with maybe three days. How far can we extend that sympathy?

So, if you're comfortable with this, I'd like you to close your eyes. And just try and remember the hungriest you have ever been. Or a moment you were just really hungry.

Perhaps you were on an intentional fast. Perhaps you just skipped a couple of meals. How did you feel?

Do you remember feeling weak? Did you have a headache? Did you have any cravings you found difficult to resist?

Do you remember feeling impatient or moody? Do you remember it being very difficult to say no to something?

[5 : 44] Did you find it difficult to be good? Now imagine an extreme version of that. Jesus fasted 40 days.

It is rare but possible for a human to survive that long. He would have literally been dying, crippled by both hunger and the difficulty of saying no to temptation.

Do you ever remember having difficulty saying no to something while your body was weak? So he wasn't, you can open your eyes.

He wasn't immune to temptation. But quite the opposite. C.S. Lewis writes, A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means.

This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later.

[6 : 54] This is why bad people in one sense know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it.

And Christ, because he was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means.

So let's dive in. As we look at this passage, instead of looking at each temptation separately, and it's broken down quite nicely for a three-part sermon, right? Three temptations.

I will resist that temptation to do it that way. We're going to look at what these temptations had in common.

We're going to see how Jesus resisted temptation. And we're going to learn something about Jesus. So we're going to look at temptation, resisting temptation, and the person of Jesus Christ.

[7 : 53] Let's pray. O Lord God, grant your people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

And with pure hearts and minds, to follow you, the only God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen. Okay, let's look first at what all these temptations have in common. There's a few running threads. What is so tempting about temptation?

The first thing we notice is that Jesus was tempted to doubt God's word. Just before this account in chapter 3, verse 22, we read, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came from heaven.

You are my beloved son. With you I am well pleased. Jesus wastes, excuse me, and Satan wastes no time questioning those words.

[9 : 06] Chapter 4, verse 3, if you are the son of God. Did God really say that? Jesus, did the Father really say that to you? Did he really mean it?

Can you trust him? Are you sure you're the son of God? And Jesus heard this temptation all the way to the cross. One of the criminals who hanged by him said, are you not the Christ?

Save yourself and us. Are you not the son of God? Are you not the Christ? Those around the cross said, are you not the Christ? Save yourself if you're saving everybody else.

And now you get this too, don't you? You doubt God's words. You doubt what God says about you. I do. Dan, are you really a child of God?

Does he really delight in you? Does he really love him? Does he really love you? I mean, you really trust him?

[10 : 13] You trust what he says? Did he really say he'll never cast you away? And this has been the tempter's strategy from the very beginning of time.

To doubt God's word. In the Garden of Eden, he asks Eve, did God actually say, you shall not eat of any tree in the garden? Do you really trust God, Eve?

Now, if the tempter's not getting us to doubt God at his words, he's tempting us to misuse or mishear his words.

And the third temptation, we read in verse nine, and he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, if you are the son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, and then Satan quotes Psalm 91, 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. Satan lays the groundwork for temptation by getting us to doubt the words of God or by twisting the words of God.

[11 : 26] And then he tempts Jesus to ignore the will of the Father. Ignoring the will of the Father. Then he tells Jesus, turn these stones to bread. Remember how hungry Jesus is, right?

Dying. Literally, dying of hunger. In and of itself, it would not have been wrong to transform the stones to bread. Elseward, Jesus transforms water to wine.

But here, Satan is tempting Jesus to forego trusting in God for his provision. And to use his divine power to serve himself. The temptation appeared innocent, as it usually does, but it was in fact a spiritual temptation to sin because as the incarnate Son of God, Christ had come to do the will of the Father and God's will alone.

Nothing else. Christ was tempted to provide for his own material needs apart from the will of the Father. Furthermore, Jesus is tempted to force the will of the Father.

In the third temptation, he was to throw himself down and have God command his angels to bear him up. And Jesus responds by using the words of God in response, you shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.

[12 : 40] In other words, temptation is like that, right? We put ourselves in precarious positions and expect God to rescue us. I mean, an obvious example would be an alcoholic who walks through a liquor store and asks God for the strength to resist buying liquor.

He should not have been anywhere near the liquor store, right? A few people got together last night. I wasn't there. My wife was there celebrating Andre Vander Westhosen earning his master's degree and Ellen Vest told a pretty great story about a boa constrictor.

A woman who got a boa constrictor from a little baby boa and nurtured the boa, felt a connection to the boa constrictor and would sleep next to the boa constrictor and the woman know that the snake was, you know, feeling the feels too because it would like, you know, stretch out, you know, and cuddle up to her.

You know, over time, like, the snake got bigger and bigger and things didn't change and the woman talked to, I believe, a veterinarian or a zoologist or some kind of animal expert and told the person about the snake and the zoologist said, you have to get rid of that snake immediately.

What the snake is doing is sizing you up and every day of its life it's been sizing you up to see if it can eat you or not and one day it's going to be big enough and it will and this is what we do with temptation, right?

[14 : 20] We cuddle up to it. Now Snopes says, and Ellen pointed this out to me too, that that's not exactly a reptilian behavior but it is the behavior of temptation.

Like, we cuddle up to it, right, ignoring our peril and then when it's too late it devours us.

It devours us. We tempt God, we test Him by getting too close to temptation, too close to the guardrail instead of staying as far away as we can.

So lastly, after twisting the word of God and tempting Jesus not to follow His Father's will exclusively or to force the Father to act, Jesus was tempted by idolatry.

Now what do we know about idolatry? We know that we attempt to derive value and pleasure and worth and meaning and fulfillment from created things instead of our Creator.

[15 : 32] This is what Jesus was being tempted to do. He was being tempted by the great life, by all the kingdoms of the world and all their glories and all He had to do was to bow down.

You know, I don't know why He would have been tempted. First, the kingdoms really do ultimately belong to Him and second, why would He bow down to Satan?

But we know because it says so that He was tempted. Satan probably appearing as a beautiful giver of gifts.

Jesus tempted to idolatry but He resisted. He resisted unlike the nation of Israel. He resisted idolatry. And how did He resist?

So how did He resist temptation after being set up by the twisting of God's Word, the temptation to do His own will rather than the Father's and the temptation to idolatry?

[16:32] Well, we see from the outset and from start to finish that Jesus relied on the Holy Spirit. We read in chapter 3 that the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove.

And then in chapter 4, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for 40 days. Then after the temptations, Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee.

It's instructive, right? That the Son of God would rely on God. If He who was God relied on God, then how much more should we?

Yet how much do we rely on ourselves? When things get really hard, we, yeah, we rely on God. We have to. But all the rest of the time, we do rely on ourselves.

I do. I do. So much of what I do feels manageable. Getting up, out of bed, making breakfast, managing children, and greeting my wife, driving to work.

[17:35] everything seems, feels manageable, but I don't rely on the Holy Spirit. When I get nervous about playing music in public, and I do, every week, how much do I rely on my training or my instincts or my abilities instead of praying?

How about that? How much do I pray, Holy Spirit, would you guide me? Would you help me? Yeah, I understand as we are all understanding that so much needs to be done about justice when it comes to race and injustice.

And I feel like I need to conjure up the right things to say and the right things to do. And I'm concerned about how I appear on this issue instead of just saying, Holy Spirit, make me into the person that can have this conversation.

Holy Spirit, give me the kind of heart that listens. Holy Spirit, come. We see that Jesus relied on the Holy Spirit and he relied on the words that the Holy Spirit inspired.

He didn't try to out-clever Satan. He went right to Scripture and so should we. It's okay to ask what would Jesus do. Memorize Scripture, the more the better.

[19:06] The church throughout its history has recognized the need to respond to temptation with the words of God. St. Ambrose wrote, Therefore, the Lord first remitted the debt of the ancient wrong in order that having shaken off the yoke of captivity, we may learn to overcome our faults with the help of the Scriptures.

Isaac Watts wrote that Scripture is the judge that ends all strife where wit and reason fail. Scripture is the guide to everlasting life through all this gloomy veil.

O may thy counsels, thy Scripture, mighty God, my roving feet command, nor I forsake that happy road that leads to thy right hand.

So we looked at temptation, how Satan twists the words of God and how he gets us to do our own will and not the will of the Father's.

And we learned about how to resist temptation, about yielding to the Holy Spirit, relying on the words of Scripture. So let's look at Jesus himself.

[20:24] Let's see Jesus here. We're going to see three things about Jesus. The first is that Jesus is the true Israel.

Just as Israel was led out of captivity through the waters of the Red Sea and followed the pillar of fire and was led by the pillar for 40 years in the wilderness.

So Jesus was led through the waters of baptism, led by the Holy Spirit for 40 days in the desert.

Israel complained to God about God's provision of manna, but Jesus trusted God to provide for him. Israel wasted no time committing idolatry in the desert, fashioning a golden calf and bowing down to it, but Jesus forsook the kingdoms and glories of the world to obey his Father alone.

Israel tested God demanding the Lord provide water at Massa and Moriah, but Jesus would not put his Father to the test. You see, Jesus succeeded where Israel failed.

[21:37] Jesus is the true Israel. We learn that Jesus is the true Messiah. The Messiah in Jesus' day was expected to turn manna into bread, just as Jesus was tempted to do.

The Messiah was expected to bring the kingdoms of the world under Israel's subjection, just as Jesus was tempted to do. And the Messiah was expected to perform a wonder, like flying around like Neo from the Matrix through the streets of Jerusalem, just as Jesus was tempted to do, but

Jesus knew that his road as Messiah was not that bringing glory to himself, but first walking the road of suffering all the way to the cross.

This was the road of the true Messiah. And we learn that Jesus is the true Son of God. The very first Son of God, Adam, he failed in the garden.

But Jesus resisted temptation in the wilderness. The good news for us is that though we inherit the guilt of the first Adam, we are imputed the righteousness of the second Adam, Jesus.

Listen, perhaps this sounds like really academic at this point. It is beautiful, I think, how all these threads of Scripture just dramatically come together in this passage about Jesus and Satan in the wilderness.

[23 : 02] But this means something for us very personally. We've talked a lot about temptation, how to resist it, and you might be thinking, oh, I'm the guy from the C.S. Lewis quote that gives in after five minutes.

Actually, that would be giving me a lot of credit, usually five seconds. And does God really love me? I give in all the time. Surely, he's given up on me. Well, on one hand, it's worse than you think. You are actually more sinful than you could ever possibly imagine, more given to temptation than you could ever fear.

fear. The good news is that the Father loves you more than you can dare to dream. Because he was the true Adam, because he was the second Adam and the true Son of God, all of that obedience he did in the desert, resisting for 40 days, resisting Satan, all the suffering, all the righteousness that he had, all the favor that he got from the Father when the Father pronounced, you are my son, with you I am well pleased.

[24 : 28] He gives to you. It is yours through union with him. So when he looks on you, he says, you are my daughter, with you I am well pleased. You are my son, with you I am well pleased.

Yeah, you gave in after five seconds. You are my son, with whom I am well pleased. And he went to the cross so all the punishment and sin that is yours is now given to Jesus.

He takes that on himself as one who was fully God, able to bear the sins of the world on his back. For you, Jesus, fully obeyed the will of his Father.

For you, Jesus chose the road of suffering and the cross. And for you, Jesus rose from the dead. And he gives new life and he gives you the Holy Spirit that you can now live for him.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Let's pray. Lord, we do confess, we give in so quickly, so easily.

[25 : 43] Lord, we need your Holy Spirit. Lord, we need your Holy Spirit. So Holy Spirit, come. Holy Spirit, fill us. Holy Spirit, give us your power to resist, to say no to the things that tempt us, to say yes to our Father.

Holy Spirit, would you please do as you are promised to do and remind us today as we come to your table that we indeed are your adopted, the Father's adopted sons and daughters.

Jesus, thank you for obeying for us. thank you. Amen.