“THE KING TEMPTED”

[Bible study lesson by Chris Mountain, FBC Rockwall TX, 12-27-15]

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11.

Let me set the stage for today’s lesson. The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness immediately follows Jesus baptism in the Jordan River. Matthew concludes Chapter 3 with words spoken by God the Father in a voice out of the heavens: “This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased.” To this point Jesus has yet to preach any sermons or perform any miracles. In fact, all we know about Jesus as He begins His public ministry is found in the words of Luke 2:52: “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.” The Father is pleased with His Son because of who He is – His character, His obedience. Then Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit into the Judean wilderness…

I think it is important before we get into the text to distinguish between temptation and testing (or trials). They are different. God does not tempt us but God does test us. Temptation is being enticed or allured to sin. The tempter is Satan, the devil. God will not tempt us with sin because God is by His very nature good and no evil is found in Him. James 1:13-14 says, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.” So temptation is done by Satan and he targets our own internal desires. Why does Satan tempt us? He wants to try and thwart God’s perfect plan and purpose for our life or the lives of others. First Peter 5:8 tells us, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour…[v 9] Resist him, firm in your faith…”

Testing, on the other hand, is God’s way of spiritually maturing us, of growing us in our faith. Again, James provides us with insight into God’s purpose for testing. James 1:2-4 says, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” First Peter 1:6-7 says, “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

So God has a purpose for the trials, the tests that He allows into our life. Recall that God tested Abraham; He tested the Israelites in the wilderness, He tests us also. Jesus Himself (as we will see in today’s lesson) was tempted, but as Hebrews 4:15 reminds us: “…in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” Sometimes God will test us by allowing Satan to tempt us. However, we have this promise from 1 Corinthians 10:13: “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man [everyone is tempted]. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” So, with the Holy Spirit’s power, we Christians have the ability to resist temptation. We do not have to sin.

READ Matthew 4:1-2. We are not told in this passage the purpose for the Holy Spirit leading Jesus into the wilderness nor why He was directed to fast for forty days and forty nights. One commentary suggests (and I tend to agree) that it was for the purpose of focusing upon His mission and humbling Himself before the Father. That makes a lot of sense because Jesus is about to embark on His public ministry. So, what was Jesus mission?

READ passages summarizing Jesus’ mission (this is placed at the end of the lesson entitled “JESUS MISSION”).

And so it is that the Judean wilderness is God’s appointed place for Jesus to avoid worldly distractions and devote His full attention to prayer and meditation…to focus on His divine mission.

And just to prove that Jesus was human Matthew tells us that He became hungry. And at that point here comes the tempter, Satan…

READ Matthew 4:3-4. What was the temptation? Was it to satisfy Jesus’ hunger? After all, He’s been fasting for forty days, so why not eat? No, it’s not just about Jesus satisfying a physical appetite. Satan is tempting Jesus to take care of His own needs, to provide His own food miraculously because He is hungry rather than allowing God to supply His needs in God’s own time and in God’s own way. Satan is tempting Christ to doubt His Father’s sufficiency. Isn’t that the same doubt that the children of Israel had in their wilderness experience? That’s why Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3. In that passage Moses is reminding the people that it wasn’t the manna that was keeping them alive, but it was God and His power. God had miraculously provided manna for the people who were suffering from hunger. God had a purpose for this people and He wasn’t going to let them die in the wilderness. In the same way Jesus knows that His Father will in His time provide food for Him. He isn’t going to let Jesus die out there. But, unlike the people of Israel, Jesus never doubts God’s sufficiency.

Later, in His Sermon on the Mount Jesus would teach this truth in Matthew 6:33: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things [your physical needs] will be added to you.”

READ Matthew 4:5-7. Where is the pinnacle of temple? It is quite possibly the highest drop off point which would be at SE corner of temple mount. At this point it would have been about a 200 ft plus drop straight down into the Kidron Valley.

So what is the temptation here? “OK, Jesus, You say You trust God? Prove it! Jump off the temple and God will catch you.” Satan even quotes Scripture now to Jesus – straight out of Psalm 91. Here’s a passage that speaks to how God will send His angels to protect His people. People often quote scripture out of context to suit their own purposes. And that’s what Satan does here. Psalm 91 is a wonderful psalm about trusting God. It speaks to God’s sovereign protection of His people from the many dangers that they face in this world. But what Satan does here is presumptuous. He is creating a peril that does not exist and then putting God to the test. “Hey, God promises that He’ll catch you!” Psalm 19:13 says, “Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins…” Jesus sees right through Satan’s ploy and He quotes from Deuteronomy 6:16. Again it’s a passage from the Israelites wilderness experience when they grumbled against God and wanted to kill Moses – because they were thirsty. Well, God in His grace did supply them with water from a rock, but He was disappointed in His people for testing Him, not having faith in Him to take care of them.

Satan is tempting Christ to try to manipulate God – to save Jesus unnecessarily – almost to perform a magic trick. This is the sin of presumption. I see a definite tension between these first two temptations. On the one hand, trust God to provide. But on the other hand, don’t be presumptuous about His care and grace. Don’t tempt God with your own plans and desires. We have a responsibility to do the right thing – not to go get ourselves in trouble then expect God to come along and bail us out.

READ Matthew 4:8-10. So, what’s the temptation? You’ve heard the expression “selling your soul to the devil.” This is probably where it comes from. Satan tells Jesus: “Just bow down and worship me and ALL OF THIS can be yours! Satan, as the ruler of this world (by the way, Jesus acknowledges this in John 12:31, 14:30 and 16:11) can give people kingdoms, possessions, glory, power and prestige. Could Satan actually deliver all of this to Jesus? Well, if Satan could not then Jesus would have known that and this would not have been a temptation at all. Some of the most evil people in the world’s history have been the most prosperous and powerful. We talked about Herod the Great last week, one of many examples.

Think about all that Jesus could have avoided had He worshipped Satan. And Jesus probably was fully aware of all this. He wouldn’t have had to keep on living in this dry, hot, dusty place, under oppressive Roman occupation, suffering from hunger and thirst, dealing with disobedient disciples, arguing with faithless Pharisees who wanted to kill Him, and all those needy, needy people out there who followed Him around just to see another miracle. If Jesus would just bow down to Satan He would not have to go through the severe beating and blood loss, the crown of thorns thrust into His skull, being nailed to the cross as a common criminal, being ridiculed and abused by the Roman soldiers, or the derision and mockery of the crowd. Jesus would not have to die! He could have had all this world has to offer – been crowned KING OF THE WORLD.

But that was NOT God’s will. It was not the plan. No God’s will was for Jesus to go through all of that so that ultimately He could accomplish His mission as Savior of the world (what we talked about earlier). In the end Philippians 2:9-11 says: “Therefore God has highly exalted Him [Jesus] and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” In Revelation 19 He will be the KING OF KINGS and LORD OF LORDS. No Satan, there are no shortcuts in God’s economy. The ends do NOT justify the means.

So Jesus tells Satan, “Get out of here!” READ Matthew 4:11. Satan leaves, for a while anyway. He’ll be back later. James 4:7 says, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” Which is precisely what Jesus did. He submitted Himself to His Father and the Father’s will for His life, and Satan ran away. It was at that point that God sends the angels to minister to Jesus. The angels met His needs and I believe they provided Him food and they worshipped Him.

By way of personal application consider these words from First John 2:15-16: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.”

In our lesson today these were Satan’s three points of attack. “Fulfill your hunger now. You can do it. You deserve it!” = the desires of the flesh; “Throw yourself down. God will catch you. He won’t let you die. You are on an important mission!” = pride of life. “Look at all of this? Just observe all its beauty. This can all be yours!” = desires of the eyes. Do you love the world? Do you love yourself? Do you love God? Who do you love the most? The answer to those questions will come in times of testing.

JESUS MISSION

Why did Jesus come? What was His mission?

To do His Father’s will…

Luke 2:49 NKJV: “Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” (Jesus’ reply to His earthly parents at age 12 when they found Him teaching in the temple)

John 4:33-34: So the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought Him something to eat?” Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His work.”

John 5:30: “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and My judgment is just, because I seek not My own will but the will of Him who sent Me.”

John 6:38: For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me.

John 7:28-29: So Jesus proclaimed, as He taught in the temple, “You know Me, and you know where I come from. But I have not come of My own accord. He who sent Me is true, and Him you do not know. I know Him, for I come from Him, and He sent Me.”

John 8:42: Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of My own accord, but He sent Me.

Luke 22:42: “Yet no My will, but Thine be done” (Jesus’ prayer to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane)

And what was His Father’s will? The redemption of sinful mankind…

Matthew 1:21: She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

John 3:16-17: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.

John 10:10: The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Luke 19:10: For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Matthew 20:28: even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

Romans 5:8: but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1 John 4:10: In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. [the Perfect One who satisfied God’s holy anger against sin, the perfect sacrifice]

1 John 4:14: And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world.