

“SATAN’S ATTACK ON JESUS: THIRD TEMPTATION.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Matthew 4:1-11

Prayer: Holy Father, we thank you for this modern miracle of live-streaming making it possible for all of us to gather around the preaching of your Word. But I pray for an old miracle, the miracle of making blind eyes to see, deaf ears to hear and hard hearts to be plowed to receive good seed fruitfully, for your glory and our spiritual benefit and blessing. In Jesus name, Amen.

Introduction.

Let me remind us where we are in our Lenten series since we took a break from it last week and the week before seems like a two months ago with all we have been going through.

We have been looking at Satan’s attack on Jesus through three temptations in the wilderness. After 40 days of fasting, Satan goes straight for Jesus’ stomach and urges him to turn some stones into bread. After all the Son of God has the power and certainly should not have to suffer and go starving.

But Jesus answers, “Man shall not live by toilet paper alone, but by the Word of God.” That’s my loose translation of the Greek. But actually it isn’t so far off. We don’t live by what we think we need most, we live by what God says we need most, the substance of His Word.

Then Satan decided to tempt Jesus with Scripture and quoted from Psalm 91 to get Jesus to jump off the church steeple and show His glory when a legion of God’s angels rush down to save Him and keep Him from suffering.

But Jesus has some better verses about not being tempted to tempt God.

So third time is charm, right? Satan pulls out all the stops, loads both barrels, pushes all the chips in. This is the big one.

Matthew 4:8-9

Again. Again. Satan is unrelenting. It is never one and done with him.

Notice he leads Jesus higher and higher, first the stones on the ground in the wilderness, then to the pinnacle of the temple and now the top of a very high mountain.

If you have ever wrestled with temptation you know how it can build until it feels like resistance is futile. You start to think it would just be better to give in and get it over with so you can start over and move on.

The worst temptation is saved for last, all the kingdoms of the world and all their glory, in exchange for a little Satan worship. When we are being tempted we must be prepared for the worst. Satan never plays fair and he never lightens up on us.

Matthew 4:9 “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

How can Satan say such a thing? Don't we sing, This is My Father's World, and don't we recite Psalm 24, “The earth is the Lord's and the fullness of it.”

Where does Satan get off saying this?

Scripture affirms Satan is the “god of this age” (II Corinthians 4:4) and in I John 5 19, “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” In Ephesians we know this world follows the prince of the power of the air (2:2) and that there are rulers, authorities, cosmic powers over this present darkness, and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12).

Satan has been given a certain power and authority over all the earth. He is a ruler in this world. But he is a deceiver. He is only speaking half-truths when he offers to give to Jesus the kingdoms of the world.

As when Satan told Eve if she ate of the tree she would be like God, so again he deceives, I will give you all the kingdoms in all their glory.

Satan always over promises and under delivers. Know that about him, remember that in the face of every temptation. He promises what he has no real power to give. It is smoke and mirrors.

What did he show Jesus? Great kingdoms and empires, great palaces glittering with gold, great kings and queens robed in splendor, great courts and thrones, great entourages of servants, great buildings and great cities and states, and all the wealth and pomp and circumstance that attends such things.

It would be enough to stir up anyone's interest, and admiration and desire. Who wouldn't find some appeal to living in Downton Abby or the Bachman mansion on H Street?

Sin begins with the eye, it did for Eve, the fruit looked good for food and pleasing to the eye. David was ensnared by his eyes.

Every commercial and advertisement is meant to do that to us.

First we see, then we covet or desire, then we take and sin.

Sin presents us something from the world, something that appeals to our flesh.

Kingdoms without suffering.

But Satan is up to something more insidious than just hoping Jesus will be attracted to the splendor and glory of the kingdoms of the earth. Satan is offering the kingdoms of the world without suffering. There is a school called the School of Suffering and Satan is trying to get Jesus to skip school.

Satan must know the Son of God must suffer in order to receive His glory and His kingdom. Satan has read the OT, and knows the prophets have said it was necessary that the Christ should suffer and then enter into his glory (Luke 24:26).

He is trying to derail God's plan by offering Jesus glory without a cross.

Think about it, Jesus. No weeping over Jerusalem, no sweating drops of blood in Gethsemane, no shameful mocking and spitting, no cat of nine tails ripping open His back, no nails, no crown of thorns, no "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me."

Here is the world being handed to Jesus on a silver platter. Your king is coming. You can have Palm Sunday without Good Friday.

This is a bargain, a really cheap price, a short cut to your kingdom and glory.

Have you ever bought something cheap and later regretted it?

Have you ever tried to cut corners or take a short cut only to have it be worse?

Have you ever not studied hoping to still pass the test and then fail?

God has opened His School of Suffering and we are all in class.

One of my sons posted on his social media, "I wish I was in school so now I wouldn't have to go to school."

I heard this week that we are getting real close to a breakthrough for a cure for the virus, but it's not coming from the scientist, it's coming from moms with kids at home.

It is ironic that when God opened His present school of suffering, all the schools in the world closed. God must want our undivided attention.

Like all schools there are different kinds of students. Some sit in the back of class trying to get by with as little as possible and not pay attention. Others sit up front, pay attention and when they don't understand something they even raise their hand and ask questions.

As I said last week, God is up to something and it is very important. He is disrupting our lives to do a deeply spiritual work in our hearts and souls and in the soul of our nation? This is a call to serious repentance, to dying to ourselves and our idols. Suffering is God's path to call us out

of complacency, to stop taking our souls for granted, to show us our sins and our idols, to bring about spiritual growth and draw us nearer to Him.

Just think about how all of us took our gathering for corporate worship totally for granted.

The best lessons, the most life changing lessons, grow out of the soil of hardship and affliction. It humbles us, teaches us dependence, deepens our prayer, strips away the dross. Jesus learned obedience in the school of suffering and the servant is not above the master.

But here is the danger. Satan is right here tempting us to skip class, to not pay attention, to grumble and complain, to be that kid who asks, “do we have to know this stuff?”, that kid who is just waiting for the bell to ring so it will be over.

How many of us would not be tempted to take a short cut to avoid suffering? If a short cut around this whole coronavirus thing were offered, would we be willing to do anything to get over it quickly or avoid it all together?

How many of us are ready for all of this craziness and nonsense to be over so we can get back to our normal easy lives? How many of us are having the idols and addictions of our hearts revealed, our love of comfort, ease, health, wealth, security, entertainment, sports, shopping, eating out?

Worship me.

We have a worship problem, we have become soft, at ease with our little gods and idols, things we put before God.

Satan puts the promise first, before any small print, before the demand.

One wonders if after the wonderful glittering promise, Satan just whispers the caveat, if. He tries to make the promise the primary clause and put the demand hidden away in the subordinate clause.

Just worship me once, just one time, no more. Just bend one knee. Just one small sin, that's it.

In the Roman empire Christians would be brought before the Emperor and told just touch the censer and they could avoid persecution. Just make that little show of allegiance, of loyalty to the crown. It's just a small sin and you will live.

Isn't that what every sin is, just a token bending of the knee to Satan, just a little show of allegiance, robbing God and giving to Satan?

The truth be told this final and greatest temptation is the one the people of God have fallen for the most. What sin stands out more prominently in the OT than idolatry, whoring after other

gods? And it is our greatest sin. Our hearts are idol factories and we are always giving to things what belongs to God.

Matthew 4:10-11.

Matthew 4:10-11 Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”

11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

Jesus says be gone. Get thee behind me, Satan. For it is written.

What is Jesus doing? He is keeping God in the center, He is putting Himself aside. It doesn't matter what looks good, what might be nice. It only matters what God says.

Keep God in the center of every conversation with Satan, in the center of every temptation. Don't lose sight of the center. The reason we fall for temptations is because we forget God.

Satan always tries to get us to set our minds on the things of man rather than on the things of God (Matthew 16:23).

Notice how we are doing in this current crisis. Does fear or anxiety or worry creep into our minds easily? Are we well down that path before we start to try to rein it in and then we have a hard go of it?

Do we not wish we had more of the Word in us in a time like this? Would it not guard our hearts and minds better in the daily onslaught of the words of man?

Psalm 119:11 I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

God's school has a text book and it has all the answers in it.

Do we have Scripture at the ready, as a sure defense?

Over the decades of being in various schools of suffering, Phama and I have collected over 50 Scripture passages as our defense against fear, anxiety, worry, doubt. If you would like a copy of this booklet email or text me and I will send you an attachment in email, or we can mail you a copy.

It is our spiritual inhaler helping us breathe again.

We can't fight the good fight of the faith if we don't have the weapons of our faith, most importantly the sword of the Spirit, the double edged Word of God. We can't just have a Bible we need to know our Bible, to have ready access to the truth for any given situation.

Tomorrow morning there will be a devotional in your email with Scripture and a hymn and prayer. The hymn is all seven original verses of the great hymn, How Firm a Foundation, based in part on Isaiah 43.

Read that slowly and reflect on the truth and let it wash over your soul and cleanse you of all fear and anxiety, all temptation to be afraid and anxious.

Angels ministered to Jesus.

Notice something that happens at the end this school of temptation, the graduation ceremony. The two things Jesus refused from Satan's hand, He gets from God's hand. He refused to make bread for Himself at Satan's tempting and He refused to jump and make angels save Him. And now He gets angels who feed Him.

He waited for God and God's will and God's timing, He didn't force things or take matters into His own hands.

And in time He will have the kingdoms of the world, after He has obediently suffered, after the cross, when He is seated on His throne.

What is the Biblical principle here?

Matthew 6:33 Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.

We are tempted to usurp, to be impatient, to run ahead, to take matters into our own hands, to not wait upon the Lord, who will give us all the good things we need in due time.

Implications and Application.

Mark 14:38 Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

What are the temptations surrounding you right now? Fear, anxiety, stress, money worries, job, future, your plans, your health?

The good news in this school of suffering is Jesus is a classmate. Because Jesus suffered and was tempted He is able to help us who are tempted. Because Jesus was tempted, we are never alone in our temptation. Jesus said no to Satan and yes to the cross to show us His love for us. Let's call on Him and rely on Him and depend on Him and seek Him and His grace and peace and power.

When we are tempted by greed, pride, lust, envy, revenge, anger, realize it is Satan and Jesus has already defeated Satan, so the battle is half won. Call on Jesus and His victory is yours.

Hebrews 4:15-16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need.