

***“‘It is Written’ vs. ‘If’”***

(Matthew 4:1-11)

The First Sunday in Lent: March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014

Saint Paul's Lutheran Church of Irvine

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Dear Christian friends, we are constantly encouraged to go along with the crowd and treat our advanced technological and entertainment-oriented cultural milieu as the most important reality and to treat what God teaches is especially real as myth, fable, or legend. The biblical teaching of the devil is one of the prime examples of what I'm speaking of. Even many so-called Christian teachers suggest that the idea of a personal and powerful fallen angel is archaic, out-dated, and blindly medieval. They would like us to think that the devil is merely a symbol of the evil things that men do and/or of the terrible tragedies that occur that cause us to suffer like the tsunamis and earthquakes that cause tangible devastation. Ironically to suggest that the devil is a figment of the imagination is the work of the devil. You might think that he derives much pleasure to be believed in, but in fact he is absolutely delighted when you don't take him seriously, because it is then that he can wreak the most havoc in your life. Why would you ever defend yourself against an adversary that you are convinced is completely unreal? Indeed, you would never waste your time or energy and as a result, the adversary would know that you are for him a sitting duck.

Matthew 4:1-11 is on the devil attacking Christ through temptation. The scene reminds immediately of Genesis 3 when the devil tempted Eve and through her, caused Adam to fall. The devil had been successful in defeating the first Adam and as a result, all of us have fallen to sin (Romans 5); when Christ came, he was ready to attack the second Adam Christ. He was aware that the Heavenly Father had announced Christ at His baptism that He was the Son of God. Now, the devil was determined to defeat this Jesus in order to frustrate His mission to save us.

Which is to say, that if you and I do not believe that the devil is real, then we might just as well cut to the chase and admit what we are really saying: “since I reject the reality of Satan, I also reject the truth of God's Word in general and as

a result, I reject Christ. Then all of my religiosity and spirituality is about my feeling good through a self-generated mentality in order to cope with this thing called life.” In this regard, we verify Marx and join in the opiate of the masses. But as for this teaching on the devil, “come on, let’s get real and let’s live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” And again whenever we do this, we pull the wool over our eyes and choose to ignore the fantastic warnings contained in the Bible against the adversary who is content to destroy your faith, your family, and every part of your true foundation that is in Christ.

In Matthew 4, we are taught that this evil one has three different names or titles:

From verse 1: He is called “the devil.” The word “devil” means “slanderer”.

From verse 2: He is called “the tempter.”

From verse 10: He is called “Satan.” The word “Satan” means “adversary”.

The Hebrew term “Satan”/adversary is understood in the sense of a courtroom accuser. Similarly, the Greek term “devil” comes from a verb meaning “bring charges with hostile intent.” (The Lutheran Study Bible, p. 2219). We get a feel for what He does in Revelation chapter 12, verses 10-12:

***“<sup>10</sup>And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. <sup>11</sup>And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. <sup>12</sup>Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!’”***

Treat him seriously dear Christians. The attacks against our bodies, our minds, our emotions, and especially our spirits come from the devil who employs many means. He uses illness, calamity, frustration, anger, distrust, earthquakes, threats to our business, threats to our marriages, nightmares, migraines, worry, fear, shame, lust, guilt, etc. etc. so that we would be accused just as he accused Christ. In essence, he was trying to get Jesus to contradict his true identity as the

Son of God, and you can bet your bottom dollar that he is trying to get you to reject your true identity as one for whom Christ lived, and died, and rose, and calls to repentance and faith, and a holy life that serves the Living God. And this adversary will not rest from his accusations against you until the day you die. And his greatest hope is that you will die without faith in Jesus Christ as a result of his accusations that are designed to undermine faith.

But thanks be to God dear Christian, that this Gospel from Saint Matthew is about the reason for you to be 100% confident that Christ is for you and now chooses to dwell in you through Holy Baptism by His life, death, and resurrection, so that not even death can scathe you.

Jesus has come. Jesus was and is and will be your Champion. And it is not only through His death and resurrection, and His current intercession for you at the right hand of God that you are saved, but it was also through His faithful obedience to the Heavenly Father when He permitted Himself to go out into the wilderness where He was alone and without any supports of any kind to face the temptation of the devil -- not for Himself -- but for you, in your stead, in your place, as your substitute, as your representative. He faced the devil to defeat the power of his temptations against you and even in the wilderness Jesus was already fulfilling the first Gospel promise in Genesis 3:15: ***“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”*** “The difference in the degree of injury inflicted [depends on]...the differing parts of the body being struck.” (TLSB, 20) Jesus struck the head of the devil and to strike the head is to bring defeat. That is, in the wilderness while resisting Satan’s temptation, Jesus was defeating this one who threatens you and divesting him of his power.

Temptation or testing in and of itself is not inherently sinful or evil or wicked; the word used here is essentially neutral, but it is put into the context of evil when the temptation comes from the devil, because whereas God uses tests always to bless us and refine us in the saving faith, the devil uses tests to draw us from God and to cause us to fall. And this is his *modus operandi*: his goal is to -- in some form or fashion – get you to take your eyes off of Jesus Christ your champion and to put your trust in something else. But Saint James says this to you and to me as we live in the Lord Jesus Christ in James 4:7:

***“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”***

Martin Luther elaborated on this theme on how to properly resist the temptations of the devil: *“...when, I say, he comes to you and accuses you not only of failing to do anything good but of transgressing against the Law of God, then you must say: ‘You are troubling me with the memory of past sins; in addition, you are telling me that I have not done anything good. This does not concern me. For if I either trusted in my performance of good works or lost my trust because I failed to perform them, in either case Christ would be of no avail to me. Therefore whether you base your objections to me on my sins or on my good works, I do not care; for I put both of them out of sight and depend only on the freedom for which Christ has set me free.’”* (Luther, LW, American Edition, Vol. 27, 11)

When you are accused, then run to Jesus and see how He defeated every temptation for you: First, the devil tempted Jesus in regard to the needs of the body. Jesus was hungry. The devil is ready to exploit in regard to the thing in this life that we do not have. He says in essence, “Where is your God? Where is He when you need Him the most...look, you are sorely and severely lacking!” What happens when everything is taken away in an instant? Everything gone?! “Where is your God?” the devil says. And it is when we are in dire need that we are tempted to give up our faith in God. This is the first major kind of temptation. So the devil says, “IF”... “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” (v 3). And he says to you, “IF”...if you are really smart focus on your basic needs, you don’t have time for God. And you will be so worried and concerned about the needs of your body, you will neglect faith and you will deny Christ. Jesus would not stand for this, so He spoke: ***“It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”*** (v 4) Jesus wasn’t denying the importance food, house, clothing, job, etc., but He was saying that first things first...it is the Word of Christ that truly gives life, so He also says, ***“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all of these things will be added to you.”*** (Matt 6:33) And how do you seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness? Right here, in the Word of Christ.

“Fine!” the devil said, “so you want to get all spiritual on me do you? Have it your way!” So the devil took Christ to the pinnacle of the temple. That is, the devil took Jesus to church, to the holy place and then the devil used the Holy Bible

as he quoted the Scripture from Psalm 91, but notice that he left out some key words from the Psalm at verse 11, namely *“to guard you in all your ways.”* What does this mean? If the devil can’t get you to give up your faith while you suffer bodily needs, then he will try to get you to go astray in your faith. He will attack you through the misinterpretation and misapplication of God’s Word. Here, he wanted Jesus to test God. He wanted Jesus to take pride in His spiritual power. And this is what He does to us. Take comfort, take confidence, not on Jesus and His Word, but on your spiritual insight, your discipline, your wisdom, your prayer life, your service, your religion, your spirituality, your visions, your dreams, your words even if you take the Bible out of context or get creative with its interpretation...take comfort in these if they make you look good. But what Jesus saw was that the rest of Psalm 91 that the devil left out was about staying in the ways of God, according to His Word, not adding, not subtracting, not getting creative, but just sticking to the Word of God. So Jesus struck back and said it again, *“... **IT IS WRITTEN**, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”* (v 7)

The devil struck out in trying to get Jesus to give in through physical need, and struck out in trying to get Jesus to give in through spiritual pride, so what was left? It is what Pastor Senkbeil describes in his book *Dying to Live*: *“Not long ago people found happiness even when they had little or no pleasure. Happiness was viewed not as an end in itself, but as a by-product of relationships forged on the anvil of family, friends, and vocation. Now, however, the focus seems to have changed. Thomas Jefferson wrote of the right to ‘the pursuit of happiness.’ Americans at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century seem blind to this conditional view of happiness. We have rewritten the Declaration of Independence; we now see happiness as an inherent right. And we have also redefined happiness. No longer is it the result of relationships and work. We demand happiness. We want it now, and we want it on our terms and according to our own definition: personal pleasure.”* (17)

The devil offered Jesus every pleasure. He went from the needs of the body, to the pride of the spirit, to the lust of the flesh. This temptation was about temporal honor and power; it was about lust, joy, riches, favor, and of course, pleasure. The devil said to Christ, *“**All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.**”* (v 9) To which Jesus answered: *“**Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’”*** (v 10) Did you hear the words again? Jesus said, *“**IT IS WRITTEN.**”* For us, Christ, the

Incarnate Word used the Written Word to defeat the temptations of the devil. This was the victory that has been given to you...He beat the devil for you.

But how do you abide in this victory of Christ, especially when the devil does not stop with his "if's": "if you want -- first and foremost -- things for your body and life; if you want to be a very spiritual person on your own terms; if you want to have all the pleasures your heart desires, then follow me," says the adversary. And after-all, these are exactly all of the things our sinful flesh wants, but the Lord has not been idle while you have been attacked. He took these "if's" presented to you and has overcome them with "it is written." This Word of Christ has covered you with the victory of Christ, washed in Holy Baptism; filled with His Word into your ears into your hearts and minds; fed by His Body and Blood in Holy Communion. The "It is Written" of Christ covers the "if's" of the devil...the Word that created the heavens and the earth is more powerful than any propositional "if"...the power of God in the Word defeats the proposals of the father of lies. Now what is true of you is not based on "if," it is based on fact; it is based on truth. It is written that you, baptized one, are in Christ. It is written, your sins are washed away. It is written, you are God's new creation. It is written, Jesus is your Savior. It is written, no one can take you out of Jesus' hand. It is written, nothing shall separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. It is written, the victory is yours.