LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION

Luke 4.1-13  Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted[a] by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

3 The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” 4 Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’”[b]

5 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And he said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.” 7 If you worship me, it will all be yours.” 8 Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’[c]

9 The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here.” 10 For it is written: “‘He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; 11 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”[d] 12 Jesus answered, “It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”[e]

13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Dear Friends in Christ,

“Lead us not into temptation” we pray in the Lord’s Prayer. Martin Luther, the great church reformer, could succinctly explain things. He says that this request means that “God surely tempts no one to sin, but we pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us or lead us into false belief, despair, and other great and shameful sins; and though we are tempted by them, we pray that we may overcome and win the victory.”

Today’s gospel lesson, the account of Jesus being tempted by Satan in the wilderness, is the perfect example of how God answers that request. What God did for Jesus then is what he does for us now.

I

Now, we may wonder, if God does not lead us into temptation, why did the Holy Spirit lead Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan for forty days? The answer is that the Holy Spirit did not lead Jesus out there to get Jesus to sin. He led Jesus out there to give him the opportunity to do what was right. That’s a good way for us to view every temptation we face, too. Whenever Satan, the world or our own sinful desires try to get us to sin, at that very same time God is giving us the opportunity to do what is right! Always keep that truth in mind- every temptation is our chance to do what is good and right.

Let’s look at the temptation Satan presented to an extremely hungry Jesus. Since Satan is the father of lies and can only speak with lies and deceit, we must ask, “What was Satan trying to deceive Jesus into doing? What was the lie here?” Certainly it was no sin for Jesus to eat. In fact, Jesus had not eaten for forty days. His human body was truly suffering! If he continued that way he would die as any of us would. The mere act of turning stones into bread to provide food is not evil any more than
miraculously feeding five-thousand people, including himself, from a little basket of food. So what was the deceit here? What was the lie?

The deceit was this: “Turn those stones into bread to assure yourself that you are the Son of God.” Had Jesus done that, Satan could have said, “Oh, so you had your doubts, huh?” The truth was that Jesus did not need to prove to himself that he is the Almighty Son of God. Satan knows that if he can get someone to do what he says, no matter how harmless it may seem at first, he then has an open door to get the person to do whatever he says. He did that to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Unfortunately he does that to you and me. But he could not do it to Jesus.

Had Jesus turned stones into bread for himself he would have failed in being our Substitute under God’s law. As our Substitute, Jesus was to put his full trust in God for all his needs for body and life. He would have cheated and thus failed to do God’s will and we would have no Savior. Satan would have won and we would be damned forever.

How was Jesus able to resist this temptation? God’s Word enabled him to resist. “It is written,” Jesus told Satan, “Man does not live on bread alone.” Jesus knew that real life, physical as well as spiritual life, depends on trusting God for all our needs of body and soul.

We have many bodily needs - hunger, thirst, clothing, shelter, income, relaxation, sleep, sexual happiness and more. God knows our needs and will see they are met. However, we are also to follow his will in gaining and enjoying them. Theft, shoplifting, embezzlement, not reporting income to the government, grumbling and complaining about what he have or don’t have, sexual fulfillment outside of marriage are but some examples of not trusting in God to provide.

The key to resisting temptations is to know the Bible well enough to quote it ourselves, know the Commandments well enough so that we can apply them to any situation in life. Then, like Jesus, we won’t give in when Satan lies and tempts us to sin. We will fear, love and trust in God above all things. We will satisfy God, not our sinful flesh.

II

Now let’s look at the temptation to bow down and worship Satan who would then give up control of the world and let Jesus do whatever he wanted. What a lie! The world does not belong to Satan to begin with. “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it,” Psalm 24:1. Satan does not control it. He can’t do anything in the world except what God allows him to do and God lets him go only so far. The major deceit was that if Jesus did what Satan asked, then Jesus would lose control and be a slave to Satan as we are by nature. Again, we would have no Savior.

As the Son of God, Jesus knew that together with the Father and the Holy Spirit he owned and ruled the world and everyone and everything in it. But as the Son of Man, Jesus had to take the hard, honest road to fame and glory. He had to crush Satan’s head by resisting all of his temptations, suffer and die on the cross in payment for mankind’s sin, and break the chains of death by rising from the dead. Anything less would not accomplish what he came here to do, which was to crush Satan’s head and establish God’s rule of grace in which he rules in the hearts of those who believe in him and then keep them safe for eternal life. There were no shortcuts in this work.

Notice again how Jesus went to Scripture to resist this temptation. He told Satan, “Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.” As the Son of Man, our Substitute under the law of God, that was what he had to do to save us, and that’s exactly what he did.
That is our duty, too—worship the Lord our God and serve him only. But, oh, how we like to put ourselves first. Maybe cheating at school will get us ahead, into the college or job we want. Spreading rumors at work about certain people or sabotaging their work may get them fired and we get their job or promotion. Dishonesty in business deals is how the company gets ahead and how you get rich. Unfortunately, such short cuts often cut short our goals and bring shame on us.

There were no shortcuts for Jesus in his work to save us from sin. There are no shortcuts for us in living godly lives and glorifying God. When tempted to gratify sinful ambitions, let’s say with Jesus, “Worship the Lord your God and serve him only,” and then do it.

III

Satan’s no dummy. He caught on to how Jesus used God’s word to resist him. Satan began to quote Scripture, too. He took Jesus to the highest point of the temple in Jerusalem and told him to jump off. “God will send angels to protect you! Trust him,” Satan said.

Satan quoted from Psalm 91, but as he spoke the words of the Psalm he lied! He made it say something it doesn’t say. Psalm 91 assures us God keeps us safe in the normal course of our lives. Satan said we can even do stupid things like jump off the top of the temple and God will rescue you. Is that trusting God or daring God?

Jesus knew the truth. He could not be fooled. If he wanted to, he could step off that high point of the temple and walk on thin air like he would later walk on water. But as our Substitute under the Law, he again had to live his life in perfect agreement with God’s Word. It is one thing to trust God when in a dangerous situation. It is something quite different to put God to the test, to dare God. Jesus used a Bible verse that actually applied to the situation at hand. He said to Satan, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test,” Deuteronomy 6:16.

How can we tell if we are foolishly putting God to the test or truly trusting him for help? Know the Scriptures! Keep reading the Bible. Remember what the Apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 5:8, “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him standing firm in the faith.” To stand firm in the faith takes persistent use of God’s Word.

We will never be able to perfectly resist every temptation we face. That’s why Jesus’ resistance is so important. He did it for us! Hear what it says in Hebrews 3:18 & 4:15, “Because (Jesus) himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted…(he) has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet was without sin.” He’s been there, done that and now helps us through it.

Jesus’ perfect resistance to all temptation is credited to us along with his innocent suffering and death on the cross in payment for our sin of giving in to temptation so often. We are saved! We have forgiveness and eternal life in and because of Jesus. Think of that each time you pray, LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION. Amen.