

Matthew 4:1-11 “Facing Temptation”

It is commonly believed that sin has no consequence and the resisting temptations only keep us from the true pleasures of life.

We yield to temptation—whatever it may be—**because we convince ourselves at the time that it offers us something better than resisting offers us.**

In our gospel story today, we see Jesus facing three temptations. Each temptation offers an enticing reward. **Jesus, though, by his actions, proclaims to us that there is something much better to be gained than what is offered by the temptations of life.**

Jesus emerges from the waters of his baptism, immediately he enters into the desert. He has also been empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry out his mission as God’s Messiah. **Now, in the desert, Jesus faces the common temptations of all who seek to respond to God’s grace and to use their blessings and talents in service to God and neighbor.**

The first words out of Satan’s mouth are a challenge. **“If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread.” This is symbolic of our universal desire for pleasure and comfort.** This is reminiscent of the temptations that the Israelites faced during their journey through the wilderness from slavery to the Promised Land. **We might recall the Israelite’s calls for food, water, and meat.**

Unlike the Israelites Jesus refuses to seek his own pleasure. This is confusing to us, who live in a society where pleasure and comfort are holy grails. **“What would be wrong with changing a few stones into loaves of bread?” we ask. “Who would it hurt?” “What’s wrong with a little pleasure or a little comfort?”**

It is true that many have sold Christianity to the masses by suggesting **God’s main goal is to give his followers affluent lives of pleasure and comfort.** There is intrinsically nothing wrong with pleasure or comfort. **They are, however, never meant to be our main goals in life, nor are they God’s central desire for us. Our main goal is faithful obedience. Our passion is to have God’s will accomplished in and through us.** Pleasure and comfort can only offer a poor counterfeit abundant life, when compared to the true life provided by obedient service.

The next thing that Satan does is to take Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and invite him to jump and to test God. **What a rush! Just think what it would be like to have the power to defy death. How powerful would a person need to be in order to avoid the consequences of his or her decisions?** Certainly a great amount of power is needed.

The Israelites in the wilderness were constantly seeking to exercise their power and rebel against God. They fought God from gathering two days worth of manna to refusing to battle nations that they thought were too powerful. Power and control were possessions the Israelites were unwilling to give up.

On the other hand, Jesus willingly gave up his power. Yes, he could have tested God; he could have proved that he was the Son of God and have had the angels save him, but he refused. Instead he was willing to give up his power and control and yield to God’s will.

It is natural for us to desire power. **We equate power with security, prestige, comfort and pleasure.** Still, the power of this world is fleeting. Rulers, CEO’s are overthrown or fired. Health fades. Nest eggs evaporate. Friends betray or desert us.

All of us have experienced how little control or power we really do have.

Giving up our power opens us up to be anointed and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Acknowledging God’s control frees us from our desperate struggle to hang on to power and frantically grasp for control. Yielding our will and giving up our power opens us up to an abundant life with meaning, purpose, and mission.

Satan’s next and final temptation was to offer Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would just worship him. In a sense, what Satan offered was a shortcut. **The kingdom of God was going to be established through Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection. By worshipping Satan, Jesus could achieve his goal without paying the price of pain and death. Jesus refused and chose the path of obedience—establishing God’s kingdom rather than his earthly kingdom.**

The Israelites turned their backs on God and worshipped idols. They gave their loyalty to anything that they thought would give them what they wanted—their kingdom and a world where everyone would serve them.

We all like to think that the world revolves around us. The Lord never helps us establish our own kingdom, so we frequently find ourselves turning from him and serving things that will enable us to see ourselves as better/greater than others and allow us to label things as, “Mine.”

Our kingdoms, however, are always temporary. There is always someone or something that is trying to take them away from us. Seeking God’s kingdom, and worshipping only him, gives us the gift of living for something bigger than ourselves and spreading a kingdom that will last for eternity.

We are baptized—adopted as God’s sons and daughters and empower by the Holy Spirit to carry on the ministry of Jesus Christ. There are many temptations that seek to entice us from our goal and bar us from our mission.

We stand against the temptations of life not because we fear the consequences of sin (Christ has already provided freedom and forgiveness through his cross) **but because God calls us to something better—to the abundant life that is ours as we live in faithful obedience to him.**

Amen