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“True Good vs. False Good”

Text: Matthew 4:1-11; Genesis 3:1-21; Romans 5:12-19

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

This was no accidental meeting. Right after Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan, immediately after the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus in the form of a dove, and the voice of the Father sounds forth from heaven, *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased* (Matt 3:17), immediately after this awesome scene which Jesus could have taken advantage of and (seems to me) gathered a lot of followers, instead the Spirit leads Jesus away from the scene, away from the crowds, away from everyone and everything, and out into the wilderness by Himself for this sole purpose: *to be tempted by the devil*. Jesus has come to be our Saviour from sin, death, and the devil, and so goes to the battle right away.

But, it seems, this is going to take some time. According to Matthew, the devil doesn't pounce immediately, but waits for the opportune time. And so after Jesus had been fasting forty days and forty nights - so this was no sunrise to sunset fasting and then you get to eat after the sun goes down, as we hear of some doing in our day and age; Jesus fasted day and night - after 40 days and nights, when he was hungry (ya think?), *then* the tempter comes. And it's *battle: on*.

And here, I think, is a good **first point** for you to know: *satan is not going to ask you if this is a good time to be tempted*. And though he'll strike at *any* time and seek to take advantage of *any* situation, he often strikes (like here, with Jesus) at the very worst times - when you're at your weakest, when you're most alone, when you're at your lowest and struggling, when it seems as if nothing is going right, when you're at that point where just one more thing is going to push you over the edge . . . At just such times you can expect satan to be there with a friendly push. Because he is not interested in a fair fight; only in winning. He is interested only in turning you away from God, in turning you against your Heavenly Father, and so devouring you and your faith in sin and fear and doubt.

And so here. . . . Have some bread Jesus. Forty days and forty night is long enough. You're the Son of God, aren't you? *Aren't you?* The one who created everything in the first place and made all food. So make some food for yourself. This is no way for God to treat His Son! And you're going to need your strength to do what you came to do; to do what your Father wants you to do! And you *do* want to be a good Son, don't you Jesus? *If* you are the Son of God. This just makes good sense . . .

But Mr. Tempter, *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God*.

Oh, you're right of course, Son of God. Well played. Okay then, here's a Word of God to live by: **throw yourself down** from the top of the temple here, because the Word that came from the mouth of God said that the angels - wait, no, I'm sorry! *Your* angels, right Son of God? - will make sure you don't get hurt. So, throw yourself down and show me this Word of God is really a Word to live by, that God will do what He says here. *That would be good . . .*

But Mr. Devil, ***You shall not put the Lord your God to the test*** . . . to get God to prove that He is God. That's . . . that's not faith.

Now, I think it safe to say at this point that satan is not used to having to work quite so hard in his temptations. People usually crumble far quicker and easier than this! A quick read through the Bible reveals countless examples of that, beginning with Adam and Eve, as we heard in the first reading. And you know it from your own life. But you also know that satan is not one to give up. So he pulls out his big gun . . .

You are a worthy adversary, Son of God. I can't beat you! So I will give you what you came for: ***all the kingdoms of this world and their glory***. Your Father would be proud at your success! All I ask in return is a little appreciation. Just ***fall down and worship me***. Just one little quick prostration . . . in *thanksgiving* for my generosity and admitting my defeat. And then it's all yours. I give up. *That would be good . . .*

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."*** You see, *that's* good. For He is good. His ways are good. His Word is good. The *only* good.

So here is the **second point** for you to know today: *satan rarely tempts us directly to obvious and explicit evil, but more often to a false good*. And so he dresses up sin and evil to look good, and makes it sound good, and convinces you it *is* good, and so leads you into sin. That's what he did to Adam and Eve and the tree they were not to eat from. That's how I portrayed his temptations to Jesus in the wilderness. And how does he do it in your life?

Well, there are surely many ways, but some of the most popular today are the ideas that *God would want you to have this (whatever this is)*. *God wants you to be happy (whatever happy is)*. *God would not want you to do without*. *God does not want you to suffer (whatever you think your suffering is)*. And in the name of those so-called "truths" have come all manner of sins dressed up to look good.

But what all those so-called "truths" have in common is this: they have no word of God to back them up. And that's why they're all **false goods**. *For God doesn't want you to be happy* - not necessarily. He wants you rather, and more importantly, to be His child and have eternal life. Those things may go together, but then again, they may not. *And God may want you to do without something* if He knows it's not good for you, and He often uses suffering to work good in us. But satan is very good at what he does. He is not called *deceiver* for nothing. And he deceives us, luring us away from the Word of God to believe something else. But nothing else is good. Nothing else can give us life. Anything else may give us that false good that we think is good, but that in the end leads only to sin and death.

That's why Jesus uses the Word of God against satan. It is *true* good against *false* good. And while the story of Jesus and His temptation is certainly an example for us in how to fight the lies and false goods of satan with the Word of God, even more than that and *more important* than that - and this is the **third** and most important truth for you to take away today - *this story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness shows you Jesus fighting for you*. And that's more important because I could stand up here all day and tell you to fight against satan with the Word of God until I'm blue in the face and you know what? You'll still sin. Satan will still get the better of you. You'll still fall for and believe his lies and false goods, especially when he attacks you in your weaknesses and at the worst possible times. You know it's true. Jesus as your example cannot save you.

But Jesus as the one who came to fight satan for you and win *can*. And does. We sang it earlier: *But for us fights the valiant One, whom God Himself elected. Ask ye who is this? Jesus Christ it is!* (LSB #656 v. 2) And so right after Jesus stands with sinners in the Jordan and is baptized for us, He is led out into the wilderness to begin the battle - the battle that will culminate at the cross. And there satan's "if you are the Son of God" will ring in His ears yet again, coming this time from the mockers, taunting Him to come down from the cross and show that He really is who He claimed to be. *That would be good . . .* To show everyone that He is the Son of God . . . right?

No! Jesus didn't come to just be the Son of God on earth, but to be your Saviour. That as Paul said in Romans, just as in Adam you have died, so in Christ you are made alive. *And that's good*. And so Jesus does not come down from the cross, but joins Himself to you in your sin and death, that you be joined with Him in His resurrection and life. And so He is baptized for you and you are baptized into Him. He gets your death and you get His life. He gets your sin and you get His forgiveness. That just as *by the one man's* (Adam's) *disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's* (Jesus') *obedience the many will be made righteous*. That the many have life. That *you* have life. That the many be sons of God. That *you* be a son of God.

That's what's happening in the wilderness that day - that good fight. That's what's happening on the cross - that good fight. And that's what's happening here, still today - that good fight. For in the wilderness of this world (as the Collect for the Day put it), satan is filling our ears and hearts and minds with his false goods, tempting us to believe him and not God. And again, if it were up to us, if we were on our own, that's exactly what would happen. And we'd be lost. If it happened to Adam and Eve in Paradise and without the burden of original sin, you can be sure it would happen to you.

But that's why this account is so valuable and so important for you. Because it shows you that it's not up to you and you're not on your own. Jesus is here and fighting for you. And He is still today speaking true good. And everytime you hear the words "*I baptize you,*" everytime you hear the words "*I forgive you,*" everytime you hear the words "*This is My Body, this is My Blood,*" you hear Jesus still saying "***Be gone, satan!***" Be gone from this, My child. Be gone with your lies and false goods. Be gone with your sin and death. Here is My good. Here is true good: life and forgiveness and salvation. For you, My child. *For you*. And so Jesus' victory is yours. As often as satan tempts you. As often as you fall. Here is the forgiveness you need. Here is the strength you need. Here is the victory you need.

And so this account of Jesus' temptation is always read on the First Sunday in Lent - that we begin this season not by focusing on what *we* can do and *our* strength, but by *fixing our eyes on Jesus* (Gradual for Lent). And by fixing our eyes on Him, fight, yes! But even more, repent and rely on Him. For He is *the founder and perfecter of our faith*, who in true goodness will, as we prayed, *lead us through the wilderness of this world to the glory of the world to come* (Collect of the Day). When the angels who ministered to Jesus and who minister to us sons of God as well, we will join in praise and joy, no longer in the wilderness of this world, but in *Paradise restored*.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.