

March 9, 2025 – Luke 4:1-13

Two weeks ago, in our men's Bible study, we talked about a very big theological word: concupiscence. Most of the men gathered there hadn't ever heard that word before, so if you don't know what it means, you're not alone. But it's a useful word, nonetheless.

You see, concupiscence is the depraved, corrupt characteristic of our heart as a result of sin. It is the perversity of spirit. A twisted, selfish desire within us that takes the good things we are given by God and turns them into something sinful.

God has given us so many good gifts. He has given us a beautiful creation to provide for our physical needs. He has given us bodies and souls to work in his kingdom. He has given us spouses and families and churches. He has given us His Word, by which we know His will for us.

With so many good gifts, we should have everything we could ever need. But our concupiscence ruins all of it. God's good gifts become things that tempt us into evil. That pull us into pride and anger and lust and greed. They become things we fight over. Things we break God's Law to obtain. There's nothing wrong with the gifts themselves. But there is something very wrong with us.

Which I think might explain why Satan tried to tempt Jesus in our Gospel lesson today. Because on the surface it seems kind of absurd. Why bother? He's the Son of God, for pete's sake. You really think you're gonna get anywhere with him? You really think you could actually tempt God into sin? How dumb is Satan?

But then you have to realize, it worked on Adam and Eve. It worked on thousands of years of humanity. Satan's been doing this for a long time. And he's really good at it. So yes, he knew who Jesus was. And yes, he probably knew it was a long shot. But he also knew that Jesus was fully God and fully man. And that sinful human concupiscence had bit hook, line, and sinker on pretty much every lie Satan had ever told. So why not give it a try and see if Jesus had that same concupiscence?

And the approach that Satan takes is an old one, but an effective one. Because he attacks Jesus by tempting him with doubt. Yes, doubt is a sin. In fact, it's among the first sins. It was doubt about God's love and care for Eve that led her to question whether he was holding something good back from her. It was doubt about God's warning that led her to ignore his Law and eat from the fruit. Doubt is central to the fall of man.

And doubt is a powerful weapon against Christians. You see, our Christian faith can hold us back from a host of sinful choices. Our faith in God's Law is what tells us what is godly and what is not. What is righteous and what is unrighteous. What is wholesome and what is tempting. Our faith in God's Law is constantly working to restrain our concupiscence.

Our sinful flesh tells us to seek out all sorts of evil things. But our faith in God's Word reminds us, "No, God said we shouldn't do that. No, God said that wasn't good for us. No, God said that only His Word is true and trustworthy." Which means that if Satan is going to open us up to a vast array of sinfulness and immorality, he must first find a way to get past that wall of faith. And doubt is a pretty effective weapon for tearing apart our faith one stone at a time.

So when we watch Satan attack Jesus in the desert, we aren't just watching one attack against one human being. Nor are we watching something unique or unusual. In fact, the attack that Satan launches is the exact same attack that he uses against countless Christians everyday. And it goes something like this...

"You're hungry, Jesus. You're hungry because you're human. You're just a human. You're nothing more than a human. If you were God, you wouldn't need to eat. But now you're hungry. You're so hungry. Your whole life revolves around your physical needs. Finding enough bread for today and tomorrow and the next day."

"You're weak, Jesus. You think you've come here with all this power, but you're nothing. This is my turf. These are my people. I'm the ruler here. You wanna work in my town, you kneel down and kiss my hand."

“You’re useless, Jesus. You’ve got nothing of value. No fame. No wealth. Nothing. You’re gonna walk through this world as a nobody until they nail you to a cross and forget you ever existed. You wanna be somebody? Show them who you are. Fly from the roof of the temple. Be famous. That’s what life is about.”

And you know, those words may have been directed at Jesus, but they apply just as well to each one of us...

“You’re hungry. If God cared about you then he’d get rid of all your money problems. He’d make sure you’re never hungry for anything. But you’re not a child of God. You’re nobody.”

“You’re weak. You can’t fight this world. Don’t even try. God doesn’t have any authority here. You try to be good, stand up for what you believe in, and you’ll get steamrolled.”

“You’re useless. What’s the point of trying to be a disciple of Christ? It’s not gonna get you anywhere. Who are the powerful people in this world? The bankers who steal from pension funds. The celebrities who cheat on their wives. The politicians who lie through their teeth. What does being a disciple of Jesus Christ get you? A lot of pain and suffering, that’s what.”

Identity. Power. And mission. The three aspects of Jesus’ life and ministry that Satan tried to tempt him to doubt. The three aspects of our life and ministry that Satan tries to tempt us to doubt. But where Jesus was alone in the desert fending off Satan’s attacks, we have a powerful tool at our disposal: Jesus’ own words in response to Satan.

So when Satan tries to tell you that if God really cared about you, he wouldn’t make you worry about money and bills, you tell him that there is far more to life than money and food and clothes. Those things will only sustain you to the grave. But the Word of God will sustain you to eternity. And that is a gift that God has never withheld from us.

When Satan tries to tell you that you’re too weak to stand up to the powers of this world and to the evil that surrounds you, you tell him that he’s absolutely right. You are too weak. And that is exactly why you worship and serve one who is far stronger than any power of this world, Satan included.

When Satan tries to tell you that it is useless to be a Christian, that faith, morality, and righteousness are pointless in a world that rewards evil and punishes good, you tell him that you do not question the will of God almighty. Although there are things in this world that I will never understand, I believe with all my heart that God has a plan, I am in it, and I will see it on the last day. And I will never put my God to the test on that.

Satan’s been tempting humanity for a long time. He’s really good at it. But he had never seen the likes of Jesus before. He had never seen a faith like His before. But he’s seen an awful lot of it since then. Because we are each baptized into His faith, nourished by His Word, and strengthened by His Spirit. So that when Satan meets you in the desert, when Satan finds that “opportune time” to attack – and he will – you can be sure he meets more than a man. He meets Christ living within you.

He meets God's Son. God's forgiveness. God's salvation. Living in your heart. So that whether the temptation draws you into sin or not, ultimately, he cannot win. He cannot drag you into hell. He cannot take you from your Father's hand. Because Christ defeated Satan in that desert. Christ defeated Satan every day of His ministry. And, most of all, Christ defeated Satan on the cross. So that the devil cannot defeat us any longer. Temptation or no temptation, sin or no sin, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

So whether you cry out to God, “Jesus is Lord,” with joy or you cry out to Him, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,” with utter despair. It doesn't matter. Cry out to the Lord and you will be saved. Believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, and hold tight to that forgiveness. Look past that human concupiscence that puts you to shame and know that, in all things, the God who defeated the very worst that Satan could throw against Him is always fighting for you. Amen.