

Invocabit, 2006
Text: Matthew 4:1-11
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✠Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ ✠

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

The devil is real. He is out to attack you – to take you away from Life and plunge you into eternal death. He is more crafty than you. He is smarter than you – for he's been at this game for thousands of years, you are less than an infant compared to him. He is more powerful than you. Just look what he did to our first parents. He comes to Eve and begins driving a wedge between her and the LORD. "Did God really say. . ." is the first temptation – a temptation to doubt God's Word, to doubt his care and provision.

"Why doesn't God want you to have this?" he says. "It's pleasing to the sight and good for food. And what's more it will make you like God – but God wants to stunt your growth, to keep you from becoming your best, to hold you down. I would never do that. I want you to grow and learn and reach your potential. If Adam gets in the way, I'll get him out of the way. If God himself gets in the way, we'll leave him behind too. Just eat this, and follow me, I can be a better god to you."

Eve fell for it and Adam failed to protect her and dove in to the devil's lies himself. And their story is the story of all humanity. The sin of Adam and Eve was to be curved in on themselves – to think of and serve themselves first. If you've ever thrown a pity party for poor-old-me and what you've had to give up for your kids or your spouse or your parents – then you've fallen prey to that same satanic voice telling you to put yourself first. If you've lied to make yourself look better, then the devil has whispered in your ear. If you have accused God of not caring, of abandoning you, of turning a blind eye to your suffering, then you have proven yourself to be a true son of Adam or daughter of Eve.

So repent. Turn away from yourself because there is no salvation there. But rejoice that today is the day of salvation: for behold, there is another temptation with a different outcome. Once the devil tempted humanity in a lush garden where all their needs were met, and still he succeeded in turning them away from God. Now the devil comes to a Man who has been hungry for 40 days. He comes to Him

in the desert where there is no food to satisfy him. And still the devil fails to turn Jesus in on himself and away from his Father.

"You've been out here forty days," he says. "The Father said you were his beloved Son but then he sends his Spirit to push you out here in the desert. Some Father he is! If you're his Son, then surely you deserve a meal at long last. Here's some rocks – they could be bread if you wished. . . ."

But Jesus will have none of it. Where Adam, husband of Eve, failed, the Second Adam, born of Mary, succeeded. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Jesus trusts where Adam doubted. Jesus lives by faith even when it appears that the Father has left him.

But the devil is patient. One trick failed, but he has another ready. "If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down and see if your Father really loves you." But Jesus knows that love does not hold people hostage or set up false tests: "You shall not tempt the Lord your God." Fine, the devil says, "Just let me be your god for a little bit and you won't have to walk this way of the cross. Instead you can have glory. You can have all the kingdoms of the world – for they are mine. Worship me, let me have the humans, and I'll see to it that they give you everything they have. After all, what has mankind done for you lately? They rebelled against you and followed me. Ever since the garden they have been doubting you and sinning. What's the point? Let's teach them a lesson. What do you say: all the glory, none of the pain."

But Jesus will have none of it. "Away from me Satan, for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve.'" Here Jesus shows us what Adam and Eve should have said. He shows us what being a child of the Heavenly Father really means: loving him and seeking his will at all times. Trusting that what he wants is best.

Where Adam failed, where Eve failed, where you and every human being ever failed, Jesus succeeds. He turns Satan away with the Word of his Father. And that is the reason to rejoice this day: Jesus has done for you what you couldn't do for yourself. He lived a truly holy life of pure trust in God the Father. He did not plot and plan on his own – he trusted that God would see him through.

And he trusted him even when life was at its darkest, even when the cross loomed large. If this happened to your Lord, will it not happen to you dear Christian? Therefore, do not listen to the siren song of those false prophets who say

you can have an easy, affluent, Christian life. There is no such thing. So whether it's Joel Osteen, or Rick Warren, or Bruce Wilkinson, or some TV preacher – ignore their talk about ease and comfort. The experience of our Lord Jesus Christ shows that all of this is at best a distortion and in the main an out and out lie. For trusting God and following his will led Jesus to a life of hardship, to the cross and to death.

That is what is in store for you, dear Christian. For since Jesus took your place by living the holy life you should have lived and by dying your death under the curse of the Law, now you have been put in his place as well. St. Paul says you have been baptized into Christ, that your life is now hid in him. Thus the true Christian life is cross-shaped – just as our Lord promised it would be when he said that those who would be his disciples must take up their crosses and follow Him.

This way of the cross is not popular. It does not sell millions of copies or fill packed arenas. But it has the advantage of being true. This is what life in Christ is like. It is hard. It is a constant battle with the devil who will come to tempt you just as he came to tempt Christ. What's worse, the enemy is not just outside of you, but in you. For your own flesh is against you, tempting you to give in to the devil's desires. The devil will exploit your weaknesses, he'll find whatever way he can to drive you from God. Folks with stronger faith than yours, with lives holier than yours, have fallen. Therefore be on guard. Do not think of yourselves more highly than you ought. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

But do not despair. For He who works in you is faithful and will save you. That is the message of Lent: the life of faith is difficult, indeed impossible for fallen human creatures – but with God all things are possible. So it is customary to fast during Lent to increase our awareness of temptation and how difficult it is to live in this world. But this fasting is worthless unless it drives us back to the way of our salvation: Jesus and what he has done for us.

So do not despair, for your weaknesses are swallowed up in the strength of Christ. Do not despair, because he loves you and has baptized you into his death and resurrection. Do not despair, because he is faithful. He will never let you go. In Christ you are cleansed and forgiven and holy. In Christ you have all you need to stand up to the devil – not by your own power but by Christ's Word. For though devils all the world should fill, and be eager to devour us, we tremble not, we fear no ill, they shall not overpower us. For one little Word can send the devil packing. That Word is the Word of God, Jesus himself and what he has done for you.

For you are baptized dear Christian. You belong to God, not the devil. Indeed, the very Life of God is put into you today once again as our Lord Jesus Christ places his body and blood into your body. This is the great Bread of heaven by which man shall live, the Word of God proceeding from the mouth of the Father, the Word made flesh and now offered to us. This is the great help against temptation, the support for faith, the ongoing cleansing of sin. Cherish this gift of your Lord Jesus Christ coming to you in his fullness in this direct personal way. Come forward this day to receive him again repenting of your sins, crying out against them, cursing your weakness and desiring salvation. Come forward all you who are heavy laden with weakness on the inside and devils all around you on the outside. Come forward and receive the very flesh and blood of God – for no devil can abide the presence of God. The Lord promises to give you salvation here – so come forward to receive it.

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

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Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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