

From Ashes To Easter Sermon Series

Week 1 – Temptation

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11, James 4:7-10, 1 Corinthians 10:13, 1 Timothy 6:9, Hebrews 2:18 and 4:12, James 1:2-3

Series Theme Scripture: Philippians 3:10-11 (NIV)

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Main Argument: Jesus experienced temptation of every kind and was able to overcome. His example teaches us what we need to know in battling temptation and rising above it in our own lives.

(Distribute chocolate pieces. Advise no unwrapping or eating! Tell them that they have to wait. Then as the message begins, allow them to unwrap and smell the chocolate, but not eat it. Ask how many are feeling tempted to eat the chocolate.)

Today we begin a 6-week sermon series called *From the Ashes To Easter*. Our lives can sometimes feel like they are a disappointing pile of ashes. We can be broken, shattered and destroyed.

However, the good news of Jesus' life, death and resurrection is that we can experience new life. Our lives, no matter how bad before, are never irredeemable. Said another way, *you are not broken beyond repair*.

In and through Christ, you can rise above the ashes and experience abundant life.

But this isn't just a series for the broken and shattered - this is for anyone who wants to grow in the knowledge and understanding of Christ. Each week we will look at one aspect of Jesus' life and ministry during His time here on earth and what we can learn from Him.

We begin this week with a conversation about *temptation*. Did you know that immediately preceding the start of Jesus' earthly ministry, he experienced a 40-day period of temptation?

While resisting the temptation of the chocolate you have is difficult, can you even imagine a persistent and prolonged season of it? And, as an added bonus, the person overseeing your temptation is none other than the devil himself? I cannot even imagine what this would have felt like, looked like, or been like to endure. And yet, this is the exact scenario that Jesus had to overcome. We begin today with a look into this season of Jesus' life and how we can learn from and be encouraged by the fortitude of our savior.

First and foremost today we all need to acknowledge that *temptation should be expected in our lives*. We all experience temptation each and every day. No one is immune from the desires to have things or do things that do not align with the way of Christ.

Temptation comes in many forms, and in many ways it can seem innocent enough. Sneaking in some social media time at work, binging that extra show on Netflix, shaving a few dollars of income off your tax return... In the eyes of many these don't seem like huge problems, but it's the little foxes that spoil the vine. (Song of Songs 2:15) And believe me, when I say that the temptations and desires behind these actions can grow into big problems.

This can lead to things that we all would agree are devastating; Broken marriages, ruined relationships, careers in the toilet, ministries closing down, the list goes on and on.

It does us no good to pretend like we are immune to temptation. Or to think that we can handle things on our own. Listen to what 1 John says about *walking in the light*;

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us." 1 John 1:8-10

Today, let's begin by confessing and acknowledging that we all deal with temptation in our lives and that there are times when we follow temptation down paths that are neither Christ honoring nor consistent with our heavenly citizenship.

So, how do we manage temptation? How do we respond to temptation? How do we model the fortitude and endurance Jesus had?

It begins with your identity

Before we look at the temptation of Christ in Matthew chapter 4, we need to talk about the event that immediately preceded his 40 day temptation in the wilderness.

Turn with me to Matthew 3:13-17, and the *baptism of Jesus*;

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. 14 And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" 15 But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. 16 When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. 17 And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

The baptism of Christ is an incredibly significant moment for many reasons. But for us today, I want you to focus on verse 17 when God says, *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*

Let's go to God's Word together this morning:

Matthew 4:1-11 Holman Christian Standard Bible: The Temptation of Jesus

4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. 2 After He had fasted 40 days and 40 nights, He was hungry. 3 Then the tempter approached Him and said, “If You are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

4 But He answered, “It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

5 Then the Devil took Him to the holy city, had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written:

He will give His angels orders concerning you, and they will support you with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

7 Jesus told him, “It is also written: Do not test the Lord your God.”

8 Again, the Devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 And he said to Him, “I will give You all these things if You will fall down and worship me.” 10 Then Jesus told him, “Go away, Satan! For it is written:

Worship the Lord your God, and serve only Him.”

11 Then the Devil left Him, and immediately angels came and began to serve Him.

As we look at verse 17 of Matthew 3, Notice God the father didn't say, “Good! Now go and fulfill your destiny on Earth!” Or, “This is my son, watch out Satan and demons and all the other spiritual wickedness because He's coming for you!”

No, none of that. He simply said, *this is my Son*. And we know God loves His son and is pleased with Him. This is Christ's identity. He is a beloved Son of God most high.

And this is such a powerful reality that when Jesus is drawn into the wilderness this is **the very first thing that Satan tries to call into question. He tries to tempt Jesus out of His identity and position.** Look at what He says,

3 Then the tempter approached Him and said, “If You are the Son of God...”

Matthew 4:3

In summary, when dealing with temptation, always remember who you are and whose you are;

For Jesus, the tempter said, *If you are the Son of God.*

For Eve, in the garden it was, *Did God really say...*

1 John 2:16

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

Satan still uses the same standing strategy:

- **Pride of the Flesh**

- *Pride of the Heart*
- *Pride of Life*

What does this voice sound like in your life?

If you really were a Christian you wouldn't...

If you really loved God...

If you were only more like x, y, or z...

If you were really saved you wouldn't be suffering like you are...

The questions may be different for all of us but the motive is always the same. The motive is to get us doubting our identity and position, AND get us doubting who God is, what He said about us, etc.

A beloved child of God most high.

Provision (Physical Appetites/Gratifications) Matthew 4:3-4 Pride of the flesh

Okay, so now we've all agreed temptation is something everyone deals with. We also realize questioning our identity is a primary tactic of our enemy. So, let's look at the three specific areas Jesus was tempted while in the wilderness.

Have you ever been really really hungry?

(Illustration of having been really hungry coming out of Florida with Dad.)

I can't even imagine how famished Jesus must've been after his 40 day journey in the wilderness. It's just cruel that Satan would come to him, question His identity, and then challenge Him to turn stones into bread.

Honestly, if you had the power to turn stones into Cheeseburgers or Chick-fil-a chicken sandwiches how difficult would it be to stay true to a 40 day fast?

But aside from bread and cheeseburgers, what was really going on here? What was the underlying need Satan was trying to manipulate? The need Jesus had, (that we all share) is a need for provision. It was food in Jesus' case, but it's also finances, clothes, a home to live in, etc... However, in all these things we look to God most high, the benevolent creator of the cosmos and we trust He will supply all we need.

Here are a few verses to remember;

"And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:19

“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?” - Matthew 6:26

“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” - Psalm 23:1

A good shepherd will always supply for the needs of his flock.

A good Father supplies for the needs of his kids.

We have a good shepherd, a good father, and we can trust our needs will be met.

All this to say, giving up the physical desires of the flesh reminds us that the only provision we really need comes from the hand of God. God can be trusted, and His Word is what gives us life: not food, finances, relationships or things. During this season of Lent, we choose to go without to remind ourselves God is all we need.

Protection Matthew 4:5-7 Pride of the Heart

The second temptation of Jesus seems to be focused on inviting Jesus to test God’s protection of His beloved son. Jesus, having confidence in the care and concern for His well being by God, saw no need to do such a foolish thing. In fact, Jesus brings up a very important principle, *that we should not test the Lord.*

But if we’re honest, we often feel tempted to do foolish things simply because we know God is a God of grace, and He can pick up the pieces of a bad decision.

Yes, we know He will protect.

Yes, He can work all things for the good.

Yes, He is omnipotent and nothing can derail His will.

But sometimes you simply need to say “NO” to the voice of temptation in your life. And if you’re in a precarious situation, then give some time to prayer, call some trusted counselors and advisors, and exercise caution and wisdom through your decision making.

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” - Psalm 46:1

Position (Pride of Life)

Matthew 4:8-11

The third and final temptation is for Jesus to worship Satan, and in doing so, He would receive dominion over all the kingdoms of the world. It seems like an easy enough choice, but for some, the temptation for position and power is overwhelming.

We are often given a choice to worship something other than God in order to get ahead or receive worldly gain. The significance that comes from worshipping an idol of any kind is temporary and temporal.

We too must choose to worship God alone and trust in the significance that can only come from our relationship to Him.

As a beloved son or daughter of the most high King, you will inherit an eternal kingdom and it cannot be shaken. Oftentimes we forget or look past this reality as believers and get distracted by worldly gain.

But truth be told, the best is yet to come.
And your eternal position is greater than any promotion your boss can give.

When feeling tempted in this area, try to keep things in perspective;

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” - Matthew 6:33

One glaring thing was consistent every time the devil tempted Jesus;

Jesus responded with scripture.

The Word of God is powerful. Hebrews 4:12 says;

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Permit me to close this morning with a message to us all individually as Christians and collectively as a church. I believe there are three main areas in which the post-modern church is yielding to TEMPTATIONS. I will leave them with you as we prepare to go for your pondering in the coming week.

- 1) Complacency: “Self-satisfaction especially when accompanied by unawareness of actual dangers or deficiencies.”
- 2) Compromise: “To give up something that you want in order to reach an agreement.”
- 3) Cowardice: “As a label, “cowardice” indicates a failure of character in the face of a challenge.

As we journey together over the next 6 weeks, I’d like to encourage you to commit to daily time in the word. Making this a daily habit can literally transform your life. You could read a Proverb everyday, jump into a chronological reading plan, or simply read 2-3 chapters every day starting in Matthew 1 and going through each gospel. (This lasts about 5-6 weeks)

You could give up your evening TV time for the word.

You could set your alarm 30 minutes early for the word.
You could read the word together over breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

What other creative ways could you carve out time to spend with Jesus and His word?

Let's make no mistake my friends.

The tempter isn't going to take the next 6 weeks off in preparation for Easter Sunday. And He definitely doesn't want your faith and knowledge to grow in response to the word of God.

But here's what we know, if scripture was sufficient for Jesus, then it is for us too.

Let's pray together.