

SERMON FOR FEBRUARY 26, 2023

TEXT: MATTHEW 4: 1-11

THEME: PROMISES

4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. **2** And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3** And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." **4** But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." **5** Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him 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 command his angels concerning you,' and "On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone." **7** Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" **8** Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. **9** And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." **10** 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." **11** Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

In the name of Jesus:

Leo Tolstoy once wrote a story about a successful peasant farmer who was not satisfied with his lot. He wanted more of everything. One day he received a novel offer. For 1000 rubles, he could buy all the land he could walk around in a day. The only catch in the deal was that he had to be back at his starting point by sundown. Early the next morning he started out walking at a fast pace. By midday he was very tired, but he kept going, covering more and

more ground. Well into the afternoon he realized that his greed had taken him far from the starting point. He quickened his pace and as the sun began to sink low in the sky, he began to run, knowing that if he did not make it back by sundown the opportunity to become an even bigger landholder would be lost. As the sun began to sink below the horizon he came within sight of the finish line. Gasping for breath, his heart pounding, he called upon every bit of strength left in his body and staggered across the line just before the sun disappeared. He immediately collapsed, blood streaming from his mouth. In a few minutes he was dead. Afterwards, his servants dug a grave. It was not much over six feet long and three feet wide. The title of Tolstoy's story was: How Much Land Does a Man Need?

In the end, Tolstoy suggests, all a man really owns is a 6 by 3 piece of earth, so we are better off putting our confidence elsewhere. As we see in our text for today, there are promises that fail and result in death, and promises that result in everlasting life. Satan uses empty promises to tempt Jesus. He uses the same to tempt us.

In Jesus' temptations, Satan offers to Jesus a shortcut. Knowing that Jesus came to offer salvation to the world, Satan attempts to tempt Jesus by offering something to Him that He can't possibly deliver on. There are promises offered to Jesus that if He would only take care of Himself first, then everything will work out in His life and mission. "You are hungry, Jesus, so

think of Yourself, turn these stones into loaves of bread and all will be well.” There is a promise offered to Jesus to show His power and might, if He would do that, by jumping off the pinnacle of the Temple, then everyone would see that He is God and then the people would make Him King. Satan says, “Take a leap of faith and trust in me, and if you do then people will believe in You, Jesus.” And the final temptation is one where Satan says, “Bow down and worship me and I will give you the kingdoms of the world.” Promises, yes, but all of them are empty promises. Promises that Satan makes where he has not the power and ability to deliver. They are promises that all end up at a dead end.

You know about those promises don't you? Satan still tempts and speaks to you and me today, saying, “You have to look out for yourself, look out for old number one because if you don't no one else will.” Or Satan will whisper into your ear, “Take a leap of faith and take matters into your own hands. Revenge is sweet and if you pay back that someone who has done you harm, just think of how much better you will feel.” Or how about this temptation where Satan says: “ you know, your life would be a whole lot better if only you had this shiny new toy. Go ahead and get it, you deserve it.” Yes, Satan is alive and well and tempts each of us today, telling us to think of ourselves first, always seeking to offer to us something better. The problem is, Satan doesn't deliver. He can't deliver. He is the Father of lies. He promises things to give you things that he can't give. All of his promises are in the end empty promises, with the goal of having you trust in his promises so that your life remains empty and ends in death and despair.

Jesus, though, trusts in a different kind of promise, the promise that God alone gives and it is the promise that leads to eternal life. This is the promise that God gave to Adam and Eve in the Garden immediately after they fell from grace by disobeying God and His Word. The Lord promised: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring, he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel."

Through Adam sin entered the world, and with sin came death. Death has spread to everyone. Yet God in mercy promised a Savior, One who would come to forgive the sins of everyone. God delivered on this promise by sending His only Son Jesus into the world. You heard last week the voice from heaven proclaiming on the Mount of Transfiguration: "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him."

Jesus came to take on Satan and defeat Him in His life, death, and resurrection. Satan tempted Jesus to deny Himself and His God given mission on earth, but Jesus did not give into temptation. Satan twisted God's Word and then lied about the Word all in an effort to thwart God's plan of salvation. But Jesus remained true to Himself and true to the Father's mission. Jesus trusted in the Word of God and relied on that Word to keep God's promise to you that He would send a Savior to save you.

So, when tempted to look out for His own interests by turning stones into loaves of bread, Jesus responded by trusting in the Word of God which says: " 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" When tempted to show off His power and might by having angels catch Him in a free fall from the pinnacle of the Temple, Jesus

responded: “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.” And when finally tempted to bow down and worship Satan, Jesus stuck to His guns and again replied with the Word of God by saying: ““Be gone, Satan! For it is written,““You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.””

Jesus came to fulfill God’s promise to humanity that the Father would send a Savior, and Jesus is that Savior. He is your Savior. In His life, suffering, death, and resurrection Jesus obeyed the will of the Father and did the will of the Father.

He kept God’s promises and made this promise, that in the midst of trial and temptation He will never leave nor forsake you. He gives you His Word which will not return to Him empty. He gives you a new birth in Baptism. He gives you strength for the days of trials and temptations that are ahead in His Supper.

Now Jesus has placed you on the path to follow Him. He has said of those who follow: If anyone desires to follow Me, let that person deny Himself, take up the cross and follow Me.” Walking with Jesus in our daily lives will certainly have its share of challenges. It can be filled with moments of bewildering suffering. It may seem, at times, as if you are alone with Satan. And during those times it may seem as if Satan is in control and having his way with you. He will tempt you with all sorts of temptations, tempted to serve yourself, tempted to forget about others, tempted to wonder if God loves you, even tempted to trust in the things of this world to get through the difficult times and moments.

But when those times do occur, God promises to be your ever present Help in those times of trial and trouble. Remember that Jesus has defeated

Satan. He was tempted in the wilderness for you. Jesus suffered, died, and rose again from the grave for you. Jesus is your Savior. Jesus rules over all things for all time. There is no place where Satan can take you that Jesus is not already there. He has promised to remain with you, to never leave you nor forsake you, so that we can confidently say that the Lord is my Helper, I will not be afraid, for He, Jesus is with you always, even to the end of the world.

Amen