

Sermon for February 22, 2026
"Lead Us Not Into Temptation"

Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus taught his disciples to pray "Lead us not into temptation." Personally, if I were going into temptation, I would want Jesus leading me. After all he seems to know how to overcome it. That is what our Gospel lesson today is all about. Jesus was tempted by the Devil himself, and Jesus did what no other person in the history of the world has ever done. He faced a lifetime of temptations and never sinned.

Of course when Jesus said, "Lead us not into temptation" he meant pray that you don't have to face temptations, but we do face them. Sometimes we place ourselves in situations where we are tempted and sometimes temptations seek us out, and the truth is that we are weak and will all give in at some time. Yet, Jesus didn't give in to temptations.

So my point is that we should follow his lead when we face temptations. We should look at how Jesus faced temptations. We should learn from his example. Then when we face the same temptations, which we do, we can resist them as well.

The first temptation Jesus faced was to turn stones into bread. Jesus had been fasting in the wilderness for forty days and was famished. It would have been a simple thing for the Son of God to turn stones to bread. A little fission and a little fusion, some basic chemistry and he could in a whim rearrange the subatomic particles of granite and quartz into wheat and rye. He had created galaxies out of nothing, what was making a sandwich out of something, and he was hungry you know, and food is one of the basic needs of human physiology.

But Jesus knew he was not on earth to feed his face. He was in the desert to prepare spiritually for the battles ahead. He was there to fast and pray so that he could go and reveal the coming of the Kingdom of God to the world. Then he would die and rise again to bring that Kingdom into being. That was his purpose.

We face the same basic temptation ourselves. It is the temptation to satisfy our hungers and appetites with cheap substitutes. Jesus would not starve to death. He knew that. He was in the desert because he hungered and thirsted for the guidance of the Father and the Spirit, but the Devil offered a cheap substitute in its place.

Isn't that how the Devil tempts us? Evil offers us things that don't truly fulfill us. One of the most basic needs is water. Without it we will die. There are times when people shipwrecked on the ocean are tempted to drink the sea water. Because of the salt content of sea water, it will actually make you more thirsty. It will kill you quicker than just dying of thirst. Evil offers us salt water when what we need is the water of life.

Jesus' response to this temptation is enlightening. He doesn't say, "not now" or "don't bother me." Jesus instead addresses the real issue here. He says "Humans don't live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Notice that Jesus doesn't disregard or pretend that the physical appetites are not important. They are a part of us, but they are not a substitute for the basic need for God. Yes, physical food keeps our bodies alive, but we need God to truly live. If we can learn that lesson then we can overcome the temptation to accept a cheap substitutes for God.

Jesus' second temptation was to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple so that all would see that he was the Son of God. It must have been hard for Jesus. To know that he knew all and to have so many people discount him and ignore him. Can you imagine what

is was like. Here he is the author of the universe and the religious leaders were ignoring and even persecuting him. He was there to show them what God was all about. If he did what the Devil said maybe they would listen for a change. Maybe the Devil had come to a change of heart and was really trying to help Jesus here?

But Jesus noticed that the real thing that would be served would be his own pride. He was sent to tell people about God, but throwing himself from the temple would only serve himself and not his Father. His purpose was to show people God's greatness not by grandstanding but by suffering for the sins of the world. The religious leaders would probably listen if he did that but then how would he die for the sins of the world?

Jesus response was direct, "Do not tempt the Lord thy God." Pride is a strong motivator. We all want to be noticed for the brilliant, creative and beautiful people that we are, and we are tempted to say, "Look at me and what I can do." When they were small my daughters liked to show me what they can do they say "Look at me Daddy, look at me," and to an extent that is good and I looked and applauded when they accomplished something because it built their self-esteem. Yet, we need to recognize where self esteem ends and pride begins.

The secret to Jesus' response is the recognition of the temptation for what it was. Yes, this action pretended to serve God, but it really didn't. Jesus noticed that and named it, and he told the Devil, "Your tempting me. Don't do that." We need to realize when we are being tempted by pride and name it just as Jesus did.

The third temptation was to worship and seek after earthly power. The Devil said, "I will give you all the kingdoms of the world if you will bow down to me." Jesus was the rightful King of kings. But the Devil had temporary power over many thrones. In a sense, the Devil was a pretender to the throne of the King of kings, and the Devil was offering to give up that throne.

Many times we are tempted to worship earthly thing instead of seeking heavenly. We worship our earthly jobs and careers instead of serving God in our spiritual vocations. Sometimes we seek earthly power and riches instead of storing up treasures in heaven. Sure there is some short-term benefit to it, but in the long run the Devil is the one being worshipped.

We can learn from Jesus' response to this temptation. First of all he told the Devil where to go. Some Christians don't realize that we have that power too. They think, "Sure, Jesus is the Son of God. He can tell the Devil to scat. No trouble." What they don't realize is that the same Jesus lives in every believer's heart and through him we have the power to say "In the name of Jesus scat."

The second part of Jesus' response was "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only." We too need to keep in mind the ultimate goal of all our actions. We are to worship God. Sometimes the wrong action seems right at a certain time because some good is served in the short term, but in the long run evil is always the winner when we do the wrong thing for the right reasons. So let us be sure all our actions glorify God.

"Lead us not into temptation." We should pray that our life's path will not go through temptation, but at some point, it will. When we are tempted, let us remember Jesus' response to it. Let us recognize when we are being offered a cheap substitute for what we really need. Let us realize that we live by God's word and not only bread. Let's realize when our pride is being fed, and let us keep in mind that all our actions should serve to glorify God.

Jesus is our example. He lived a sinless life. Let's follow his lead in our battles with the Devil. More importantly we can turn to him to help us when we do face evil. He can

strengthen a guide us to stand up to temptation just as he did.