

Lenten Series: "Do Not Test the Lord"

Matt 4:1-11

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If you're joining us for the first time this morning, we are in the Season known as Lent, which is period of time that lasts 40 days long that started back on Ash Wednesday and goes through Holy Saturday the day before Easter.

From Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday it's actually more than 40 days, but the church decided not to count Sundays to give people a break, and so on the Sundays during Lent - you're allowed break from your fasts and celebrate a little.

This doesn't mean to start doing things that you normally wouldn't do, but the idea behind it was that since Sundays are days to worship God we should worship Him with joy & gladness with celebration & thanksgiving, and not with a somber mood or even empty stomach's! So put on a smile everyone! We're here to worship God and even have a little fun!

Our scripture passage for today is the same one we looked at last Sunday, and that's Matt. 4:1-11.

We spent a lot of time last week looking at the first temptation and that was the one where the devil tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread.

What made that temptation so tempting was that Jesus hadn't eaten anything for the past 40 days and any of you who have ever experienced hunger, well, when you're starving - you could eat just about anything. And so the temptation to turn stones into bread was playing into a physical hunger.

So how did Jesus respond to that first temptation? He pulled out a quote from Deuteronomy which talked about how God provided manna and quail all throughout the Exodus.

Jesus said:

"Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

or as the MSG translation says:

"It takes more than bread to stay alive. It takes a steady stream of words from God's mouth."

And so my encouragement to you last week was to make sure you have a "steady stream" of God's word, that it's part of your regular diet and part of your daily intake, because when you feast on the Word of God, you will never go spiritually hungry.

Today we are looking at the 2nd temptation from Matt 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered: "It is written, 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

(That was the 1st temptation. Here's the 2nd one.)

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

(And now the 3rd and last temptation)

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended to him.

Self Quarantine

Several months ago during my normal weekly routine, I came into contact with someone who tested positive for Covid-19. And so after reporting this to the church, I contacted everyone else who also came into contact.

Then when I got home, I sequestered myself to a room in the corner of our house, isolated from the rest of my family and all by myself and for the next few days I was in self-quarantine.

When it was mealtime - I took my meals all by myself. When I needed to get something - I texted it to my family and they dropped it off at the door.

I was in total isolation - not allowed to interact with them. (I wasn't even allowed to pet the dog!)

For the first day or two, if I could be honest, it was actually kind of nice! Meals were brought to the door and empty plates were then taken away, and being in isolation meant that I was exempt from having to do any chores!

I didn't have to wash the dishes, take out the trash or sweep the floor, all I was allowed to do was to stay in that room, and with a tablet and good internet connection, I caught up on a lot of TV shows!

Well, as the days passed, I started to notice something about being in isolation. (First of all I should tell you I wasn't displaying any symptoms and when I tested a few days later the results came back negative,) but here's what I noticed about being in isolation.

After the novelty of the 1st few days and being all alone, exempt from responsibilities and doing chores around the house - basically sleep all day, what I started to notice is that I really missed being with my family.

I missed the social interactions - the meals at the table, the hugs before going to sleep, even the fist bumps after telling a good joke!

And so naturally when my period of quarantine was over, I couldn't wait, to be with my family and then all the other people in my circle, and that was only after less than A PERIOD OF A WEEK!

But try to imagine being in isolation for a period of 40 days, which was the amount of time that Jesus spent in the desert wilderness.

Not only was Jesus fasting from food (which caused a physical hunger,) but Jesus was also isolated and away from civilization (which caused a social hunger.)

For 40 days there was no one to talk to. For 40 days there was no one to interact with. And maybe for the first few days it was nice to have peace & quiet, but very quickly, you start to miss all the things that you used to take for granted. Like walking down the hallway at school and laughing with your friends. Like going out for lunch with your colleagues from work.

For 40 long days, Jesus had no social interaction because out in the desert wilderness there are no café's or bookstores, no internet or billboards, not even the noise of traffic, and as you can imagine, after being away from society for a very long time, Jesus probably wanted to be around other people.

The holy city - Jerusalem.

This is exactly what made the 2nd temptation so alluring.

Jesus had just finished a 40 day fast - fasting not just from food but also from social interaction, when the devil took Him to the highest place of the temple in the holy city of Jerusalem.

The fact that the devil took Jesus to the holy city of Jerusalem was very intentional. Jerusalem was the capital city as well as the religious center for the people of God, and because of that, it was the most populated city among Jews in the 1st century.

If you wanted to be around people (a whole a lot of people,) that's where you would go. To mingle with the crowds, to walk through the marketplace, or even grab a cup of coffee or tea, and to surround yourself with the comforts of society.

This is where the devil took Jesus, and when they got there, he brought Jesus to the highest point of the temple, would have meant that all the people down below would have seen Jesus standing there.

If the 1st temptation which was turning stones into bread was about physical hunger, than the 2nd temptation was about social hunger.

And for some people, it's their social appetite and their hunger for attention that they are craving to feed.

I don't how many of you are familiar with an app called Instagram, it's a Social Media app where you can post pictures of yourself, your pets, what you're eating or where you've been.

Instagram is a very popular app and according to their website they have roughly 1 billion users.

I don't know if any of you have an Instagram account or have used the app, but the demographics show that it is very popular among people in the 25 to 34 age range.

Contextually, that would be the demographics that Jesus belonged to when our story took place, as well as the disciples and many of the characters in the New Testament.

Anyways, Instagram is a very popular app and used by a lot of people, and one of the features of the app is that you can "follow" people.

Well, some people have a lot of followers, other just a few. I have like 2 followers - my immediate family, but there are some people who have 100's of 1000's of followers, some people even have more than 1 million followers!

When you reach that many followers you are known as an "Influencer" because when people see your pictures and see what you're eating, or what you're wearing or where you're going, those pictures "influence" others and make them want to do the same.

And so, sometimes an "influencer" will post a picture of a restaurant that he/she is eating at and then all of a sudden everyone wants to eat there!

Other times an "influencer" will post a brand of makeup or a certain fashion label, and then all of a sudden everyone wants to wear those labels.

Influencers will go to great lengths to gain more followers, and sometimes, they'll try to take pictures at some very exotic locations, or take pictures of themselves doing something very dangerous, and the more dangerous it is, or the more riskier it is, the more followers.

For example, this young Instagrammer is famous for posting pix of herself standing on top of buildings 1000's of feet above.



and here's a famous Instagram couple who took this picture while hanging over the side of of a moving train.

And in pursuit of more followers, and in pursuit of becoming more famous, people will post riskier and more dangerous pictures, and unfortunately, in the attempt to become "insta-famous" some people have died, while trying to get that perfect picture.

Well, long before Instagram was invented, this was the tactic the devil used in our Bible verse today, to tempt Jesus to do something spectacular, in front of all the people.

"If you are the Son of God."

Listen, now, to the way the devil presented the 2nd temptation.

In Matt 4:6 the devil said:

"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

It's an interesting choice of words that the devil chose to say to Jesus:

"If you are the Son of God"

The way the devil began this temptation was kind of like saying:

"Prove to us that you're the son of God"

and remember, this took place right after Jesus was baptized, where a voice from heaven said:

"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

So Jesus knew that He was the Son of God. John the Baptist also knew, that Jesus was the Son of God, but here, the devil was asking Jesus to show some kind of proof, and well jumping off the side of the temple and having God come and rescue Him would have been very convincing.

Prove to us that you are - who you say you are.

Let's say you're the child of a famous person and no one believed it, how would you go about proving it?

Well, if you're the son of a famous athlete, you might want to show off some kind of athletic ability. Or if you're the daughter of famous singer, you could sing a few notes. And if you're the child of a wealthy billionaire, showing off a few \$100 bills might be very convincing.

The devil was asking Jesus to prove He was the Son of God, and here, he was asking for a sign - for a little small miracle.

This was actually something that people were constantly asking Jesus for all throughout His ministry - they were asking for a sign.

In Matt 12:38

"Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.'"

In Matt 16:1

"The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven."

Even to the very end, in Matt 24:40 as Jesus hung on the cross, the crowds said to him:

"If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

Do not Test the Lord

So how did Jesus respond? How did Jesus respond when the devil asked Him to jump and to call upon God to send angels to rescue Him? What did Jesus say when the devil asked for a sign?

Jesus said:

"It is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

In order to understand Jesus' response, you have to go back to the Old Testament, in particular, to Deut. 6:16 which is where that quote came from.

Jesus was quoting Moses - who said to the Israelites,
"Do not test the Lord your God as you did at Massah."

And to understand *that* quote, you have to go back to an earlier book which is Exo 17:1-7. (It's sort of like a quote within a quote!)

The incident that Jesus was referring to was early on in the Exodus, when the people had fled Egypt and all the food had run out. And so, God provided manna & quail for the people to eat every day, but then, there was nothing to drink.

And so they complained to Moses asking for another miracle, so God told Moses to strike a rock with his staff, and when he did - water came gushing out.

Listen to Exo 17:7

*"And [Moses] called the place Massah and Meribah which means testing and quarrelling because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the Lord saying, **"Is the Lord among us or not?"**"*

And so that was the original story that Jesus was referring to when the people of God put God to the test - demanding for a miracle.

They demanded that God prove to them that he was with them. They demanded that God prove to them that he cared for them. That God didn't drag them all the way out into the desert just to starve them to death, and so they demanded a sign something to drink.

If you are the Son of God, if you are - who you say you are and if you really say that God loves you, prove it - by jumping off this ledge and ask God to save you. Then we'll know that you're the son of God and that God really exists.

So, what's the take-away from this temptation and how are we supposed to apply this to ourselves?

Good question!

Perhaps for those of you who are bungee-jumpers, sky-divers, fire-eaters and risk - takers, maybe it means not relying upon God to bail you out of trouble or to get you out of jam. Don't "jump" first and "ask" God to save you later, but ask God for wisdom before doing those things!

And then for the rest of us who are not death-defyers and risk takers, what we can take away from this second temptation is to re-examine what our relationship with God is like.

To see if there are any areas of our lives where we're trying to control God... to force God to follow us into places, or to force God to do things for us that we shouldn't be doing.

To force God to meet our demands and work on our time tables, when it should be the other way around.

A few weeks ago after a worship service, one of our younger members text me and she told me that she really liked the puppy story I told and wanted to hear some more, and so, here's another puppy story which I'll close with.

We have a new puppy in our family - her name is "Doc" (short for "Doctor") and every day - sometimes several times a day, Doc needs to go out for a walk.

But because she's still a puppy, she hasn't learned how to walk right beside me or right next to me - like how other dogs do - when we go out for a walk, it's more like she's pulling and dragging me up and down the block.

Here's a picture to show you what I mean.



That's Doc on the end of a 25 ft long leash and she's looking back at me, as if to say, *"Hurry up! Can't you keep up with me! Don't make me drag you up the street! You're embarrassing me!"*

So this is me and my dog "taking a walk" or to be more accurate, this is my dog dragging me up and down the street.

But it's not just dogs that drag their owners is it.

Sometimes we drag God - don't we? (not literally, of course) but sometimes we drag God into our plans, into our schedules and into our agendas, and instead of following where God wants us to go, we drag God into follow us.

And sometimes when we pray, we ask for God's blessings and ask God to do what we want, instead of doing what God has already blessed.

What if this week, instead of tugging on our leashes and dragging God with us to go wherever we wanted to go, what if we came up alongside Him and said:

God, not my will but your will be done, not my path but your path,

and then as we went into this week we walked stride for stride and walked in synch, and followed wherever the Lord leads us.

This is my prayer and hopes for us as we continue our journey during this season of Lent.