

## **The Tempter – March 1, 2020 – Pastor Donna Doult – Matthew 4:1-11**

How many of you know who Howard Kirby is? Recognize him from anywhere? Let me refresh your memory. A few months ago, Howard became quite famous. You may remember him as the man who paid \$35 for an old couch at a Habitat for Humanity Thrift store, and found close to \$43,000 in one of the lumpy cushions. Now Howard wasn't a wealthy man. In fact, after this experience a Go Fund Me page was set up to help this gentleman. Even though he was tempted to just keep the money, the store manager said, "'He could use it (the money). ... He has needs, but he said he just felt this prompting from God that said, 'This isn't yours.'" And following God's prompts, he reached out to find the former owners and returned the money.

And then there's my husband. As I was contemplating where to go with this sermon, I asked him to consider when he was tempted and failed to resist the temptation. He shared the story about being 13 and watching two older boys in the neighborhood sneak off to smoke cigarettes. He was so tempted to smoke, purely for selfish motives like "looking cool," and wanting to be accepted by these older kids; so he stole a cigarette from his mother's pack of Kents, and as he said, "The rest is history." It led him into a life of crime (such as it was) because from then on he stole cigarettes from his mother on a regular basis. Obviously, he didn't consult God on this. That devil sitting on his shoulder had a greater influence on him than he could resist.

Temptation is a frequent story line in the Bible. When I start talking about Biblical temptation, what is the first story that comes to your mind? Of course, it's Adam and Eve! We all know that story. Eve takes the fall for succumbing to Satan and offering forbidden fruit to Adam. But we need to remember, it didn't take too much coercion from her to convince him either.

Satan is a slippery character. And if even a blessed couple like Adam and Eve can fall victim to such manipulation, it is even harder for us these days when we are bombarded by temptation 24/7.

One of my favorite stories about temptations is one you don't hear about too much is the story of Ananias and Sapphira.

<sup>1</sup>Acts chapter 4:32 closes by stating that the first followers of Jesus did not consider their possessions to be their own but rather held in common, in order to use what they had on behalf of those in want. For example, Barnabas sold a plot of land and donated the proceeds to the apostles.

As told at the beginning of Acts chapter 5:1-11 Ananias and Sapphira, following Barnabas' example, also sold their land but secretly withheld a portion of the proceeds. The Tempter convinced them it was okay to betray God and lie about it. Ananias presented his donation to Peter. Peter replied, "Why is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit?" Peter pointed out that Ananias was in control of the money and could give or keep it as he saw fit, but had withheld a portion of it. Peter stated that Ananias had lied not to men, but to God. Ananias died on the spot and his body was carried out.

Everyone who heard about the incident feared the Lord. Three hours after Ananias' death his wife arrived, unaware of what had happened. Peter asked her the price of the land that she and Ananias had sold, and she stated the same untruthful price that Ananias had given. She also fell dead.

No one, and I mean NO ONE, is immune from Satan's temptation. This week's Gospel reading is one of the most famous because we see Satan up close and personal. He's not quietly slinking around in the background in this scripture.

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia contributors. "Ananias and Sapphira." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 5 Jan. 2020. Web. 21 Feb. 2020.

He's face to face with Jesus, and he offers him three things: The temptations were hedonism (satisfying yourself), egoism by power and might, and materialism by wealth.

He gets Jesus fresh from his return from the desert where he fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. A bold Satan, the Tempter, appears to Jesus and taunts him, "I'll bet you're really hungry! Since you are God's Son, speak the word that will turn these stones into loaves of bread." Admittedly, Jesus was hungry and tempted, but Jesus was ready and had a snappy comeback. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy to him by saying, *"It takes more than bread to stay alive. It takes a steady stream of words from God's mouth."*

So then Satan takes Jesus to the Holy City. He sat him on top of the Temple and said, "Since you are God's Son, jump." The Devil goaded him by quoting Psalm 91: *"He has placed you in the care of angels. They will catch you so that you won't so much as stub your toe on a stone."*<sup>7</sup> Jesus countered with another citation from Deuteronomy: "Don't you dare test the Lord your God."

Satan wasn't even done there yet. Our scripture says, *"For the third test, the Devil took him to the peak of a huge mountain. He gestured expansively, pointing out all the earth's kingdoms, how glorious they all were. Then he said, "They're yours—lock, stock, and barrel. Just go down on your knees and worship me, and they're yours."*

<sup>10</sup> Jesus' refusal was curt: "Beat it, Satan!" He backed his rebuke with a third quotation from Deuteronomy: *"Worship the Lord your God, and only him. Serve him with absolute single-heartedness."*

Jesus is tempted by bread for his hunger. He is tempted to save himself from danger. And finally, he is tempted to take all the power in the world that the devil can offer. But each time he rejects temptation.

Satan is a tempter for sure. Every time we say the Lord's prayer, we remember this when we speak, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Lest we forget, we've always got those seven deadly sins knocking on our door. It's easy to give into those!

First we have lust. What is lust? It's defined as strong passion or longing, especially for sexual desires. 2 Timothy 2:22 tells us, "*Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love [and] peace...*" Some of the finest people we may know are pursued by lust. I think of that famous Methodist, Jimmy Carter. <sup>2</sup>In 1976, Jimmy gave an famous (or infamous) interview to Playboy magazine, openly admitting he "lusted in his heart." For some, the interview served to humanize Carter as a regular person, prey to the same failings as everyone. To others, the interview was a kind of humble-brag, a confession of a flaw that was so minuscule that it served as an unspoken claim to virtue. Others simply thought it was over-sharing."

Next, we've got "gluttony." It's defined as an excessive and ongoing eating of food or drink. I have to raise my hand here and say "guilty!" But as you well know, there's a scripture for that sin as well. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, "*Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*" I stand guilty as charged of overeating just because I lack self-control. The "Tempter" certainly knows how to push my buttons on that subject!

Third up, we've got "greed." I think we all know that greed is an excessive pursuit of material goods. I certainly don't think of myself as "greedy," but I certainly do like my Amazon Prime membership. The Tempter is at work putting everything I could ever want in front of my with the click of my mouse. It's hard to resist. Hebrews 13:5, "*Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'*"

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ajc.com/news/when-jimmy-carter-lusted-his-heart/kzdD5pLXvT3qnf5RyJllik/>

Fourth is “sloth.” Sloth is defined as an excessive laziness or the failure to act and utilize one’s talents. Solomon spoke of sloth in Proverbs 6:6 saying, *“Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise.”* I have to admit that isn’t one of the deadly sins to which I relate...thank goodness! I’m a mid-range Type A personality, so you won’t often find me being “slothful.”

Nor will you often find me sinning by exhibiting our fifth deadly sin that is “wrath.” Wrath is defined as a strong anger and hate towards another person. The Bible speaks about wrath in Romans 12:19, *“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’”* Even when I am most angry or upset, I consider my words and actions carefully. It’s sort of like at a trial and the judge commands the jury to disregard something. Once the words have left your mouth, they can’t be unheard. Consider your words and actions carefully.

In the sixth spot, we have “envy.” Envy is an intense desire to have an item that someone else possesses. The Bible says the following in Proverbs 14:30, *“A sound heart is life to the body, But envy is rottenness to the bones.”* Kindness cures envy by placing the desire to help others above the need to be better or above them. This also falls under the tenth commandment: *“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house, nor his farm, nor his cattle, nor anything that is his!”* I sometimes waffle a little bit on this sin. The Tempter can plant seeds of envy in me. I have a good life, but I sometimes DO wish for more. How about you?

And last but not least, we have “pride.” Pride is an excessive view of one's self without regard for others. The Bible says the following in Jeremiah 9:23-24, *“...Let not the mighty man boast of his might...but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me...”* (meaning God). Humility cures pride by taking ego out of the equation.

Just a week or so ago, our Front Porch study women were discussing how easy it is to falter as a Christian. One of the scripture that kept coming up was Matthew 16:23 when Jesus declares, ““Get behind me, Satan!” You hear that? *“Get behind me Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”*

It’s not easy. I know it’s not. Humans are fallible being. We have passion, we have hunger, we want everything, we get angry, we get puffed up, arrogant, and full of ourselves.

*And there we have it my friends, we are all human! But as humans we are children of God, and that God is a forgiving God. But we often times forget to keep our hearts on God. We forget to keep our eyes on the prize. And that prize is our salvation.*

Our Gospel lesson this morning ends with this in verse <sup>11</sup> *The Test was over. The Devil left. And in his place, angels! Angels came and took care of Jesus’ needs.”*

“Get behind me Satan.” We are children of God, and Jesus can take care of all our needs.

“Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.”

Amen.

## Matthew 4:1-11 The Message (MSG)

### The Test

4 1-3 Next Jesus was taken into the wild by the Spirit for the Test. The Devil was ready to give it. Jesus prepared for the Test by fasting forty days and forty nights. That left him, of course, in a state of extreme hunger, which the Devil took advantage of in the first test: “Since you are God’s Son, speak the word that will turn these stones into loaves of bread.”

4 Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy: “It takes more than bread to stay alive. It takes a steady stream of words from God’s mouth.”

5-6 For the second test the Devil took him to the Holy City. He sat him on top of the Temple and said, “Since you are God’s Son, jump.” The Devil goaded him by quoting Psalm 91: “He has placed you in the care of angels. They will catch you so that you won’t so much as stub your toe on a stone.”

7 Jesus countered with another citation from Deuteronomy: “Don’t you dare test the Lord your God.”

8-9 For the third test, the Devil took him to the peak of a huge mountain. He gestured expansively, pointing out all the earth’s kingdoms, how glorious they all were. Then he said, “They’re yours—lock, stock, and barrel. Just go down on your knees and worship me, and they’re yours.”

10 Jesus’ refusal was curt: “Beat it, Satan!” He backed his rebuke with a third quotation from Deuteronomy: “Worship the Lord your God, and only him. Serve him with absolute single-heartedness.”

11 The Test was over. The Devil left. And in his place, angels! Angels came and took care of Jesus' needs.