

“Falling into the Arms of the Savior: temptation”

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11

Graphic: desert, temptation, trust, falling

Key Verses: Matthew 4

Theme: Jesus’ temptations teach us that, as Christians, we aren’t to ask for miraculous exemption from temptation, but are to have a trusting relationship with God that strengthens and provides an escape when temptation comes. Falling into the arms of the Savior means knowing Jesus Christ intimately in order to call on Him in your hour of temptation and sin.

1) Introduction

- a) In the Bible, there are a series of encounters that Jesus has with certain individuals that are critical in defining his mission and purpose in the world as Savior.
- b) And in each encounter, we not only learn something profound about Jesus and God’s Kingdom he came to usher into the world, but we find out something more about what it means to be fully human.
- c) Because Jesus was fully divine and fully human – he is both/and – his encounters with those around him show us God’s nature and what GOD is like. And on the flip side, and as a reflection, these encounters show us, with more clarity, what being human is all about.
- d) And so, over the next 5 weeks, Jesus will meet a man named Lazarus, who he raises from the dead. He will meet a blind man, to whom he gives sight. He encounters a Samaritan woman at a well, to whom he reveals the kingdom of God. In the middle of the night, Jesus meets a man named Nicodemus, whose faith he challenges.
- e) And in each of those cases, the encounter with Jesus not only makes a statement about Jesus’ divinity, but also, more intimately for us, statements about humanity and the struggles we face. We face doubt. We face feelings of isolation. We are spiritually blind and spiritually dead sometimes.
- f) And in order to be more alive, more faithful, more included in God’s plan for humanity, we have to get to the point where we trust God and are willing to fall into the arms of the Savior He sent to save us. And so we’ve entitled this series, Falling into the Arms of The Savior. We have to be willing to release our handholds on the ledge that we cling to so fiercely, and fall into the arms of Jesus.

- g) There's a simple activity that we do at camp and in youth group that illustrates what I'm talking about. It's about trust...Trust Fall - youth
- h) But see, falling is not something we like to do right? Not really in the top ten things that we enjoy... Some people fall out of airplanes and off bridges for fun! We think those people are insane!
- i) I mean, what happens if we hit the ground? What happens when something goes wrong and we finally stop falling because the ground came up to meet us? Gravity can be pretty brutal, right?
- j) Psalm 111:7 The works of [God's] hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy.
- k) Learning to trust God is one of the main goals of faithful Christian living. If you are having a hard time trusting God because of something or someone in your past or present, then make it a priority. I pray that this sermon series will invite you to trust in your Holy God more deeply.
- l) Learning to trust in God is so important because when the doubt creeps in...when the blindness takes over our sight...when the isolation and rejection comes...falling into the arms of the Savior is our only way out.
- m) Today, as we open our Bibles to Matthew chapter 4, we encounter the newly-baptized Jesus being led out into the wilderness. And he goes into the wilderness for one purpose...to be tempted by the devil.
- n) When we read that Jesus was tempted, what does that mean for MY life...for MY temptations and MY sin...let's take a look...but before we read, **let's pray**...

2) Scripture

a) Read verses 4:1-2

- i) So right after Jesus was baptized, both the gospels of Mark and Matthew tell us that he was led, **BY THE HOLY SPIRIT**, into the desert.
- ii) And he was led into the desert for the express PURPOSE of being tempted by the devil.
- iii) God's **PLAN** was for Jesus to be tempted. Why? Like, why God? Well, resisting temptation solidifies our resolve and desire to be obedient to

- God. It's like building up our immunity to disease by being around people who are carrying germs.
- iv) And because God knew that in three short years from now, Jesus would have to be as obedient as it gets – Philippians 2 tells us *he was obedient until death, even death on a cross* – God had to allow Jesus to be tempted in order to get a glimpse of what it would be like – to fulfill the plan God had. And because God's plan included the salvation of humans, God wanted Jesus – fully human, remember – to experience temptation as a human.
 - v) And so, God's Spirit led Jesus into the desert...ALONE...to be tempted.
 - vi) Here's a question for all time: Why is there evil in the world? I mean, what possible benefit would there be for God to allow evil to be present in the world? Wouldn't it just be easier to wipe out evil and live in all good, all the time? God can do it! He's God!
 - vii) That's a sermon for another day, but suffice to say that God allows evil to be present in the world so that when we choose God's will over sin, which is evil, it's a real choice. In order for God to allow us to choose Him freely, we have to have an alternative, which is evil.
 - viii) When Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted, he had CHOICES to make. He was TEMPTED and had to choose to be obedient. In those choices, we see the real heart of the One God sent to save us.
 - ix) But he had to be prepared – you can't just go into battle with the devil without the proper training...so he fasted for forty days and forty nights. This reminds me of Noah – when he was on the Ark and it rained for how long? (40 days and nights). Or Moses, who TWICE was on the mountain with God for how long (40 days). This is an intense time of preparation...a time of transformation or testing. And Jesus spends this WHOLE TIME fasting in order to gain clarity and to prepare for what was coming.
 - x) And here's what was coming...look at verse 3...

b) Read verses 3-4

- i) Now, some people don't believe in the existence of evil – how they believe that, I'll never know – just look. Other people believe that evil exists, but they don't believe that there is a devil – a personalized evil that is loose in the world. I believe Satan is real and I believe that he

works in our lives in subtle and devious ways to distract us and block us from knowing and doing God's will. I don't spend a whole LOT of time thinking about it, but I know that we have to be diligent in seeking the Kingdom of God in order to frustrate the devil and remind him that Jesus has already defeated him – he is NOT the winner, ultimately.

- ii) And so, the tempter, the devil, came to Jesus and said, “IF”, “If you are the Son of God (which he VERY WELL knew to be the case, THEN command these stones to become bread.
- iii) Now, it said in verse 2 that, Jesus was famished! He was starving. He hadn't eaten in 40 days. Can you imagine that LEVEL of hunger?
- iv) I go 6 hours without food and I'm like a raging bull...40 days?!
- v) But see, the devil knows exactly what's going on with Jesus. He KNOWS that he's hungry and so this first TEMPTATION is: “hey, make bread from these stones to satisfy your physical hunger.”
- vi) IF you are GOD...you can DO IT!
- vii) But instead of just making bread and mashing it down, Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 8:3 – “One does not live by bread alone, but by every Word from the mouth of God.”
- viii) (LOUD) It's not about the bread! Bread only satisfies for a season! But having a trusting relationship with God is eternal.
- ix) What's the temptation for us in this? Think for a minute...where are you famished? Is it emotionally? – been fighting with my kids or my spouse for so long, I'm famished! Careful – the tempter knows that.
- x) Is it physically? – been struggling with health or just worn out because I haven't taken care of myself. Too busy! I'm famished! Be careful – Satan will hand you an easy way out that may make it worse. I'm not knocking doctors or medicine or those who take it to stay alive, but we are a highly-addicted culture. We have to be careful not to rely too heavily on drugs and alcohol to fix the problems that could be fixed by healthier, yet harder and more involved, choices.
- xi) Maybe the famine is sexual or is it spiritual?...Satan will find the VERY THING in which you are the least prepared to fight and use that to tempt you to fall into sin.

- xii) So what do we do? How do we fight this? The Boy Scout Motto is: Be prepared! Not just for the Boy Scouts any more. Be rested and ready... Take a real Sabbath each week, please! Disconnect from the TV, the iPod, the computer and fall into the arms of the Savior. Exercise and take care of yourself. Reconnect with your parents, spouse, kids, family...whoever you have.
- xiii) Because, honestly, an unhealthy body of Christ that is reacting out of the depletion in our lives is no witness at all to a world that is exactly the same. And if we can't meet these BASIC needs in our lives, then the other temptations are just that much easier for Satan... look at verse 5...

c) Read verse 5-7

- i) One word: PRIDE. Probably the most significant and detrimental temptation and sin in the body of Christ, not to mention the world.
- ii) “Hey, I don’t need you to tell me what to do, because I got this by myself.” “I’m the man!” “If you were like me, we’d all be better off.” “It’s great that you want to do it THAT way, but you’re wrong and I’m right.”
- iii) We think people are less than us, especially those outside the church.
- iv) Jesus is standing on a high point. Now, the Temple in Jerusalem (holy city) was the highest spot in the city. And the devil took Jesus to the highest point at the Temple, and tempted him to just throw himself down.
- v) And it’s not like the devil wasn’t speaking the truth...in the first temptation and now here. Jesus COULD turn stones into bread. Jesus COULD send himself hurling down without being hurt...and angels WOULD attend to him...but what would that prove, besides what Satan already knew.
- vi) See, he just wanted to see if Jesus would DO IT!
- vii) But instead, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:16 – “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” Just because you think you can because of who you are, doesn’t mean it’s not sin. Jesus came to SERVE, not use his divine power to BE SERVED.
- viii) Just because we are born-again children of Almighty God doesn’t mean that we have some honored place in THIS world. In fact, we are specifically called to humble ourselves, pray, and serve with a contrite

heart. Trust God...fall into the arms of the Savior by releasing any pride that is in you because of who you are in Christ.

ix) We can ultimately trust God for salvation – for our place with Him in eternity – and we can trust the Holy Spirit to guide us and protect us now. But don't ever let that develop into spiritual pride in us today in THIS world.

x) Besides, the world doesn't really care that you're saved. What it will care about, is if you share the good news with someone who doesn't yet have the hope that you have. Do that humbly...

xi) Last temptation...verse 8...

d) Read verse 8-11

i) Third temptation. Jesus is taken to a VERY HIGH mountain. Remember from last week – high mountain = something significant to Matthew. Satan takes Jesus to the 'top of the world' and tempts him with EVRERYTHING there is – all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.

ii) "All you have to do, Jesus, is worship me," says the devil.

iii) I spent seven years ministering nearby the Allegheny Casino in Salamanca. I saw a few people's lives ruined because they were promised the world and gave up everything to get it...only to find out they lost everything in the end. The UM Church states that gambling is a menace to society and I agree, based on my experience. People were in my office regularly who had no food or gas because of their choices.

iv) Choices based on greed. More money...more power...more stuff.

v) All you have to do is WORSHIP ME, and all this will be yours.

vi) Jesus rebuked Satan, now... "AWAY WITH YOU, SATAN!" and then quotes Deuteronomy 6:13. "Worship the Lord your God and serve HIM only."

vii) Having stuff in our lives is not a sin. Being rich in not a sin. Putting wealth and power before God in your life is. The devil was tempting Jesus to give up who he is to get what would all be his someday ANYWAY, just to have it NOW!

viii) For those who are wealthy, trusting God is hard! When we have everything we need due to the money that we make, we sometimes find it hard to trust in God's provision.

ix) Falling into the arms of the Savior for those who have means entails letting go of the money and watching God do some amazing things in your life and those around you. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be adding to you...

3) Application

- a) Let me say just a few things about Jesus' use of scripture to combat the temptations from Satan. From the earliest age, Jesus was raised in the church. He was a Jew... followed all the Jewish laws and regulations, and knew the Hebrew Scriptures. But he didn't just memorize them or know enough to be dangerous.
- b) Jesus hid those scriptures in his heart. He understood the words spoken by Moses, spoken by the prophets. He lived the history of his people in a way that made a deep impact on his life. And in his deepest hour of need in the wilderness, those words from God came welling up in Him as the fortress around his heart.
- c) Falling into the arms of the Savior entails spending the time studying the Bible to understand who this Savior is. It means reading the grand stories of God's people and of Jesus and his disciples, and the church, so that when you find yourself in a similar situation, the Holy Spirit will access that assurance and anchor you.
- d) NT scholar M. Eugene Boring commented that, "To the extent that Jesus' temptation serves as a model for Christians today, it might teach us that to be a 'child of God' means to have a trusting relationship to God that does not ask for miraculous exceptions to the limitations of an authentic human life."
- e) I would add that to be a child of God is a richer experience because we live this life in the presence of temptation and evil, yet are hopeful for the eternity that is promised in Christ Jesus. There's freedom in that!
- f) And when temptation comes, falling into the arms of a Savior is our escape route from temptation.
- g) When we are tempted by our selfish wants and needs, pride, greed, and power, God calls us to resist – to choose His way. Jesus is our source of power and strength when we are tempted.

- h) The place to start, however, is to acknowledge that what the temptation leads to is sin – not the temptation itself.
- i) I could go off and list a bunch of temptations in our lives and the sins they leads to, but the list would be long. We are all probably aware of most, if not all, of them. When those temptations come, when the pull is increasing and we are having a hard time resisting...fall into the arms of the Savior.

4) Conclusion

- a) Sky-divers trust their parachutes and the people who packed them. Bungee jumpers trust their nylon cords. Our youth trust that their fellow disciples will catch them.
- b) We, as Christians, falling into the arms of Jesus, trust God. And just like those parachutes and bungee cords have proven to be effective, Jesus has proven to be sufficient for salvation and for discipleship. The feeling of falling is an out-of-control feeling
- c) We want to hold on to the temptation and sin because it's tangible...we can focus on the struggles of the Christian life if we are always struggling with temptation and sin.
- d) But living life always struggling with temptation can become miserable.
- e) Falling into the arms of the Savior means letting go of the temptation by asking Jesus to release you from it. With the power of Jesus, you can finally say, "Away with you, Satan!"
- f) And even though there will be more temptations that come, once you begin to trust, it becomes easier to do it.
- g) Next week, Jan Wheeler will be preaching. We are so blessed to have several trained lay speakers in this church...people who have spent time learning what it means to bring the word of God to the church.
- h) She'll hopefully be talking about Nicodemus, and his desire to know more about this Jesus. It's a story about doubt and fear in the midst of life.
- i) As you gather, know that I'll be facing a day-long series of interviews for ordination. Next week, be in prayer for that process and my willingness to fall into Jesus' arms for guidance and peace...
- j) (kneel) Let's pray...