

Sermon Series: The New Normal
Facing Temptation Like Jesus
Matthew 4:1-11

Facing temptation as normal – vs.1-2

I wonder how many here this morning made some type of New Year's resolution that pertains to dieting? Eating healthy is a battle many of us fight and lose. At times I feel like this picture the worship team developed. We try and do the right thing like exercising; yet in front of us is always that temptation to eat the very food that puts on the pounds. But that is life. Facing temptation was also the norm for Jesus. If we think he was so radical and powerful that the devil didn't even try, we would be flawed in our assumption. So let's get into a well known story about one of many times when Jesus was tempted.

Read Matthew 4:1-11

The word tempted means to go contrary to God's will, so why would God lead Jesus into a situation of temptation? However maybe this isn't just a temptation story; but a story of Jesus being tested. **One bible scholar has said that temptation and testing are two sides of the same coin.** Jesus was experiencing life. He faced situations where he could go down the path of defying God or demonstrate his character through obedience that wanted to please God.

As we continue in our sermon series, The New Normal, we're seeking to move from seeing Jesus as a radical, some extreme personality to seeing that he was normal; it's the rest of the world that is crazy. Jesus is what normal living should look like from God's children because we were created in his image. One of the normal experiences for Jesus was he had many opportunities where he could have defied God but it was normal for him to obey God.

He wasn't just tempted once but many times. Think about when he was tempted to do things like give a sign to skeptics just to appease them or knuckle down to authorities who wanted to limit his power and influence, or show discrimination of one ethnic group over another or even when he was popular to be made an earthly king. Too often we think Jesus had one major temptation by the devil in the wilderness. He faced moments of temptation all through his life.

The relevancy of making that point is so we know being tempted is not wrong, nor should we use it as an excuse to give in, but instead use it as a time of testing to follow God's word.

Trust in God's Sufficiency – vs. 3, 5, 8

One way or another, temptation is going to somehow invite us to doubt God's sufficiency. Whatever tempts us is going to try and give us permission to play God just to make sure life is working the way we want it to play out. Temptation will try and weaken us from many angles to distrust God's will for us.

We see from the scripture how three times the devil would tempt Jesus to want more than he had and not be content with God's care. The devil said to Jesus, **“If you are the son, turn these stones into bread.”** I almost wonder if there isn't a bit of dry humor being used here in the scripture. Because the devil said turned these stones into bread. Where Jesus lived the ground was barren. Rocks and stones are everywhere. I have never been to the Holy Land but I heard a person speak who had and they said rocks cover the ground. We have dirt and grass but rocks big and small are everywhere. So there is Jesus being tempted by the devil to turn stones into bread – that would be way too much bread.

I was told this week that a woman was arrested for stealing a cancer donation jar from a restaurant in Dyersburg. The security camera was able to identify the person. She came in to get her take out order and when no one was looking she stuffed the jar under her

sweater and left with her order. Once she got outside she checked her bag and realized some food was missing. She re-entered the restaurant and was caught on camera wearing the sweater but her hood was down and a identification was able to be made. Her story reminds us the drive to get our share will come back to bite us.

The devil then tempted Jesus by challenging him to demonstrate he was God's son by jumping off a high part of the temple. Another example of over the top demonstration of power. Let's really push God to do something big; but has no purpose.

The last temptation the devil used was to offer Jesus all the riches in world. He wasn't offered a sufficient amount to live on; but all the riches of world. As temptation comes our way take a good look at it and ask yourself if some how the temptation doesn't contain thoughts and attitudes that motivate us to be dissatisfied with what we have, or we are or doubt that God is not doing his job, God is not being faithful, God has not kept his promises.

Temptation plays off our fears that God will not provide.

Illustration – RC's email of the polar bear attack.

The other day someone sent me this email.

Polar Bear Attack in Churchill, Manitoba, Canada

**These are pictures of an actual polar bear
attacking a man.**

**The pictures were taken while people watched
and**

could do nothing to stop the attack!

Reports from the local newspaper say that

the victim will make a full recovery.

Here's the picture -

And then the final caption just nails the truth when it says.

**May your troubles always be smaller
than your imagination!**

Temptation targets our imagination to doubt that God is able to sufficiently provide for us.

Use scripture correctly – vs. 4, 7, 10

There are certainly times in our lives when being dissatisfied is justified. This story of the temptation of Jesus gives us a way of sorting it all out, so the temptation can actually be used by God as a time of testing. God will not tempt us to disobey him; but he will test us to see if we are truly following him.

Every temptation is fought the best with God's presence leading us. Every temptation can be converted to a test when we allow God's Spirit and his scripture to guide us. The Bible tells us the Spirit led Jesus and he faced his temptation with scripture. This is another reason why I stress that we need to live by more than just personal convictions and our feelings. Feelings come and go. Scripture contains truth that is timeless.

Alarm Illustration: Jesus use of scripture worked like our new church alarm system. Now if some one enters the building when it is locked, they have to about 30 seconds to enter a 4 digit code that indicates they have authority to be here. If they have the wrong code or no code the alarm will sound.

When temptation entered the presence of Jesus, he used scripture to alert him whether or not what had entered into his life was of

God or not. Scripture both protects us and grows us.

Over the summer I read the book *The Christian Atheist*. There is a section in that book where the author makes some suggestions about how we change and grow in Christ. But his words really remind me how we can face temptations more normal like Jesus. Here are three reminders from his book that we need to hear.

One step we need to take is cut the excuses for following temptation instead of following Jesus. I read a about a pastor who was very successful and his church was growing but at the cost of hurting his family. He was referred to counselor and the pastor was telling the counselor all the reasons why he just couldn't slow down. The counselor let him finish and then leaned across the desk and said to him, **“So what your telling me is, even our God isn't big enough to help you change?”** (*Christian Atheist, Groschel, p.126*) We need to can the excuses why we cannot change and resist temptation. One pastor has said, **“If you're not dead then you're not done.”** p.137 don't tell the God of the universe you're to big for him to change, Lord you better just stick with creating something out of nothing. Excuses play right into the hand of temptation that God is not sufficient enough to help. God's word can help us to cut out excuses.

The Apostle Paul once said, **“We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ.”** 2 Corinthians 10:5

Secondly, cut the ties that reinforce temptation. Jesus used God's word to let the devil know the boundaries that cannot be crossed. **Minimize and possibly even avoid the friendships, relationships, activities that would encourage us to doubt God's sufficiency, and grow discontent and live counter to God's will.** 1 Corinthians 15:33 states that **“bad company corrupts good character.”** Face temptation leaning on those who

encourage you to put God's word into action; not discount it by saying its irrelevant for today.

Illustration: This past week Gary, Mark and I met to talk about planning the background for the sermon slides. One of the things we said partly in jest but intentionally at the beginning of the meeting is we would develop our own picture for the message points to appear on. See we often go to websites like Google to hunt for pictures that support theme of the message. There are times when you put in words and you get hit with images that are far from biblical and carry image of hate, prejudice and misuse of sexuality. Since this week was on temptation, we agreed, there is no need to put in the word temptation or we'll be seeing images we just don't need to be seeing. Cut the ties in your life that feed temptation. God's very testing of your character may include making necessary changes in relationships and the things that have your time and attention.

Third, surrender to God's power. Jesus waited and when the temptation was over he was ministered to by God's angels. But lets remember the story also said the temptation began after he had been praying and going without food or fasting. The point was Jesus faced temptation from beginning to end by surrendering to God's power not doubting and questioning whether God really cares, wondering why God is taking so long to help.

Russell Kelso Carter is credited with writing the hymn Standing on the promises of God. He grew up in a very devout Christian family. At a young age he made his decision to follow Jesus Christ. **He writes, : "But I made a common mistake; I didn't forsake my old companions and habits, and four fourteen years I lived the up and down experience so familiar to the average church member....My soul cried out to God for deliverance....but I wasn't willing to pay the price."**

Carter tells how he became stricken with a disease of the heart that doctors could not cure or improve. He said he had heard of the prayer of faith for healing; but felt it would be wrong to ask God for the bailout. And then finally with his strength slipping from him, he prayed for healing and totally surrendered his life to God. Then he went to a prayer meeting and was anointed for healing by a Dr. Cullis. **He writes, "I was terribly weak, but I went. I will only add that I returned in three days, walking by faith, not by feeling, resumed my college work and all types of religious work. I was healed by the power of God alone."** (Then Sings My Soul, Robert J. Morgan, p.215)

He finally came to point in life where he stood on God's promises rather than the falling for temptations of this life.

If that is our hearts desire this morning, lets sing his song, Standing on the Promises of God.