

We are now in the first week of lent and we ponder on Jesus' own sufferings as he went to the cross. As Jesus began his ministry he himself was tempted in the wilderness for forty days when he was full of the Holy Spirit. The focus is on Jesus the beloved Son who is obedient to God in a way that Adam was not. Jesus begins his ministry by overcoming all the attacks of the evil one showing his commitment to live in a manner that may not be the easiest road to travel, but the way that most pleases God. Jesus himself had fasted during these forty days and was physically hungry. At this moment Satan tempts him because he is weak and vulnerable. Three temptations are listed for us.

The first temptation was to challenge Jesus to change the stone into bread. Jesus is hungry and ought to feel free to provide himself food. The challenge that the evil one gives is, "If you are the Son of God then turn this stone into bread." Jesus was just reaffirmed in his baptism that he was God's beloved Son and God was well pleased with him. The devil attacks this very identity of Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus replies quoting Deut. 8:3 which says, 'Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.' In the original context this was said to the Israelites in the wilderness where God had humbled them in order to test them. He made them hungry and fed them with manna that they would know that Yahweh is the one who provides. The point is that not just the fulfillment of physical hunger but to trust in God to satisfy one's inner most desires. The devil wanted him to make use of his supernatural powers to satisfy his bodily desires. The devil continues to tempt us with our bodily desires to satisfy them in an inappropriate manner. Jesus shows that true satisfaction can only come through the word of the Lord. We may think of various things that we crave for thinking it will give us ultimately satisfaction, but ultimate satisfaction comes from the word of the Lord, the commandments and his directions. Bread will keep us physically alive, but it's the word of God that uniquely gives human lives its meaning, shape, purpose and value. So no matter how much we try to satisfy ourselves and our needs with material things, true satisfaction will elude us. Jesus overcame this temptation by depending on the very word of God.

In the second temptation the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world and told Jesus that he would give him all authority and glory to him if only Jesus would worship him. Jesus again replies that one should only worship the Lord your God citing Deut. 6:13. Satan's condition is that the Son renounces allegiance to the Father. He is to bow down and worship Satan, an act that would change his life. If Jesus did this then he would be accepting Satan's authority and sovereignty. Jesus knows that he would be glorified only through suffering, death and resurrection. He would be seated at the right hand of God with all power and authority on completing his work. Satan wanted Jesus to forget the way of the cross, to forget the power and glorify that he will receive after his suffering and death. Avoid the cross. Just worship me and I will give it to you immediately. Instant gratification will be granted if only you will lose your soul to the devil. Satan continues to offer us instant gratification whether it be money or power or sex if we offer our souls to him. He promises us also power and authority and satisfaction but these empty promises lead us to death. Jesus knows that he would be breaking the first commandment of having no other God and to worship him alone. He knows that his Father who created the whole world is the one who has dominion over all the kingdoms of the earth, he alone would give that dominion to Jesus. Satan continues to tempt us by offering us power and glory and making us avoid the way of the cross. We too are to use scripture to overcome such temptations.

In the final temptation Satan wants to test Jesus about God's faithfulness and to become famous. Satan takes him to the pinnacle of the temple and asks Jesus to jump from there because scripture states, "He will command his angels concerning you to guard you." Jesus' reply was that 'you shall not put the Lord your God to the test'. The temptation here is for Jesus to do something spectacular and become famous. A flashy display of power, not the cross is what the devil offers to Jesus. The test is also a challenge of God's faithful protection. If Jesus is the Son and is righteous then God will protect him even if he jumps from the pinnacle. It is interesting to note that even Satan cites scripture to tempt Jesus. Jesus refuses to test God's miraculous protection nor does he want to become famous by doing something spectacular. In all three temptations Jesus used the word of God to overcome his temptations.

Because Jesus Christ was tempted like we are and yet did not sin he is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. We can therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness and confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. No temptation is beyond our ability to overcome it because God is faithful and he will not let us be tested beyond our strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that we may be able to endure it. May we as followers of Christ truly overcome our temptations using God's word and be drawn closer to him during this period of lent.