

February 22, 2026

Invocabit

Text: Genesis 3:1-21; Matthew 4:1-11

When we think of the devil, Satan, we think of him as a pretty powerful being. After all, it seems that he used to be one of the archangels, the high ranking heavenly beings, before rebelling against God and being thrown out of heaven. And it seems he was allowed to keep much of his power, being able to transport Jesus vast distances in the blink of an eye, for example.

Yet despite this sort of power, there are several things that he can't do. One of the most important is that he doesn't have the power to make you do anything. "The devil made me do it" isn't a true statement, especially for a Christian. No, all the devil can do is tempt. He uses temptation to try to get you to follow him in rebelling against God.

Temptation is our focus on this first Sunday in Lent. We see how the devil tempts us, and we also see how our Lord resists temptation through the Word. Christ does this for us, and then calls us by faith to follow in His footsteps.

What we find in the devil's tactics are those very things that make temptation so tempting. Consider the appeal of the forbidden fruit to Eve. We read, "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate."

What do we see there? "Good for food" – an appeal to reason, to "common sense." Why would God make a tree have fruit if you aren't supposed to eat it? We also learn that the fruit "was a delight to the eyes" – it appealed to the senses. It's beautiful, and so it must be good. And then third, we hear that "the tree was to be desired to make one wise" – wisdom is a good thing, and so it must be a good thing to want this fruit, right? The temptation was directed toward Eve's reason, her senses, and her desires. It's all having her look inward, rather than outward toward God.

And this ties in to what Satan said right before this. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." He told Eve that God was holding her back, God was limiting her, God was being selfish and unfair to her – and she didn't have to take it. She could be like God. She could use her own reason, senses, and desires to decide what was right and wrong for her. She didn't have to be held back; she could be free.

Those temptations are still attacking us today. Temptation appeals to reason. How often do you know what God's word says, but then think that the temptation just makes sense and so what could be wrong? If two men or two women love each other, then how could it be wrong for them to get married? What does it matter what they do in the privacy of their own home?

Temptation appeals to the senses, the feelings. The sins of gossiping, lust, drunkenness, wrath, laziness – there's a part of us that very much enjoys how these things make us feel. How can it be wrong if it feels good? And on the other side of the coin, if doing the right thing, speaking the truth, causes someone pain or sadness, can it really be the right thing?

Temptation appeals to desires, especially desires for things that, by themselves, are good things. People desire children – a good thing – but if unable or unwilling to have them naturally, resort to things like surrogacy, which involves the buying and selling of human beings as a product, or IVF, which involves conceiving many children knowing that most of them will have to be killed.

In all these temptations, we're directed to look inward, to what makes sense to us, to what feels good to us, or what appears desirable to us – not outward to the Lord God and what He has told us in His perfect word.

These attacks are leveled against Jesus by Satan in the wilderness. And here, we see how Satan takes those things and applies them to specific situations. Jesus has been in the wilderness, fasting for forty days and nights, and is very, very hungry. So what does the devil say? “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”

What would reason say? “Why not make bread?” “How can a few little loaves really matter all that much?” “Why would you have the power to make bread if you're not supposed to use it?”

What would the senses say? “Being this hungry doesn't feel good; wrestling with the devil while hungry is even worse!” “What kind of Father would make His Son go hungry?” The devil's trying to make God look like the bad guy, just like he did with Eve!

Consider the next temptation. “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”

The devil appeals to reason, even twisting Scripture to do so. “God said He'd protect you, so you can jump.”

He appeals to feelings – imagine how good it would've felt to be falling from the pinnacle and then heavenly angels swoop down and gently set you in the courtyard. It would be an adrenaline rush like skydiving, but with divine intervention! And even more to the temptation, imagine how good it would've felt to have all the crowds watch in amazement as it happened. And more than that, imagine how good it would've felt to rub it in the noses of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Who's the true master of the temple now?

In addition, this appeals to desire, in this case, desire to “win converts.” Surely the people would see such a grand sign and fall down and worship! “Isn't that what you've come to do, Jesus?”

On to the third temptation. The devil takes Jesus up on to an incredibly high mountain and by the power he still possesses as a fallen angel shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. Then he turns to Jesus and says, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

Now maybe we think, “Jesus is the God of all, how does this tempt Him?” It's true that He is God, yet He is in what we call His state of humiliation, where He put aside much of His power and instead chose to suffer as one of us. Satan is offering Jesus the option to skip all that suffering. Skip the hunger. Skip having to deal with wavering crowds and obnoxious Pharisees and thick-headed disciples. Skip the cross. Just get all the glory of the world right away.

Human reason would call that a pretty good deal. And human feelings? Would you rather suffer the agony of being crucified and God's wrath poured out upon you, or not? And desire? All the world would be yours, and so then you could get them to do what you want, bring your kingdom to earth. "Isn't that why you're here, Jesus, to bring about the Kingdom of God? All you have to do is worship. Bow down once, get glory forever."

The devil attacked Jesus' human reason, senses, and desires. He attacks us in this way as well. And we're only deceiving ourselves if we think that we can resist him by ourselves. Remember, Eve was innocent, without sin, but when she looked at the fruit for herself and judged it according to her own decision, she fell. You and I are born sinful, starting off already bearing the corruption of sin because of that fall. Instead of thinking, "If I were in Eve's shoes, I would've done it differently," look to Christ and see how He resisted temptation.

How did our Lord resist temptation? Not by using His divine powers or perfect reason. He didn't just vaporize the devil when he came to Him in the wilderness, or cast him into the abyss then and there. No, Jesus was there as a true man to redeem men, to fulfill the Law which we have failed to uphold. This is what makes Jesus that great High Priest that Hebrews speaks of, the High Priest "who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."

Jesus resisted the devil through the word. When the devil tempted Jesus to trust His power to make bread for Himself over His Father's care and provision, Jesus responded with Deuteronomy 8:3: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Jesus had set aside His divine power, fully entrusting Himself into the hand of His Father. And so He would trust that His Father would preserve Him, giving Him bread when He knew was right, just as He has promised to all people in His Word.

When the devil tells Jesus to jump off the temple top, and twists Scripture to try to justify it, Jesus again responds with the Word – Deuteronomy 6:16: "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test." Jesus would trust in His Father to provide daily bread, and He would not go out of His way to try to force His Father into doing things merely for His earthly benefit or glory. He would not test, only trust.

And then when Satan offers Jesus all the kingdoms and their glory, Jesus responds with Deuteronomy 6:13: "You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve." Though Jesus is the Lord God, worthy of all worship, He doesn't blast the devil with His glory, but simply declares that God alone is to be worshiped. And this is true even if that worship and honor of God means going to the cross. The Lord Jesus drives the devil back with the Word, perfectly obeying the Father, remaining as the pure Lamb of God whose blood will take away the sin of the world.

The Lord's use of Holy Scripture to drive away the devil is a wonderful blessing and example for us, because it's one that we can actually follow. If Jesus had simply used His divine power to banish the devil, that would be great and all, but you and I can't do that. We'd be defenseless before

the tempter. But Jesus drove away the devil and his temptations with the word, the same word that He has given to you and me!

When the devil tempts us to take the easy path, to avoid suffering by breaking just a “little” part of the Commandments, then we respond with Scripture as Jesus did. We can face times of plenty and want saying “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

When the devil would try to ensnare us by doing things that are contrary to God’s word, but that feel good, and that make sense, and that the rest of the world are doing, then we can remind ourselves that God’s ways are higher than our ways, and that our Lord always leads us in right paths for His name’s sake.

When the devil would offer us worldly glory and pleasure and comfort if only we would trust him over the Lord, then we drive Him back with a prayer to God, the song of praise sung around His throne: “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.” We remind ourselves of the words of Jesus, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.”

The devil would love to drag you down to hell, to the eternal destruction. He can’t force you there; he has to get you to choose that path. Yet our Lord has given you everything you need to resist the devil. He has washed you in Baptism, clothing you with the righteousness which He showed in His own temptations and which He offered up on the cross. He has given you a new heart to fear, love, and trust in Him. And He has given you His holy and perfect word. Trusting in that word, you are able to resist every temptation of the devil.

In the name of Jesus, amen.