

February 26, 2023

Invocabit

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

“You had one job!” Ever said that to someone, or had it said to you? “You had one job!” Typically something said out of frustration, frustration at someone whose task was simple and straightforward... and he blew it.

When we hear our Old Testament reading, it’s something we might want to say to Adam and Eve: “You had one job! Just listen to God! But no, you blew it, and look at what happened!” However, we can just as easily say the same thing to ourselves, can we not? We can look in the mirror and say, “You had one job! Listen to God!” And yet how often do we fail at this? Every single person who has ever lived could say the same thing.

Well, almost everyone. The exception is, of course, Jesus. He also had one job, to listen to His Father. And unlike us, He did it. As we consider the temptations He endured from Satan in the wilderness, comparing them to what was faced by Adam and Eve, and by us, because Satan loves to recycle the same old lies, we see that Jesus is the one who has remained faithful, the one who loved His Father and His Word above all things. Though we fall before Satan and his lies, Christ does not. He had one job, and He did it – for us.

So let’s consider the first temptation of Christ, and how it comes to all people. We read, “And the tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’” Here we have a temptation concerning basic needs, God’s provision for us.

How does that apply to the situation of Adam and Eve in the Garden? You’d think that it shouldn’t have had any appeal at all. After all, they’re in a garden planted by God Himself. There are trees all over the place with all sorts of fruit just waiting to be picked. Sin hasn’t corrupted creation yet, so it’s all perfect fruit, better than fresh pineapple from Hawaii or peaches from a farmers’ market in Georgia or blackberries right off the bush in summer. And it was all set up to perfectly care for Adam and Eve and their children, no need to supplement with extra vitamins or minerals or whatever. Perfect provision was literally in their grasp in Eden.

But then comes the serpent, the deceiver, and he asks – among other things – why they aren’t allowed to eat of the one tree in the midst of the Garden. He implies that God is holding something back from them, not providing for them as best as He could.

And besides, if God had made everything else in the Garden good for them, wouldn’t that tree be good too? As Satan says, speaking directly against God’s Word, “You will not surely die.”

He appeals to their senses, their reason, over and against God’s Word. If the fruit is a delight to the eyes, then surely it can’t be bad for them. And so they ignore God’s Word and take of the forbidden fruit and eat.

What about us? Rawlins may not be the Garden of Eden, but in all honesty we live in what most of the world would consider luxury. You can drink from the faucet and not get horrible diseases. Or if you don’t like that water, you have multiple brands of bottled water – think about that, different

brands of something as basic as water – at the grocery store or Walmart or any of the dozen convenience stores in town.

The shelves may get empty when the roads close, but that's due in part to the fact that we're used to being able to have food shipped to us from hundreds and hundreds of miles away as just a normal thing.

And even with our economy being what it is, we're still beyond blessed compared to much of history. For example, the very concept of "retirement" is a pretty new one even in our country, and in many places in the world you work until you physically can't, and then you die shortly thereafter.

God promises us our daily bread, and then He has poured out richly above and beyond that. So surely we wouldn't be tempted to ignore God's Word and promises and want even more, right?

Well, let me put a question to you. Let's say you have a job, it's stable, it pays the bills, put food on the table, lets you live in a warm, dry house. You're not getting rich, but you can provide for your family and spend time with them, including going to church with them on Sundays. But then you get offered another job that pays twice as much. Only downside is that you'll only be able to make it to church once a month. Do you take the job?

God has said that the gifts He offers here give eternal blessings... but just think of the extra money and what you could do with it. And I'm not talking necessity; I know that there are sometimes you have to work on Sunday mornings. I'm talking about choosing to, for the sake of worldly gain. God created the other six days to work, why not Sunday, too? God created all the other trees in the Garden, why not that one, too?

So both Adam and Eve, and us today, seek after more than our daily bread, ignoring God's Word in the process. Who doesn't? Jesus doesn't. He answers the tempter and says, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Jesus trusts solely and completely in God's Word, even to the point of seeming foolishness. We might ask what one loaf of bread would matter in the grand scheme of things. Would it really undo the promises of Scripture if Jesus strayed from His Father's will juuuuuust this once?

And the Word is great, but science and common sense tell us that we need bread to live, Jesus, and surely God would never go against those things. Plus, Jesus has fasted for forty days and nights. Isn't that enough to prove His love and obedience? Surely His Father wouldn't deny His beloved Son a little loaf of bread!

No doubt Jesus felt all these temptations, and even others we can't think of, from this simple request. But He trusts in His Father. He trusts that He has been sent to earth for a purpose, namely the cross, and that His Father will not allow Him to perish before the time.

It will be hard, sure. He will suffer. And He knows that. But He hasn't come to be comfortable. He has come to obey, to fulfill the Law that Adam and Eve and you and I break, to win salvation for us through the shedding of His blood. He has one job to do, and He does it.

So then comes the next temptation. “Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, ‘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.’” There are a few different things wrapped up in this temptation, but a big one is the question, “Is God – and His Word – trustworthy?”

Again, this wouldn’t seem to be an issue for Adam and Eve. They’re in the Garden, walking and talking with God face to face. They hear His words constantly, and they can observe the truth of everything He says. They have no reason to doubt Him, both because He has been perfectly honest and because the inborn doubt and suspicion of God’s Word we possess they didn’t have. And, their minds haven’t been corrupted by sin, so they can perfectly recall what God said – no foggy memory or having to think hard about it.

But when Satan comes to them, what are his first words? “Did God really say...?” He immediately twists God’s Word and calls God a liar, both by accusing God of forbidding them from eating from any tree at all and then outright denying God’s warning about what will happen if they eat.

Adam and Eve fall into this temptation, not because they just don’t remember what God said, but because they added their own ideas to God’s Word. Eve says that God said they will die if they even touch the fruit, which goes beyond God’s actual words.

Now whether this was Eve’s addition or something Adam put in in an effort to increase the word’s effect, we don’t know, but the point is they didn’t stick only to the Word of God. And so when Eve touched it, and didn’t die, well, what other parts of God’s “Word” weren’t true? Was the serpent telling the truth?

Doubting God’s Word has led to all sorts of stumbling blocks among Christians throughout the ages. We should be in awe every time we pick up our Bibles. Here is a document that has been miraculously preserved for thousands of years, despite numerous attempts to see it destroyed.

Though it was copied by hand for most of its existence, which if you’ve ever tried to do that you’ll know accuracy suffers, and yet the differences that appear in the thousands of ancient manuscripts are very, very minor, none of them changing any teaching of the faith.

And in that Bible we have record after record of God’s faithfulness to His people, His care and provision shown in countless examples, His love practically leaping off the page.

Yet along comes Satan, who asks us, “Did God really say...” followed by some twisting or ripping out of context. Did God really say that clothing made from two different fabrics is sinful? Did God really say that everyone who struggles with same sex attraction is automatically going to hell? Did God really say that racism is okay? And on and on he goes.

Christians, then, are tempted to look to their own reason and feelings, rather than going back to the Word to see what it really says, and then by reason and emotion go, “Gee, if the Word says that, that’s not good. We better just ignore that part or explain it away. And if that part’s wrong, maybe other stuff in here is, too.”

So many people who have fallen from the faith, both individuals and entire denominations, started down that path by choosing to listen to their own thoughts rather than trusting in God's Word, and God's love to preserve that Word for His people.

But then there is Christ. His reply to the twisting of Satan is short and sweet: "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

From the perspective of our sin-corrupted reason, Jesus would have had reason to doubt. Why? Consider the passage of Scripture Satan quoted – it deals with God commanding His angels. And what is Satan? A fallen angel. In these words to Jesus, Satan is in effect saying, "Can God really command His angels like the Scripture says, because after all, I'm not following His commands."

The call for Jesus to throw Himself from the temple peak then becomes a call to go beyond the words of Scripture – if Jesus doesn't jump, He must not trust His Father. But Jesus knows that God's Word doesn't need man's inventions to defend it. Jesus in His perfect knowledge could have pointed out the flaws in Satan's reasoning – Satan ceased to be one of God's angels by the time the Psalm was written, and the Psalm isn't talking about being totally free from physical harm – but He doesn't waste His breath.

He simply quotes more Scripture, pointing out that Satan isn't asking this from genuine concern but from sinful spite, and such testing are not going to take Christ away from His Father or His Word. He has one job: trust His Father. And He does it.

So then, Satan tries one more thing. "Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.'"

The world and its glory. What is that to Adam and Eve? They are in the most glorious part of the newly created world. And God Himself has told them that they have dominion over it all. They are God's agents, His second in command, over the whole thing. Not even the angels exercise such authority. What more could they want?

Satan has an idea what they might want, because it's what he wants. "You will be like God." Satan wasn't content with just being an angel, shining with glory and filled with power. He wanted to the power and glory of God Himself.

Now he tells Adam and Eve this lie, that they can be like God. They don't have to be content with what God has given them. They don't need to trust God if they can just do things for themselves. Divine knowledge is in their reach, if only they will trust Satan's word over God's Word, serving him rather than their Creator. And so they eat, and they then know evil, and shame, and death.

Satan also tempts us to not be content with what God has given us, to always want more. Sometimes this takes the form of coveting, wanting that grass that's greener on the other side, and slicing ourselves open on the fence barbs to get to it. Jesus tells us that "You cannot serve God and wealth," and we respond, "I'm going to try to anyway."

Or Satan convinces others that they can actually be like God, becoming gods themselves, be that the eastern religions and their goal of becoming one with the universe or the false religion of Mormonism and its supposed path to godhood, or others like these.

This temptation is ultimately manifested in desires in all people, the desire to set good and evil for ourselves, to establish what is true for us. This might be deciding that unborn babies aren't people or that boys can actually be girls or that all "good people" go to heaven or that God would never do anything I don't think is right, or any number of other ideas. The root is hearing God's Word and deciding "I know better."

Jesus doesn't go down this path. He tells the deceiver, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.'"

Though He is the God who created the world and its kingdoms and even this fallen angel who is tempting Him, Jesus doesn't answer glory with glory. He again goes to the Word, pointing out the most basic truth that the Lord, Yahweh, the Holy Trinity, is God alone, and there is and can be none other. Only He is worthy of service and worship.

And Jesus does all this while still remaining in His humble state. Scripture speaks of Jesus "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Jesus did not come to get glory, but to suffer and die according to His Father's will, for the sake of us sinners. He did not seek His own glory, but waited on His Father to grant Him glory at the right time. He had one job, trusting His Father, even when that lead to death on a cross, and He did it, for us.

The Son of God took on flesh to win salvation for us by His perfect obedience to the Law and by His perfect sacrifice on our behalf.

The cross, and the path to it, was brutal beyond our imagining. He endured temptations that have ensnared all of us. Our Lord bore a burden that everyone else is crushed under, and He did so purely out of love for His Father and love for us.

The victory He won, both that day in the wilderness, and again on Golgotha, He didn't do for Himself, but for you. He had one job, the cross, and He did it for you.

In His holy name, amen.