

If...Then...

Lent 1

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Luke 4:1-13

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Oh I wish I were an Oscar Meyer wiener...” Do you ever stop to consider those words? Would you really wish to be a food for consumption? My guess would be probably not; but are there ever times where you find yourself wishing you were someone else or somewhere else or that things were going differently?

The very notion never entered Adam and Eve’s minds before the fall. They had it perfect. Why would they have wanted to be anything other than the man and woman God had created them to be? But then the Serpent, that old deceiver Satan, with his bag of tricks, lies, and deceptions. “Did God actually say...?” He opened the door to desiring new things. He opened their minds to coveting that which was not theirs: being God. “God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

Since that time, many of us have had those times of desiring that we were someone else or that something would go differently than it is. If only this were to happen or that were to happen, then everything would be going well. That’s what we think. That’s what we would hope.

But what does God think about such thinking? Did Jesus ever have such desires? You can expect that Satan was more than willing to tempt Jesus with the idea; and that is the basis of our Gospel text for this morning. Jesus is given three “If...then...” temptations, and after a period of fasting no less. As we begin our Lenten season, you can also expect that Satan will tempt you to turn away from looking to Jesus and the cross.

1

Verse

The devil said to Jesus, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.”

Now from that verse alone, one might think that Satan was not giving Jesus an “If...then...” challenge. After all, Satan said, “If you are the Son of God,” but he never said “then.” This is true, but what was the intention behind the question? Was it to get Jesus to doubt, or to distract Him, or to make Him obey Satan? Any of these may be correct. If Jesus were to doubt He was the Son of God, then He may not have gone through with the crucifixion. If Jesus were to be distracted from His goal of the cross, then Satan would have still won. And if Jesus turned the stone to bread, then who would He have been obeying: God His Father or Satan?

Does Satan ever try to tempt you in the same ways? Does he ever try to make you doubt your salvation or that through Jesus’ work you are indeed a child of God? Satan likes to do this in a myriad of ways. He will even go so far as to live up to his name, the Accuser, and to point out all your sin to you. He will catch you in a sin or sins and he will point his finger at it and say “You see? God couldn’t love you after you did that. God sent His Son to die for you but now you are failing to live up to being one of His children. You need to make sure you don’t fall from grace, and you just failed. God might love everyone else, but how can He love you after you just did that?”

When Satan points out your sin to you, what is he doing if not distracting you from what happened on the cross? If you focus on your sin and sinfulness, you lose sight of what God has done for you. Once your focus is on your sin—or anywhere else, for that matter—who are you obeying? More importantly, who are you not obeying? Does not God want you to focus on your salvation? Does He not want you to know that you are loved? But Satan, the world, and your own flesh would rather that you were someone else, or that you sinned and don't deserve God's love, or anything, but the cross. Thank God Jesus didn't lose sight of the goal after that first temptation. Now we'll look at the second.

2
Verse

The “devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, ‘To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I will give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.’”

Ah ha! There is an “If...then...” statement! Jesus wasn't being distracted from His purpose, so what about an alternate route? What if Satan just gave Him the world and everything in it? Satan says it will be “all yours.” But, how would Jesus get it? What did He have to do? He had to worship Satan.

Now stop and consider that idea. If Jesus worships Satan, then how would Jesus have all the authority? More than that, how could Satan say that their authority had been given to him in the first place? God is the one who made everything. So who gave Satan that authority? Well, the answer to that is twofold: we did and no one did. We, that is, humanity, gave Satan dominion when we listened to him instead of God's Word not to eat of the tree. Yet how did Satan get us to give him that authority? By planting seeds of doubt in our minds. He planted in a field that did not belong to him, and the weeds of sin have grown intertwined with us since that time.

But no matter how he took the authority of the kingdoms, what is Satan doing here? He is once again tempting Jesus to look somewhere other than the cross. Don't go to the cross; I'll give it all to you and you won't have to die. Just worship me. What a tricky one Satan is! Distraction from the cross; doubt that it was the only way; and disobedience toward His Father. The same sins, just in the newest ways.

Have you seen Satan at work in your life with these sins? Does he make you doubt, distract you from the cross, or make you disobedient? He does it to me all the time. Chief of sinners though Paul and I be. Yet why does he do this? To distract us from where God is at work: the cross, the cross to which Jesus was heading. Satan wants you to look at your own sinfulness. He wants you to doubt that you are a child of God. He doesn't want you to remember the cross or your baptism—both places where God has said “You are My child by merits of Jesus on the cross.” The same cross to which Satan will try to deter Jesus once more in our text.

3
Verse

Satan “took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, “‘He will command his angels

concerning you, to guard you,” and ““On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.”””

The worst thing Satan can do is to deceive using God’s Word! He uses it improperly, but it takes reading and knowing the Word of God to know it. Here we have an “If...then...” from Satan’s knowledge of the Scriptures. If Jesus would throw Himself off the temple, God would certainly save Him, as it says in the Psalm.

Here again we question why Satan would go so far as to even use God’s Word to try to keep Jesus from the cross. It’s because he hates whatever God is doing. Satan doesn’t have omniscience to know what would happen at the cross, he just knew if God was for it, he was against it. And so he tries one more time to get Jesus to stop. He tries to distract Him, make Him doubt—even cause Him to kill Himself so that He won’t do God’s will, but his own—even if it means using some of God’s Word to do it.

Does Satan or the world or your own sinful flesh ever use these tactics on you? I don’t even have to list any because you already know one or all three of our enemies have already done that to you, as they have to me as well. Sometimes we may be able to use Scripture to refute what they are saying, as Jesus did—“It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”—but too often we fail. You give in to the idea, whatever it is, and you sin. Then Satan is all too happy to point you to your sin. He wants to point you anywhere, anywhere but the cross.

Satan and his demons know about God, they know the Scriptures enough to misuse them, but they don’t trust God’s Son. Through God’s Spirit, you do. You do believe what Jesus was going to do on the cross, and that He did it. You do believe that you are God’s own child by Jesus’ death, and you don’t need to be anyone else at any other point in time for that very reason. And you do believe that it doesn’t depend on you to get to heaven, but on Jesus, and that it’s already been finished. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.