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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Invocabit (First Sunday in Lent)

February 18, 2018

Text: Matthew 4:1–11

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

God's Holy Word describes, in great detail, Satan's work, character, essence, and power over this fallen world. The Bible also describes his defeat and his ultimate judgment and fate. He is described in both the OT and NT. The "doctrine of Satan is so interwoven in the whole of Christian doctrine that the entire structure would collapse if one denies the existence of that evil spirit. In one denies the existence of the devil, one must also deny the fall of man, original sin, the redemption, Christ, Baptism, yes, the entire Gospel; yes, then one must make a liar out of the prophets, apostles, and Christ Himself" (Walther, *Gospel Sermons*, V. 1, p. 158).

What does the Bible say about Satan? Today's OT text says the serpent, the devil, was more crafty than any other beast of the field" (3:1). Scriptures says Satan is:

- the prince of the power of the air who is working in the sons of disobedience (Eph. 2:2)
- the father of lies and a murderer from the beginning (Jn. 8:44)
- the accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10) including Job and the high priest Joshua (Zech. 3:1)
- like a lion prowling around seeking whom he may devour (II Pet. 5:8)
- the god of this world who blinds the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the glory of the gospel of Christ (II Cor. 4:4)
- able to masquerade as an angel of light (II Cor. 11:14)

It is most important that we understand who Satan is so that we are not outwitted by his temptations and lies. For we are not ignorant of his ways (II Cor. 2:11). Knowing who Satan is, will help us understand better the victory the Lord Jesus Christ won for us. Today's gospel text from Matthew 4 retells the battle between Satan and Jesus. It was a strange and dreadful strife when the Lord of life and the lord of death contended for 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness. But thanks be to God! Jesus did what Adam, our forefather, failed to do. Jesus remained faithful and true. He rebuked Satan at every turn. Jesus endured Satan's lies, his corruptions of Holy Scripture, his

allurements, and was not deceived. Our Lord and Savior defeated Satan for us, dear saints of God. That Satan, described in all the Bible references mentioned earlier, is the one who met his match in Jesus. This victory is our victory. For Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into harms' way in order to redeem us from that foul murderer, liar, and fiend.

Yes, dear saints of God, the Bible says the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (vs. 1). The reason why Jesus must do this is hinted at in the word "wilderness."

After Israel's mighty deliverance from Egyptian bondage, God's redeemed people were led through the wilderness by a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day. The book of Exodus says God miraculously provided food and drink for His people. But Satan was also active, inciting Israel to rebellion time and time again with one temptation after another.

At the very borders of the Promised Land, Israel rebelled against God. As a result of Israel's rebellion, they wandered in the desert for forty years. At every crucial point Israel failed to trust and believe God's promises. They tempted the Lord God with one rebellion after rebellion after rebellion. Those dismal years of wilderness wandering are the miserable saga of failure and defeat.

Jesus, on the other hand, is led by God's Spirit into a wilderness wandering to face the devil's temptations. Jesus is Israel reduced to one person. As the Holy Spirit anointed Messiah, Jesus now represents God's people and even the world as the very Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to do what Israel failed to do. He will "fear, love, and trust in God above all things."

In the wilderness, Israel had grumbled about the lack of food and the lack of variety. Jesus, on the other hand, willingly fasts for 40 days and 40 nights. After that time of fasting, Satan comes to the Lord with what had to be a very appealing invitation: "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread" (vs. 3). Jesus is starving. It's been forty days of wandering in the desert with no food. All that He has to do is say the word and rocks will become bread! What harm could there be in that? After all, God miraculously provided manna for the Israelites in the wilderness. Should He not also provide food for His beloved Son?

Doesn't Satan's temptation sound so rationale and reasonable? Be aware dear saints, Satan will certainly use your fleshly appetites against you. Everybody immediately thinks about sexual temptations. Satan certainly uses those. But his arsenal of fleshly temptations are much more sophisticated and varied: the desire for food, rest, pleasure, knowledge, security, family commitments, etc. Satan will use them all.

Jesus, God's beloved Son, took upon Himself our flesh and blood in order to be our Servant. He will not use His divine power to serve Himself. He will wait as we must wait on the Father to open His hand and give Him daily bread. So Jesus waits and lives upon God's Word. Our Lord quotes Deuteronomy 8:3 as His rebuttal to Satan's temptation, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (vs. 4).

But the devil is persistent. A second temptation is presented to our Lord. Taking Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple, Satan says, "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'" (vs. 6). Satan uses the Word of God, Psalm 91:11–12, as a means of tempting Jesus to win the world's love and devotion by performing a spectacular miracle. Just jump down from the Temple. God's Word does say the angels will protect you. Think of the devotion, fame and glory you'll receive Jesus. No suffering death, no blood and sweat; only glory and honor. And it's all based on the Bible!

Dear saints, we are warned by Holy Scripture that many false prophets and teachers will go out into the world to deceive. We are commanded to test them, to evaluate their doctrine, teaching, and life against the pure standard of God's Word (i.e., I Jn. 4:1–3). Not every preacher or author or devotional booklet quoting the Bible is true and faithful. Satan quotes God's Word in this second temptation.

Again Jesus answers from God's Word, Deuteronomy 6:16, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test'" (vs. 7). Psalm 91 is about trusting God not testing Him. Jesus is our Savior not our showman. And the Bible is the story of redemption not a book of useful quotations available to justify whatever we want to do. Our obedience to God is to include the whole counsel of God from Holy Scripture.

Satan has one more temptation: worldly glory and power. Satan takes Jesus and shows him all the world's kingdoms. He says to Jesus, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me" (vs. 9). Satan is, in effect, saying to Jesus, "You need not

suffer and die in order to become King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Bend you knee to me. I am the prince of the power of the air. It can all be yours.”

The Devil is tempting Jesus to bypass the pain and suffering of the cross, the chosen means established by God the Father. Dear saints of God, flee from any teaching or any worship or any piety that ignores or sidesteps the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the only means of salvation and forgiveness. This includes any teaching that ignores repentance, daily prayer, faithful worship attendance, the regular use of the sacraments, etc. Or which ignores the daily discipline of hating and avoiding sin. Holy Scriptures admonishes us to flee from every form of evil, to chastise and discipline our sinful flesh through prayer, fasting, and repentance. We are to live by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus so that we may, day by day, walk before God the Father in righteousness and purity forever.

Jesus renounces Satan, “Be gone”! Our Lord renounces the devil’s works and all of his ways. Quoting Deuteronomy 6:13 Jesus says, “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve” (vs. 10). Satan’s defeat is sealed. God’s Son remains faithful. Three years later, Jesus will be faithful unto death for us and for our salvation.

Saints of God, we aren’t strong enough to withstand Satan’s temptations. We don’t have the power to do battle with the old evil foe. Jesus went to the wilderness to endure your temptations and fight this battle. You stand in the strength and victory of Christ alone. His victory over the devil’s temptations is your victory over daily temptations. Christ’s death is your death. His resurrection is your resurrection. It will not mean the end of temptations for you. But when faced with Satan’s temptations, you can confidently say, “I am baptized into Jesus. Depart from me, you wily foe. My Lord Jesus has defeated you. Be gone!”

In Christ Jesus, you stand secure unto eternal glory and blessedness.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.