**February 21st 2024 Invocavit Sunday**

**Text: Matthew 4:1-11** 0704

**Theme: In All Points Tempted Like as We Are.**

May our Lord and Savior teach us this day of temptation to sin and wickedness, and how to fight against it in the Spirit and power of God. Amen. Dear friends in Christ: We Have an enemy, an enemy which will do anything and everything to cause our overthrow from the faith. He will tempt us with comfort, he will tempt us to prove the things we believe, he will tempt to ease, he will use our families against us, he will use our emotions against us, he will use pride, anger, embarrassment, envy, and anything else he can. Now imagine for a moment that you were targeted by a murderer, who had nothing to lose, and would do anything and everything in his power to end your life, you would be terrified and do whatever was necessary to protect your own life. You would contact police, arm yourself, be vigilant and prepare to the greatest extent possible to guard your life. Yet, all too often the eternal threat to our life is not taken as seriously as it should be. We are confronted with temptation, and unlike how we would protect our earthly lives, we often play around with the temptation, walking around it, admiring it, not realizing that it is deadly to us. These temptations come in a thousand different forms and may originate directly from Satan, or they might come from the world at large, or even from within us.

I would like each person here today to think on just this past week, and what things or decisions we were confronted with that were temptations to sin. Now they are rarely obvious things, as Scripture says: *“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. and no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.” (2 Cor. 11:13-14)* The temptations of Satan are rarely if ever presented to us as they truly are. They will never be presented to us as wicked or evil, because Christians especially will take notice of such a thing. However, when they are presented as something holy, or with the tone of religiosity, or with Bible passages to back them up, we can be deceived, we can misbelieve, and fall into great shame and vice. A Christian must, as any man would be concerning his earthly life, be on guard and watchful for the tricks and deceptions of Satan, and make all provisions for our own protection and even the protection of all those we love. It may well be that many decisions we make, particularly when or if we fall into temptation, can also cause the spiritual downfall of those in our care, like our spouses or children. One could say the overall theme for the this sermon is spiritual preparedness and the necessity of facing temptation not in our own strength and wisdom, but in the grace of God, in His true Word, and in Christian prayer. Today then we will study the example of facing temptation, that of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, while He was on earth in His humiliation. It is important to see this story for a few reasons. The first is to see the perfection of our Savior, for it was necessary that He be without sin. Secondly to teach us how to deal with the onslaughts of our enemy and the varying degrees and methods used to deceive us. And finally to show unto us the methods and manner of our enemy. Our text for today is the temptation of our Savior by Satan, and we will see that He was tempted in all points like as we are yet without sin. Our purpose will be to see that the temptation of Christ was identical to the temptations we face and how they should be identified and dealt with. We will do so according to our text for today which is found in the fourth chapter of the book of Matthew beginning at verse one.

**Quote text here.**

Let us pray, O most glorious and gracious Lord Jesus Christ, as we stand before Thee today, we ask that Thou wouldst remove from our hearts the pride of our flesh which causes us to deny that temptation exists or to deny that we are susceptible to it. Humble us, O Lord, that we may not lean on ourselves when we are tempted, but only upon Thee and Thy Word. Grant, by Thy grace, that we may not be overthrown by the assaults of our enemy, but grant us strength to bear whatever temptations may come. Teach us of our own weaknesses, Lord, in honest hearts, that we cease pretending that we have no weaknesses, but confess them, pray about them, and fight against them. O Savior, we praise Thy name and glorify Thee for the great work Thou didst perform here, having overcome the devil and his wicked works, and in our behalf applying this righteousness to us. Teach us to be on our guard, and give us wisdom to discern temptation. Give us Thy Holy Spirit that in that moment, we may overcome temptation and remain steadfast. Forgive us for any offenses and sins, even those which we do not know. Keep us in the true faith unto our end and bring us safely home to Thyself in heaven. Amen.

Guided then by the Spirit of God let us learn that Jesus, without sin, was tempted in all points like as we are, seeing that first He was:

1. **Tempted by comfort.** We read verses one through four of our text: **read verses here.** Out of all the times in our life and circumstances which we find ourselves facing, the greatest temptations often come in the comforts of life. We are not here talking about the simple necessities of life, but those things that make life seemingly better, or more enjoyable. Many times in these situations we sin grievously against God, murmur and complain about His dealings toward us, and would do anything to make ourselves even marginally more comfortable. We can see this actually play out time and again throughout Scripture, particularly amongst the Israelites while they wandered in the wilderness. We hear: *“And the children of Israel said unto them, would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” (Ex. 16:3)* Wandering through the wilderness the people of Israel had no food to eat and were become hungry. Their bellies rumbled, they saw the hunger on the faces of their children, and desired to return to bondage where plenty could be had, grumbling against the Lord. In this instance God had provided bread from heaven to sustain them called manna. Later on we hear: *“And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: but now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.” (Num. 11:4-6)* The initial complaint was for God to feed them, in so complaining they sinned against God being tempted by their own flesh, and later the manna no longer satisfied their eye nor their tongue, and they wanted more, and sinned again, wanting rather than sustenance, comfort, more comfort than they currently had. Does this sound familiar to us, dear Christians? How many times do we sin against God, not because we are in desperate need of anything, but because we are not enjoying a certain level of comfort in our lives. We ask God for work maybe, and He gives us work, but the work is too difficult and we complain. We ask God to give us good weather, and then we complain that it is too hot or too cold. We ask God for food, but are not satisfied to have the food He gives. We are tempted in our flesh to desire whatever is comfortable to us, and it is masterminded by Satan, to be presented just at the moment when you are hungry, or about to eat more manna yet again and are tired of it. This is the very same temptation that Satan throws at the Savior in our text.

We want to take special note of a couple things here. It is necessary to note that the Savior was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to endure these things. It was not by accident, but allowed to take place. In the book of Mark it says that Jesus was “driven” into the wilderness by the Spirit. Likewise, though God tempts no one to sin, God does allow temptation to come, not for the purpose of causing our fall, but to test our faith, and to strengthen our faith. Now Jesus’ temptation was to demonstrate to us the wisdom necessary to identify the temptations of Satan when they come. On the surface the temptation offered to the Lord does not seem out of reason. Jesus is hungry, He has the ability to turn stones into bread, would it be wrong to do that to sustain Himself? Do you see how our flesh takes hold of the temptation and begins to justify it? Now we must remember a few things here. The first is that Jesus came to earth not to be ministered unto, but to minister and give His life as a ransom for many. Secondly the purpose of Christ’s life on earth was to make eternity possible for sinful men not to serve His own belly. Jesus was to be heavenly minded, not earthly minded. Finally the true bread of man is not that which fills the belly, but that which fills the soul, to hear the Word of God. That is the very answer that Jesus gives, and overcomes the temptation. Yet, as is usually the case, Satan doesn’t stop there with that temptation but pivots, and we are:

1. **Tempted to be glorified.** We read verses five through seven of our text: **read verses here.** The devil, being the prince of the world, takes Jesus up to a pinnacle of the Temple, the holy place on earth, God’s house, and from this religious cover, and quoting Scripture, the devil tells Jesus to cast Himself down, for after all God promised that the angels would bear you up, and let no harm come to you. In this case the devil is asking for proof of Jesus being the Son of God. Prove it! The devil says. How often are we tempted with the same thing! The devil says, prove what you believe! If its true what you say, then surely God would protect you in all cases whatsoever, but if you refuse to do this or that then it must mean you don’t actually believe what you say you believe or that it is not true at all. Prove it by jumping off the pinnacle of the God’s house. Prove it by running headlong into danger! Prove that you trust in God! Yet as was the case previously, Jesus answers this temptation with another quote from Scripture, that we should not tempt the Lord our God. In other words, don’t presume something that God never promises. There is a so-called Christian sect that believes and actually attempts to practice the handling of deadly snakes, because Jesus promised the seventy He sent out that no serpent could harm them, but that promise was to those individuals only, and further, that many of God’s promises like that in the Psalms, quoted by Satan, are from an eternal perspective and not for this earth. The angels will bear you up, they will watch over your soul, and the Spirit will keep you in the faith by the Word, but to carelessly and recklessly expose ourselves to danger because of misbelief is tempting God, just as it would have been for Jesus to cast Himself down headlong from the pinnacle of the temple. In so doing Jesus would have attempted to glorify Himself, though His mission was not to be glorified yet, but to save the world from sin as their Substitute. It is necessary for us to take note of the subtilty of Satan here, for when the first temptation does not work, he does not give up, but pivots based on Jesus’ answer to say prove who you claim to be! Are you the Bread from heaven? The Word of God? Show me by throwing yourself from this so that I can see the angels bear you up as is promised in the Psalms! He uses Scripture, and quotes Scripture in God’s house to provoke a shroud of religiosity, an air of piety to cover his deception. We must ask God for wisdom to cut through the confusion he creates, and clearly by God’s Word to refute him. Yet once again Satan doesn’t quit, but again pivots and we are:
2. **Tempted to ease.** We read verses eight through eleven of our text: **read verses here.** The devil then says: Okay, okay, you got me, I was tempting you, and you answered right. You are the Son of God, the Bread of the world, you are the Savior of mankind! But what if you could receive the very thing you came for without having to go to the cross, or even suffer an ounce. What if, because I am the prince of this world, and because all sinful souls are mine, what if I just give every one of these souls, and all you have to do is fall down and worship me. Here is a powerful tool of Satan: temptation to ease. The devil says things like: “what if you just didn’t follow God’s will in this one case, just to make things a little easier right now? What if you just skip church this one time so that you can work? Is that wrong? What if you just stole this one thing today to get you through until you get paid?” what if, what if, what if you just…. Quite frankly the whole time he is saying these things, our flesh joins him and echoes him, and the world joins the choir and pounds these things into our heads and our souls. Yet all the while it is nothing but a deception, it is designed to open the door just a little, and then next time a little more, and the time after that a little more until it is entirely ajar, and no one stands guard. This is the very thing that Satan offers to Christ: all the souls He had come to save in a much easier fashion.

The apostle Paul declares: *“there hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” (1 Cor. 10:13)* We pray in the Lord’s Prayer that God would not allow temptation to sin to come upon us, but that if He should allow it in His eternal wisdom, that He would grant us strength by the power of His Word and prayer to overcome it. Let us then, as God’s people, look to the example of our Savior, who though He was tempted in all points like as we are, He sinned not and is the perfect propitiation for our sins. Let us pray that God’s Spirit would guide us when temptation comes, that we may overcome and obtain the victory. May God be praised for this wondrous and life- giving story in Scripture: *“And out of them shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of them that make merry: and I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small.” (Jer. 30:19)* Amen.