

MARCH 9, 2025 SERMON

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. You may be seated.

So in our gospel lesson today, as we begin these 40 days of Lent, now of course we have to have that caveat, it's actually 46 days, but we don't count the Sundays. So it's 40 days minus the Sundays. The reason we don't count the Sundays is because every Sunday is a miniature Easter, a miniature resurrection. And so we don't really count them when we count the 40 days. So the rest of the days are 40 days. But as we begin these 40 days of Lent, we are reminded of Jesus' own temptation in the wilderness where he was there for 40 days. Now, why in the world do we keep bringing up this number 40?

There's a lot of scripture where 40 seems to be a number that represents both judgment and salvation. It rained during Noah's day for 40 days and 40 nights. Moses, I don't know if you knew this, was up on the mountain for 40 days before he came down with the Ten Commandments. And then of course you got the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. And why? Because the spies were in the land of Israel for 40 days, and they rejected that. And so God said, "For every day they were in the land, you will spend a year in the wilderness." And now here Jesus is in the wilderness for another 40 days. This 40 comes up, and these aren't the only ones. There's a couple of others. This comes up as sin and judgment and redemption. And so Jesus is taking our place in the wilderness. In essence, he is walking over the path that the Israelites took for 40 years, and he is wiping it out with his own walk of 40 days.

Because while the Israelites, who were supposed to be in the presence of God, and obey him, and listen to him, and use his word and follow his word, when they heard his word, they so often rebelled, and they failed in their mission to be a light unto the world. So Jesus comes to be that light that they could not be, to take their sin and their failure upon himself and give them and us his perfect life. And so he spends 40 days in the wilderness.

And then there's the most understated statement in the entire Scripture. He was hungry 40 days. Yeah, of course he was hungry. He was starving. I mean, we miss a meal or two and we're famished. And this is 40 days. And not only that, it's... I don't know if you noticed this before, but it says he was in the wilderness for 40 days being tempted by the devil. Now we've only got a list of the three big ones, but it's entirely possible that the devil was tormenting him the entire 40 days, and then it culminated in these last three big ones. He was at his weakest moment physically, spiritually, mentally. So this is a time where Satan decided to take its full advantage, or at least he tried to.

So he begins, of course, again with this Passover theme and this Exodus theme. He says, "Look, here's some stone. Turn it into bread. You can do that. I mean God, after all gave manna to the Israelites out of nothing. Surely you can turn this stone to bread." And of course, Jesus responds with God's word when he says, "Man shall not live by bread alone."

Now, I need to inform you that the passages that Jesus uses, all three Scripture references that he uses come from Deuteronomy 6 through 9. In those chapters, their focus is upon the true worship of the true God. In fact, in that passage, you have what is called in the Hebrew of the great Shema. Shema means listen. And it is the creed of the Old Testament is the creed of the Israelites. Listen to Israel. The Lord your God, the Lord is one. There's only one God and this is your God. Yahweh is your God, and you'll worship him.

And so around this great confession is what do we do in worship and how do we serve God? And so Jesus pointedly quotes from this section of scripture when he's being tempted by Satan to worship somebody else other than the one true God. Satan is trying to knock him off track of being the Messiah. Of course, he will always be the son of God, but if he takes this selfish focus, he will lose the purpose of his mission. He will no longer be living for us, but he's living for himself if he turns the stone to bread. And so his mission is to live for us a life that we could not live, so that we might be redeemed from a sin that we could not get rid of.

And so he says, "Man shall not live by bread alone." And of course the follow-up is, "but by every word of God." So the devil then says, "Okay, fine. You got past that one. You didn't focus upon yourself. But here, let me show you all the kingdoms of the world. These are mine, and I will give them to you. I will give you all of their authority and all of their glory." Now, a lot of times commentators have said how in the world? Satan doesn't have that authority. But the fact of the matter is he does. We gave it to him. And when we ate the fruit and stopped listening to God and instead listened to Satan, we gave him authority over this world. And so it was a legitimate offer.

Now, like any promise of Satan, it wasn't quite all that it looked like, and it was a little hollow and shallow when you get down to it, and it's not really what you think it is. Because again, think about this. Satan promises to give Jesus all the authority on Earth. This is the son of God who has authority over heaven and Earth, and Satan's going to give you authority on Earth. Ooh, big promise there. How shallow, how weak of a promise is that compared to what he already is and already has? And then all glory, all the glory of the kingdoms. The glory of the kingdoms that are fallen and sinful and full of decay and rot, that glory, versus the glory of Almighty God?

Yeah, Satan offered this, but it was shallow, it was weak, and it was nothing compared to the surpassing glory of Christ crucified. And so he goes and tells Satan, of course you shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve. Listen, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one." God is only one, and he's the only one you're called to worship. Jesus is bringing the focus back to what does God desire of us, and that is to worship him in truth and purity. And Satan's trying to get him off track, trying to get him to lose his mission, forget about his mission and focus upon his own selfish interests, and it does not happen.

So Satan's been defeated twice now by scripture. So he decides to be a little crafty and use scripture itself. And if you were paying attention, you heard that scripture in our intruits. It's for Psalm 91, and Satan quotes from Psalm, and he says, "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. It's about in the middle of the intruit, and on their hands, they will bear you up lest you strike your foot against a stone.

Okay. So Satan's like, "This is what God promises." But I'm sorry. Satan's not that clever. He really isn't. We tend to think of Satan being clever, and we tend to think, "Well, I don't want to get tripped up by him because he's Satan and it's somebody to be feared." No, he's a fool, and he's only got one trick up his sleeve. And that only trick is, "Did God really say this? Is this really what God promised? Are you really going to die? Is God really going to save you? Can you really trust him when you're sick and ill and dying? You really trust him when life is not going your way? Can you really trust God?"

That's the only thing Satan can do, is put a seed of doubt into our minds. And so he tries it again with Jesus. Well, maybe I should show my glory. I mean, wouldn't that be amazing? But look at the passage that he quotes. This is why I say he's not very smart. Right after "lest you strike your foot against a stone," what's the next verse? "You will tread on the lion and the adder. The young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot." Well, what's the serpent that Jesus is going to trample underfoot? Satan himself. I mean, Satan quotes a passage and then misses the next step where it says he's going to be defeated. He misses the verse right following after. He's not very clever. He's not to be feared. Because we have a God who knows us and we can trust him, and his word is sufficient to carry us. And we don't need to test God because his word has continued to be true, day after day, year after year, millennia after millennia. We can trust him.

But Satan leaves him and departs. Now he is asking Jesus to take his authority and his glory and to show it by having the angels pick him up and guard him and lift him up as he drops to the ground. But Jesus refuses. Does he not have the authority to call the angels down to do this? Absolutely. In fact, when he is being arrested, what does he tell his disciples? Don't you think that I could call down a legion of

angels? And he could, and they would come, but he would be taken away from his mission if he did that. And so he doesn't take advantage of the protection of the angels and the promise of safekeeping, because that's not his goal.

Even at the cross, he could have left the cross, the angels could have come and rescued him, but he did not take advantage of that, because his goal was not to show his glory and authority through power, but to show glory and authority through the weakness of the cross. Satan didn't see that coming. He didn't understand what was going on. He did not see that God was promising to take away our sin, and the only way he could do it was through his own death.

And he then gives that and plants that in our hearts, through our baptisms. We are buried with Christ in our baptisms and raised to new life in Christ. And that is the hope and the promise that we have. And so we are called now, during these 40 days and for the rest of our life, now that we know what God has done for us, now that we understand that Satan has no authority over those who call upon the name of the Lord, we now are called to love God with all our might and to serve each other, just as Jesus served us. In some small way, we are called to serve each other. How do we respond in Thanksgiving to this gift that he has given to us? How do we respond with joy in the confidence of our salvation, of the forgiveness of our sins? Jesus wiped away the guilt of the Israelites in the wilderness. Jesus wipes away our guilt in our own wilderness in this world.

And while we still wander in this wilderness, what will sustain us? What will keep us when we have hardship and heartache, when we have sorrow and pain, when we have doubt and worry? The same thing that sustained Jesus Christ, the word of God and the God behind it, who is and always will be our Father who loves us and cares for us. And for that reason, we then thank and praise and serve and obey him because of all the glory that he has done. And so let us ever seek after his word, confess with our mouths to Jesus as Lord, believe in our hearts, and serve one another, because he has succeeded in his mission. He has forgiven our sins. We are free. And no matter what happens, as Luther said, you can take away our life, our wife, our homes, our goods, everything that we have. The victory is still ours. May his grace, his mercy, and his peace and that victory in Christ Jesus be and abide with you always, now and forever, more unto life everlasting. Amen.