

# **“Temptation and How to Defeat it”**

**February 18, 2018**

**Our Savior’s Way**

**Worshipping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM**

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Have you heard about the changes in the Lord’s Prayer? Pope Francis wants to change the Lord’s Prayer. He’s not happy with the part that says, “And lead us not into temptation.” Pope Francis says, “God doesn’t lead us into temptation. Satan does that. That’s the Devil’s department.” I don’t know if we’ll change the Lord’s Prayer, but however you pray it, temptation is a problem. There’s a story about a man who died and went to heaven. When he arrived in heaven, St. Peter met him at the pearly gates. The man looked past the gates and noticed that heaven was filled with clocks. He asked St. Peter, “Why all the clocks?” St. Peter answered—“Every person on earth has their own clock. And each time a person sins, the hands on their clock move forward one minute.” The man asked, “But where’s my clock?” St. Peter replied, “It’s in the office. Moses is using it for a fan.” As a pastor, of course, I don’t have a problem with temptation—except maybe 40 or 50 times a day. So, today we’re going to talk about temptation—every man’s problem and every woman’s problem.

Years ago I learned a spiritual equation that I’ve never forgotten. It goes like this—**TEMPTATION + OPPORTUNITY = TROUBLE**. Do you remember the “Hee-Haw” TV series? It was a country music program on TV and one of the characters was Grandpa Jones. There was this recurring joke--Grandpa Jones would come on with his arm all bandaged up and in a cast and Grandpa would say, “This week I broke my arm in two places.” And somebody

would shout out, “Well, maybe ya’ better stay out of them two places!” Did you know--there are a number of psychological studies that support the idea of “staying out of them places.” It’s called “Willpower Depletion.” Here’s the way it works--the more often and the more regularly you face a temptation, the more likely you are to give in to it. “Willpower Depletion”—if you’re worried about temptation “ya’ better stay out of them places.”

It’s the first Sunday in Lent and every year on this Sunday we see Jesus heading off into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. This year we hear the story from the Gospel of Mark. Do you know what I love about the Gospel of Mark? It’s short. It’s brief. And Mark’s a great story-teller! Today, in seven short verses we have the baptism of Jesus and the temptation of Jesus and Jesus’ first sermon—in just seven verses. Mark’s Gospel is short and powerful. In Matthew and Luke we read that at Jesus’ baptism “the heavens opened.” Look what it says in Mark 1:10. Mark says the heavens were “torn open.” The Greek word here is schizo. Say it with me, “schizo”. You can almost hear the rough, jagged edges in that word. The heavens were schizo-ed! (Tear a shirt apart.) Do you see what happens when something is schizo-ed? When something is schizo-ed you can’t easily put it back together. Like our relationship with God, our Father in heaven. When we give into temptation we sin and sin causes our relationship with God to be schizo-ed—torn apart.

In 1 John 2:15-16 the Bible lays out the pathways of temptation. “Don’t love the world or anything that belongs to the world. If you love the world, you cannot love the Father. (Now, here come the three pathways of temptation.) Our foolish pride comes from this world, and so do our selfish desires and our desire to have everything we see. None of this comes from the Father.” There are three ways in which temptation comes at us. Let’s examine these pathways one-by-one. First—“OUR FOOLISH PRIDE.” When

Satan tempted Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden he showed them the tree in the middle of the garden. “Don’t pay any attention to God,” he said, “if you eat the fruit of this tree you will be like God.” It was an appeal to their pride. Satan took Jesus up to the highest point of the temple, “Throw yourself down,” Satan challenged. “If you are the Son of God, won’t he send his angels to protect you.” Jesus answered with a word from God, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.” Pride” is one of the seven deadly sins. The book of Proverbs calls “Pride the sin that leads to destruction.” Do you know the problem with pride?—Pride puts ourselves in the center of our own universe. God is kicked out, displaced and ignored. Pride is always a pathway to sin.

The second pathway is “OUR SELFISH DESIRES.” Our bodies have certain appetites—the appetite for food, the appetite for exercise, the appetite for love. That’s the way God wired us up and God gave us these appetites for our good. Here’s the problem-- Satan takes these good gifts from God and twists them into something evil. Our appetite for food turns into obesity; our appetite for exercise turns into an addiction; our appetite for love turns into obsession or infidelity. Satan came to Adam and Eve with something that would satisfy physical hunger—a piece of fruit and that piece of fruit poisoned their relationship with God. Satan tried to do the same thing with Jesus. He tempted Jesus with bread—“If you are the Son of God turn these stones into bread.” Now, there’s nothing wrong with bread. Jesus answered with a word from God—“Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

The third pathway of temptation is “OUR DESIRE TO HAVE EVERYTHING WE SEE.” Welcome to Northern Virginia. I will never forget when a pastor from Uganda came to visit us—Pastor David. He was blown away by all the stuff you can buy in the stores here. Can you read the message on this slide?—“Just buy

way more stuff and forget your problems.” In this country where we have so much stuff that we have to buy more stuff to organize the stuff we do have and rent storage rooms to keep our extra stuff—are we ever going to learn that more stuff is not going to make us happy. This desire to have everything we see is not a good thing! Do you remember the movie “The Silence of the Lambs.” Jodie Foster played an FBI agent on the trail of a serial killer. She was given a clue by Anthony Hopkins—He said, “Remember the first principles, Clarice ... We covet what we see.” Satan takes God’s good gift of sight and makes our eyes a pathway for temptation. Satan took Jesus up to a high place where he could see all the kingdoms of the earth and said, “Look around. All these things I will give you if you will fall down and worship me.” Jesus answered him with a word from God--“It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’”

Pay attention now—Jesus teaches us how to defeat temptation! First, Jesus responded to every temptation with God’s Word. Read, study, memorize the Bible. It’s a powerful weapon against comes to temptation. Second, Jesus prayed. He spent 40 days in prayer and when Satan came to him, Jesus was ready. Prayer is a powerful weapon against temptation. Third, Jesus knew who he was. He was God’s Son. Remember back when heaven schizo-ed when Jesus was baptized? God spoke—“You are my beloved Son.” Jesus knew whose child he was. Do you know that you are God’s beloved child? And every time you defeat temptation you become more like Jesus. Let me just say, there’s another place in the Bible where the verb schizo—“torn open” is used. Do you know where? It’s when Jesus is crucified and the veil in the Temple is torn in two—schizo-ed from top to bottom. It is a sign to the whole universe that you and I don’t have to let our sin separate us from the love of God. Jesus died and rose--for you. You are God’s child. You always will be and you are loved and you are forgiven by your Father in heaven.