



good shepherd
presbyterian church

Turning from Idolatry to Worship

Luke 4:5-8; Deuteronomy 6:10-14

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Today is the first Sunday of Lent and the first Sunday in a series that will run to Easter. Lent is a “season” in the life of the church in which we prepare for Easter by considering our sinfulness, God’s invitation to trust and turn to Him, and God’s provision of grace, forgiveness, and salvation. In January and February we looked at what precedes repentance – how God goes before us and works in us to prepare us to turn to Him. In this series we are going to look at repentance – at that “turning” – and what it means for our lives.

Last week Zach looked with you at Satan’s first temptation of Jesus. That temptation was for Jesus to turn the stones into bread, to rely on his own authority and power rather than to first seek God’s Word and purpose for him. Today, we look at the second temptation. We do so not just to learn about Jesus, but because Hebrews describes Jesus as being tempted in all ways as we are, yet doing so without yielding to sin. We will also see how we are tempted in this particular way – toward idolatry – and consider the way that God’s Word, Jesus’ example, and Jesus’ faithfulness invite us to turn away from that temptation and toward worship.

Tempting Jesus

The context of these verses is a 40-day period in which Jesus went to the desert to fast and pray. This was the beginning of his traveling and teaching ministry, and he was beginning it with prayerful attention to God’s Word and will. Throughout his ministry there is a tension between the Messiah-expectation of the people around him and Jesus’ own understanding of being God’s anointed. Many looked for him to be a revolutionary and take on the military power of Rome. Satan’s temptation was not just a “you can have all this” line, but a short step away from the already existing expectations for the Messiah.

This is also the deal that endless stories have been based on. It's the "sell your soul to the devil" story: "If you will only worship me, you can have it all." It's the deal at the crossroads, and Jesus resisted by standing on God's Word.

He quoted Deuteronomy 6, as he also did in response to the other two temptations. He said, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.'" Worship is the first and highest purpose of being human, and Jesus refused to give away his humanity. Rather, he leaned on God's Word and declared his intent to love, obey, and serve God alone.

The Human Story

This temptation is one of those most common to humanity. Even when God is the one promising or giving the riches and blessing, Satan would rob God of worship. That's the bottom line. The "stuff" is just the carrot, but Satan does not want God to be worshiped or served. In the passage Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 6, God is telling His people not to fall into the worship of a false god. Listen again to what is going on there:

...when the Lord your God brings you into the land... great and splendid cities... houses full of all good things... cisterns... vineyards... olive trees... and you eat and are satisfied... then watch yourself, that you do not forget the Lord. (vv. 10-12)

Listen to the next part, in verse 13:

You shall fear only the Lord your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name. You shall not follow other gods...

When surrounded by plenty, even God-given plenty, how easy it is for human eyes to wander!

It reminds me of the story of the first humans, Adam and Eve. They were in Paradise, and yet they heard the same whispered temptations from Satan: "Listen to me; do this; you can be like God!"

How much we desperately need Jesus to make a way for us! He has shown us the way through and he is the way through!

Tempted by Idolatry

I think this temptation translates into our lives in more than one way. One is the confusion between “success” and “blessing.” Even within Christianity, maybe even particularly there, these are confused as many teach a “prosperity or health-and-wealth gospel.” But God seems clear about the difference in Deuteronomy. God is the source of blessing – it is not the doing of the Israelites. And God’s warning to those enjoying his blessing is to “watch yourself, that you do not forget.” Forget what? Not that this came from God, but that God is the One who brought you out of slavery – who rescued and saved your life.

Success is something human beings strive for, measure, and accomplish on their own. It is defined in worldly terms, in dollars and cents, and as a measure of power and status. Success means you are educated, or wealthy, or comfortable. It does not correspond to God, godliness, or faithfulness to God, except perhaps as one is willing to give it away and serve others. You may sense that two different lines of thought are present. There is one theme of success and prosperity and there is one of worship and obedience. The great lie and temptation of Satan is to tie those things together. The subtle lie is to link faith with prosperity. Satan will take that deal, for it’s easy to give up on God when He doesn’t come through with the money or the deal. The more open lie is to erase God from the picture altogether and to serve other gods in an effort to achieve success or prosperity.

Milton captured this lie precisely in *Paradise Lost* when he has Satan giving a speech to the condemned of Hell and telling them that he would rather reign in Hell than serve in Heaven. That is *exactly* Satan’s lie – that we are better off on our own with some level of material success than first and foremost loving, obeying, and serving God. This second temptation builds right on the first of self-reliance to keep our eyes and hearts away from God.

The Way of Jesus

We are reminded in Hebrews 4:14-16...

Since we have a great high priest who can fully sympathize with our weaknesses, having been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin, let us hold fast to our confession and approach the throne of grace with confidence to receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

What kind of help does God offer in time of need, in the face of this particular temptation?

There are the words of Deuteronomy 6, which warn, “watch yourself, that you do not forget the Lord who brought you out of slavery.” Jesus himself drew on those words to resist Satan’s lies. Positively, that passage leads to Jesus’ response to Satan: love, obey, and serve God alone. Do not forget God’s salvation and worship God alone.

The way *through* the temptation to chase after the false gods of success and discover the riches of being *blessed* is to draw near to Jesus – that is, lined up and following after the will and Word of God. Jesus demonstrated this way and he *is* the Way.

This is not to say that you can’t do well financially or that poverty equals godliness. It’s a wake-up call to see that one of the things we most often take for granted (success and prosperity) are not to be the lord of our life and cannot be the savior of our soul. God’s path may well be one of suffering, but there is no more blessed way than wherever love, obedience, and service to God’s will and Word lead you. Amen.