

Victory of the Lamb – March 5, 2017 – Bill Limmer
Like Him in Every Way – Temptation – The Kingdom of Me or The Kingdom of God

These aren't real geese. You know that right. But guess what geese don't know that. These are called decoys. And the geese will see these decoys as they are flying sky high. And they will hear the hunter calling to them on the goose call. And the geese will go sweet. That looks like a good place to eat. And there is already a bunch of guys there. Let's join them. And among the decoys, they will notice this one. This one is called a sentry. It is on the look out for danger. And the geese flying over head will see the sentry not moving and just know it is safe. To the geese. It looks good. It sounds good. It might even smell good. But they don't see the hunter hiding. And as they getting ready to land into the decoys, they set their wings. And when they set their wings, their wings are out wide. And they are gliding in slow, big, easy targets. And just like that "bang." And it is over with in no time at all. If you are hunter, it is pretty cool. If you are a goose, well that stinks.

Today we are beginning a new series called, Like Us in Every Way. As our resident designer Naomi says, "Christ was like us in every way as though we're seeing a reflection of ourselves in a mirror, looking and feeling all the same things as us. But His life here on earth also serves as a mirror that reveals our sinful ways, being like us in every way yet absolutely perfect." Raise your hand if you have ever been tempted. Today we are going to see that Jesus is like us in that he too was tempted to sin. Let's look at one occasion.

Right after Jesus was baptized, right after he made a connection with us. In other words, right after a great spiritual high. Jesus was **led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.** ³**The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."** (Matthew 4:1-3). One quick side note before we go on with this, where says "if you are the Son of God," what that means is "since you are the Son of God." So what Satan is saying to the famished, the starving to death, the I haven't eaten in 40 days and 40 nights Jesus, is since you are hungry and since you have the power turn these stones into bread, do it. Oh man, Jesus was hungry. And not only could he turn the stones into hot homemade bread, after all this time of not eating I imagine he could see the bread with the steam rising off the top of the loaf, he could smell it. And Jesus could turn those stones into hot almighty made homemade bread, with butter, and his favorite top from cinnamon and sugar, to honey to whatever. Oh man, I can taste it now. It looked good, it sounded good, it smelled good. At the heart of this temptation and all temptation is Satan wanting us to make everything about me. So we could say when temptation comes it going to be either about the kingdom of me or the kingdom of God. Jesus responds to the thought of almighty made bread, and you have to know that this is best chef ever, **Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.** (Matthew 4:4) He put himself to the side, and gave glory and honor to God. For Jesus, it was always about the Kingdom of God.

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶**"If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.** (Matthew 4:5,6) Satan misrepresents, twists, and takes out of context the Scripture. Did you know that? Did you know that Satan is a student of the Bible? He doesn't like it. He doesn't believe it. For him, it can't be true or he is doomed for an eternity. So he will scratch, claw, fight, lie (he is the father of lies – John 8:44) all to keep you and me from believing God's Word. In our world, a lot of people don't believe in God but look at this **Even the demons believe that—and shudder.** (James 2:19) Satan twists God's Word in our lives too. Have you ever heard if God is good why is there so much evil in the world? Think for a minute about who introduced that question. Satan himself. He wants us to

deny or at least blame God for the evil that he, Satan, caused in the world. And Satan doesn't want us to grasp that God has redeemed the evil through the blood of Jesus. Satan wants God to seem unfair, uncaring, unloving. He will make things seem so good, look good, sound good, smell good but it is a decoy, a trick, a lie. So, consider some of these present day rationalizations: as long as no one knows, as long as no one gets hurt, as long as you love each other. What a scam. Jesus responds to this temptation: **Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'** (Matthew 4:7) Satan was trying to get Jesus to be something spectacular, to stand out, to make it about the Kingdom of Me instead of the Kingdom of God.

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ **"All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."** (Matthew 4:8,9) With these words Satan is offering Jesus a shortcut. The lie of instant gratification instead of the truth of infinite joy. Knowing the Scriptures, Satan knows that Jesus is going to have to suffer a lot, but Satan says to him, check out all these kingdoms and their beauty, worship me and I will just give them to you. Take the easy way out. No pain, no suffering but also no truth. Satan didn't have the power nor the kingdoms to give to Jesus. It was all a lie. Do you realize Satan will make promises to you that he has no intention of keeping, that he can't keep in the first place. Just to trip you and to keep God's kingdom from coming to you. Satan's lie to you and me is the end justifies the means. Do whatever you want as long as you will be happy. In addition to the horrible encouragement to whatever you want, no matter what God says, is the lie that you will be happy. You have the right to do that. (I'm just saying, does this sound familiar to anyone besides me). Once again Jesus responds to Satan with the word of God, **"Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.' Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.** (Matthew 4:10,11) For Jesus it wasn't about the kingdom of me, it was about the Kingdom of God.

Temptation to means to lure, seduce, decoy, disguise the truth. Satan tries to portray sin as good and good as bad. What is the decoy, the disguise that is so alluring and tempting to you? Satan makes temptation about my life instead of about God. Satan calls into question God's love and God's Word. Satan presents himself as our friend. But his only real intent is to destroy us. Temptation: (James 1:14,15) **but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.** ¹⁵ **Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.** I know you know this but I'm going to lay it out for you so that you can see it more clearly. Step one – flirtation. This is the step when we see how close we can get to sin without actually sinning. So how close can I get to something, some substance, someone, without sinning. Virtually every young person, and not so young people, ask me: How far can we go without sinning? How close can I get to sin? That's a bad question, right. The right question is: How close can I get to Jesus? And remember Satan is patient and he knows that most often the first step away from God is a small one. Friends, is there anything or anyone that you are flirting with that you ought to be fleeing from? Second step – Rationalization. It is not that bad, nothing to be concerned about, everyone is doing it. We tell ourselves irrational lies when we try to rationalize sin. We always have an excuse for what we do. Sin is wicked. (If your child, or grandchild, or niece or nephew was playing with a copperhead snake to be happy would you let that go on. When we are playing with sin we are playing with the snake Satan.) Step three – Transformation. Once you go through flirting and rationalization it won't take long until there is transformation. It will change the way you think, the way you act and maybe even the way you believe. Which leads to step 4, the final step – destruction. When we sit with sin, it is not a fun chair. It is an electric chair. Sin leads to death, the death of employment, death of friendships, death of marriage, death itself – the wages of sin is death. Sin always takes from you. It never adds to you.

If we are honest there have been times when we have spread our wings wide to sin and settled for instant gratification instead of infinite joy. Jesus spread his arms wide too, not to sin but to receive our sin. He spread his arms out to receive all of our temptation and all of our sin. And there was the “bang” of the hammer hitting the head of the nail causing it to pierce Jesus flesh and fastening him to the wooden cross. And that folded him in death. But it is not over at the cross. His victory is not just a matter of humility. It is a matter of power. And so he rose three days later from death to show his victory is resounding and complete, and so he walks with us and lives inside us giving us power to refute temptation and forgiving us when we fall. Through Jesus you are what Satan could never have you be: you are a child of God, adopted, free, forgiven, loved, healed, holy, redeemed, renewed, restored, saved. Through Jesus you are not who you once were.

Jesus was like us in every way, in that he was tempted. **Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.** Jesus knows the struggle is real. Jesus knows that temptation is hard. So keep in mind, it is not sinful to be tempted it is sinful to sin. Due to our culture, many of us will struggle with the same sins but in the midst of our culture Satan has an arrow or two or more that are specifically meant for you, for me. Temptation is universal but also individual. Jesus tells us, Watch and pray. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Specific temptations could be anything from holding a grudge, talking bad about someone behind their back, gossip, looking lustfully at an attractive person as they walk by, or blame God when things don't go the way we want them to. If Satan finds it impossible to overcome us by the greatness of the temptation, he tries to overcome us by persevering until he has wearied us. It is sinful to place yourself in the temptations way but temptation in and of itself isn't sin. Sometimes we let our temptations plant seeds of doubt about our salvation. We wonder if we are really Christian why do we struggle so much? This suffering tension is actually a good thing. This side of heaving not having this tension will usually mean that we have given into the sin.

Following Jesus doesn't mean you won't be tempted. It means that when you are tempted God will give you the strength to resist because he has saved you and empowered you to endure. He will provide a way out. A reformation hero said it this: You can keep birds from flying over your head but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair. As you can see I struggle with that, so I just cut all my hair off. The struggle is real but so too is our rejoicing in the Savior's gift of forgiveness, by which he renews both our strength and our desire to continue with that struggle. Our obedience to God doesn't earn our status as forgiven children of God. We have that by virtue of the forgiveness won for us by Christ and given to us by faith in the gospel promise. Obedience and the struggle against the devil, the world, our sinful flesh are fruits of faith, the results of faith, not the cause of faith. Right now we struggling against temptation and sometimes fall into sin. It won't always be like this. Because even in the middle of temptation and sin, the victory is ours in Jesus Christ. Heaven is our home. In heaven there is no sin, no temptation. :)

So when temptation comes: **Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.** James 4: The scriptures are our weapon against temptation. Put on the full armor of God – Ephesians 6. You can combat the lies of Satan with the truth of God's Word. When temptation comes remember: ¹⁵ **For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.** (Hebrews 4:15) When we are tempted we can run to Jesus instead of away from Jesus. Greater is he that is in you than he who is in the world. In the moments we are tempted to sin, we have to remind ourselves that Jesus only wants the best for us. The faith that Jesus has something greater in store for us pours water on the fiery arrows of Satan's assaults. When we are weak, remember Jesus is always strong. Make no mistake Christ is for you.

So go ahead be on his side in His kingdom as the Spirit calls you by Word and Sacrament because the kingdom of me doesn't last but the Kingdom of God does and will always prevail. Amen.