

Love Fights

Matthew 4:1-11

There was a battle going on in the early days after the creation of the world. It was a serious battle- a battle of epic proportions. It was a battle that had implications for how the world and the people living in the world would exist after it. It was literally a matter of life and death for the entire universe. The good guys win, the world goes on living in perfect harmony with God. The bad guy wins, there is destruction, evil, and death, eternal separation from God....Adam and Eve lose. Point...Satan.

Fast forward thousands of years. It's present day. There's another serious battle going on. Ross is hanging out with his buddies at the bar on a Friday night. He's on the brink where he knows if he has one more drink, he'll be beyond his limit, beyond what his conscience is telling him is too far, beyond what would be God-pleasing. Satan is behind the scenes pushing him to stop being a wimp and just have a good time. If Ross wins this battle against Satan, God is glorified. If he loses, he'll experience shame, embarrassment, and guilt. Ross doesn't have just one more. He has three, four, five more. Ross loses. Point.... Satan.

Now rewind about 2,000 years. You're in the desert. There's another one of the biggest battles in the history of the world going on. This battle too is a matter of eternal life or death. It's Satan in one corner and it's not just any human being, it's true God and true man in one person, it is Jesus Christ in the other corner. If Jesus loses this battle, it means eternal destruction for each and every one of us. If Jesus falls for the devil's trap, his future death on the cross means absolutely nothing for you and me, because a sinner cannot pay for the world's sin.

It's amazing how some things never change. Since the beginning of the world God's people have been in serious battles against Satan and his temptations. Just look back at the battles with temptation God's people had in the Old Testament. Of course you have Adam and Eve in the garden. Noah was tempted by alcohol. Abraham had the temptation to do anything but trust in God's promises. Jacob was tempted to deceive his father, his brother, and his uncle. Job who lost everything he had was tempted to curse God to his face. Joseph battled sexual temptation with Potiphar's wife. David battled sexual temptation with Bathsheba. The list goes on. Some of these temptations God's people battled and won, a lot of them they didn't. We don't even have to look back in the Old Testament to know there's a battle with Satan going on. Look back at your week. There's a new temptation every minute. Temptation to lust. Temptation to gossip. Temptation to blow your gasket. Temptation to be lazy. It never ends. Some battles we win, a lot more we lose. It causes us to wonder, "Is God here?" Does God have my back?" And the more we lose these battles the question will naturally come up, "Can I ever win these battles?"

The answer of course is yes, because love fights. Love fights temptation. Love fights to keep God's will. But as we look at this battle between the Savior of the world and the Accuser of the world that is Satan, I'm not gonna really be talking about our love which fights temptation – our love of God and his word. No. I'm going to be talking about the love of God incarnate in the

person of Jesus Christ fighting the battle over Satan. Because that love is the key to answering the question, “Can I win this battle over temptation?”

Let’s read this account from Matthew chapter 4:

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² 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.”

⁴ Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

⁵ 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.’”**

⁷ Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

⁸ 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.”

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

The devil comes at Jesus with three tactful temptations. But maybe as important as how he tempted Jesus is when he attempted Jesus. Matthew says **Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.** Award for understatement of the millennium goes to that. 40 day is about the max a human being can live without food. The organs are failing. The body is shutting down. Jesus is near the point of death. Worse than that is what is going on in the mind. Without food the brain is not working. You can’t see straight, you can’t think straight. The mind is prone to thoughts of irrationality and hallucination. So Satan comes prowling around Jesus when he is at his weakest, when he’s near the point of death, at a time when a normal human being would do anything to have just a crumb from a loaf of bread.

And Satan comes with his first attack, **“The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”** At first glance, you might be thinking how is this a temptation? How would Jesus be sinning if he performed this miracle? Later on he would provide thousands of people with bread by performing a miracle. How is this any different? If we dig a little deeper, however, we see that this attack from Satan is subtle and effective. If we go back to when the people of Israel were entering the promised land we see how Satan might have tempted the Israelites the same way. Moses says to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 8, **Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. ³ He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna,**

which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. You see a lot of connections don't you? God led the people in the wilderness and it says he caused them hunger to see where their hearts were at. Was the hunger in their stomachs going to turn into grumbling in their hearts or were they going to rely on the Word of the Lord and his promises? You can imagine Satan in the background tempting the people, "Look how hungry you are! Does your God really care about you?"

Doesn't he attack you in the same way? Does Satan point to the hunger in your life and tell you that God must not be there? You've prayed and prayed to God to relieve from this health problem, but it seems that you'll be stuck with it for life. Again and again you go to God in midst of financial trouble, praying that there can be some sort of relief, but the bills hit you harder and harder. Satan uses these troubles in life, when your stomach feels so empty, and leads you say "where's the love, God? Where are you?" We might crumble under that attack, but love incarnate fought that temptation and won.

It says, **Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'**" Jesus fights back with a perfect passage. He doesn't need that bread because he has the words of God which fill him up. He says to Satan, you're a liar. I'm going trust my Father in heaven. Love fights and wins.

Satan comes back though with another attack. This time he's going to beat Jesus at his own game. **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."**

After Jesus just told Satan that a man lives on the word of God alone, Satan responds by giving Jesus God's Word. This is God's promise for you, Jesus! Don't you trust in your Father to protect you from danger? Come on. Throw yourself off and see God work a miracle. Satan's tactics remind me of what I heard from a fellow Seminary student. He and his fiancé were shopping at a wedding boutique, and they came across napkins with graphics on them and one napkin which you could purchase had these words on them, "Eat, drink, and be merry, Luke 12:19." That's what Satan was doing. He took a Scripture passage and twisted it by ripping it out from the context it was in. He was making God's Word say whatever he wanted it to say.

Does Satan attack you with that temptation where you want to make God's Word say what you want it say. If God forgives me for all the sin that I've done and the sins I will commit in the future, then that kind of gives me the license to sin all I want. If God promises to take care of me like he takes cares of the birds of the air, then I don't have to put in any work! I can skip work or school whenever I want. I can spend my money on anything I want. If God promises that he knows my future, then there's no use in me planning for my future! We all maybe have fallen for that temptation before, but love incarnate fought that temptation and won.

⁷**Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'**

Jesus says, “we’re not gonna play that game, Satan. I’m going to let Scripture interpret Scripture. I’m going to let my Father explain himself. Nowhere does the Father tell us to do something stupid like jumping off a building. Don’t put him to the test.” Yes, we can trust the Father to protect us, but don’t test him. Jesus wins again.

Now for Satan’s third attack. Out of all his temptation this is the one that’s going to get him. **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.”** Think again about the time in Jesus life when Satan was tempting him with this. As true man, he was at his weakest. He was all alone, with no praise, glory, friends, or family, nothing. And here Satan offers him everything if only he would bow down and worship him.

Does Satan attack you with this one? He offers you fun, pleasure, wealth, popularity, in exchange for your morals and integrity. He gives you everything you could ever want in this life, but only if you are willing to sacrifice part of your relationship with God. He offers you something temporary to replace God. Maybe we fall for that temptation, but Jesus, love incarnate fought and he won. This is what he says.

Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’ Again he goes toe to toe with Satan and uses the Word of God to fight him. He tells Satan, “think again if you think I’m going to serve anyone except my Father. He is my Lord 24/7 and nothing you say is going to change that.” What does Satan do? He gives up and angels come to attend Jesus.

What do we draw from all this? At first glance we might think that main point of this is our love of God and his Word is the only thing that should use in our fight against temptation. We have a solution to the problem of temptation. It’s God Word, so we immerse ourselves in that word and no matter when those temptations come, we can be ready. Yes, that is a huge takeaway from this account. But I think if we only focus on that we’re missing the bigger point. That bigger point is not what we can do to win battles against Satan, but it’s the fact that love incarnate, Jesus Christ fought and won that battle already. Love fought and won the battle against temptation for you. Throughout those temptations, in his seemingly weakest state, Jesus was thinking about you and what he must do to earn your salvation. He remained the perfect Son of God so that through his perfect sacrifice he can present you as perfect children before his Father in heaven. Love incarnate fought for you on that cross by giving up the fight and offering his life for you. And because Jesus crushed the devil’s head, God says the same thing he said to his Son right before Jesus went into the wilderness, “with you I am well pleased.”

So back to the question at the beginning. Can you win the battle over temptation? Friends, you can, because the love incarnate that destroyed the devil’s power in the wilderness, the love incarnate that gives the status of perfect before God, is the same love which lives in you through faith and gives you power to say no. So no matter what Satan throws at you, know that he’s already defeated because love fights.

