

## Rev. Ben Jones

How y'all doing? I don't kid here enough. Holy cow! Look at all these people. Wow.

So, you know, one of the things that excites me about Scripture is that it is a story. And one of the things that I've been on a mission to do lately is to help people see how stories like the temptation are plugging in to this bigger Bible story. And it's so important we're going to need to have this perspective in order to understand what's going on here.

But we're also going to zoom in. I'm going to call that the panoramic view. We're also going to zoom in and just look at this story and see what Jesus is enduring. And we'll see how temptation works. And then we'll get to a point where we're ready to sort of ask, what does all this mean for our lives today?

So let's take the lens out and move it way back and take the panoramic view. When the first readers of Matthew's gospel, when they picked it up and they read it, and these people would have been Jewish, that's who Matthew is writing. They would have immediately picked up on this story. And this is our story. This is our story.

They would have heard Wilderness temptation 40 days and 40 nights, and they would have said, oh, wow, this is this is tying into our formation story. The exodus.

The Exodus is the great salvation story of the Old Testament. Now, it's not on the same level as the death of resurrection of Jesus. Don't get me wrong, but it is the saving event. It is the formation story of the Jewish people. And in the Exodus, something amazing is going on because the Exodus is actually tying into an even bigger Bible story.

So think about this with me. The Exodus is God leading his people out of slavery in bondage in Egypt into the Promised Land. And along the way, they wander through the wilderness for 40 years. There's the word. There's the number 40. Of course. Moses is on the mountain. Moses is on the mountain, Mount Sinai, for 40 days and 40 nights.

So it occurs a couple of times. And people are reading this story going, okay, what's going on? What's happening here? What's Jesus doing? What's he up to? But the Exodus story itself is plugging into the story of creation. You want to know why that we read from Genesis this morning, this morning, this evening. It's because this is the big Bible story.

Think about it this way. Revelation 21 and 22, the last book, the last two chapters of the last book of the Bible are about new creation. The first book of the Bible, Genesis chapters one and two, are about the original creation. And they're bookends. They're bookends telling us that there's this big story of creation going on and how God is going to set things right after the fall.

And in the story of the Exodus. Anyone here old enough to have remembered the Ten Commandments with Charlton Heston? Okay, I'm showing my age. Yeah. Remember that? It was for its time. It was a great film and had lots of good special effects. The people of God are at the Red sea, right? Pharaoh's armies are chasing them down, and they're stuck.

And Moses spreads his arms out and the waters part. This humongous wall of water on either side. And the people of God go through on dry land. Now, you wouldn't know this necessarily, but the way that's written in the Hebrew language, the language is echoing a story in Genesis one where God separates the waters above from the waters below, and he separates the seas and the dry land.

You see how this is working? The story of Exodus is tying into the story of creation. What's going on here? God is going to undo the fall. God is working to bring creation back to rights. And this story is a big part of it. And of course, eventually the people of God arrive at the Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey.

Think in a new Eden, okay? That's the big story of the Bible. And Jesus is plugging into this and they're looking at this story. These Jewish people are looking at the story going, whoa, whoa, wait a minute. Jesus is leading us into a new exodus. Okay. I want to see how this turns out. It's a page turner for them because they want and they want to know.

They've been waiting for God to show up and do something like this. They're waiting for God to lead them out of their bondage to Rome. And we're waiting for Jesus to lead us out of our bondage as well. Jesus is leading us on a new Exodus. But here's the thing. You know where the Promised Land is in him.

He's the Promised Land. Jesus in his resurrection body is new creation, right? When you think of heaven and going home to heaven, you need to think Jesus. So that's the big picture story. Jesus. This is the launching pad of Jesus's new Exodus, leading people out of sin and death into new life. So now let's move that lens real close and look at just the story.

One of the things that we learn really quickly is Matthew makes a point of saying that after 40 days and 40 nights, Jesus was hungry. One of the biggest biblical understatement of all time.

He was starving. I looked up what happens physiologically to the human body when you're starving. And after 40 days and 40 nights, you're beyond the point of fasting. Your body is in starvation mode. You're physically exhausted and spiritually at your limit.

And he would have been emaciated. He must have started as a healthy guy, maybe with a little bit of fat on him. But by the time it was over, he was emaciated, exhausted, weak, and the lack of blood sugar meant that he couldn't think clearly. He would have had trouble thinking clearly. So hold that in your mind for a moment.

I then asked myself, what does it mean to be tempted? I mean, what does it mean to be tempted? I like donuts. I actually love donuts, and I particularly love cake donuts with icing. Just saying. But you know, there are times when, let's just say, for the sake of argument, that I give them up for lent. I haven't given them up for lent, but let's just say that I have and you offer me some donuts.

But it's one of those days. I'm sure you've had those days when your body is saying, not only are you not hungry. Don't put one more thing into your mouth and you offer me donuts. Oh no. No thanks. Oh, come on then. I know you love donuts. I do, but I don't want them. I just don't want to.

Thank you very much. That's not temptation, right? I'm not being tempted. When I'm being tempted is I'm giving them up for lent. And you arrive when I'm hungry and you offer me the donut. And you know, this little dialog will go on in my head, right? Wow, that looks like a really good donut. Look at that icing. It's even reflecting the light.

Giving up donuts for lent. And that was stupid.

You know, they don't know that I've given up donuts for lent. I can have one, and no one would know. God. God won't mind. It's just one donut. You see how this is working, right? And this lands at one of two places. Either I break my fast and take the donut, or I eventually arrive at a point where I say, I really want that donut, but I'm not because I'm fasting.

Multiply that by a thousand and we're getting close to what Jesus was experiencing.

Now I'm only going to deal with this one temptation, the other temptations. I'm going to talk about the stones turning into bread. The others are the same kind of thing in different clothing. So it's enough for us to just focus on this one. So here's Satan saying, if you're the Son of God, turn these stones into bread.

Now I'm putting something into Scripture that isn't there, but you tell me if this has a has a ring of truth to it. Jesus probably took a long, hard look at those stones.

I'm really hungry, father. I don't know if I can do this one more day.

You don't want me to die yet?

I'm really hungry, Lord. Father, you don't want me to suffer.

Oh, wait.

Yeah, you do.

That's when he comes back. That's Satan. We live by every word that comes out of the mouth of God. It was a struggle to get those words out, but he gets them out.

That's temptation.

And I think that's what Jesus endured. And parenthetically, so when we talk about your Lord and your Savior, you need to know something about him. He knows what you're going through. Not only that, he's been there. He has been there probably in ways that you can't imagine. And 2000 years later, the risen Lord has not forgotten any of that.

So keep that in mind about the God that we worship in Jesus Christ. This is the God who came to be one of us, a human being. Now the other thing that we learn when we look at the this close up view of the temptation, is we see how temptation works, right? Temptation is an invitation to do something that you want to do, that you need to do, but you're going to do it in an unfaithful way, right?

It's an invitation to meet a need, real or perceived. It comes at you. The second thing is when you're vulnerable, that's what makes it a temptation. When you're hungry, when you're tired, you're exhausted. You're feeling powerless and helpless. That's when it comes. That's when you're tempted. And the third thing is, it always sounds reasonable, right? It always sounds reasonable.

Can you hear the serpent? As we look at the temptation. Can you hear the serpent? You won't die. God doesn't want you to die.

God knows that you're going to be like him. God's holding you back. God's keeping you down. Maybe you should take things into your own hands. I mean, he put this tree here anyway. What was he thinking?

This is how temptation works. And we, even as we read the story, we have the same problems. What was God do? I'm putting that tree there. And all of a sudden, we start blaming God and miss the point.

Right. Can you hear his voice? And here's the thing. You know this voice. I know this voice. My marriage is on the rocks. I've lost that spark.

I deserve. I deserve to be happy. I do, I deserve to be happy. I don't deserve to feel like this and that. That person at work or that person at the gym. I really feel alive when I'm around her.

Yeah. God wants me to be happy. God will understand. It'll just be a short little fling. No harm done.

Or the bills are piling up and you're really frightened.

I'm. I'm the one who provides for this family. I'm the one who has to put a roof over our head and clothes on our backs. And food on the table. What am I going to do to make ends meet? Well, it's a dog eat dog world. Everyone for themselves. So I'll fudge the numbers. No one will get hurt.

I'll make that questionable deal. Besides, I have an obligation. I have a duty to provide for my family. See how this is working? My career is on hold and I'm stuck. Everyone around me is getting promoted. I work hard. I deserve something more. I deserve to advance. What am I going to do? I'm going to have to take my life into my own hands.

And you know, I see what other people do. How? Let's just make other people smaller so that I look bigger. I'll take credit for other people's work. And you know what? I'm going to take credit for it. In the meeting, when the boss is there. I'm going to make them come at me. I'm going to make them under, put them on the defensive.

Because after all, it's everyone for themselves. God helps those who help themselves. God will understand. Right. We know this voice. And the biggest lie here is God will understand.

Right. It sounds reasonable.

The problem is, is that if we stay here in this close up view, let's think about where that takes us.

Because at least to my way of thinking, if we stay in the close up view, we. This quickly becomes a morality tale. So Jesus was able to resist temptation. And brothers and sisters, I've just told you what to do. I've told you how temptation works, right? It's an invitation to meet a need and a in a faithless way.

It comes at you when you're vulnerable. And it sounds reasonable. So I've given you what you need to resist temptation now. Go forth in the name of Christ and do it.

Don't be like Jesus. Come on. What are you waiting for? I imagine there are some sermons that sound just like that.

That's what I, at least in my mind. If we stay too focused on just the story, that's where we end up. So we got to pull that lens back again. We got to pull that lens back and see that. Oh, wait a minute. This is a story and a bigger story. And let's just stick with Jesus for a moment.

Forget the whole story of creation. Just Jesus. This is the one who is leading us out of death and sin into new life, and on his death and resurrection. Everything is made new.

Heaven is located in him, and suddenly all kinds of passages from Scripture begin to make sense. So, for example, in Second Corinthians, Paul says, anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old has passed away, the new has come. And listen to the way he wrote it. Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation, not will be someday.

Not that you're given an IOU card. And when you go to heaven, then it'll finally come true. You are a new creation. The old has passed away. The new has come.

In Philippians, Paul says, we are citizens of heaven.

In baptism you are marked on your forehead. The person who's being baptized is marked and the words you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own forever. That's your passport. You have a new passport. I mean, you have it. It's not. You're going to get it someday. You have it. Here is your new home, and it's in Jesus.

That's where you are located. You are in him. Your life is hidden in the one who has led you out of sin and death. But here's the thing. Paul was no dummy. We're a new creation. But we have to grow. Even a new tree has to grow. You know, a seed gets planted in the ground. It's. It's a new seed.

It's got to grow. We're citizens of heaven, but we're still learning the language of heaven. We got to put that language into practice, and it's not going to come overnight. You are not immediately perfected, but you are genuinely transferred. You are not immediately perfected, but you are genuinely transferred into the life of Jesus Christ. That, my friends, is the good news right there.

That's the gospel. Now, I want to end with an analogy. This service of Eucharist. What's going on here in the Episcopal Church? We use language like the Real Presence. Jesus is really present in the Eucharist. Now, we're not particularly concerned with saying how or where he's present. In other words, we don't particularly have a need to say that he's like located in the bread, in the wine, but the bread and the wine are part of his service.

So I'm not saying they're not important. They are. But it's the whole thing together. And this becomes important because let's say you're not baptized. You know, this this Eucharist is for all baptized Christians and you are not baptized or for whatever reason, you come up and you put your arms over your chest and you get a blessing. You, my friend, are still entering the real presence of Jesus.

Make no mistake, of course, the invitation is. Take the nets. Take the next step. Go all the way. Let's close the deal. Get baptized. This meal is for people who are citizens of heaven and who are a new creation in baptism. And then at the end of the service were sent out. Go do the work you've been given to do.

And so we go out. Knowing we got to grow. We go out trying to put the language of heaven that we're learning into practice. And if you noticed something when you come back, you don't have to earn your way back in. You know why? Because this is your home. I don't mean this. I mean the real presence of Jesus.

That's your home. You belong here. You are a new creation. You are a citizen of heaven. How can we say no to you? When Jesus has said, you are mine and you belong. So, my friends, make no mistake about who it is we worship. We're worshipping a God that, first of all, has a whole lot more in view when it comes to salvation than just you and me.

All of creation is in view. That's really good news as far as I'm concerned.

But you are also in view. That's the big picture. The lens up close is. Yeah. God knows you, I. God sees you. Jesus sees you. Jesus knows where you are. And he's telling you, man, I've been there. Oh, I have been there. Let me lead you home.

Amen.