

Good morning, Fellowship. It's good to be with you today. I need to confess something. Last week, I came in on a high and was tempted by someone on our staff to make much of my beloved New Orleans Saints and to belittle all you die-hard Cowboys fans. By Monday night, I had been humbled with the Cowboys pulling off a historic comeback and the Saints losing.

I should have known better. I've seen this kind of thing happen before. When I worked in student ministry, I watched students have incredible encounters with the Lord on mission trips and at summer camp. Students experienced salvation, felt calls to ministry, and prepared to go home to make a difference in their world. They were on the camp high.

Each time, I watched many of them swing from their high to a low. Once home, they were tempted by old sins or new ones arose. Their encounters with the Lord were genuine. God was working in their hearts. But we have an enemy – and when He sees us being prepared to make an impact – He attacks.

You've probably experienced that, too. Intimacy with the Lord increases? Attack. Volunteering in ministry? Attack. Joining a Bible Study? Attack. About to make His name great? Attack. Start living out your purpose? Attack.

Jesus experienced something similar in Luke 4.

Last week we started a series on discipleship in the book of Luke called, *Succession*. Kurt shared that ultimately our "success" as believers is measured by our successors – those we pass our faith onto.

Before reading Luke 4, let's talk about Luke 3. When Jesus gets baptized, the Holy Spirit descends upon Him and the Father says to Him, "You are My Son, in You I am well pleased." It's an intimate moment between Father and Son. The Father confirms Jesus' identity. He is the empowered and beloved Son of a doting Father. He lacks and longs for nothing because He has received affection, affirmation, and approval from His Father. It's the high. And you know what happens right after that? The attack.

Luke 4:1-14: **4** Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness <sup>2</sup>for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. <sup>3</sup> And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." <sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE.'" <sup>5</sup> And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. <sup>6</sup> And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. <sup>7</sup> Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours." <sup>8</sup> Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" <sup>9</sup> And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; <sup>10</sup> for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU TO GUARD YOU,'

<sup>11</sup> and, 'ON *their* HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'" <sup>12</sup> And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" <sup>13</sup> When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time. <sup>14</sup> And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district.

He's affirmed by His father at His baptism and now He's attacked in the wilderness by the devil – from high to low. The wilderness was a dusty 35-mile-long by 15-mile-wide stretch of land filled with jagged rocks literally called, "The Devastation."

Ever felt like you've been in a place called, "The Devastation" before? These last 6 months, in particular, have been hard, confusing, discouraging times filled with isolation, anxiety, and depression. I know we've all felt under attack and tempted the same way Jesus is.

### **Satan tempts through our appetite.**

Jesus became hungry. <sup>3</sup> And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." <sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE.'"

He's alone, hungry, exhausted and Satan attacks His vulnerability – hunger. If you are the Son of God – feed yourself. Surely, your Father doesn't want You to starve. You don't need Him to meet your need. Use your own power. He's tempting Jesus to gratify His flesh instead of trusting His Father. Will He act independently, choosing instant gratification or trust His Father?

We've been tempted to do the same – to satisfy momentary wants and needs with temporary solutions and Satan probably uses the same line, "Sure your Father doesn't want you to..." Provide for yourself. You don't need Him.

The area of my life that this has shown up in the past and still shows up from time to time is in the area of money. We all need money to survive. But I have turned money into a place that I go to for comfort. Surely my Father wants me to feel secure. And then a couple of years ago, we were stripped of just about every single dollar we had saved in our marriage. It was a humbling process. I could no longer find comfort in a number in a bank account. This moment illuminated for me that I was placing my trust and security in money instead of the Lord.

**The underlying issue with appetite is fear.** We fear not having enough – food, money, or please. We fear God won't provide so we attempt to satisfy eternal needs with instant gratification. We're tempted to doubt God's provision and believe the lie that He won't meet our needs fully or quickly.

### **Here's a question: what areas of your life are you tempted to fulfill your needs on your own?**

How does Jesus respond? He quotes Deuteronomy 8:3b: "Man does not live by bread alone." The rest of the verse says: "But man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the

Lord.” Putting your trust in food, pleasure, and comfort will keep you hungry. But His Word will satisfy eternally. Like my wife, a holistic health coach says, “Stop obsessing over bread and start obsessing over the Bread of Life.”

**Satan tempts us through our appetites. He tempts us through our ambitions.**

In verse 5, Satan shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and says, “I will give you all this if you will worship me.” I envision this being an intoxicating moment. Jesus could probably smell the power available to Him. All it would require is a little worship. That’s how idolatry starts, right?

He’s offering Jesus the keys to the throne – power without the pain – glory without suffering. Jesus can forego the feeling of exhaustion, conflict, betrayal and ultimately, death on the cross. Just a little worship and He can have the kingdom without the cross. It’s the ultimate cheat code.

When the gyms shut down in March, Erin and I started working out with the Beach Body App. By April, I started to fail at the 1<sup>st</sup> temptation – turning to food for comfort. I started eating more and becoming stationary. I haven’t weighed myself, but I’m pretty sure I’ve gained the COVID 19 – as they’re calling it.

But I am ambitious about being in shape, so I continued working out. I want the beach body. I want the abs, sculpted muscles, and just one less chin. But ya know – I haven’t started taking steroids. I didn’t order an ab belt. Y’all remember those? It was a belt that supposedly gave you sculpted abs because it stimulated those muscles while you sat around doing nothing. Sign me up!

Why? Because it’s a shortcut. It’s cheating. It’s getting results without putting in the work. Progress without the pain. Those folks with the beach body have put in the hard work. They’ve suffered for their results.

Maybe for you, you’ve been tempted to lie on your LinkedIn, resume, a job application or your taxes. Maybe you were tempted to throw someone else under the bus to get ahead in your job. Sinful ambition is wanting power and influence so much you’ll lie, cheat, steal, gossip, and cut any corner to achieve more.

Not all ambition is bad. God created us with unique abilities and for many, that means a drive to succeed. But if my earthly kingdom becomes more important than God’s and I cheat along the way – I need a heart check.

**Here’s a few questions to ask yourself: Am I building up God’s Kingdom or my own? Where am I seeking my own glory instead of giving God glory? Where am I avoiding hardship and taking shortcuts?**

So, how does Jesus respond? He quotes Deuteronomy 6:13. <sup>8</sup> Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" Jesus chooses allegiance to the Father. He chooses pain and suffering. He chooses His Father's Kingdom and glory instead of a shortcut to His own.

**Satan tempts through us through our appetites. He tempts us through our ambitions. He tempts us through our desire for approval.**

Possibly through a vision and not literally – Satan takes Jesus up to the temple – overlooking the Kidron Valley some 450 feet below – a site that would make some visitors dizzy – and as they look down, he says, "If you just jump (and then he quotes Psalm 91), your Father will send His angels to rescue you." If He leaps, divine intervention would be needed to save Him, and it would assure Him of His identity in the Father.

Satan is tempting Jesus to test His Father, His Word, His affirmations and promises. He's suggesting that this will enhance their relationship and Jesus' dependence on the Father. If your Father loves you like He said He does, you'll be protected and safe.

He's testing Jesus' identity. He's testing to see if Jesus knows where His worth and value come from. Listen, we all want to be loved, accepted, and valued. There's nothing wrong with that. It's hardwired into our DNA. The question is, "How is that desire met?"

**Where are you turning for approval?** Is it in an earthly relationship with someone? Is it in a job or status and how you stand out to others? Is it Instagram followers for your "brand?" Are you looking for approval from man? Because if you are, you will have to be sustained by that same never-quite-filling approval.

Let me tell you where I struggle with this. Right here. It's right here on this platform. Have I been funny enough? Did I word things well? Did I say it right? Did I smile enough? Am I as cool as Gary Brandenburg? Do people like me? If I'm not careful, I can prepare a sermon with your approval in mind instead of the glory of God in mind. I can write words that make much of me instead of making much of God. I can start asking the question, "Will everyone love me after this?" Instead of asking, "Will everyone love the Lord more after this?" I can start to desire your approval instead of leaning into the fact that I have already been approved. I don't want to try to "be enough." Instead, I want to rest in knowing Jesus has made me "enough."

So, listen, pray for me anytime I step up here. Pray I make much of Jesus and nothing of myself. I would appreciate that from you as my brothers and sisters in Christ.

Back to our passage. How does Jesus respond? He quotes another passage in Deuteronomy. This time 6:16: <sup>12</sup> And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'"

Why doesn't God need to be tested? Because His promises are true. He's faithful. What He said about Jesus at His baptism remains true during the temptation. He is the approved Son of a loving Father. And the same is true for you. God's Word makes it very clear who you are in Him. **Are you believing lies about yourself or do you believe God's Truth about you?**

<sup>13</sup> When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.

<sup>14</sup> And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district.

Jesus perseveres through the temptations unscathed. He is now more prepared than ever to start His ministry – to make an impact – to begin investing in His successors.

What do we do with this?

- **Memorize God's Word and follow the Holy Spirit.** You noticed the pattern this morning. Jesus gets tempted 3 times and each time He responds to Satan's attacks with God's Word. Why? Because the only way to combat lies is with Truth. You also probably noticed each passage was from the same book, Deuteronomy. So, I want to take Kurt's challenge to you last week to read the book of Luke 3 times and step it up. Memorize it. And when you are tempted these next few months, use it to fight off temptation. Ask the Holy Spirit for help to memorize it and help to sustain you in temptation.

As I mentioned earlier, I know this season of life has been hard for so many of us. Old temptations have resurfaced, and new ones have arisen. We've felt alone, anxious, depressed, confused, and frustrated and we've given into temptation in an attempt to find comfort, meaning, value, or to pursue our ambitions and so some of us this morning need to start with confession.

- **Confess your sins.** Know His grace and mercy extend beyond anything you've done. Move forward in His grace and truth. Remember that His forgiveness is deeper and wider than your sin could ever go. He loves you still.
- **Know your Savior sympathizes with you.** That's what Hebrews 4:15 tells us. Jesus doesn't shame us in our weakness. He doesn't turn His back. He knows what it's like to be tempted. He knows what it's like to struggle. You know, there was no one else there with Him and Satan and the Holy Spirit. Jesus had to have told the disciples as a way to instruct them about Satan and his techniques – but also to say – “Guys, I get it. This temptation to sin thing is tough.”

“The real scandal of Hebrews 4:15, though, is what we are told about why Jesus is so close and with his people in their pain. He has been ‘tempted as we are’ – not only that, but ‘in every respect’ as we are. The reason that Jesus is in such close solidarity with us is that the difficult path we are on is not unique to us. He has journeyed on it himself. It is not only that Jesus can relieve us from our troubles, like a doctor prescribing medicine; it is also that, before any relief comes, he with us in our troubles, like a doctor who has endured the same disease.

Jesus was a sinless man, not a sinless Superman. He woke up with bed head. He had pimples at thirteen. He never would have appeared on the cover of *Men's Health*. He came as a normal man to normal men. He knows what it is to be thirsty, hungry, despised, rejected, scorned, shamed, embarrassed, abandoned, misunderstood, falsely accused, suffocated, tortured, and killed. He knows what it is to be lonely. His friends abandoned him when he needed them most; had he lived today, every last Twitter follower and Facebook friend would have unfriended him when he turned thirty-three – he who will never un-friend us.” – Dane Ortlund in *Gentle and Lowly*

Friends, it doesn't matter where you've been in regards to sin. You are loved. Don't continue down the path of devastation. Turn from it. Reject it. Use His Word as a sword and know He is with you every step of the way.