

Sermon: *Temptation Island*
Text: *Luke 4:1 – 13*
Date: *February 21, 2010 AM*
Place: *Jesup First UMC*

One day a struggling pastor came home and found his wife standing in their den with a brand new, red dress. Well, his first reaction was excitement. She was beautiful! But then, the more he thought about it the more he wondered. So finally, he asked her: *“Honey, just how much did you spend on that dress?”* She said: *“\$250.”* Well, he hit the ceiling; he said: *“\$250! How could you do that to me?”* She said: *“I don’t know. I was just standing in the store in front of that mirror and it was like the Devil whispered in my ear, ‘Gee, you look great in that dress. You should buy it.’”* And the pastor said: *“But don’t you know how to deal with him? You should have said, ‘Get behind me, Satan.’”* She said: *“I did! I did! And then, he said: ‘You look pretty good from back here too.’”*

Have you ever been there? There’s no use trying to ignore the reality of sin in our lives. Paul told the church at Rome: **“Sin entered the world through one man and since Adam all sin.”** And in reality, the nature of sin has not changed since the very beginning. Every sin begins with a moment of temptation. Just as Eve was tempted by the lure of forbidden fruit, so you and I have things which entice us too.

Maybe you’re a pretty good student, but you just need a little extra to get that special honor or that scholarship; and something tells you: *“You know, you could cheat just a little. Come on! You know everybody else does it.”*

You've always been dedicated to your spouse, but lately your schedules are hectic and there are so many responsibilities and very little time for romance; and something tells you: "*You know, you could find someone to spend a little time with. Come on! Who's gonna know? Everybody else is doing it.*"

You've always been a loyal employee, but lately, you feel overworked, underpaid, and underappreciated; and something tells you: "*You know, you don't have to give these people your heart and soul anymore. You can pull up and just coast; you know, just go through the motions for a while. After all, everybody else is doing it.*"

You see, temptation is a very present reality. Everybody is tempted by something ... even Jesus! In fact, the synoptic gospels tell us that after His Baptism, Jesus was driven out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. And He was there, fasting and praying, for forty days. And the Devil came and tempted Him. He said: "*Turn these stones into bread and feed yourself;*" "*Bow down and worship me and I'll give you the world;*" "*Throw yourself down from here and people will worship you.*" Yet, Jesus withstood the moment of temptation and God sent angels to minister to Him.

Jesus stood! ... but how? How does one stand in the midst of temptation?

First, it helps to know when temptation is coming! Temptation is so common that it's almost predictable. And this morning, I want us to reflect on several seasons of temptation. ***Temptation often***

comes when we're spiritually strong! Remember: Jesus' moment of temptation came after a very high moment for Him. We went down to the River Jordan and was baptized by His cousin, John; and as He was coming up out of the water, the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended, and a voice came from heaven that said: "*This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*" When you've been through a revival or on a retreat, and you're thinking to yourself: "*Man, it can't get any better than this,*" you'd better watch out, because temptation is coming.

Temptation often comes when we're physically weak. Jesus had been fasting for forty days. He was tired and hungry; and Satan played on that. He said: "*Look, you're hungry and tired; man, do I have a deal for you?*" It's the same with us. When we're physically weak and thinking, "*I just don't know if I can go on,*" that's when the Enemy comes to offer us a shortcut or an easier way.

Temptation often comes when we're isolated! As far as we know, Jesus was alone in the wilderness. He didn't have the support of His family and friends; and Satan came and said: "Hey, I'm here for you. Let's be best buddies." Now, the Bible, especially the New Testament, really emphasizes the importance of fellowship. God's people are to pray for one another, encourage one another, comfort one another, and challenge one another. John Wesley called this: "*Helping one another work out our salvation with fear and trembling.*" But when we're alone, in a strange place or another town, the Enemy comes and says, "*I'm*

here for you. I understand you. And I have an offer for you."

If we're going to stand, it really helps to know when temptation is coming.

Second, it helps to be prepared for the battle! We know Jesus overcame temptation by quoting the Word of God. On three different occasions, Jesus said: "*It is written ... it is written ... it is written.*" In fact, in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells Satan: "*One does not live by eating bread alone, but by feasting on the Word of God.*" Now, Jesus didn't wait until He was in the heat of the battle to learn God's Word. For one thing, He is the Word of God. From everlasting to everlasting, He is God's Word. But when He was a little boy growing up in Nazareth, He studied the Word; He memorized the Word; and He even debated the Word in the Temple!

Friends, there's no substitute for reading, studying, and meditating on God's Word. We don't go to Sunday School, Bible Study, and Kidzone to learn a few facts and see a few friends. No! We go to prepare ourselves for holy living in an evil, fallen world.

We also know Jesus overcame temptation through prayer. The Gospels tell us about another moment of temptation in Jesus' life. On the last night of His life, when you know Jesus had to be tempted to run for His life. Yet, He went to the Garden of Gethsemane, and fell on His face in prayer: "*Father, please remove this cup from me, but not my will but yours be done.*" We might never know how many times

Jesus was strengthened and sustained and overcame through prayer, by rising early in the morning and going out to a quiet place to commune with His Father.

There's an old church hymn that says: "*When you met with great temptation, did you think to pray? By His dying love and merit, did you claim the Holy Spirit as your guide and stay? Oh how praying rests the weary. Prayer will change the night to day. So when life seems dark and dreary, don't forget to pray.*"

God sustains us in the battle through prayer! You see, it really helps to be prepared for the battle!

Third, it helps to stand and fight! You see, we are engaged in a spiritual battle, a battle between good and evil, God and Satan, that has been fought since before the creation of the world. And we are the battle ground. We aren't fighting against people or problems, "***but against the rulers, authorities and powers of this dark world and against spiritual forces of wickedness in the spiritual realm.***" And so, Paul tells us: "***Put on the full armor of God so that ... you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything to stand, stand firm.***" The Bible never tells us to flee from the Devil; it says: "***Resist the Devil and he will flee from you.***" Paul didn't say, "*Run;*" he said: "***Stand.***"

It really helps to stand and fight, using the spiritual weapons that God has given us.

There is an old Cherokee legend that has great wisdom to share with us. One day, long ago, a young Indian brave hiked out into a beautiful valley covered

with beautiful flowers and gorgeous trees and there, he fasted. And after three days, he noticed a nearby peak covered with snow. And so, he went there and as he looked around at the beautiful scenery, he heard something at his feet and looked down to see a snake. And the snake said: "Sir, I am about to die, because it is too cold for me. Please put me under your shirt and take me to the valley so I can live." And the young brave said: No, you are a rattlesnake and I know what will happen if I pick you up."

The rattlesnake said: "No. I will treat you different. If you help me, I will not harm you at all." The brave refused to believe him, but the more he looked at the snake's beauty the more he thought about it and finally, he picked up the snake, put it under his shirt and walked down into the valley and there, he laid it in a patch of beautiful grass. And just as he turned to walk away, the snake coiled and bit him on the leg. The boy cried: "But you promised." And the snake said: "And you knew what I was when you picked me up."

Daddy always said: "*If you play with fire, you're gonna get burned.*" That's why the hymn writer said: "*Yield not to temptation for yielding is sin; Each vict'ry will help you some other to win; Fight manfully onward, dark passions subdue; look ever to Jesus, He will carry you through.*"

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!