

Matthew 4:1-11

If you ask **scholars** of English literature for a list of the names of the greatest English **poets**, very frequently their list will include the name, **John Milton**. Milton lived in the first part of the 17th century. His most **famous** contribution to literature is his epic poem Paradise Lost. In this very long poem, Milton takes **hundreds** of pages to describe the events which are found in our First Lesson this morning - the **fall** into **sin**. Not too long after he **published** Paradise Lost, Milton also wrote a poem called Paradise Regained. At **first**, we might think that his subject for **this** poem would be Christ's **death** and **resurrection**. After all, those are the events which actually brought about our **salvation**, and **regained paradise** for us. But that's **not** what **Milton** chose to write about. Instead, he chose the event found in our **sermon text** for today - the **temptation** of Jesus in the **wilderness**. Now, John Milton was **not** a great **theologian**, but I do think that the connection he makes between the **fall of man** in the Garden of Eden, and the **temptation of Jesus** in the wilderness, is spot on. During the season of **Lent**, we often place a strong emphasis on Jesus' **suffering** and **death**. But it's **just** as important for us to recognize what Jesus accomplished with His **life**. That's what we're going to do today as we look at the account of Jesus' **temptation**, and see that there is a vital **connection** between **His Life** and **Our Life**.

Our text for today begins with the word "**then**." And for that reason, it's important for us to know what it was that came just **before** today's text. That **event** was Jesus' **baptism** in the Jordan River. Usually we think about Jesus' **baptism** as marking the **beginning** of His public ministry. Interestingly enough, Jesus **doesn't** start out by preaching to **large crowds** of people. He begins by going into the **wilderness** by **Himself**. While He is there, we're told that He **fasts** for 40 days - 40 days with no **food** at all, and perhaps even no **water** either. But Jesus wasn't just suffering the physical effects of His **fasting**, and the physical dangers of being in the **wilderness** with wild animals; but the **devil himself** was **tempting** Jesus throughout those 40 days. The temptations which are listed for us in our text for **today** came toward the **end** of His 40 days in the wilderness. So, we can well imagine that by this time, Jesus would have been both physically and emotionally **drained**.

Each of these three temptations is, in its essence, a **lie** from the devil, and that makes perfect **sense**. After all, that's exactly what the name **devil** means - **liar**. Although each one of his lies was **unique**, they all served the same **purpose**. Each lie was an attempt to **destroy** the world's **Savior**. If the devil were to be

successful, Jesus would be a **failure**, and all hope would be **lost** for mankind. Our **salvation** was on the line.

The devil's **first** temptation for Jesus was **simple**, *"If you are the Son of God, command these **stones** to become **bread**."* Just think about what a **strong temptation** this must have been for Jesus. His body was **hungry** - **aching** for food. But Jesus is **all powerful**. With a single word, He could easily turn **stones** into **bread**, and **satisfy** His hunger. But if He **did**, He would be turning His back on His Heavenly **Father**, who had **sustained** Him through the trials of the last 40 days. The devil was trying to sell Jesus the **lie** that His Father's care was **not enough**. But Jesus didn't **fall** for the lie. He answered, *"It is written: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God"*

For his **next** temptation, the devil took Jesus to a high place in the **temple complex** in the holy city of **Jerusalem**. Our text doesn't give us an **exact** location, but a logical spot would have been on the **east** side of the temple, overlooking the **Kidron Valley**. The historian **Josephus** tells us that the **drop** there was about 450 feet. As Jesus looked down from this lofty position, once again the devil **tempted** Him by saying, *"If you are the Son of God, 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."* It's somewhat **surprising** that the devil actually uses **God's Word** here. But it's not surprising at all that he uses it **incorrectly**. God's promise in Psalm 91 is **not** that God will protect His people no matter how **reckless** their behavior might be. In reality, it's an assurance of the Lord's protection while His people go about their God-given **responsibilities** from day to day. Once again, Jesus didn't fall for the devil's **lie**.

Then for his **final** temptation, the devil brought Jesus to a high **mountain** and showed Him all the kingdoms of the **world** in their **wealth** and **glory**. Then he told Jesus, *"I will **give** you **all** of these things, if you will bow down and worship **me**."* In this temptation the devil was basically offering Jesus the **easy way out**. He was telling Jesus that He could have all the power and the glory which His heavenly Father had **promised** to Him, **without** going through the **suffering** and **death** that was part of the Father's **plan**. All it would take was bowing down to the **devil**, and worshipping **him**. **Simple** - **easy** - and **attractive** - but just like **everything** the devil says, it was a **lie**, and Jesus **knew** it. He knew that if He bowed down to the **devil**, the world would be **lost**. So Jesus sent him away saying, *"Go **away**, Satan! For it is written: Worship the **Lord** your God, and serve **him only**."* At the end of our text we're told that the **angels** came, to **do** what angels **do** - they **served** Jesus.

The **victory** which Jesus achieved in this text is really **impressive** - something **we** could **never** have accomplished. We don't even need to be in a **weakened** state in order to believe the devil's **lies**. And the **temptations** which he puts in front of us **pale** in comparison to the ones he brought to **Jesus**. But in our **sinfulness**, we are tempted to lose **confidence** in the loving **care** of our Lord. We **give in** to the impulse of trying to fend for **ourselves** in this world, because we think that trusting in the **Lord** just isn't going to **work**. We have believed the **lie** that says the Lord is going to take care of us no matter how **reckless** we are with our life - that we can **do** whatever we want - that we can **live** however we want. And we've even been tempted to take the **easy path** and follow our **sinful nature**, in order to gain some kind of **temporary, earthly** pleasure. Why should we follow the path **God** wants us to be on, when it's so often filled with **persecution** and **pain**?

Why? - because God **always** tells us the **truth**. On the other hand, the **devil** continues to use the same **lies** he has used since the beginning of time. And why does he still **use** them? - because people keep **believing** them. And where has that **gotten** us? Have we received the **joy**, the **pleasure**, and the **peace** which the devil **promised** to us? Absolutely **not**. When we live our lives following **sin**, we only end up with **pain** and **heartache**. As we look at how **easily** and how **frequently** we fall **prey** to the devil and his lies, it's clear to see why we need a **Savior** like **Jesus**.

Jesus easily **countered** every one of the devil's **lies** with the Word of God. The devil told Jesus to use His power to make **bread**, but Jesus replied, "*Man shall not live by **bread** alone, but by every **word** that comes out of the mouth of **God**.*" The devil told Jesus to jump off the **temple** and expect the **angels** to protect Him, but Jesus replied, "*You shall not **test** the Lord your God.*" The devil told Jesus to **bow down** to him, and promised to give Him **power** and **glory** in return, but once again Jesus replied, "*Worship the **Lord** your God, and serve him **only**.*" Jesus **knew** the Holy Scriptures. He **knew** His Father's will. And He **knew** he had come to this earth to accomplish our **salvation** by living a **perfect** life - a life which **no one else** could live. So, He **followed** the Scriptures, **obeyed** His Father's will, and **saved us all**.

That's the **comfort** we find in the account of Jesus' **temptation** in the wilderness. That's how **Our Life** is connected to **His Life**. The perfect life of Jesus **paid in full** for our sins. His perfect **life**, and His innocent suffering and death on the **cross**, have been credited to **our** account. So now, we can stand before God **without fear**, because we can claim the perfection of **Jesus** as our own.

That perfect life of Jesus **also** serves as an **example** for us as we go back to our homes, and are confronted **again** and **again** with the devil's **temptations**. Our only hope for standing **firm** against the devil, is using the **same** weapon that **Jesus** used - the **sword** of the **Spirit** - the **Word of God**. We should be sick and tired of falling **prey** to the devil's **lies**, and of the pain and suffering that we cause ourselves because of them. So, let's keep turning back to **God's Word** and **Sacraments**, where the Lord **builds up** our **faith** and gives us the **strength** we need for our daily struggles against our spiritual enemies; as well as the **forgiveness** we need for the times when we **fail**. Amen.