

March 1, 2026
Sermon Manuscript

The Lies of Temptation, Pt. 2

This morning we continue with sermon number two on temptation, looking once again at Satan's temptation of Christ, which Jesus successfully resisted, and then going back even further to the temptation Adam & Eve succumbed to. We're going to continue looking at the lies at work in these temptations, because as much as the temptations of Adam & Eve and Jesus may seem unrelatable to us, the lies they are being tempted to believe are exactly the lies at work with essentially every temptations we experience. Every time we are tempted or sin, there is one of three lies we're being seduced to believe. But the good news remains that the Lord wants to help us recognize the lies that are at work in our temptations and sins, so He can lead us forward in(to) greater truth and freedom.

So, we're sort of jumping off some of the Gravity Commons material we cover in the latter months of our Kairos Groups. And last Sunday, in part one, we looked at the first lie. With both Jesus' temptation to turn stones into bread when He is hungry and with Eve concluding that the forbidden fruit was (quote) "good for food" - even though God said if they ate it they would die - with both of these the lie underneath the temptation is that "God doesn't care about my physical needs," "and if that's the case, I better take it entirely into my own hands to attain the security and survival and care I need by whatever means necessary." And we saw how this lie is at work in all sorts of temptations we may experience, such as idolizing money & possessions, fear of harm or death; even the temptations to care for ourselves through lust or through indulging anger with retaliation, and we could add to that any addictive behavior.

But then we saw that the truth in Christ is that we have become God's children through faith in Christ, and God looks out for His children. And so, we can trust that God longs to guide and partner with us to address our needs for security and survival and care - by either meeting them or alleviating them - perhaps not always in the way(s) we want, but as He deems best in His perfect love & wisdom. However, it is not enough to know this in our minds; in order to get these truths into our hearts requires *acting* as if this is true: taking experiments of trusting it, such as through asking for or receiving help when we might be disinclined to; or through spiritual practices like fasting or generosity. The good news is that the Lord wants to help us recognize the lies that are at work in our temptations and sins, so He can lead us forward in(to) greater truth and freedom.

So that's a little review of last week. And now, today, we're going to turn our attention to the second lie that can be at work in our temptations and sin. Now, today I had us read St. Mark's account of Jesus' temptation, just to change things up, but Mark doesn't give us all the detail that Matthew and Luke do. So, in your bulletin, you'll find a

re-printed Matthew’s telling of Jesus’ second temptation. The devil’s second go at Jesus comes in verse 5, which says,

Then the devil took (Jesus) 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.”

Now, just think about *how amazing* it would be to witness that! You’re a Jew, going into the temple, and you look up and Jesus does a swan dive off the temple when all of a sudden angels swoop in to rescue Him. If it was *all of us* back then, you know somebody would’ve caught it on their phone. And then it’d be all over social media and become the most viral video in the history of the internet.

Well, the devil’s second temptation here is for Jesus to *wow people* with a miraculous display. Anyone who saw this would’ve thought He was the most amazing person who ever lived. ((And, of course, Jesus was the most amazing person who ever lived, but not because of His miracles, but (most of all) because of His love; His perfect fulfillment of the Two Greatest Commandments.)) But the lie at the *root* of this temptation to wow clothes is that “our worth is determined by what others think of us”. This lie is to believe “my worth is determined by what others think of me”. And (when this lie is operating in our hearts) it can manifest in our lives in a myriad of ways.

For example, when I am motivated by what others will think is cool - notice I didn’t say what I like or what I think is cool - but seeking for *others to think* I’m cool, this lie is probably at work. And the same thing is at work when we are driven by a desire to be admired for our beauty or appearance. This is what we see at work with Eve. The last verse I’ve re-printed in your

Side 1

Jesus’ Temptation	The Lie at its Root	Examples of some sins the lie can produce in us	Genesis Temptation
Turns stones into bread	“God doesn’t care about my physical needs”	Idolatry of money or possessions; enslavement to preserving our own energy or fear of harm; self-sufficiency; stealing; lust; indulging anger with retaliation	Forbidden fruit was “good for food”
Jump off temple to be rescued by angels	“My worth is in what others think of me”	Preoccupation with being cool or being admired for our beauty or appearance; taking responsibility for other people’s emotions; an inability to say no; FOMO (fear of missing out); fear of being misunderstood; pretending we’re someone we’re not or being ashamed of who we are	Forbidden fruit was “pleasing to the eye”
Bow for all the kingdoms of the world	Next Week		Forbidden fruit was “desirable for gaining wisdom”

bulletin from Genesis 3 says she notices how the forbidden fruit is (quote) “pleasing to the eye”, one of her three motivations behind grasping for it, and Adam following suit. Eve wants to be *associated with* that which is beautiful and impressive, and yet God had said it would actually be bad for her. He *said* it would kill her, which is ironic because any of us who have seen a corpse know that it *is not* a pretty sight.

But, let me stop here to speak for a moment about *beauty*. Because I don’t want you to hear what I’m not saying. I am not suggesting that we care nothing about beauty or our own appearance; not at all. The Protestant Reformation turned many against beauty as something to value, at least when it came to their Churches. They were reacting in large part to the Roman Catholic Churches, which were adorned ornately using fine metals at the altar, and priests wearing vestments, and so on - though notably a lot of the money that paid for it was excised from people unethically. Well, in reaction these Protestant Churches seemed to throw out beauty altogether: *no* stained glass, no clergy wearing beautiful garments, everything austere. “Just give me a building and a Bible.” And this was even adopted in some corners of Anglicanism; and, to be honest, this remains pretty powerful in much of Protestantism today. But the beauty of God’s creation and creatures - beauty itself - is a gift. In fact, whenever we create beautiful things, we are in some sense living out our identity of being made in His image, it can be to His glory.

So, turning back to caring for our own appearance, to do so is a way to stand in our dignity as children of God. Where that line gets crossed - into the sin of vanity or excessive spending on it - is when that self-adorning is motivated in attaining the adoration and acceptance of others, because that’s about trying to attain or maintain a sense of belonging, about grasping for love from others. That’s what He wants to heal us from.¹

But vanity is of course not the only way that this grasping for acceptance can manifest in us. For example, the impulse to take responsibility for others’ feelings - anxiously trying to keep someone happy with us - is also rooted in the lie that “my worth is in what others think of me.” And, included under that umbrella is the inability to say no - or maintain other healthy boundaries in our relationships - this is about trying to keep people being pleased with us no matter the cost. This is emotional enslavement that God wants us to free us from! !

Just two final examples related to this second lie are the temptations to pretend we’re someone we’re not or to be ashamed for who we are. Have you ever been in a social interaction and found yourself agreeing with the person about something you don’t actually agree with them about, or saying something about yourself that isn’t really true, or

¹ What I’ve said here is consistent with 1 Pet 3:3-5, which says, “Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves.

...and also 1 Timothy 2:9-10: “I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.”

exaggerating a story to really wow them? Me, too. More often than I'd like to admit. And we do it maintain or bolster our sense of belonging with that person or group of people.

But the desire to attain belonging can also make us ashamed of who we are. We live in a world where certain human characteristics are considered normative, while other characteristics are not. These could be characteristics like class or skin color, having a disability, being neurodivergent, or struggling with mental illness, not fitting into society's very narrow views of what masculinity is supposed to look like for men or femininity for women. I could go on, but these are characteristics that can make us feel like outsiders - to be ashamed of who God made us to be - making it a temptation to compromise who we really are to try to be more like - or be more accepted by - those whom society centers or considers normal. Now, probably is easy for me to say - as a white male - but I'm pretty sure there

are ways and contexts where all of us feel like the outsider or unacceptable or inadequate, and can seek to mitigate that shame in all sorts of dysfunctional ways.

Well, thanks be to God that with all of this we have forgiveness in Christ. If some

things have come to mind as I've been talking, I encourage you to name those before the Lord in our few moments of silence before the Confession this morning. But, in addition to the good news of God's forgiveness, the Lord also wants to help us recognize the lies that are at work in our temptations and sins, so He can lead us forward in(to) greater truth and freedom.

And so, what is the truth He wants to lead us into, to break us free from always grasping for acceptance (and love) from others? Well, the truth is that in Christ we are unconditionally and immeasurably loved by God, our Creator. And this love of His was demonstrated most fully in His willingness to come to earth and die just to be in relationship with us. (I'd say that's valuing us *pretty* highly.) In Christ, God loves and delights in us just the way He made us, and even amidst our struggles with sin! And the more our hearts can begin to grasp this, the more we will be free to engage others (and ourselves) as Jesus did in His earthly life. #

Side 2

The Good News in Christ about ...		Our Blessing(s) in Christ	Experiments of Trust
Security / Survival / Care	...is that God looks out for His children!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision, Protection, & Care through means God deems fit • Resurrection & Everlasting life beyond death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask for and/or receive help • Fasting • Generosity
Belonging / Acceptance / Love	...is that God loves and delights in us just as we are!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belonging, Acceptance, & Love through means God deems fit • Frees us to love others and receive love from them or accept when love is withheld 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pray for self-acceptance to embrace who we are in Christ • Tend to our grief over relationship disappointments & loss • Celebrate created beauty as a reflection of God's beauty

Because Jesus's sense of belonging was rooted in the Father's love and delight for Him, this freed Him to be Himself without concern for making sure everyone accepted Him, and to love others - that is, to advocate for God's best for them; speaking the truth in love - and do so, not in complete disregard for their feelings, but with a healthy detachment toward whether the outcome included them celebrating Him or not. John 2 famously says that Jesus did not entrust himself to humans (v24); He knew what people thought of Him was not a reliable indicator of His worth. Now, this is not to say that Jesus didn't receive love from other humans, He absolutely did. But when He became a pariah, such as when His mother and siblings thought He was crazy,² or even when His disciples abandoned Him before His crucifixion, Jesus was able to endure it, though He had to grieve it, for sure. And Jesus even asked others for love, one example being when He was in great anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane and asked the disciples to keep watch and be a supportive presence for Him, though they ended up unable to stay awake. But when others failed to love Him, Jesus was still able to remain faithful because He trusted in His Heavenly Father's never-failing love. This trust is what sustained Jesus when, as Isaiah says, people rejected Him or "esteemed Him not". The good news is that the Lord wants to help us recognize the lies that are at work in our temptations and sins, so He can lead us forward in(to) greater truth and freedom.

So, setting our hearts on what other people think of us to satisfy our need for belonging - grasping for people's love & acceptance - will not give us the life of flourishing that God wants to bless us with.

And so our invitation is to take steps toward trusting God with this need. If there are things we don't like about ourselves. What do you not like about yourself? It could be about your appearance or your own temperament or some way you feel you don't measure up. I wonder if we could name that before God and ask Him for the gift of acceptance about it. That's part of the Serenity Prayer, right? God, help me to accept what I cannot change, even about myself. Acceptance is a gift, why not ask God for that gift to accept certain realities, to tame the shame we feel. "God, help me to love myself as much as you love me, even in my imperfections." The more we come to accept who God created us to be, the more we will be free to be ourselves - to be really ourselves - with others. And everyone won't think we're amazing, but there will be people who begin to see us and be blessed by the gift that we are.

...which *is* important, because when it comes to our need for belonging, yes we can find it vertically in relationship with God, but we still need people. We were made for relationships. So, I wonder how we might take a step of faith toward finding greater human connection, believing God wants that for us? Maybe it means dipping our toe in the water with getting real or vulnerable with someone who's demonstrates

² Mark 3:20-21

trustworthiness, sharing with them about a burden we were not meant to carry alone. Or maybe just experimenting with engaging others socially a little differently than the habits we've developed. Ask people about themselves, and about things familiar to them, and about their experiences. Love other people in conversation like God loves them.

But we do need to be prepared that sometimes connection fails. Jesus experienced relational disappointments, so we can't expect to avoid them either; they *will* come. But what we can do - to survive those losses and not give up on relationships altogether - is grieve the losses. This can look like naming the hurt to God or another, and giving ourselves space to feel what we feel about it, space proportionate to the significance of the loss.

So pray for acceptance of ourselves - to love ourselves as much as God does - so we can be ourselves and love others, make friends. And finally, celebrate beauty. Whether it is something beautiful about ourselves or in creation around us, these are reflections of God's beauty. But remember that what is most beautiful about God *by far* is His love. So, the most beautiful way we can adorn ourselves - by far - is to grow in our capacity to reflect His love to the world.

In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.