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WHAT EVERY FISHERMAN KNOWS

Matthew 4:1-11

INTRODUCTION

Toby and Anna's dog, Doc, is, unfortunately, insane. He has a sweet disposition, but this dog is light years beyond hyperactive. If you shot him with a tranquilizer dart it would probably just calm him down to the level of a normal dog. After his rotation in psychiatry Toby told me that he thinks Doc needs an anti-psychotic drug.

Doc has several bizarre behaviors. He freaks out when anyone tries to take a shower. He'll do anything to keep a person from what he appears to think is the evil shower monster. He has a similar psychotic episode when he is in a room with several people and one of them tries to leave. Oddly, if they all leave he gets mildly agitated, but not too bad. However, if one or two try to leave it's Dogageddon.

Laurie has hit upon a solution for Dogageddon. There are some dog treats that Doc and his more sane sidekick, Banjo, both love. Laurie will get one of those treats and draw Doc away from the door. Then she will give him the treat and as he is preoccupied with the treat those wishing to leave the room can do so without the world ending. Doc never catches on. It never seems to occur to him that he is being lured away from what he considers his sacred duty. I briefly wondered if Doc might actually be a genius and this whole Dogageddon act is just a ploy to pry more dog treats out of the gullible humans. But then I saw Doc go into one of his weird, manic spasms again and thought, "Nah." He's just nuts.

Somehow he never can figure out that he's being tricked. Sadly we humans often do not figure out that we are being tricked. Have you been called by Marriott Hotels to inform you that you have been selected for a very special vacation deal? I get those calls at least once a day. They are a scam. They aren't tempting, they're just annoying. But there is another scam being run on us all that we often, maybe mostly, don't see through. Like every other scam, this one is intended to do us harm. Unfortunately this is a very clever scam, and intelligent humans are continually falling for it, much to their detriment. We will learn about this from Jesus, who was in the wilderness at one point but wasn't fooled for even an instant when the scam was attempted on him. We will see this last of our wilderness stories in Matthew 4:1-11.

SATAN TRIED TO PLAY ON PHYSICAL NEEDS

At the end of chapter 3 Matthew tells us that Jesus had insisted on being baptized by John. This was a way of acknowledging the validity of John's ministry and message, but also of Jesus declaring his submission to his Father's will. In 3:17 we see the Father's response. "A voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son whom I love. With him I am well pleased.'"

At that point Jesus initiated his ministry. But his first move was counter intuitive. He headed into the wilderness by himself where he wasn't going to minister to anyone. He did this because he was doing the Father's will. Verse 1 says he was led by the Spirit. The purpose of this action was to be tempted by the devil. Why would the Spirit lead Jesus to a place specifically to be tempted? I will return to that question later in this talk, but I will say for now that the temptation was part of his preparation for what was to come.

The direct attacks didn't begin until Jesus had been in that desolate wasteland for 40 days. He'd gone the entire time without eating. I'm going to guess that while this certainly took considerable discipline on Jesus' part, he also must have had a metabolism that was quite different from Laurie's. If it had been Laurie it wouldn't have taken 40 days, it would have been about 4 hours. However, that after almost 6 weeks without food Jesus was weak and most definitely at a low ebb.

Satan attacked at Jesus' most obvious need first. According to verse 3 he said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." He wasn't calling into question Jesus' identity. The grammar of that sentence tells us its literal meaning was "since you are the Son of God." Satan knew exactly who Jesus was and also knew it was absurd to pretend that he didn't. So he comes along posing as a helpful kibbutzer. Hey, you look hungry. That's understandable. After all, you haven't eaten anything for a month and a half. You are literally starving. You're not going to do much good for the Father if you die of starvation out here. You are getting close to seriously damaging your health. I think you should do something about it, especially since you have the power to make the food you need. So why don't you use a little of your divine power, then you can have a nice snack and get some strength back. You're carrying this fasting thing overboard. You need a little balance in your life. You need to eat. So take care of yourself and get something to eat. After all, you can't love others if you don't love yourself.

Was there anything wrong with Jesus being hungry and desiring food? Absolutely not. That was a normal human need. Our bodies require fuel to function, and Jesus was no different than us. There was nothing morally wrong with him desiring to

eat. Would it have been morally wrong for Jesus ever to use divine power to miraculously produce food? No, later he would make a couple of pieces of pita bread miraculously expand into enough food to feed thousands of people. So he had the ability to do something like that and employed it at times.

So why was this suggestion by Satan a temptation? We get a clue from Jesus' response to Satan. He quoted Deuteronomy 8:3, where Moses reminded the people of Israel that God "Humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

Israel had to learn in the wilderness to trust God and do what he said, believing that he would provide for their physical needs. Genesis tells us that when God created life he spoke and things came into being. That verse in Deuteronomy alluded to the fact that it is what God says, it is God speaking, that is the source of life. Israel needed to learn what was most important is trusting what God says and does, even when he led them into a wilderness where there was no food or water. As they trusted his word they would receive what they needed for life.

Jesus said the same principle applied to him. He was saying that the Father had told him to not eat, but to wait until the Father provided him food. He told Satan that the path to life is not in taking it upon oneself to fulfill one's physical needs and desires no matter what that requires, but in doing whatever the Father said to do and trusting that he would provide what is needed. Later he would tell his disciples that his food was doing the will of the Father. This was an example of that.

If Jesus had turned those stones into bread he would have been saying, "I don't care what the Father says, I need to eat. Since he's not giving me the food I need I will just have to get some for myself." So the temptation was to be driven by physical need to the place where Jesus would disregard God's command and fix the problem himself. Jesus refused to fall for that lie.

SATAN TRIED TO PLAY ON DOUBT

Physical needs and desires, plan A, didn't work for Satan so he moved on to Plan B. Satan takes Jesus to the first century Jerusalem equivalent of the top of the Empire State Building and challenges him to jump off. Then he quotes Scripture to him. He refers to Psalm 91:11-12 saying, "He (God) 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.”

How nice. Satan is trying to help Jesus out by quoting the Bible to him. If Jesus is insistent on living in accord with God's Word, then Satan will give him some to live by. Actually that's pretty scary, isn't it? Satan knows the Bible as well as anybody, and he would love to use it against us by misapplying it to our lives, as he did with Jesus. He's saying, “Hey, the Father promises to take care of you. He's got lots of angels up there. So if he's really going to take care of you, jump off and give him the chance to do so. Then you'll know for sure that the Father really will protect you. When things get tough later you won't have any doubts because your Father will have proven to you that he's got your back.”

Psalm 91 sounds terrific. Verses 9-13 say, “If you say, ‘The Lord is my refuge,’ and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your feet against a stone. You will tread on the lion and the cobra, you will trample the great lion and the serpent.”

Some scholars suggest that what Satan is tempting Jesus to do is prove something about himself. Throw yourself off this tall building and the angels will ensure a soft landing. It will be a spectacular and visible demonstration of who you are. Everyone will know you're Messiah then. However, I don't think that's the issue here because of the way Jesus answered. Again he quoted Scripture. This time it was Deuteronomy 6:16. “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” In other words, don't try to make God prove himself. Don't doubt him to the point where you try to create some situation where God has to prove himself.

The idea is Satan was saying if you do this and the Father rescues you then you will never have any doubt about the fact that he is going to take care of you. You will know for sure that he will always protect you. In other words, make the Father prove that he really is going to keep you from harm.

That's a place Christians sometimes find themselves. We put out a challenge to the Lord that if he wants us to believe in him he needs to show up and do some particular thing. We challenge him with a sort of “if you don't do this then I don't know if I can trust you.” Actually the demand that God work miracles that is so prevalent in much of the church kind of falls into this category. God has to do something dramatic if we are going to believe in him. That is putting the Lord to

the test. God tells us to walk by faith not by sight. That means to believe and trust even when we can't see him or his work in our current circumstances.

In the early years of our ministry we dealt with a young guy who had a past history of drug abuse. He had come to faith in the Lord and gotten out of the drug life. But then he began experiencing disturbing flash backs, which he attributed to his previous substance abuse. He prayed fervently that God would take away those flash backs, but they kept on happening. He got to the place where he said, "I don't think I can trust God, because if he's really there and he really loves me, he would take away these flash backs that are causing me so much trouble." Essentially he walked away from his faith, at least for a time. He insisted that God rescue him if he threw himself off the precipice and if he didn't then he would no longer trust God. I don't want to leave you hanging, so I'll tell you that as he went through some counseling he uncovered a lot of unresolved issues that had been the reason he started using drugs in the first place. As he began working through those issues his flash backs began subsiding. The flashbacks were not a result of drug use at all, but of suppressed pain in his life. God didn't take them away because he knew the guy needed to deal with the real cause of them.

By quoting this verse Jesus told Satan he was not going to give in to doubt and demand that the Father prove his faithfulness. He was going to walk by faith, not by sight. He would trust his God's promise and not insist on proof. He wasn't falling for the temptation.

SATAN TRIED TO PLAY ON PRIDE

Foiled again, Satan moved on to plan C. Verse 8 says he showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in all their splendor. Then he said, "Worship me and I will give you all of this. All these kingdoms will be yours." Ephesians 2:20-22 speaks of God's power and says he exerted that power, "When he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything."

According to those verses, who do the kingdoms of the world belong to? They belong to Jesus. He is over every dominion, every kingdom in both heaven and earth. Satan is claiming to be able to give to Jesus what already belongs to him. Those nations aren't even Satan's to give! Pride isn't exactly the right word for this, but it is the temptation to think, "I deserve this. This should be mine and it should just be given to me."

Unfortunately for Jesus the process for taking ownership of what belonged to him was an unpleasant one. Philippians 2:8 says Jesus humbled himself and was obedient to the point of death on a cross. Only then, verse 9-10 say, "God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow." Satan was offering Jesus a shortcut. Dude, you are the rightful ruler of the whole world, right? But nobody here believes that. To everybody you look like Joe Nobody from Chunky, Mississippi. Come on, you can show them who you really are. All Jesus had to do was bow down to Satan. In other words, submit to him instead of to the Father and he could avoid all that nasty stuff that lay before him. Here's an easy way to get what you want and what is rightfully yours Jesus.

I believe it was in the second year of our ministry after Laurie and I had first planted a church in this area as a newlywed couple that we had a night out. We had no money and weren't living on a budget because there was no budget that would allow us to survive on the little income we had. We just scraped by somehow, and God in his grace provided for us, but we had been given a gift certificate to a local restaurant so we went out to eat. There was a big limousine parked at the entrance to the restaurant. We wondered who that might belong to. But when we went into the place we encountered a young couple that we had previously met. Today I can't even tell you how we knew them. But we spent some time talking to them. The limousine was theirs. They were ridiculously wealthy, especially given their young age. After we talked for some time we bid them a good evening and went to our table. But later when they were about to leave they came over to talk to us. I thought they were going to say goodbye, but they said a great deal more than that. They told us they felt God was leading them to ask me to come to work with them. They described the income range they had in mind and for us it was mind boggling. I told them I felt like God had given me a job to do as a pastor, but I thanked them. They urged me to consider their offer. They gave me their card and asked me to give them a call. We had this dinky little ministry that wasn't exactly setting the world on fire. We had a race every month to see if the month would end before we were destitute. We were faced with the serious question of whether we would stay true to what we believed God had called us to do. Man that other life with what seemed to us to be a huge income, looked good. Those people were not Satan. They were good people. But we faced the question of who we would bow down to. We chose to bow down to God and do what he had given us to do. Boy was that a dumb call. Just kidding.

Jesus answered with Scripture again, this time Deuteronomy 6:13, "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only." Jesus would never bow down to anyone other than his Father in heaven. He would serve only the Father, doing his will no matter how difficult it might be. At that point Satan was out of plans, so he left. Angels showed up to minister to Jesus and the temptations were over.

IMPLICATIONS

THE WILDERNESS IS OFTEN A PLACE OF TEMPTATION

When you are in a wilderness it is important to remember that Jesus was not the only person ever to be tempted there. Wilderness times are prime time when it comes to temptation. You should not be surprised, in fact you should expect that those difficult times will bring temptation with them.

I grew up in Bakersfield, a place that most people think of as blazing hot. And from May through September it is awfully hot. But it usually peaked in the 100 to 102 range with rare days when it hit 105 or more. After living here you kind of forget what that's like. But years ago we went to visit friends in Phoenix. In June. I wasn't prepared for it. It was 115! It made Bakersfield seem like an icebox. It was so absurdly hot I found just getting into the car to be dangerous. I would almost get burned opening the door because the metal on the door handle felt like touching a hot frying pan. I mentioned that it was crazy hot to our friends and they said, "Well duh. You're in Arizona! What did you expect?"

When you are in the wilderness, what do you expect? You should expect to encounter Satan, and he will have a number of very appealing offers for you. We must learn from this to be alert when we find ourselves in a desert time. We should be looking out for the lies and temptations of the evil one. So when in the wilderness watch out! Be on the alert for temptations.

TEMPTATIONS OFTEN ARE ABOUT LEGITIMATE NEEDS AND DESIRES

We will all face temptations like these. We are tempted to doubt whether we can really trust God. We are tempted to demand what we "deserve," to make all of life about oneself.

There was nothing wrong with Jesus being hungry. He had a legitimate need for food. There was nothing wrong with his desire for the Father to protect him. And the nations of the world actually belonged to him. There was nothing wrong in Jesus having desires for these things.

This tells us a couple of truths we need to remember. First there is nothing wrong with being tempted. In fact, God often allows and uses temptations as a part of his work to strengthen and prepare us just as was the case with Jesus. Second, often the things that we will be tempted about are legitimate things that are not necessarily inherently wrong or sinful. An obvious example of this is our sexuality. It is a gift from God and is a good thing, but it can be abused and misused. Another example might be wealth. There is nothing wrong about gaining wealth, but the desire for wealth can get way out of whack and turn into greed or badly skewed priorities. The thing is not wrong in and of itself, but we can be tempted to use it wrongly.

Temptation happens when we begin to think that gaining some good, natural or legitimate thing that we desire, or even think we must have, is so crucial to our well being and life that even if it requires violating God's will to get it we must do that. Temptations come in all shapes and sizes. They come in so many different forms we sometimes don't even notice them. There are obvious ones like greed for more, lust, anger, the idea that God is irrelevant and life is found in the good stuff of this world, and so on. But some are subtle. One of the guys in our men's breakfast shared how a group he is part of had an event at which they honored members of the group for their contributions. He said he was a bit surprised to find himself thinking, 'Hey, what about me? I've done a lot for this group. I'd like a little credit and notice.' We all know exactly what he means. We all would like to win applause and acclaim. The desire for that is normal and is not wrong. But there's a very real temptation to so want that and pursue it that it becomes the driving force of our life. It can distort our priorities, cause us to compromise our convictions and it can cause us to resent other people who get what we desire or fail to give us the credit that we want.

Here's another example. Being a parent actually presents us with a temptation. That temptation is to make parenting about ourselves. So being a good parent means other people will see what a good job I've done, and my child will be eternally grateful and love me more than just about anything in the world. It is not wrong to desire to do a good job of being a parent nor to be loved by my child. But what happens when your little child picks the perfect, very visible and very public place to throw the mother of all tantrums? Does the driving force in your life at that moment become embarrassment and the need to prove that you are a good parent in the eyes of others? Or how do you react when your 14 year old daughter goes to great lengths to make sure that her friends do not know that she has parents, for if they ever saw her with her parents she would be mortified? Or how do you respond when your dearly loved child goes away to college for the first time and rips your

heart out, but then comes that first time they come home for a weekend? You are so excited to have the wonder child back home and anxious to spend quality time finding all about their college experience. Except the only time said child is actually home he or she is asleep. The entire time the offspring is awake he or she is with friends. Do you get your feelings hurt? Are you tempted to be upset at such ingratitude?

Almost every moment of every day, every single thing we do has the potential to present us with multiple temptations. When other people treat you in ways you feel are unfair or unkind, you face the temptation of harboring resentment or even lashing out at them. The most dangerous temptations are to believe that God is either not there at all or to think that he doesn't really care about us, thus he cannot be trusted. It is to believe that what God supplies most definitely is not enough.

APPLICATION

How can we resist temptations? What can help us do what Jesus did, and say no?

RECOGNIZE THE TEMPTATION

One of the problems we all suffer from is that often we don't even realize we are being tempted. We just act on our desires without thinking. I was reading about a player in the NFL, a linebacker, who is known for being a truly smart player who also studies assiduously. An opposing player talked about how his own team has a very creative offense full of deception and misdirection, but they were frustrated because before the snap, despite all their clever schemes, this linebacker would call out to his teammates what was coming. He wasn't fooled by the deception at all and could recognize what they were setting up.

The point of an offense in football using deception and misdirection is to defeat defenders. We need to be like that linebacker so we aren't fooled by the deception of our enemies. We need to instantly recognize the temptations for what they are. Temptations will always focus on some key points. You can't believe God, you can't trust him, you deserve stuff and you must do whatever you think is necessary to get it, and true life comes from some thing in this world, be it a possession, approval, power, pleasure, position.

REMEMBER THE GOAL OF THE TEMPTATION

Once we've realized, "Aha, I'm being tempted here," it is crucial that we remember what the purpose of that temptation is. It most certainly is not to bring more glory to God or to draw us closer to him. Neither is it to bring us more joy and more life. That is the lie. The temptation will always tell you that you will be happier, better off, more fulfilled if you take the bait.

But remember, it is bait. It is a lure. Have you ever gone fishing? I realize I might sound like a snowflake here, but even as a kid there was a point at which fishing troubled me. It was when you put the bait on the hook. Maybe I have an overactive conscience, but that felt dishonest. Oh look here, fishy. Here's a nice worm you surely would like to eat. Shouldn't we be more open and honest about our intentions? Here, fish, bite down on this hook so it can stab into your mouth. That's the other part of my problem. That barbed hook that you hide in the bait is terrible. I imagined myself biting down on that fierce thing and having it rip into the tissue of my mouth. How awful, how painful would that be? Fish aren't the most cuddly of animals, but still, that seems gruesome.

We need to learn from that. When the fisherman puts that bait on the hook is he hoping to enhance the life of that fish? No, he wants that fish to bite and have that sharp barb sink into the tissue of his mouth so he can then drag him out of his environment into a place where he will quickly die.

We need to see ourselves as the fish and recognize that bait is a lie, and biting it is going to produce bitter fruit. The best it can produce is terrible pain and the worst is death. We need to remember that the point of the temptation is not to enhance our lives, it is to destroy us. That is true of every temptation we will ever face. Never forget that temptations are always bait, and if you bite you are going to get the hook.

Here is a thought we should always remember. Temptation is a scam. As soon as you recognize something is a scam it is easy to reject it. Do you have any trouble saying no to the guy from Nigeria who just needs your bank account number so he can wire \$10 million to you? I don't think so.

RELY ON THE SPIRIT OF GOD

The strangest thing about human nature is that we seem to have a sometimes self-destructive tendency. We can know that something is a lie, know that it is bad for us and still fall for the temptation. I know for a fact that a jelly doughnut from VG's is not going to enhance my health. It will not give me needed nutrition, it will not help me reduce my weight and it will not make me more fit. But a couple of weeks ago Toby gave me one. Do you know what I did? I ate it. Yes, I know this is not good for me. But I can't resist it. I want more!

It would be great if just knowing the truth was all we needed to enable ourselves to resist temptation. Sadly it is not, and every day provides evidence that humans do

not consistently do what is best for them. We need the power and work of the Spirit of God to resist. We can ask him and trust him to give us both the will and the strength to say no to temptation if we will only ask. The Spirit of Christ is in you, the Christ who resisted all of the temptations thrown at him by the enemy. If you look to him and ask him to work, he will do so.

There is a great promise in James 4:7. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." He's a bully, and if in the Spirit of Jesus you stand against him, he will run away, just as he did with Jesus.

RECITE THE WORD OF GOD

Did you notice that in every instance Jesus answered the temptation by quoting the Bible? This was the Son of God, and he knew that the best weapon to fight against the lure of temptations was God's Word. The more you know God's word and can call it to mind, the easier it will be to resist the temptation.

The airlines are having a bit of a rough patch here, aren't they? Have you heard about United Airlines' new ad campaign? They have a couple of catchy new slogans. "We put the hospital in hospitality" and "We now offer both red eye and black eye flights." As you know we have had our issues with airlines. I have mentioned how last summer on our return from our visit with Michael and Carissa our flight from New Orleans to Dallas was delayed because they had to change a tire on the plane. We knew this was going to cause us to miss our connection to our San Diego flight. I called the airline and explained our predicament to the reservations agent. She looked up our reservation then said "I see that your flight is now scheduled to arrive only 10 minutes before your connecting flight departs." I said, "Right, that's the problem. We will never make that connection." She then said "Well, Sir, I see that you made this reservation 4 months ago. Why did you plan a trip with such a narrow window and why have you waited until today to try to fix the problem?" She was blaming me for the situation! I was astounded, and I was offended. I wanted to go ballistic on the idiotic woman. This wasn't our fault. We planned the trip with an hour and a quarter between flights. It was the airline's mistake that caused the problem. How could she be that dense? I was on the very brink of reading her the riot act when James 1:19-20 popped into my head. "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires."

I was being tempted. I have a legitimate desire to be treated fairly and with respect. That wasn't happening, and so the temptation was to speak in an unkind and unloving way, to vent my clearly justified anger upon a woman who deserved it.

That woman deserved my best efforts at blistering her ears. What she said was inexcusably stupid. But my anger wasn't going to produce righteous action or words. It was not love. So I took a deep breath and as patiently as possible once again explained the situation. She proved totally unhelpful, but at least she didn't have me dragged off a plane.

REALIZE TEMPTATIONS ARE NECESSARY

One of the really curious aspects of this passage is that it tells us Jesus was led into the desert specifically to be tempted by Satan. Why would the Father want Jesus to be tested like this? The message is that this incident was quite purposeful. It was no accident.

Our son-in-law, Michael, is studying hard to learn all the systems of the Boeing 757 and the 767 the aircraft he will soon be flying for Delta Airlines. In two weeks he will begin his training for flying the plane. He will spend hours on simulators, going over first the basics, then he will be presented with repeated difficulties and failures. He will have to do this over and over. The goal is to create muscle memory and instinct. Should an emergency occur he needs to be able to react instantly without having to think through what he should do. The training is preparing him to handle any problem.

If when we face temptations we have to go through a list of steps, uh, let's see, recognize the temptation, realize its goal, rely on the Spirit of God, recite the word of God, we will be ruined before we can even get traction. We need to work on muscle memory and instinct, so that we instantly respond in a way that will enable us to resist the temptation. Jesus had to go through these temptations because in his ministry he was going to face a lot of them, and it was going to happen in stressful and tense situations. The Father was giving him practice out in the desert to prepare him for his ministry. And when we face temptations we might wonder why. This is why. God is building muscle memory and instinct in us so that we can stand firm when tested in the future.