

Title: "Truly Tempted"
Text: Matthew 3:13 – 4:11

Turn with me today to the Gospel of Matthew, and to the end of the 3rd chapter, and beginning of the 4th.

We are "re-introducing Jesus" this Fall.

-Or more precisely, we are inviting the writers of the New Testament to re-introduce us to the Jesus that they knew, -and that they wanted everyone else to meet.

Two weeks ago we highlighted a "hymn" of the early church that was sung in praise of this Jesus.

-It is found in Paul's Letter to the Philippians, chapter 2; and it proclaims both the divinity of Jesus, and the humanity of Jesus.

The believers would sing of him, "*who though in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant, and being found in human likeness, he was obedient even unto death on a cross.*"

Last week we saw how the words of this "Jesus Hymn" were lived out in the very manner in which Jesus was born into this world.

Today, come in on Jesus at his baptism in the Jordan River, and his subsequent temptation in the wilderness.

-See if you can't hear echoes of the "Jesus Hymn" again being lived out again at this stage in Jesus' life.

The Jesus Hymn proclaims that "*He who was in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.*"

My friends, Jesus' temptation in the wilderness was the devil trying to get Jesus to do exactly the opposite.

-Satan wanted Jesus to grasp after equality with God.

Satan was basically saying, "Wow, Jesus. You have just been baptized, and anointed with the Spirit,

- and God has just proclaimed from heaven that You are His beloved Son, with whom He is well pleased.
- So go for it, man! Use that power, enjoy that position, exploit the opportunities you have as the “Son of God.”
- You’re hungry after 40 days of fasting: turn these stones into bread to feed yourself.
- Come with me to the Temple in Jerusalem and let’s see you do some miracles to wow the crowds and show them who you really are.
- And let’s set you up as the true King of the world, and create a government to beat all governments!”

Do you hear the underlying temptation?

- You who are in very nature God, go ahead and grasp it!
- Grab that equality with God!
- Exploit it! Run with it! Flaunt it! Use it.

And you know what? You may have never thought about it before,

- but this is the very same temptation that Adam and Eve fell victim to all the way back in the Garden of Eden.

Grabbing after “equality with God” was the “original sin.”

- Adam and Eve were God’s beloved son and daughter,
- created for relationship with Him, and with each other,
- and for tending the Garden and graciously ruling over the created order.

- But just like here with Jesus, the Tempter appeared on the scene, and began asking questions.

“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the Garden?’”

- And Eve answered, “No, we can eat from the trees in the Garden, just not from the one tree that is in the middle of the Garden. That tree we must not eat from or touch, or we will die.”

“You will surely not die,” the Tempter said. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be (what?)...like God.”

You see, “equality with God,” becoming “like God,”
-that is the original temptation, and Adam and Eve fell for it.

They saw “equality with God” as something to be grasped.
-So they took the fruit; they grabbed it for themselves and
ate of it.
-And that was the original sin.

Jesus is sometimes called “the second Adam” in the New
Testament.
And it is no surprise that the enemy, Satan, is right there at the
very beginning of Jesus’ ministry,
-ready to throw the second Adam off the rails just like he did
the first human pair.

And it’s the very same temptation: why don’t you just reach
out and grasp equality with God?
-Use your identity as the beloved Son of the Father to
benefit yourself!
-Use your power as the anointed One to do some major
miracles: turn stones into bread, take care of world
hunger,
-give some unmistakable signs that you are God so that
everyone will believe in you.
-Use your position as Son of God to rule the world, bring
down all the bad guys, set yourself up as the rightful
king, stop all the injustices, make the world great
again!”

And you know what? Satan was actually offering Jesus the
chance to be the kind of Messiah we all actually want.
I mean, wouldn’t every one of us rather have a Savior who
is a mighty victor, rather than a dying sufferer.

If we are honest, don’t we really want a Messiah who
will give us bread when we need it,
-and wow us with miracles when we want them,
-and run the world better than the people who are in charge
now?

Don’t we really want an all powerful Messiah who will:
-protect us from hurricanes and floods,

- heal our cancer,
- bring down bad guys, prevent injustices,
- take care of world hunger, and give us world peace?

I mean, I'd really like more quick answers to my prayers, don't you?

- I want to just pray and have God go "Zap," and have it done.
- That would be awesome.
- That would increase my faith.
- That would show people that Jesus is really God.

Wouldn't we all like more success in our lives as a result of being a Christian and having God on our side?

- Shouldn't we have more achievement? More victories in our lives? Less suffering? Fewer setbacks?

I mean, who really wants a suffering Messiah?

- The Apostle Paul said a suffering Messiah was a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.
- And it still is to this day.
- We sons of Adam and daughters of Eve are still far more desirous of following someone who promises equality with God as something to be grasped.

We like results. And we like them sooner rather than later.

Do you remember when Jesus first told his disciples that he was going up to Jerusalem to suffer and die?

Peter said, "No way, Lord. That is not going to happen!"

And Jesus said, "Get behind me, Satan. You don't have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

You see, Jesus saw in Peter's words another echo of Satan's temptation.

- The temptation to avoid the cross, and be the kind of Messiah everyone wants:
- the kind of Messiah who will go to Jerusalem to be enthroned as King and change the world.

That's what Peter wanted. That's what all the disciples wanted. That's what we all still want.

-A Messiah who is god-like enough and powerful enough to do what we all want him to do.

And we really don't see how being obedient to death, and especially death on a cross as a common criminal,
-is any help in bringing about our desired ends.
-It just doesn't make sense.

Until the resurrection.

-The Jesus Hymn ends proclaiming, that by not grasping after equality with God, but rather suffering death, even death on a cross,
-God the Father exalted His Son and raised Him to the right hand of the throne of God and gave him the name that is above every name.

You see, somehow in the great wisdom of God, the wisdom of the world is turned upside down.

In Jesus' death and resurrection, we discover that by actually laying down our lives and our will,
-God does the most amazing thing of all: he resurrects us.

By taking on the nature of a servant, God raised Jesus to be Lord over all.

It's the upside down wisdom of the Kingdom of God.

-Those who would save their lives, lose them, while those who give up their lives for God and His Kingdom, save them.

It's crazy, but in the Kingdom of God:

-the way up is down.
-the way to greatness is through humility and servanthood,
-the way to strength is by admitting and embracing our weaknesses,
-The way to life is by way of the valley of death.

It's why the first thing Jesus says as he begins his ministry after the temptation in the wilderness is this:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are those who mourn and suffer, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Do you hear the upside down nature of the Kingdom of God in Jesus' words?

He is saying, "Those who follow me and do not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
-but somehow get in touch with their own emptiness, their own poverty of spirit, their own inability to measure up,
-their own frailties, losses, grief's, struggles.
-they will find God raises them up.
-They will find God strengthens them.
-They will find a kind of resurrection power they never knew existed before.

And haven't you experienced that in your own life?

-You give up something that you had wanted to do in order to go and visit a friend or family member who is in need.
-You think you are making a sacrifice, but then you find that in going to help the person out, you are the one who gets blessed.
-You come home feeling better about yourself and better about life.

It starts out feeling sacrificial, but it ends up that you are richly rewarded.

In the same way, in the Garden of Eden,

-if Adam and Eve had sacrificially given up their desire for that fruit that looked so good at the time,
-God Himself would have been pleased to come and spend time with them himself.
-He would have been glad to teach them all they needed to know about the difference between Good and Evil.
-They would have been richly rewarded.

They didn't need to grab after that knowledge and get it for themselves.

-All they had to do was ask, and it would have been given in the context of a loving relationship with the God who

created them and loved them.

And Jesus, when it came to doing miracles:

- The devil was trying to tempt Jesus to do miracles to serve himself.

But guess what?

- In saying no to the devil's temptation, Jesus was actually freed up to do all kinds of miracles to serve others.
- He would actually do a miracle and feed bread to the 5000.
- He would calm the sea, and heal the sick, and restore sight to the blind.

The Father did intend for Jesus to do those things.

- But the true miracle of Jesus ministry was the miracle of restraint.

- Jesus only did what the Father asked him to do, and did what he did in service to God's people.
- He only said what the Father asked him to say.
- He lived his life in submission to the will of His heavenly Father, even to the point of death on a cross.

The miracle of restraint.

- Jesus didn't go around acting like a little god, zapping out miracles everywhere to benefit himself, or prove who he was.
- He constantly held his divinity in check, and every day said, "Not my will, Father, but Thy will be done."

The devil constantly tempted him to give up the restraint.

- The devil constantly tried to get him to do his own thing, -exploit his own power, take matters into his own hands.

The greatest miracle is that Jesus never did.

- It's the miracle of restraint.

And the Apostle Paul says, "Have this same attitude in yourselves."

Practice saying, "Not my will, but thy will be done."

- It is the undoing of original sin.

- And it doesn't come naturally to any of us.
- In fact, on our own strength we can't do it at all.
- Because that original sin of Adam and Eve lives in us all.

But the good news is that in Jesus' death and resurrection,
-that original sin was atoned for.

- And once we are washed of that sin, we are able to receive that same Holy Spirit that lived in Jesus.
- It is by the power of the Spirit that we then begin to live a new kind of life.
- It doesn't happen all at once, but by the power of the Spirit a work of sanctification begins to take place in us.
- We begin to change, and mature, and grow.
- We begin to say more and more, "Not my will, Lord, but your will be done."

The devil will do all in his power to divert us from that path.

- He will tempt us to consider equality with God something to be grasped.
- He will try and make us self-centered, self-righteous, judgmental, and perfectionistic.
- He will try and make us think that power will give us influence, and money will give us control, and sex will give us happiness, and material possessions will give us satisfaction.
- He will tell us to grab for all the gusto we can, because life is short and the one who dies with the most toys wins.

But go forth singing the Jesus Hymn, my friends.

- It will keep us clear eyed, and aware of the devil's schemes.
- Grabbing after equality with God is not what leads to life, or love, or joy, or peace, or long lasting prosperity.
- Those are attributes that only really come from God, and we find them only by submitting our wills to His, and trusting in Him to provide them.

And He will.

- It was He who was obedient even unto death who was raised to the right hand of the throne of God and lives forevermore, honored and glorified.

Let's pray.