



Give It Up - Control

Luke 4:1-12

to control God. Notice the temptation is to force God to act. The devil takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple. It was the highest place. It was a place that from which if one were to fall surely they would fall to their death. The devil says throw yourself off this pinnacle. In other words, take that leap of faith for surely God will save you. In fact, the devil uses scripture against Jesus. It is as though the devil says jump for you know what the Bible says. Yet, Jesus answers do not put the Lord your God to a test.

Here is the lie in this temptation. God is not God, we are. I say this because if we can manipulate God or force God to act, then just who is God? God or us?

We do have those moments in life when we attempt to manipulate God to act according to how we think God should act. We might speak in demanding ways to God. We might strike a deal or negotiate our situation. Yet, Jesus response is you shall not test the Lord your God.

Jesus' response is trust. Jesus trusts God the father without testing Him.

When we want to control God, as absurd as that really sounds, we need to trust instead. We need to trust that God knows us. We need to trust that God loves us. We need to trust that God is good. We need to trust that God is God. Our real question in this temptation is to answer is this; is God, God? And if so, is God the God that Jesus shows us? If so, then we need not seek to control God but we can instead trust and rest in God's love.

Now lets review for a moment. The first temptation is to control our own circumstances and needs. Instead, we live with gratitude for God's provision and in turn we receive joy. We are released from the burden of control and instead, find joy of the day and moment.

The second temptation is to control others. Instead, we react with servanthood toward others and we are released from that frustration and in return we receive honor and influence when God lifts us up.

The third temptation is controlling God. Instead, we

trust and our fear is replaced with resting in God's love and grace.

The passage ends with the reminder that the temptation was over for now, but not forever. The devil would be back at a more opportune time. The 12 step programs speak of HALT times. The times when we are hungry, angry, lonely and tired are the very moments that temptation arrives. The HALT times are also times we are to halt and reflect so we can make the right choice.

It is true "opportunity knocks once, but temptation leans on the doorbell." Especially the temptation to be in control. We can over come it by remembering that control leads to frustration, burden and disappointment. The way of Jesus is gratitude, servanthood and trust. We can give it up. Give up control.



TRINITY PULPIT

Over the past 16 years as your pastor, I have preached from the texts concerning Jesus' temptation on various occasions. This text and story from Jesus' life is an intriguing story. At the moment of Jesus' baptism, when one would think he would readily go into the world preaching his message of hope, he spends the first 40 days wandering in the desert wilderness alone. It reminds us that many times we think we are ready when really we are only ready to be prepared. Jesus goes into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He goes there to prepare for His ministry and the call of God upon His life.

There are so many ways to approach this story. We can see it as temptation that is very basic to living. There are physical, emotional and psychological challenges that Jesus must face and choose God's way. Many view this text as a preparation of what type of ministry Jesus will perform. Will Jesus take the shortcuts or will Jesus stay true to God's plan for His life?

There are many sermons within this text that is for sure. It may simply be this way because temptation is our constant companion. It is as one person put it "opportunity only knocks once, but temptation leans on the doorbell.

I want to use this text today to discuss the temptation of control. I want us to spend a few moments exploring what the temptation of Jesus says about the delusion we live under that we are somehow in control of not only our lives, but of others, and even of God.

Jesus, after His baptism we are told, is full of the Holy Spirit and was led by the Spirit in the desert where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. Let that first phrase settle in for a moment... Jesus was full of the Spirit and

the Spirit led Him into the desert and there He was tempted by the devil. Interestingly, Matthew states it more emphatically than Luke does. Matthew states in Chapter 4:1 "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil." Luke seems to soften the connection between the Spirits leading toward the temptation event. Where Matthew connects them in such a way that it is obvious that the purpose of the desert experience was to be tempted and to be tested.

In his new book, *The Road to Character*, David Brooks tries to help us recover... moral vocabulary. Through his profiles of people who achieved character through tenacious "self-combat" -- people like Dorothy Day, Dwight Eisenhower and George Eliot -- he urges us to look again at the tradition of "moral realism." This tradition, he says, emphasizes that we are sinners made of "crooked timber," capable of great good, but deeply flawed. What unites his "exemplars" is the idea that "the inner struggle against one's own weaknesses is the central drama of life."

Brooks is suggesting that character is formed and forged not just expressed. In contrast, Brooks says that there is a new moral romanticism. This is expressed by not self-combat, what we might call the discipline of choice, but instead self-expression and self-liberation. So, instead of someone looking within and discovering a need for change, a need for the discipline of choice, they instead simply say, "this is who I am and I am not changing." I am who I am and you have to accept me as so. Did not God make me this way? Yes and no. God did create us with great personality traits, but what we forget is that sin is also a part of our humanity. We are not perfect the way we are. We are far from it. What we need is transformation and we need to learn the discipline of choice. Choosing to follow



Jesus and the way of Jesus. This is the example of Jesus.

Jesus, before he begins his ministry, goes into the desert to be tempted by the devil. It is part of the process. It is part of the obedience of Jesus to the will of His Father. Why should we imagine that we would be spared such a process?

Now let us look at these three temptations and today look at them in light of the subject of control. It seems to me that control is a delusion and a burden in our lives. Many of us live with the delusion that we are in ultimate control of our lives, the lives of others and even we can manipulate God. In addition, the daily burden of being in control drives many people actually away from the discipline choice and to giving up and going off in self expression that many times is nothing but sinful disobedience and leads to horrible consequences.

As we look at the three temptations, what I want to do is to identify the lie of the temptation and then the issue at hand in regard to control.

The first temptation is the temptation to turn stones into bread. We are told that Jesus has been fasting for forty days and the devil comes to Him with the statement of doubt and a temptation to use His creative powers to turn stones into bread. If you are the Son of God, then turn these stones into bread.

The first lie is that we are in complete control of our circumstances. It is true that we, through our choices, can participate in the provision of food, shelter, and other everyday needs and for sure can create consequences good and bad. However, the delusion is that we are somehow in complete control of these things in our lives. All we have to do is loose our job, our health or community and we quickly know that what we thought we controlled is sometimes beyond our control.

These, of course, are the things that we worry about the most and so when we worry we obviously want to control the everyday needs as much as possible. Jesus would remind us that we are not to worry about what we shall eat or wear because our heavenly father knows we need them and will care for us.

I think we might say that this temptation is t to control our circumstances. The devil says turn stone to bread and Jesus says you do not live on bread alone. Matthew adds but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. It is true that Jesus

could turn stones to bread if He would have chosen. Why not? The one who through whom all things are created and the one who calmed the sea could have turned, as one preacher put it, “marbles into marble rye.” Yet, here is the truth of this temptation. Stones are not meant to be bread. We are always asking God to exceed the bounds of God’s own creation. It is true that all things are possible with God and yet in creation God established certain laws. Could God make you fly? Yes. Is God going to make you fly? No. Why? Well it is a little thing called gravity. Gravity plays an important role and so we do not fly. Stones were not meant to be bread.

It might have been easy for Jesus to turn stones to bread, but it is not for us. So, our frustration of control each day is like us turning stones into bread. Think of the frustration we have when we cannot control the baby crying, the teen from coming in late, or the parent from leaving. Think of the frustration we have when we cannot control our schedule being full or even the frustration that our schedule empty. We want to control the everydayness of life and yet we find such an effort as frustrating as turning stones to bread.

What is the response to this temptation? Jesus says it is to remember that we do not live on bread alone. Yes, we need bread, shelter, clothes, companionship, work, companionship and much else that fills life, but there is something beyond all of this.

The response to this temptation of control is to know that God is and to live in gratitude to God whatever the circumstance. Jesus knew the Father would care for Him. This is the attitude whether we have much or we have little. The acknowledgement of God and God’s provision is why a Christian can be rich and why a Christian can be poor and have the same response to our physical needs. The one who follow Jesus knows God is providing and will provide. The one with wealth lives in gratitude for the abundance and knows it is a gift from God. They live humbly before God. The one who lives with lack does so with confidence that God will provide and thus they do not fear. Both relinquish the burden of control. They both realize that there is something beyond the physical. Man does not live by bread alone.

The lie is we are in control of our everyday needs. The response is to live with gratitude. It is as the Apostle Paul writes in Philippians 4:12

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret

of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

The second temptation in regard to control is really about controlling others. The temptation is concerning power and self- glory and honor. The devil takes Jesus to a place where in an instance he shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and tells Jesus I will give you all the glory and the splendor for it has been given to me. I can give it to anyone and I will give it to you if you worship me.

The temptation to control what others think of you and to control others. Here again is another lie. The devil claims that the splendor and glory of this earth and creation belong to him and he can give it to whom he wants. That is a great lie. The earth is God’s creation and it reveals God’s goodness, greatness and loving generosity. It glorifies its creator and not the father of lies. The lie is simply it is ours to take when the truth is splendor and glory is God’s to give. So, it is with controlling others. We really cannot control others and ultimately we cannot control what others think of us. Both of those endeavors can be extremely burdensome.

Jesus is essentially told you will be in charge. I will give you all the power if you will worship me. Yet, Jesus says He will not misplace His worship. He will worship God and God alone. Now what this means for Jesus is not that He will never have the power but power, splendor and glory will come God’s way. For Jesus, it is the cross. How different are the paths to glory and splendor? The devil says here it is, take it. The Father says to Jesus, be obedient to me even to the cross and I will raise You up in glory.

How many times would we like to control everyone around us? We think to our self, “If they would just put me in charge, I would get things straightened out.” We want to control our spouse, our children, our friends, our church, our work, our neighbors, our political leaders and of course just strangers. We want to be in control. So we grasp hold of any splendor and glory we might have in us and we seek to control others.

Yet, the way of Jesus is so different. We are not here to control others, but to serve others. In that

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wonderful hymn about Jesus in Philippians we are told that even though Jesus was God, He let it go to be the servant. Jesus came to earth not to control others, but to serve others. Jesus came to earth and did not demand His rights, although He was God. Jesus came to earth and became a servant. Jesus was so obedient to God as a servant, not demanding His way that it ended in the cross. But listen to how Philippians 2:1-11 ends.

Therefore, that is because Jesus did it God’s way, God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every other name. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the father.

Did you get that last part? The devil remembers has promised glory, splendor and power over all people and all things. But Jesus knew that this was not the devil’s to give. Only when we become the servant does God lift us up. Only when we seek God’s glory and not our own do we truly receive what God has for us.

Rick Warren tells a story of Dan Cathy who was building another Chick Fi La in California where Rick Warren lives. Dan asked Rick to come look at the restaurant while it was under construction. When it came time for lunch they went next door to a competitor’s restaurant. They went to a Taco Bell. Before they ordered they went to the restroom and as Dan Cathy as washing his hands Rick Warren noticed Cathy doing something unusual. He took several paper towels in his hands and the soap in the dispenser and began to clean thoroughly the sink and counter in the bathroom. He cleaned it and wiped it off and then threw away the towels. Here was the CEO of one restaurant cleaning the bathroom of the competitor. Rick asked him why he had done this. Cathy responded we instruct our employees to leave every place better than when they found it, whether it is at our place or somewhere else. Taco Bell never knew that day that this CEO of another restaurant had cleaned their restroom for free. However, that is what servants do.

The temptation is take control and receive the glory. Jesus says that is misplaced worship. Be a servant and let go of control and you will be lifted up.

The last temptation is oddly enough the temptation