Today we’re introduced to 2 important realities: Sin, & the Devil. (I just lost some.) Sin is our enemy. If there is one thing that robs our joy and ruins our lives, it is sin. I hate it. Yet I sometimes commit it. I always regret this and I hate what it’s done to me. It is the ultimate problem in the world. You’ll never hear a political stump speech about it—they’d be laughed out of the race & called a fanatic. But God says sin is our enemy. Look at what it has done to the world. Everything would be great if people didn’t envy, steal, lie, cheat, hurt others, hate…the world would be like some John Lennon or Elvis Christmas song. “Oh why can’t every day be like Christmas?” because of sin. Why can’t we as an enlightened culture stop it? Because it is who we are. We are sinners. All of us. We inherited it from our parents…Adam. It’s hard to be human. On top of the fact that we are bent toward sin and selfishness, there is a real Devil who is very good at tempting us—indeed he is called the tempter. You can laugh and pretend he doesn’t exist—and you’ll fall right in his trap—he’d love for you to deny his existence! Jesus certainly warned us of his existence—and ultimately defeated him! In addition, this world is so full of temptation. I can get overwhelmed and give in, and then I feel so angry with myself. Is this just an inevitable situation? Are we all just like the Israelites in the wilderness who seem to just not be able to help themselves—just stiff-necked, rebellious, hopelessly sinful? How are we to handle temptation?

There is a model for us. Jesus. “Oh yeah, but he is God.” Yes. But he was also fully man. And he “in every respect has been tempted as we are” and this should give us comfort. So if we are to follow Christ’s example (1Pet. 2:21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.), how did Jesus handle temptation? What does this show about Jesus? And how can his example help us as we battle temptation?

There was, before Jesus began his public ministry, a very real season of intense temptation that he experienced. Three gospels talk about it. Luke 4: And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. Wow, a lot there! This wilderness experience comes on the heels of his baptism. Frequently that’s when suffering occurs—after high points—and that’s when temptation is strongest. But God is in the wilderness as much as he is in the mountaintop experience: Jesus “was led by the Spirit in the wilderness.” And 40 days of wilderness camping—let me tell you, that’s rough. Mark says he was “with the wild animals.” But there’s more… And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. Ya think? Some think this is impossible. It’s not. I’ve known men who have fasted 40 days. They told me how they broke emotionally, how their mind played tricks, how many weird affects it had on their body. The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” (more persuasive!) Instant gratification of physical need & fleshly fulfillment. Come on, Jesus, you have the power to make a fresh baked loaf of bread and not be hungry. Maybe Satan knew this to be Jesus’ favorite. Why would it be so wrong? Here’s why: If he could get Jesus to use his divine power to fulfill his own fleshly desires—one little compromise—he knew he had him. Satan offered a shortcut. But Jesus would not use power without permission. His power was for the mission, and his mission was for others. To use his divine power for self would be self-serving and not embracing his humanness. And Jesus answered him, “It is written, (Dt.8:3) ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’” Matthew wrote that Jesus also quoted the rest of that verse: “but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Interesting. He’s saying “I don’t need food. I need God’s truth.” He realizes he’s in danger, not of starving, but of compromise & sin. He needs God’s word. That’s what we really need. Do you realize this?
The devil wasn’t finished: 5 And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. Don’t you wish you could know more about this? I’m sure Satan “showed him” more than Herod’s castle. He saw the power and wealth of the Pharaohs of Egypt, the temples/academies/mansions of Athens, and to Rome & Caesar’s palace. Also the Parthian Empire, and the Han Dynasty in China. He may have even shown him the empires of the Americas Myans, & what would later become Aztec & Inca. “and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will.” If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” Don’t think this was not a temptation to Jesus. What Satan offered was better than anything any powerball or lottery could give, better than all that the Vanderbilts, Carnegies, Rockefellers, Howard Hughes, Kennedys, and Sam Walton, Trump, Gates, Buffet, Zuckerberg…Satan offered Jesus more. Sure, Jesus knew he’d get it all one day, but just think of how much time it would have saved him, how much effort—including crucifixion! Satan offered a shortcut. But Jesus wouldn’t take the crown without the cross. 6 And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, | and him only shall you serve.’” How could he say that? Because more than anyone else, he knew that if you gain the whole world & lose your soul you lose. Infinitely. He knew infinite wealth & power. He knew by humbling himself that his name would be made above all names! All the wealth & power of the world—ALL of it—is nothing by comparison to what God has to give. 1Cor.2:9 “…no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.” Question is…Do you love him?

But there was one more climactic temptation (pun): 7 And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If (“since”) you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, “for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, | to guard you,’ 8 and “On their hands they will bear you up, | lest you strike your foot against a stone.” What’s the deal with this? The temple is the center of Jewish culture & religion and the highest point of the most densely populated city in Israel. There was a Jewish rabbincic tradition that Messiah would appear at the top of the Temple. If he jumped with angels catching, he would have created a scene like never before. His intro to Israel would have been the most memorable in history. No one would have ever doubted his identity. Again, it would have been an epic shortcut to fame, based on his own superior faith & supernatural power as the Son of God, shown in brash & audacious form. “Here I am! I’m the greatest.” Again, Satan offered a shortcut. But Jesus would not have glory without Gethsemane. 9 And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Jesus said two: I’m not going to test God. And you’re not going to test me. 10 And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time. That time would be 3 yrs later when Jesus was betrayed & killed. 11 And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, So the Spirit led him to the wilderness temptation, and he returned in the power of the Spirit.

Two big reasons for this story: A theological one, and a practical one.

• Jesus’ temptation foreshadows his final victory over sin. These temptations show Jesus as better than Adam & Israel (parallels) who failed. Here he serves notice to Satan: I’m not weak. I’m not in it for me. I’m committed to my mission.

• Jesus’ temptation exemplifies how we can overcome sin. Jesus’ 3 temptations represent the 3 categories of temptation we all experience: These are found listed in 1Jn. 2:15-17 12 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 13 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. 14 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.
These categories of temptation are the same, and are in the same order, as the ones Jesus faced in the wilderness.

1. **Natural physical fleshly desires.** (desires of the flesh) Jesus turn stone into bread. Hunger, thirst, sex, ease & comfort,

2. **Power and worldly wealth.** Satan “showed him” (desires of the eyes) the worldly power and wealth and possessions.

3. **Fame and Prestige.** (pride of life) Look at me, my superior faith, my personal power, me, me!

These are where we struggle. Where I struggle. I want to please my flesh—have my power & possessions—people to be impressed with me. That’s what Satan does. He entices us to desire these same things & offers “shortcuts” (temptations) that ultimately leave us empty…and in hell.

So what do we do?

1. **Recognize that God leads us through wilderness seasons of suffering in order to grow us.** These often come after high points! It is in these times that Satan will be most evident and temptation most attractive. The devil works this way. He doesn’t play fair. He has been at this game for millennia. He’s an expert. He means the wilderness for your defeat and God’s shame, but God means it for your good and his glory. The next time you’re in the wilderness, don’t selfishly whine, “why me, Lord?” Remember, now is your greatest opportunity.

2. **Know and utilize the weapon of Scripture to defeat temptation.** Jesus uses 3 quotations from Deuteronomy (while Israel was in the wilderness failing) as a not-so-veiled contrast between them and him for Satan. Point: No one knows the Bible more than Satan—no one hates it more. Use it! But you must know it.

3. **Draw close to your God.** You have a conquerer who fights for you, a priest who loves you, and an advocate who knows what you’re going through.

   Heb. 2: “[Jesus] himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” Jesus is an amazing advocate. Is your personal priest. He is your champion. He refused the shortcuts offered by Satan, not because they would have necessarily hurt him, but because they would have made it impossible for YOU to have forgiveness. He has already defeated Satan for us. And because he endured temptation, he understands…and he helps us when we are being tempted.

   Hebrews 4: “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

So I say to you: Draw near! Begin your day in his Word and in prayer. Ask him to guide you and help you. Walk with him throughout the day. This is called “living in the Spirit.” When you sense Satan at work, call on Christ! And just as Jesus left his wilderness temptation powerful in the Spirit, so will you. IF you have not surrendered to him, do now! He will save you. He will make you his child and keep you. Jas. 4: “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.”