

What have you got to lose?

(Gen 3.15-17; Matt 4:1-11)

13 March 2011 Lent #1

Opening Prayer

Lord, let my words be your words, spoken with your heart and to the glory of your kingdom here on earth.

Amen

Introduction

Without the events that happen in Gen 3 the rest of the bible would not exist as it does ... it may not have been written at all.

If there was no chapter 3 my sermon today would end something like ...

... and that's how we came to live in the Garden with God... now it's time for the kids club to play with the big cats ... and remember look out for snakes!

Everything from Genesis 4 onwards is the story of God cleaning up after we (through Adam & Eve) failed to take God seriously and obey his word.

While it is impossible to read these parts of scripture without encountering Satan it is not my intention to focus on him today.

However he does have a prominent role so I thought I would deal with him up front and then move on to the important stuff.

Who is Satan?

It is unfortunate for us, that Satan has been ridiculed by so many famous writers, artists, actors and comedians. Nowadays most people don't believe he exists, or if they do, they don't take him seriously.

But we need to. In Scripture he is referred to as:

- the Serpent who deceives,
- a lion that devours,
- the destroyer,
- the adversary,
- the slanderer,
- the father of lies,
- the evil one,
- the Prince of this world, and
- the god of this age.

While, Satan most assuredly should not become our focus, we must be careful that we don't give him a foothold in our lives because his presence has consequences.

What is Temptation?

When we consider the events from today's readings I think it's a reasonable to provide this working definition for temptation:

Temptation is an opportunity to accomplish something good in a bad way

- It's a good thing to pass an exam, but not by accepting an offer to sneak a peek at the questions before the test.
- It's also a good thing to pay our bills, but not if we do it by stealing from someone else.
- It's a good thing to protect our children, but not by taking the law into our own hands.

Of course our society has refined this view of temptation into what I believe is one of the central mantras for our age: "The end justifies the means".

Under this mantra we are allowed, even encouraged to

- take short cuts,
- look the other way, and
- even do a little harm, if the goal is worthy.

So with this view of temptation in mind let's have a closer look at what happens to both Eve and Jesus.

Eve's temptation in Gen 3

Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?' (v1)

If he really loved you then you could eat from any tree in the garden. Of all the places in the world isn't this supposed to be the perfect place, IT'S THE GARDEN OF EDEN ...

***"For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*(v5)**

Come on, God is obviously holding out you Eve!! Why would it be so bad to be like god? Eve aren't you made in the image of God?

Go on ... what have you got to lose?

What went wrong for Eve?

By getting Eve to question Gods motives, she forgot what God said - that they could in fact eat freely from all the trees in the garden, but for their own good there was one prohibition, they shouldn't eat from the forbidden tree in the middle of the garden.

Gods' actual words were:

***"You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."* (Gen 2:16-17)**

But Eve changed it to

"We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" (Gen 3:3)

Satan may have started out by questioning God's word and motives but Eve ended up by

- changing some of what God said,
- leaving out some of what God said, and
- finally adding to what God said!

By raising doubts about the truthfulness of God's word Eve questioned the goodness at the heart of God's motives.

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Then Eve's own senses deceived her.

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. (v6)

Do you remember the Gospel passage from a couple of weeks ago?

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness” (Mat 6:22-23)

So finally, Eve succumbs to temptation. In her case the strategy was to target her desire for wisdom and knowledge ... and by disobeying God ... taking the short cut to her desires ... Eve goes from temptation to sin.

Jesus' Temptation in Matt 4

Let's look at the temptation of Jesus in Matthew's gospel.

So you are the Son of God. You look hungry. How about a little bread? Surely you can command these stones to become bread. It's OK. It's just a little bread, not a great feast. You will feel better when you have a little food in your stomach.

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“tell these stones to become bread.” (v3)

Let's show the world who you really are, right here and now! If you jump from up here then God will have to save you.

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“they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” (v6)

Since your mission is to claim the world for yourself let's save some time. I own it! It's mine to give, so you can have it now

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“All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

In Jesus' case the strategy is to get try and get Jesus to validate himself to offer evidence of his identity.

- If you're the son of God – prove it
- If you're the messiah – show us
- If your mission is so important why wait?

Temptation of Christ

However when Jesus was tempted by Satan, he answered Satan with God's truth and three times affirmed.

“It is written!”

‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ (v4)

'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' (v7)

'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.' (v10)

But it's not enough just to know scripture. We also need to know which scripture applies to the situation.

As Gerald reminded me on Friday, it's not enough to simply say NO to temptation as if we are able to stand in our own strength and wisdom, we also need to know we are saying YES to the alternative:

- God's truth and righteousness.

Jesus knew who he was, why he had come, and what was to be accomplished. He also knew that the conduct of his ministry was as important as the destination of his ministry.

- Jesus refused to doubt God.
- Jesus refused to doubt God's motives.
- Jesus refused to disobey God.

Satan's Strategy

Essentially the temptation of both Eve and Jesus (and by extension us) was the same...

I can give you something that you want or need. You can have it now and you can enjoy it now and ... no consequences!

It's a very simple strategy. Target our desires, insecurities, doubts and fears. I am using the word targeted very deliberately because we have different desires, passions and weaknesses.

You and I are constructed in such a way that we must believe in something. If we won't believe the truth eventually, we will believe lies.

If we adopt the mantra of this age "the end justifies the means" then we have, as Paul describes it in Romans,

"exchanged the truth of God for the lie and worshipped and served the creation rather than the creator" (Rom1:25).

We have been tempted to believe that men and women can be their own Gods and not suffer any consequences for doing so.

Whether it's humanism, commercialism, materialism or the so-called new-age religions the battle cry is the same: ***"Glory to man in the highest"***.

Go on ... what have you got to lose?

The new Adam

While it's true that Eve may have been deceived into taking the fruit and eating it, Adam sinned wilfully with his eyes wide open. This is why Paul points to Adam, not Eve, as the one who brought sin and death into the human race (Rom. 5:12-21).

The first Adam is the head of the human race, the old creation. When that Adam sinned, we sinned, and through him and his disobedience suffered the consequences

- sin and death.

Yes, sin and death are in this world, but so are grace and righteousness through Christ (Rom. 5:14, 17, 21).

Because Jesus obeyed God in all things God sees Jesus Christ as the Head of the church, the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17); and through His righteous acts of obedience in living and dying on the cross, we have life and righteousness through his resurrection.

By faith in Jesus we are moved out of Adam and into Christ.

For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!
(Rom 5:17)

So as we begin this season of Lent, a season of repentance and reflection, I encourage you to reflect not just on sin, repentance and forgiveness, but also on obedience to Gods word and the consequences of disobedience because

- temptation is not a short cut to anything we want, and
- sin is nothing other than simple disobedience.

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