

The Temptation Substitute
Luke 4:1-13, 1 Cor 10:1-10

Friends, you know what is so discouraging about temptation?

You can resist what is tempting you a million times... but it doesn't really count for anything...

Because when that temptation comes around again- as it inevitably will... the consequences of giving into that temptation are not muted one bit by all your prior efforts to resist, right?

Let's look at a classic temptation issue –food. Maybe you are attempting to watch what you eat in order to lose weight, and you have to cut out a lot of sugar from your diet – so that means no more deserts, no more pop, no more cookies after church...

And let's say that for a few weeks you resist the temptation to eat these things – which is hard because they taste sooooo good! But every time they come around you summon up the

will-power and self-discipline and you resist the temptation to gobble them down.

But, one day you've just had a bad day, a long day, a really stressful day and you are tired, you are emotionally drained...whatever - your will power is down and someone has left out a bag of Two-Bite brownies on the counter...

And you see them and you think – oh I shouldn't... but they look sooo good, well maybe just one... and ten minutes later you realize in horror that you've finished the entire bag of brownies!

And all that sugar you've ingested is still going to react with your body and your weight in the same way it has before, regardless of the fact that you've resisted the temptation of desserts and sweets for two months....

Here's another example - maybe you've been really good in resisting the temptation to flirt and date and keep another boyfriend or girlfriend on the side while you've been married...

But then things at home start to get routine, your spouse doesn't take care of themselves anymore, there is no fun, no spark – and suddenly that co-worker at the office seems so attractive and you're spending more time with them, looking for excuses to go on business trips with them – and you find yourself in an emotional or physical affair.

It doesn't matter that you resisted this kind of temptation for five, ten, fifteen, twenty some years – when your spouse discovers that you're having an affair it will destroy your marriage.

Nobody says “well you resisted the temptation for so long; I guess I can let this slide...”

And so friends... because temptation is like this, as I was studying and reading up on it, I noticed that all the material I was coming across was solely concerned with avoiding, resisting, and overcoming it – because the consequences can be quite dire.

There were many warnings... like “Don't play around with temptation, it's like playing with fire – you will get burned”

There were illustrations about being aware... like the one about an undefeated boxer falling to the hands of some no-name fighter because that fighter studied the champion's style, saw a weakness and took advantage of it in the ring - the lesson: Beware! Satan will throw temptation at us this way...

There were avoidance strategies... “stay away from the things that tempt you!”

Now all these warnings, illustrations and strategies to help us deal with temptation are laudable because it's good to try to do what is right and not get dragged into doing what is wrong – and most often we just want to avoid the consequences of what it tempting us.

But in truth friends we need to ask the question if focusing on dealing with temptation in this manner will help our faith and trust IN Jesus Christ grow... or will it do something else?

Is our main goal in life to avoid the consequences of temptation, or should our main goal be to become so full of faith and trust in Jesus?

Will employing avoidance strategies, remembering illustrations, or just saying “No” in the face of temptation encourage us to trust IN Jesus Christ more... or will it simply reinforce our belief and trust in ourselves and in our own abilities?

Or let me ask the question in another way, friends... are you ever plagued by feeling like it is impossible to always react and respond in the appropriate Christian manner? Do you feel like God expects too much of you? Do you feel like you try... but you just can't live this Christian life well enough?

Well friends - that's the result of dealing with temptation through things like avoidance, resistance, or simply trying to overcome it.

You may have some successes but eventually you will be worn down, you'll succumb and give into some temptation – what then?

But Friends – there is a better way to deal with temptation, a way that is better because it increases our faith and trust *in* Jesus Christ... instead of *in* ourselves, and in this way of dealing with temptation we turn to **Jesus as our temptation substitute** instead of our temptation example.

Just like the commercial where that stuntman steps in to take over for people when they can't do normal everyday tasks because of their back pain...

So friends, in dealing with normal everyday temptation we become aware of our weakness and failings and our inability to resist it... so we need to begin to see Jesus as the one who has resisted temptation on our behalf and steps in for us.

Now typically, when we turn to Luke 4 and study the temptation of Jesus we're looking to discover how Jesus

resisted temptation – what skills did he use, what strategies did he employ? Can we pick up some clues here that would help us overcome temptation?

But what if we stopped asking those types of questions and instead asked “how can this increase my faith and trust in Jesus as my everyday stuntman, my everyday temptation substitute?”

Then friends we might pick up on the parallels between Jesus wandering in the desert for Forty days after being immersed in water... and how the nation of Israel wandering the desert for Forty years after passing through the waters of the Red Sea...

And we might recognize the similarity between the temptations which both Jesus and Israel faced. They both faced temptation in dealing with their hunger, they both faced temptations about who to worship, and they both faced temptations about putting God to the Test.

Remember what Israel did when they were hungry? Exodus 16 tells that story.

“The Israelites said to them [Moses and Aaron], “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.” “Who are we, that you should grumble against us?”⁸ Moses also said, “You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him.”

Wow – Ten plagues, the Passover, deliverance from slavery in Egypt, passing through Red Sea on dry ground, watching Pharaoh’s army destroyed in pursuit... the pillar of fire at night, the cloud leading them by day...

All this just to starve them to death in the desert? Really? They get hungry and immediately they give into the

temptation to grumble and blame God for their predicament and accuse his servants of plotting their demise.

Friends, by comparison - Jesus has had nothing to eat for forty days and when Satan tempts him to prove he is the Son of God by commanding stones to become bread – Jesus simply and quietly rebuffs him.

And Israel was also constantly being tempted to worship Idols. Exodus 32 is but one episode...

“When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, “Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.”² Aaron answered them, “Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.”³ So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. ⁴ He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said,

“These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.”

So Moses is away for a month... and Israel is ready to abandon Yahweh who has appeared to their leaders on Mt. Siani, made a covenant in blood with them, given them the Ten Commandments- which explicitly state – you shall have no other gods before me! They give into the temptation to make their own gods and worship them...

By contrast Jesus is offered all the power and wealth of this world, he is offered all that He came to reclaim for God – he can have it all without the fight... if He worships Satan instead.

Tempting – absolutely... but Jesus deflects that offer and refuses it.

And remember what occurred when Israel stood on the edge of the Promised Land?

In Numbers 14 they hear reports about nations living in Land and they became afraid and they refuse to believe God will go with them into battle.

They said "Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?"⁴ And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt."

Friends they put God to the test... God himself said *"How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them?"*

That's just it, if God can deliver them from the Egyptian empire, bring them well feed and watered across the desert, surely he can give them victory to take their Promised Land?

But in spite of all that, with one discouraging report about the size of the people and the cities in the Promised Land they

gave into temptation and refused to put their faith and trust in God.

Contrast Jesus again - He doesn't need any additional proof or have to pull any additional stunts like jumping off the temple wall to force to God act and give Him reassurance that He really is God's Son. He can trust in the voice which spoke from heaven when He received John's baptism which said "This is my Son..."

Jesus does not give into the temptation to put God to the Test.

So Friends, if we stop looking for tips to deal with temptation then we'll realize that Jesus went through these trials, not so that we could copy his approach by fasting and quoting scripture, **but to prove that He could succeed where the nation of Israel had failed.**

That He could stay loyal, obedient and trusting as a Covenant partner with God – no matter what Satan threw at Him.

And He succeeded! Which means that his success is our success – and that is really really really good news!

That means that Jesus is our temptation substitute – he faced situations which would tempt him to be unfaithful, disobedient and untrusting with God.

He faced situations where succumbing to temptation would destroy our relationship with God – as it did for those whom Paul mentions in 1 Cor 10, those whose bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

Friends, in broad strokes - these situations which Jesus faced summarize everything and anything which can tempt us. Everything and anything that would make us unfaithful covenant partners and would destroy our relationship with God.

The good news is that Jesus has resisted temptation on our behalf – in our place – as our substitute!

The covenant relationship between ourselves and God can no longer be broken – because Jesus is in our place – perfectly resisting temptation, maintaining at all times and in all situations a faithful, loyal response as a covenant partner with God.

Praise God! Amen! That's how we need to deal with temptation friends – we put our faith in Christ that He has done it for us.

The truth that Christ is our temptation substitute ought to fill us with gratitude and love so that we reach out to Him in faith when we are faced with temptation, so that we are attempting to deal with temptation IN him, IN his strength, not our own.

And if we succeed in resisting a temptation – we give Christ the glory and the praise for his work, and if we should fall to a temptation – we will give Christ glory and the praise because he forgives, and his work still maintains our relationship with

God – whose Spirit is working to sanctify us so that sin no longer tempts us as much.

Now – friends in the midst of the joy and relief which this truth brings, we must still be on guard against the sin that would have us twist this truth into self-indulgence.

The fact that Jesus is our temptation substitute is not an excuse for playing fast and easy with things that God has set off-limits to us, it doesn't mean that there are no consequences to our actions.

This is precisely what Paul is warning us against in 1 Cor 10. He says “remember what happened to those Israelites”

And yet friends – as their example warns against care-less self-indulgence; it also magnifies their need and our need for someone who can step in for us – because while we are duly warned by Paul in this passage against giving in to the temptation of idolatry, sexual immorality, grumbling and blaming against God....

The biggest temptation we will face as Christians friends is not about sex, money, or power...

The biggest temptation we will face is what Paul describes as being common to all men, and that is where we constantly go back to fooling ourselves that we have the ability in some way shape or form to be faithful covenant partners with God – and thus Christ is no longer necessary – he got us started but we can take it from here.

He becomes our example to emulate instead of our substitute whom we continue to grasp through faith.

So Paul exhorts us not to stand on our own abilities and strength – He says “*If you think you are standing firm... watch that you don't fall*”

Emulating Christ's example friends is not the same as grasping on to Him in saving faith because our efforts will never succeed in keeping covenant with God and maintaining that life giving relationship.

That is our greatest temptation – that is the temptation which we all struggle with. It is the most deadly temptation because it is disguised as doing something good, which actually leads us to put faith in something other than Christ.

But friends, as Paul reassures us *“God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.” But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*”

God has provided a temptation substitute, and God will use all the little temptations we face to remind us that we need our temptation substitute...

Friends, that provides a way out... to keep us from that big and deadly temptation of believing we stand secure on our own efforts instead of IN Christ.

Because friends it IN Christ that we live and move and have our being – he is our everyday stuntman, our everyday substitute – our temptation substitute

Grab ahold of him through faith friends!

Amen. Let’s pray...