

“Tempted By the Devil,” Luke 4:1-13 (Fourth Sunday After Epiphany, February 3, 2019)

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness ² for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. ³ The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” ⁴ And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’ ”

⁵ And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, ⁶ 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. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸ And Jesus answered him, “It is written, “ ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’ ”

⁹ And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written, “ ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’ ¹¹ and “ ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’ ”

¹² And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ” ¹³ And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

PRAY

Last week in the *New York Times* there was an article titled “Raising Children Without the Concept of Sin.” The author explains how she was raised in Indiana in what she describes as a “fundamentalist” Christian home. She obviously did not enjoy the experience because she writes that she doesn’t have any contact with her parents anymore. She also writes, “That tiny word [‘sin’] still makes me cringe with residual fear. Fear of being judged unworthy. Fear of the eternal torture of hell.” And so the author and her husband have raised their two daughters without ever going to church or a Sunday school. In fact, her nine-year old daughter never even heard the concept of sin until she happened to encounter the word one day on the streets of San Francisco. She turned to her mother and, with her forehead knitted, asked, “Mama, what is sin?”

I read that last week and I tried to imagine what would happen if the author and her family happened to walk into Grace Bible Church this morning, because the subject of my sermon isn’t just sin. The subject of my sermon is *the devil*. If they walked in their heads might explode.

Seriously, if you’re here this morning and you’re new to Grace and, especially, if you’re new to Christianity, please know you’re welcome. We are glad you’re here, and I want if possible to immediately put you at ease. This sermon is written with those who believe in the devil and with those who don’t in mind. There won’t be any fantastical stories of demonic possession or lurid pictures of hell in this sermon.

My goal this morning is to argue that without a healthy understanding of the devil and real evil in the world you will underestimate or simply misdiagnose so many of the problems our society

faces, including those you face in your own life. For those of you who claim to follow Christ, you also need to understand what the Bible says about the devil, for without it you can't really see the glory of the gospel.

Three points, and then we'll take the Lord's Supper: first, we'll look at the devil's nature. Second, the devil's game. Third, the devil's doom.

First, the devil's nature. Who exactly is the devil? The Bible indicates (I use that word intentionally, because the Bible never sets out to explain the origin of the devil the way that it does man or Jesus – it mainly indicates when it talks of the devil, though it indicates a lot) that the devil is a fallen angel. “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” Luke 10:18. Apparently the devil rebelled against God in the heavenly realms before God created the earth.

Now, speaking of the devil, there are two equal and opposite mistakes people can make regarding him. First, *we can make too little of the devil.* Like the mother in the article I quoted a moment ago, you can try to get rid of the entire notion of the devil, of sin, and of evil.

Thomas Harris grew up in Rich, Mississippi, just outside of Clarksdale, just a short drive down Highway 6 from here. You might better know him as the author of the book *The Silence of the Lambs*. In the movie, you have Anthony Hopkins playing Dr. Hannibal Lecter and Jodie Foster playing Officer Starling.

But in the novel (it's not in the movie) Officer Starling asks Dr. Lecter, “What happened to you that you have become like this?” Now that is the question of someone who has gotten rid of the entire idea of sin and the devil. Her reasoning goes like this, “You've done bad things, Dr. Lecter. Therefore, someone must have done something to you. Someone must not have loved you.”

In the book, Dr. Lecter replies, “What happened to me? Nothing happened to me, Officer Starling. I happened. You can't reduce me to a set of influences. You've given up good and evil for behaviorism, Officer Starling. Look at me ... can you stand to say I'm evil?” And she can't say a word in reply. She's horrified.

The Bible says there is a devil, there is sin, there is evil, so you can't reduce everyone down to just a product of their environment. And while Christians of course understand that environmental factors have a tremendous amount to do with how we wind up the way we do as adults, we also respect each individual enough to say to them, “As hard as it may be, you still have a choice between good and evil. You're not an animal running on pure instinct. You can make decisions. You can make changes.” And we respect victims of violence enough to say, “What happened to you was wrong. Not unfortunate, not a product of poor life choices, but wrong. Evil. And we will hold those who commit these evils accountable.”

Also, Christians are not so naïve so as to look at **systems** of injustice and say, “Well, that's just the way things are. It's not right or wrong, it just is. It's the way we've evolved as a society. What can you do?”

No, we can look at certain systems, like antebellum slavery, or the Jim Crow South, and even some systems in existence today and say, “That is evil. It is evil to bind a fellow human and all his descendants up in slavery. It’s evil to grant this person certain rights and privileges under the law and take those same rights and privileges away from this other person because of the color of his skin. This system takes advantage of the powerless and that is wrong.” We can say that because Christians believe in a devil.

But we don’t need to make the opposite mistake, which is to *make too much of the devil*. He is not on equal terms with God. He is a created being, in that sense like you and me. He can’t read minds or force you to do things against your will.

It’s something of a contradiction how our society treats the idea of the devil. A big part of American culture says he doesn’t exist, but one very influential part of our society portrays him all the time. You know which part I’m talking about? Hollywood. They’ve made tons of money off the devil over the years.

In the movies, the devil operates by possessing you, by making your head spin around 360 degrees on your neck. He makes knives float off of the table and then fly at you. Now there is such a thing as demonic possession, but what you see in the movies is nothing like how the devil actually works. So what is he up to?

Second, the devil’s game. Now let’s look at our text for this morning. Luke 4:5-7: “⁵ And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, ⁶ 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. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.’”

This was not an idle boast. The kingdoms of the world actually belong to devil. In John 14 Jesus calls him “the prince of this world.” And in 2 Corinthians 4:4 we read where Paul calls him “the god of this world.”

You ask, “How did the devil get this power over the world?” The answer is: we gave it to him. Genesis 3. When Adam and Eve, the first human beings, sinned, they plunged the world into rage, ruin, and decay. Ever since, the world has been marked by violence, by death, disease, injustice, poverty, hunger, and brokenness.

And enjoying it all the while is the devil. The devil is a parasite – he can’t create anything by himself. All he can do is derive whatever pleasure he can off of what God has made. But because the devil is a ghoulish, because he is twisted and perverse, the devil does not derive joy from our joy. **The devil derives pleasure from our pain.** He is a masochist.

Did you ever have a friend in school who constantly started drama in your group of friends? If everything was calm, this friend would start some rumor or say something just to get everyone riled up? Multiple that friend by a million and you have the devil.

World history is proof of how wildly successful the devil has been at stirring up the brokenness of this world. But the devil’s game is simply this: ***to hold onto his power as long as he can.***

How does he do that? Again, not through mind-reading or mind-control. In John 8:44 we read where Jesus, talking to some people he considered under the control of the devil, said, “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

The devil holds onto his power and keeps the world in turmoil *through his lies*. He is a master manipulator. He’s not omniscient, but he knows human beings. He’s watched us for centuries. He knows our weaknesses, he knows how to play us.

If you’ve ever had a relationship with someone who knew how to push your buttons and get you to do what he wanted, or who could make you feel crazy, or who would lie and lie and mistreat you but you would walk away convinced it was all your fault, then you were dealing with someone who was skilled in *playing the same game as the devil*.

The devil lies and manipulates so that we don’t know which way is up, so that we don’t trust anyone (not even ourselves), and in the destruction that always results from an environment like that – whether in families, in neighborhoods, in schools, in the workplace, in government, or between nations – in all that destruction the devil takes his perverse pleasure. Keeping us stirred up with his lies and feasting on the results: that’s the devil’s game.

I’ll give you one example of how this works: say you’re a successful student, and all of the sudden you have this tremendous sense that if you have a great career when you get out of school then you’ll be happy. Then you’ll be satisfied. That’s your goal.

But if give that prime place in your heart, if you build your life on that goal and don’t change, then over time it will lead to destruction. At the very least, you’ll overwork, and slowly your health will begin to deteriorate. You’ll neglect your family. You may have one, but you’re constantly skipping out on them to go to work. Then, you’ll cut corners to get ahead. Not so much at first that anyone would notice, but more and more as the years go by. You compromise your ethics. Then, finally, you find that you’ll trample on people to get to the top. And all the while there’s this impression in your heart that it’s going to be worth it, it’s going to be ok, one day it will all pay off. *But that’s a lie.*

In Mark 5:3-5 we read about Gerasene demoniac, a man who had listened to the lies of the devil for too long. We read, “He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain,⁴ for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him.⁵ Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones.” How did the Gerasene demoniac get to that point? I’ll tell you: gradually. He didn’t get there overnight. Did you see verse 3? It says, “No one could bind him anymore.” At one point the chains worked, but not at the end.

You see, the devil doesn’t come to you say, “Here’s the deal: I’m going to make your career such an idol in your life that after about thirty years you’re going to wind up with broken health, with

broken relationships, and with a broken heart for all the things you've done." If he did, you'd never say, "Okay! Sign me up!" Instead, he lies to you so skillfully and carefully for years and years that one day you just find yourself sitting among the tombs cutting yourself and wondering, "How in the world did I wind up here?" The devil got you to play his game.

But the biggest lie the devil tells us, the lie that makes all the other little lies possible, is the lie he first told Adam and Eve in the Garden, in Genesis 3, when he came to them and said, "God doesn't really love you. He's trying to keep all these good things from you because he doesn't want you to be like him. If he loved you, he'd let you eat this tree. But he doesn't, so you must take it for yourself." That lie of the devil has passed into our hearts and now we find we can't trust God at all. We can't trust that he's good, that he loves us, that he means to bless us. And so we go and try to build a life for ourselves through our career, or our money, or our family, or something else, ***we make an idol out of those things, we worship them instead of God and in the end we wind up miserable and broken.***

So, what can we do about the devil? Actually, that's the wrong question. It's not what we can do about him, but what Jesus has done.

Third, the devil's doom. Let's read Luke 4:1-4: "And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness ² for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. ³ The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.' ⁴ And Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone." ' "

What's the devil doing by tempting Jesus like this? *He's trying to figure out Jesus' game.*

The devil knows Jesus is special. He knows Jesus is different. All throughout the gospels we read that when Jesus approaches demons scream at him and say, "This man is the Son of the Most High God" or "He will show you the way you must be saved."

But the devil is not sure how different Jesus is. You can picture him pacing around Jesus in the wilderness, staring at him, trying to figure him out. Twice he says, "If you are the Son of God ..." The devil is not sure if Jesus is the greatest prophet who ever lived – on the order of Elijah times ten – or if he really is the Son of God.

So, the devil tempts Jesus in ways he'd never tempt you and me to try and learn who is really is. The devil doesn't tempt Jesus by setting a supermodel in front of him and saying, "She's yours," or a setting a big bag of money and saying, "Here – take it. It's yours, and no one will ever know." That would be how he'd tempt us. Instead he says, "Turn this stone into bread." If the devil said that to me, it would be no temptation at all. I can't do it. But for Jesus, if he ***is fully God and fully man***, and he hasn't eaten in forty days, that's a real temptation indeed. The devil offers Jesus all his power. The devil dares Jesus to jump off the temple. Anything to get Jesus to tip his hand.

But Jesus doesn't take the bait because he came to earth with a specific mission: though fully God, to live a completely human life in total reliance on God without using any divine abilities for as long as the Father in heaven saw fit.

Jesus' mission is to be *the new Adam*. The first Adam believed the lie of the devil, sinned in the Garden of Eden, and because he was our representative his failure plunged the entire human race into rage, ruin, and decay. But Jesus, the second Adam, being fully human and without using any of his divine prerogatives, fasted forty days and rejected all the temptations of the devil in the wilderness and the rest of his life. He was the perfect human being.

If he had cheated even once by turning stones into bread or jumping off the temple, he couldn't complete his mission. But because he did live completely and perfectly as a human being, when he went to the cross he was able to die for us *in our place*.

This is the good news (gospel) of Jesus Christ: in the perfect life of Jesus and in his sacrificial death on the cross, your sins aren't counted against you anymore. You are now in a perfect relationship with the God of the universe, not because of anything you've done (in fact, in spite of everything you've done) but because Jesus did it all for you.

But how did this lead to the devil's doom? The devil looked at Jesus in the wilderness and wondered, "Could he be the Son of God? Could this really be God in the flesh?" But he just couldn't bring himself to believe it. Why? 1 Corinthians 2:8 is the key: "None of the rulers of this age [that's a reference to the devil and his demonic allies] understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

The prince of this world couldn't understand God's love. The devil couldn't imagine sacrificing himself for human beings, so he just couldn't understand how God could do it either.

Therefore, the devil thought Jesus had to be just another prophet, so he determined to get rid of him. It's easy to get rid of those – just kill them. The devil had gotten hundreds killed in Israel over the centuries. "I'll just nail this one to a cross."

But it was the devil's greatest mistake. On the cross, Jesus exposed the lie of the devil that's kept us in slavery for so long, the lie that God doesn't love sinners. The cross proves that of course God loves sinners! For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son so whoever believes in him would not perish but have everlasting life! And now, with his lies exposed, the devil is doomed. **The nations aren't deceived by him anymore.** Every place the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached and believed is one less place people believe the lies of the devil. So the devil is doomed to watching his power over the world shrink and shrink as the gospel advances, until one day he's destroyed altogether. ***The devil never would have had Jesus crucified if he had known what Jesus was up to, because on the cross Jesus destroyed the power of the devil.*** "He [Jesus] disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in [the cross]." Colossians 2:15.

Friends, here's how you know you're a Christian: when you can look at Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, living the life you should have lived, and then on the cross dying the death you

deserve to die, and you don't just understand it (unlike the devil); ***you marvel at it. You glory in it. It's the most astounding news you've ever heard.*** You say to yourself, "I can't believe that God would do that for me, but he did! He loves me like that!" You want to say to others, "Behold! What wondrous love is this!"

When you see the gospel like that then the devil can't touch you. At the end of the first *Harry Potter* book, Lord Voldemort possesses one of his servants and tries to kill Harry Potter to get the Sorcerer's Stone. Voldemort screams, "Seize him!" We read Harry felt the hands close on his wrists, but to his surprise this servant of Voldemort lets go with a cry and is bunched over in pain looking at his fingers. They were red and covered in blisters.

"Kill him," Voldemort said. Again this person lunges at Harry Potter. The next thing you know he jumps back, his face now covered with red, shiny wounds, and Harry realizes the evil one can't touch him.

Later on he talks to Dumbledore, his mentor, and he says, "Why couldn't he grab me?" Dumbledore says, "Your mother died to save you. If there's one thing the evil one cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realize that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark ... to have been loved so deeply ... will give you some protection forever."

Friends, the love of Jesus Christ gives you ***perfect*** protection forever. "We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him." 1 John 5:18. To the degree you believe in his love for you, to that degree the evil one cannot touch you with his lies. You'll believe that God loves you, and you won't be tempted to build your life on the things that can't satisfy, like power, success, on the acceptance and approval of others, because you know that if you do they won't free you, they'll only control you. Jesus is the only one you can give your heart to who will set you free.

In a few moments, we're going to take the Lord's Supper. We invite all believers to participate with us in the Lord's Supper, whether you're a member of this church or not. Whether you've been baptized or not. Even if you think you started believing *this morning that Jesus is your Savior*. When Christians take the Lord's Supper we are confessing all over again what saves us is ***Jesus Christ***: his perfect record applied to us, the body and blood of Jesus Christ, represented by the bread and the cup, broken and shed for our sins. For all who believe in the good news that Jesus has overcome the evil one for us, come, and welcome, to the Lord's Table. AMEN