

Luke 4:1-13.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, ² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. ³ The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." ⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" ⁵ The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. ⁷ So if you worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" ⁹ The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. ¹⁰ For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; ¹¹ they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" ¹² Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ¹³ When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

God cares for his people

- 1. See it in the Savior's perfect love**
- 2. Hear it confirmed in God's Word of Truth**

This past Thursday was Valentine's Day. On this day many of us observed the practice of giving special gifts to those we love. On this day we get to see the love of our loved ones on display. Bouquets of flowers, boxes of chocolates, cards are all given and received and all serve to demonstrate love. On a day like Valentine's Day many of us get to hear love shared in expressions that are above and beyond the usual. We appreciate those displays of affection. It's nice to have that proof that your spouse cares. It's nice to know that you are appreciated by family at friends. And I think that it is safe to say that not only do we appreciate such displays of love, but we need them, and at a certain level we all crave them. Everyone wants proof that they are loved.

Unfortunately in this sinful world the devil takes that craving for proof of love and he twists it and he uses that against us as he seeks to destroy our relationship with God. He comes to us when we are the most vulnerable, when we feel unloved and forgotten and he whispers in our ear, *"God doesn't care about you. Just look around."*

What are we to do then? When we are in these moments of weakness how are we possibly supposed to defend ourselves against the power of the evil one? He tempts us to despair of God's love and to find happiness and satisfaction in the arms this sinful world and its inviting ways. He sets his clever trap. He baits it with the savory ideas of instant gratification and sweet smell of easy happiness. How do we stand firm in the faith when the devil tempts us with such cunning and such persistence - especially when we are

down and vulnerable? How do we ever, even when we feel strong, defend ourselves against the devil's wily temptations? Our Savior tells us. Our Savior shows us. Shortly after Jesus was baptized the Holy Spirit led him into the desert to take on the devil. There he would face the tempter. There he would face continual temptation, day after day, for 40 long days. And while he was fighting this battle, he did not eat. At the end of the 40 days Jesus our Savior was weak. He was hungry. The devil saw an opportunity. He thought he saw an opening, a way in, a weakness. ***The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."*** This was not simply an appeal to a man's hunger this was also a carefully laid trap by the evil one. It was as if he said, *"If you really are the Son of God prove it. Listen to my simple request and show me your power. If you are the Son of God why hasn't your God and Father taken better care of you? Don't trust him. You can take better care of yourself. You don't need him."*

When we are down when we are hurting that's when he comes at us with this wicked whisper too. *"If you are really God's child why would he let this happen to you?" "If you were really God's child you wouldn't be swimming in debt, your health wouldn't be failing, your marriage wouldn't be faltering; you wouldn't be suffering." "If it really meant something to be a child of God he would prove that he cares. Where's the proof?!"* The devil hisses. *"Where's the proof that he even loves you. Forget about him. You don't need a God who doesn't give a rip about you or your needs. Forget about him."*

How do we survive this temptation? How do we respond to the tempter? Jesus shows us how. ***4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.*** God will take care of us both physically and spiritually. He will see that all our needs are met. These words are written in Deuteronomy 8:3 and not only do these words provide a fitting answer to the devil's temptation the larger context of this passage proves that God takes care of his children. In this section from Deuteronomy Moses reminds the people how God sent them manna from heaven. God provided for his people. The Lord would not leave his children lacking. God taught his people to trust in him and his promises in all circumstances. God taught his people he cares for them. Jesus was confident that just as God took care of the people of Israel, the Lord God would take care of his Son. He would strengthen him and provide for him physically and spiritually. God promises to do the same for us because God cares about us.

With the Word of God, Jesus shredded the devil's temptation, but the devil wasn't done. He still tried to get Jesus to doubt the love of the Father. ***5 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. 7 So if you worship me, it will all be yours."*** With these words the devil implies, *"Why follow God's plan of salvation, why obey your Father's will, why suffer for this world Jesus? I can give you the world and save you some time and a whole lot of suffering. If you want the people of this world to respect and obey you I can give you that. If you want glory and honor I give it to you through my ways, my methods. Forget about God and follow me."*

The devil leans and makes his fiendish promises to us as well. He will take care of us. He will show us a good time. He will give us happiness and we won't even have to work that hard at all. He will make it easy. Glory, wealth, material possessions, prosperity, these can all be yours if you bow to him, if you follow his ways. If you lie, if you cheat, if you manipulate others, if you are dishonest, and crafty like him. If you follow your sinful heart, if you forget about God and bow down to the devil and this wicked world and their wicked ways things will be so much better.

In our weakness we crave this easy way. The devil dangles the temptations of sex, and money, and alcohol in front of us and we take the bait. We forget about denying ourselves and following our God and we indulge in selfish ways. We lust. We have improper thoughts. We are greedy. We indulge in sinful and selfish ways. We cut corners to get what we want. We are impatient. We are dishonest. We are cruel. We manipulate, bad-mouth, and back stab to get ahead, to make ourselves feel better. We chase after the things of this world and neglect and forget our God.

Too often, much too often, that's how we respond to the devil's temptation, but how should we answer? How should we respond to the devil's cunning temptations? Well, how did Jesus respond? ⁸***Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'*** God cares about us. He will take care of us. He might not grant us fame and fortune in this life, but he gives us the everlasting joys of heaven. The Lord God would raise and exalt Jesus after he suffered. Having completed the task of salvation he received Jesus back again to eternal glory. Now he promises to give the unending joys of heaven to those who believe in Jesus as their substitute and Savior. And the life that he gives to us to live here is not a life meant to find joy in serving ourselves, but it has been given to us so that we may find joy in serving others and serving our God. When we serve others are we not simply serving our God? Yes, we are to worship the Lord our God and serve him only. He is the only one who is worthy of such honor and praise because he cares for us and fulfills all our needs according to his gracious will.

Once again the Word of the Lord proves to be the key in defeating the devil. When Jesus defeats the devil with the word of God once again the devil cringes. In frustration Satan wants to twist and break the unbreakable word of God and so he leads Jesus to the holy city Jerusalem, he takes Jesus to the place of worship the temple, and in desperation he snarls, *"Prove it! Prove it! Prove the word of God that you love to quote; prove the love of God! Throw yourself off!"* With a sly and devilish grin he quotes from Scripture attempting to use it for his own purpose. Throw yourself down because after all **"He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully."** With a clever smirk and menacing snarl he curls his lips, leans in, and seems to dare "Prove it!"

Jesus' reply is from the same portion of Scripture that he referenced before and our Savior calmly replies, the Word of God also says: **"Do not put the Lord your God to the test."** Do not test God and put yourself and risk. Instead trust God. Listen to all of his Word and obey his commands. Patiently trust his love. For God's word tells us that he cares about us. In fact, he cares about us so much that not only gave us angels to guard physically they also protect us spiritually. The Lord loves us so much that he gave us a

conscience and a mind that is filled with common sense. He created us in such a way that our minds and bodies are filled with countless reflexes that protect themselves from harm. The Lord loves us so much that he gave us his Word that tells us how he lovingly created us and this word also commands and lovingly instructs us to take care of ourselves and to protect human life. He gives us helpful instructions that will keep us from harm and he promises that he will watch over us.

God loves us. His word is filled with examples of his love for us his children. But the devil wants nothing more than us to doubt that truth. He wants us to doubt the love of God, forget about our love for him, and go off and waste our life, hurt others, and lose out on eternity by chasing after the things of this world. So he attacks that central truth and to further our doubts of God's love for us and the devil shouts, "Prove it!" Satan tells us to look at humble existence and the problems and the shortcomings in our lives and that liar promises better. He even stoops so low as to twist the very word of God to trick us and to trap us to justify our misdeeds. He tries to twist God's own word in order to discredit and shame our God. Don't be fooled by the father of lies! Your God loves you and gives you all that you need. He provide for your every need. You are God's child and he cares about you and he will care for you.

God proved his love to Jesus when at his baptism he spoke in a voice from heaven and assured Jesus of his love. God strengthened Jesus when he was weak and then gave him the glory of heaven when his service on earth was done. God wants the same for you. He wants to assure you of his love. God wants to speak to you through his Word. He wants to be your strength and refuge when you are weak. And when your service here is over he wants to bring you to the glory of heaven. You are his own dear child, no ifs ands or buts about it. God cares about you and will care for you.

If we still want proof of his love just look at your Savior suffering for you in the desert. Just look at the lengths that he went for us. He went up against the devil, our enemy, who daily tempts us and tramples us, and Jesus defeated Satan. For 40 days he resisted all of the devil's attempts. Hungry, tired, at his weakest Jesus defeated the devil and showed us how to defeat him. He used the mighty Word of God as his sword and slashed down every temptation. Now he has given us that powerful Word as well.

God's Word also tells us why Jesus did what he did. He suffered and fought the master of temptation one on one and defeated him, he lived his whole life as our perfect substitute – what an exhausting and difficult task that must have been – but he gladly did it so that we sinners could have his perfection. He resisted every single temptation; he lived a spotless life, and then died in our place so that as his children we could wear an eternal robe of righteous and be with him in the glories of heaven. He defeated Satan in the desert and then crushed him on Calvary in order to pay the price of admission for us to get into heaven. How's that for proof of his love?! God cares about you and he will care for you and he demonstrates this with items far more precious than fine jewelry, a greeting card, or a box of chocolates. God cares for you. See it in the Savior's perfect love. Hear it confirmed in God's Word of Truth. And now live of life of loving obedience serving the Lord who cares for you. Amen.