

Sermon for Sunday, September 5, 1976, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
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"WHEN THE DEVIL MAKES YOU DO IT!"

St. Matthew 4:1-11

Text: "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted  
by the devil."  
--St. Matthew 4:1

The Jordan valley is a wide cut through the earth, running parallel to the east side of modern Israel. Actually, the Jordan Valley is what the geologists call a fault--a break in the crust of the earth. It is like a crack in one side of this little planet Earth. Through a part of this crack runs the Jordan River until it empties itself into the lowest place in the world, the Dead Sea. Because it is the lowest point in the world, the water in the Dead Sea has no place to go. For that reason the water is filled with chemicals and salt. No animal life can survive in that water and no vegetation grows along its banks. For that reason it is called the Dead Sea. On either side of the Jordan valley the land rises up into barren, desolate mountains. Hardly any rain falls there and it is a bleak desert area. Just north of the Dead Sea and not far from the Jordan River is the ancient city of Jericho. It is one of the oldest cities in the world, going back at least 9,000 years. There, in that low area, life-giving water bursts through the ground in an oasis. From the air, Jericho must look like a drop of green paint dropped carelessly on a canvas of brown. A few months ago I stood on the tell of Jericho. To the east, far across the Jordan valley, one could see the barren mountains that marked the beginning of modern Jordan. To the west, the desert land erupted suddenly upwards into a mountainous area almost a mile above the valley below. It was there--near Jericho--in those wild, desolate, waterless, hot desert mountains that Jesus went after his baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. The Bible says, "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." And when you stand there on the Jericho tell, you realize why the Bible says he was led up as your eyes lift higher and higher to catch sight of the peaks above you, and why the Bible says it was a desert--a wilderness--as your eyes search in vain for any sign of vegetation on the crags and peaks above you.

There in that desolate, forlorn, lonely region Jesus went to be alone after his baptism. There he went to pray, to think through, his mission on earth. And there the devil came to tempt him. As Jesus contemplated the hard, difficult years of ministry that lay before him which would end in bitterness and pain upon the cruel cross of Calvary, the devil came to show him some shortcuts to his goals. That's the way with temptation. It comes to us in terms of shortcuts to our goals, shortcuts to meeting our needs. For example, if Jesus was hungry, bread was a legitimate desire. But the temptation to turn stones into bread was a shortcut to meeting his need. Again, as the Son of God it would be necessary for him in the months ahead to demonstrate to the world who he was. Yet, to do so by a spectacular stunt such as jumping off the temple was a shortcut to that goal which stopped short of the cross. And again, as the Lord of lords and King of kings he had a right to rule the kingdoms of the world. However, to worship Satan in order to gain his kingship was an illegitimate shortcut to achieve his goal.

In our scripture for this morning we learn something about temptation. One of our television comedians plays a character who is always being tempted to do something bad. When the character gives in to temptation and does his bad deed, he always justifies his action with the claim, "The devil made me do it." Just how does the devil make us do it? How does the devil work through temptation in your life and mine to make us do things we don't want to do?

Well, notice first that temptation is pervasive. Pervasive means to permeate, to pass through all the parts. It means to spread through the entire extent of a thing. So, when something is pervasive it is everywhere; it means there is no place where it is not.

So temptation is pervasive. There is no place where it is not. Our scripture for this morning says that Jesus was "led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." That sounds as though God and the devil are working hand in glove! What it really means is that even when God has you by the right hand, the Devil has you by the left. It means that even when you are very close to God temptation is pervasive because the devil goes to church with you.

That's rather startling, isn't it? It means we can never run away from temptation. We can't run away from temptation because it is pervasive, it is everywhere. Just because we come to church doesn't mean we won't be tempted. It is just when we are at our prayers that the devil strikes. Sometimes we think because we are doing the Lord's work that the devil is dead or at least outside the sanctuary doors--or better still, over visiting the neighbors! But that is exactly what he isn't doing. He is with us everywhere, even the presence of God.

The second thing we learn about temptation is that it is personal. Now, I have never seen the devil. Several times I thought I had, but it always turned out to be an Elder or Deacon! But that doesn't make him any less real, because I haven't seen a toothache either! Isn't that what the Bible means when it says of Jesus that "The tempter came to him?" It means that temptation is intensely personal. We have to wrestle as Paul put it, "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of the world." (Ephesians 6:1) So temptation is not only pervasive, it is also personal--intensely so.

The third thing we note about temptation is that it is also particular. Were the temptations of Jesus vague and general, or were they terribly specific and awfully particular? You see, the fact is, you can't be good or bad in general. It is always in the particular. For example, you can't say, "I'm going to be a Christian in general, but I'm not going to like this one person in particular." That's what I call the Charlie Brown syndrome. Charlie Brown says, "I love humanity, its people I can't stand." No, you can't be good in general, you have to be good in particular. So temptation is always specific, it is particular.

The fourth thing we note about temptation is that it is private. As Jesus went into the wilderness to seek God's will for his life--as he contemplated the hard years of rejection and agony and suffering, culminating in the tragedy of the cross--surely he was tempted to turn aside. And as he wrestled with that temptation, the Bible tells us he was alone in the wilderness.

Is it not so with us? Our temptations are terribly private, awfully lonely. No one can really make our decisions for us, no one can really share the suffering of the battle, the loneliness of the choice. No, within our own hearts we must make the choice of who and what we will be. It is a private affair where no one can make for us those ultimate decisions of our personal destiny.

But not only does Jesus give us some insights into the nature of temptation, he also gives us some help when the devil tries to make us do it. And after all, that is what we need, isn't it? When we are tempted, we need to know what to do to keep the devil from making us do something we don't mean to do. Notice first that Jesus introduces us to the principle of preoccupation. To the temptation to turn stones into bread, Jesus replies, "Man shall not live by bread alone." You see, a man

who is focused on the things of God is too preoccupied to let other things distract him. See how it works! The Jews had been in captivity in Babylon and under the leadership of Nehemiah had returned to Jerusalem. The people in the area decided to stop the building of the Jews by killing their leader. So, they invited him to come down from the walls where he was working for a visit. But Nehemiah was busy with the things of God. To his enemies he said, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down." We hear this principle of preoccupation echoed in the words of St. Paul, "Never let evil get the better of you. Get the better of evil by doing good." (Romans 12:21, Moffatt) It is said that after William Lloyd Garrison accepted Jesus as Savior, he was complimented upon the beauty of his handwriting which once had been so poor as to be almost unreadable. "I set to work to improve it when I became a Christian," Garrison explained, "for I resolved that I would make my Christianity reach into every detail of my life." Here is the picture of a man who will not be easily overcome by temptation for the simple reason that he is preoccupied.

Notice second that Jesus introduces us to the principle of resistance. Satan tempted Jesus to leap from the temple, but Jesus replied, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God." Last Sunday I preached on the 6th chapter of Ephesians where St. Paul tells us to take the whole armour of God. He ended by saying, "and having done all, to stand." Sometimes we simply have to resist the devil. We simply have to stick out our courage and resist the devil. In the book Jane Eyre there is an unforgettable scene. Rochester is pleading with Jane to go away with him to the south of France. They loved each other, and to Jane, who had all her life dreamed of such love, the appeal was almost irresistible. Only the memory of what she had been taught as a little girl saved her in that hour. She said at last, "Laws and principles are not for the time there are no temptations; they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigor. Stringent are they; inviolate they shall be. If at my individual convenience I might break them, what would be their worth? They have a worth--so I have always believed; and if I cannot believe it now, it is because I am insane; with my veins running fire, and my heart beating faster than I can count its throbs. Here I plant my foot." Yes, "Here I plant my foot."

Note thirdly that when the devil tries to make you do it, Jesus introduces us to the principle of a higher attraction. When the devil offered the kingdoms of the world to Jesus if he would worship him, Jesus said he had something better, a higher attraction. He said, "You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve." There is an ancient Greek legend that illustrates for us how this works. It is the story of the argonauts who had to sail by the southern shore of Italy where the sirens lived. The sirens were beautiful in voice, but evil in soul. They came out to the shore to sing as ships passed by and lured the sailors to turn towards shore where their ships were destroyed on the hidden rocks. As the argonauts sailed by this dangerous place they had on board the famous poet and singer Orpheus. According to legend his voice was such that lions and tigers would come and crouch at his feet, rocks were softened, and oaks moved from their place to be near where he sang. As the argonauts arrived at the place of peril, the sirens came out and sang their sweetest. Strangely enough the argonauts only laughed at their singing and rowed steadily on. Every day they had heard the sound of the music of Orpheus. And for these men whose ears were accustomed to the most beautiful sound on earth, the inferior music of the sirens had no attraction.



Is not this the profound secret of the Christian religion? The attraction of evil is overcome by a higher attraction. The devil tries to make us do it, but for the person whose eyes are on Jesus the attraction of evil is overcome by a higher attraction. There is a little chorus we sometimes sing that goes like this:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in his wonderful face;  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,  
In the light of his glory and grace.

When the devil tries to make us do it we have the principle of preoccupation, the principle of resistance, and most of all we have the principle of a higher attraction. You see, when your eyes are upon Jesus there is no way the devil can make you do it.