

March 29, 2020

“It Ain’t Over ‘til it’s Over”



Luke 4:13

13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Special Music: “Still in the Fire” The Speers

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9koQ1tc-vJI&list=RD9koQ1tc-vJI&start_radio=1

Several years ago, I learned of a project at a major airport in which management had decided that money could be saved by creating a routing program for baggage tram drivers. The vision that the airport had was that a device, like an ipad, could be installed on each baggage tram and that a program would run that would tell each tram driver the best route to their next destination. Some thought this vision was inspired. After all, a computer thinks much faster than a human and if the tram drivers were forced to follow the directions as they appeared on their screens, common delays could be avoided because all of the conditions of the airfield, including construction and weather conditions, could be uploaded in a common database and would save having to deliver all of that information to the drivers. All the driver had to do was follow the given directions and time would be saved. And time saved is money saved.

Money was budgeted and then allocated. The project was planned out. Contracts were signed. Programmers and hardware techs were hired. Hardware was purchased. Testing was done. And management signed off at the completion. All of the decision makers were pleased. They had pulled off the project under budget with an early completion. Somebody was going to get a feather in their cap.

When the project went online, and the tram drivers were forced to follow the pre-designated paths, it didn't take long for those baggage trains to backup and

finally come to a halt, which, in effect, put flights farther and farther behind. In order to get the airport back up to standard operations, the devices were disabled, and the drivers were told to return to their previous ways of doing things. Before long, things had returned to normal and flights were once again on time.

When a post-mortem was conducted on the project, an interesting fact came to light. In their haste to bring the project to fruition, no one had discussed with the tram drivers how they managed to navigate the airport. The assumption was that it could be process could be improved even though the people making the decisions had never performed the job that they were trying so desperately to improve. You see, when it came to actual airport conditions, management could plan for construction conditions and normal activities. But the tram drivers did their jobs every day. They knew where the potholes were. They knew where the low places in the asphalt were so that when it rained, they could avoid those areas and not flood out the trams. They could easily adjust when planes were not quite where they were supposed to be. They knew the traffic habits of the planes. They instinctively knew what the best routes were to get the trams from one area of the airport to another. But nobody bothered to ask them. Hard lessons were learned. The biggest lesson of the day was that if you want to improve a process, go to the source to get the best information regarding that process. If you do not do your due diligence, you leave an opening for the project to fail.

I want to spend a little time this morning talking about David. We want to pattern our lives after Jesus and even though David did not live at the time of Jesus, we find him striving to be a servant leader to his people in the same way that Jesus did. Of course, David was not the Son of God and was not brought to this earth to die for our sins, but he had a heart that loved God in a way that most of us can only long for.

King David is my hero. There is a simple reason for that. When you read the story of David, and actually look at his life, you realize that, although he did a great many magnificent things, he was not really bigger than life. He always gave glory to God for his successes, and always took the blame for his own failures. When he did mess up, he didn't blame God, he blamed himself for not only letting God down, but letting his people down as well. He did not look to place fault somewhere else.

It can be somewhat hard for us to relate to David, knowing that he was a King. After all, we aren't kings. And while David may have, at times, allowed arrogance and pride to slip into his persona, he didn't place himself in a position that looked down on his people. He never forgot his roots as a shepherd. Most of the time, his pride and arrogance were because he could, at times, feel like he was above the law, but God was quick to set him straight. Because he wasn't born into royalty, there was a real sense of humility that helped him overcome those

moments of moral lapse and bad decisions, just like most of us. Being king didn't really buy him any special consideration before God. As a matter of fact, God had higher expectations of him than the people that He was reigning over.

So, we are going to take a peek at one of those moments that David messed up and it cost him so dearly. Let me read to you from 1 Chronicles 21:1-8.

- 1 Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel.
- 2 So, David said to Joab and the commanders of the troops, "Go and count the Israelites from Beersheba to Dan. Then report back to me so that I may know how many there are."
- 3 But Joab replied, "May the LORD multiply his troops a hundred times over. My lord the king, are they not all my lord's subjects? Why does my lord want to do this? Why should he bring guilt on Israel?"
- 4 The king's word, however, overruled Joab; so, Joab left and went throughout Israel and then came back to Jerusalem.
- 5 Joab reported the number of the fighting men to David: In all Israel there were one million one hundred thousand men who could handle a sword, including four hundred and seventy thousand in Judah.
- 6 But Joab did not include Levi and Benjamin in the numbering, because the king's command was repulsive to him.
- 7 This command was also evil in the sight of God; so, he punished Israel.
- 8 Then David said to God, "I have sinned greatly by doing this. Now, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing."

In this case, God allows David to pick his own punishment and he gives him three choices.

1. Three years of famine
2. Three months of being swept away by his enemies
3. Or three days of the “sword of the Lord” in which a plague would ravage Israel

David feels he is better off in God’s hands than human hands and so he chooses the third option and the result is the death of 70,000 Israelites from the plague that God sent. God also sends an angel to destroy Jerusalem but stays the hand of that angel at the last minute.

There is a lot going on in this story, but we really want to focus on the very first verse. **“Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel.”** Satan really likes to mess with David. It is almost like Satan is just sitting there waiting for an opportune time to reach into David’s life while he is distracted, and put some temptation in his way that will catch him off guard.

To put it in context, this event occurs at a time when David is constantly doing battle with the Philistines and his thoughts are probably preoccupied with size of the Philistine forces. He wants to know how many men he can muster to do battle with the Philistines. He’s taking inventory in his head to make sure he has

enough military strength to continue the fight. This is a very logical thing that most military commanders do on a regular basis.

We do the same thing. We get preoccupied with the details of the problems that we are facing, so much so that we often forget that God is in control, That He is taking care of things. Just like David, we are comfortable knowing the numbers. But we often forget that the battle is not ours, it's God's.

When we read this first verse in this story of David, we can see ourselves clearly. **“Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel.”** When we get distracted by the mountains and barricades in front of us, Satan sneaks up behind us to put in his two cents and encourage us to leave the path that God has us on. Satan wants us to put our trust in our own abilities and not bother seeking God's input. He wants us to detour around the mountains and the obstacles, in spite of the fact that our God is perfectly capable of removing those mountains and those obstacles should He choose to. And there are times when God needs for us to climb a few mountains. Satan keeps us so busy trying find routes around the mountains or ways to maneuver around the obstacles that we don't stay focused on the path that God has laid out before us. Our way looks easier and more efficient. We are so very convinced that our way is the best way that we don't even bother to ask God even though God has the best route mapped out for us. We are going to save God some time and money by taking the wheel.

David and his people paid a huge price because David could not get outside of his own head and let God run the show. Satan looks for those moments of distraction in our lives where he can step in and guide us down a completely logical path; a path of his choosing, and not of God's choosing. And it looks like just the right choice because we don't take time to include God in the decision. It never occurs to us that we need to stop and pray, before we commit. All too often we come to a major intersection in our life, and we make a decision based on what we assume God wants.

We have spent the last four weeks talking about the temptations of Christ. What have we learned?

1. **“And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness”**

Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. His choice was to follow, not to lead. He acted with the heart of a servant which would be exemplified throughout the rest of His ministry. We learned that WE can find Joy in allowing ourselves to be led. That we don't have to sit in the driver's seat. By allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us, God will bring Joy into our lives by delivering us where we need to be at the time we need to be there. He truly does not need our input. He only needs us to follow His lead.

2. “It is written, That man shall not live on bread alone, but by every word of God.”

We learned that we can find Joy in Hunger. That hunger can drive us to greater things. It can give us purpose. It can shine the light on God’s purpose in our lives and inspire us to reach for things that we feel are beyond our grasp. We learned that when we feel confined by our own limitations, what we feel is impossible, God makes possible. We learned that Jesus chose to meet the challenge that lay before Him when He was in His weakest state, not to show us how strong He was, but to show us how strong we can be by allowing the Word of God to speak into us

3. “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only’”

We learned that there is Joy in servanthood. That by allowing God to work through us to meet the needs of others, we can accomplish things as vessels of the Almighty God that we would never be able to accomplish alone; that we can find Joy in washing feet, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty and shelter to the homeless. We learned that our vessels are filled because we worship the Creator of the Universe and no other. Satan’s promises are temporary and empty; they hold no substance.

4. “It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

We learned that when we are afraid, we can Find Joy in Trust. That our trust in God allows us to conquer our fears. As we allow Him to lead us, we allow our hunger for Him to drive us. As we allow ourselves to be used by Him in service, we develop a trust that shows us that we can step beyond our own capabilities as the power and light of God moves through us. We learned that taking that step of trust is not testing God, but embracing the blessings he provides for us. We have no reason to test God because we understand that what God provides for us is what is truly best for us.

Which brings us back to today’s passage, Luke 4:13

“When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.”

Why bring up this verse at all? After all, Jesus has resisted all the temptations. He has shown us how we need to approach temptation. He has show us how we can find joy in places that we might not normally look for Joy. Satan is defeated, right? The devil’s work is done. He has failed. Jesus prevailed.

**“When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him...
...until an opportune time.”**

There is a reason for this verse being here. It is a warning for us. It is so very tempting for us, as Christians, to get complacent. We get into a boxing match with Satan even though we should know that the battle is not ours to win, but Christ's.

Satan knocks us down by forcing us to look at our own hunger, instead of seeing our starving neighbors. He tells us to complain about the things we do not have and completely ignore the fact that those around us are naked, hungry, thirsty and homeless. But we rally and we cry **“It is written, That man shall not live on bread alone, but by every word of God.”** And we feel a sense of victory.

Then Satan knocks us down again by telling us that we can have anything we want if we will just worship him. We can be rich. We can be healthy. We can have power. We can be popular. We can stand in a place where people are in awe of us. We can sit at the front of the temple. But because the Holy Spirit resides in us, we can fight back and tell Satan **“It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only’”** And again, we can taste a small victory.

Then Satan comes right back and tells us how great our faith is and how wonderful it is that we believe. But maybe, just maybe that faith might be misplaced. He sows that seed of doubt and then tells us the way to

remove that doubt is to put God to the test. Well, that seems kind of logical, doesn't it? Trust, but verify. And then the Holy Spirit grabs hold of us and helps us take a stand and we shout, **"It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"** And Satan turns to leave, and we feel a great sense of victory. And because we taste victory, we want to just ignore verse 13. After all, Satan is defeated.

But that is not what it says. It says **"When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him... ..until an opportune time."**

Satan is always looking for that "Opportune Time." He is looking for that moment when, like David, we get so busy with the details we allow Him to slip in the back door and provide us with what seems like a logical solution to an immediate problem. Where we forget to consult with the Architect of the Universe and commit our lives to a fool's errand. We drop our guard because we don't want to bother God with our details. We allow Satan to take advantage of that "Opportune Time" which too often results with other people around us getting hurt. This is Satan telling us "It Ain't Over 'Til It's Over."

It doesn't have to be that way. This week, let's take time each day and look at Luke 4:1-13 and say these three important verses aloud.

"It is written, That man shall not live on bread alone, but by every word of God."

“It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only”

“It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”

Let these verses become gatekeepers in our lives, shutting the back door to Satan and preventing him from finding that “Opportune Time.” Let’s seek the face of God and allow him to lead us, to provide bread for our hunger, to use us to wash a few feet and serve others, and to fill us with the Holy Spirit to the point that trust is inevitable.

AMEN

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