

Temptation  
Genesis 2: 4b-7, 15-17, 3:1-8  
Matthew 4:1-11

Westminster Presbyterian Church  
Pastor Doug Browne  
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Genesis 2: 4b-7, 15-17, 3:1-8

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.’

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God say, “You shall not eat from any tree in the garden”?’ The woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, “You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.”’ But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’ But he answered, ‘It is written, “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”’

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you”, and “On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”’

Jesus said to him, ‘Again it is written, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”’

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, ‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! for it is written, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”’

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

You've all heard the story before, the story of the Fall of Humanity. You know, Creation. Adam, Eve, the snake. The fruit, which always seems to be depicted as an apple, even though Scripture doesn't say what kind of fruit it is. God says don't eat the fruit. The snake says that it will make them like God. Adam and Eve eat the fruit, and boom! They see that they are naked, and they make themselves some clothes. Their eating the fruit, though, messes up the relationship between them and God.

You've all heard the explanations, that Adam and Eve were tempted. Adam and Eve sinned because they disobeyed God, and, as a result, they were kicked out of the Garden of Eden. Does this sound familiar?

Adam and Eve were tempted. Adam and Eve did disobey God. And they were kicked out of the Garden of Eden. But I don't think that disobeying God was the real root problem.

Let's compare that story to what happened when Jesus was tempted. The tempter – the word is *diabolos*, which is the origin of our word “Devil,”<sup>1</sup> but the original word is not the name of a specific being – it literally means “a tempter,” or “a slanderer.”

The tempter starts each of the first two conversations with, “IF you are the Son of God.” The tempter is trying to get Jesus to lose his temper and defend himself, proving that he is the Son of God by displays of power.

The tempter is defining who the Son of God is by power, and by using it to gratify himself, the way he would if he were in Jesus' situation. But Jesus refuses to use His power that way. He tells the tempter off, each time.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devil#Etymology>

Then the tempter offers Jesus all the power in the world, all the kingdoms and their splendor, if Jesus will fall down and worship him. Jesus angrily refuses, and tells the tempter to go away.

I don't believe that the Father ever told Jesus, "You're not allowed to use your power to make bread for yourself – only for other people."

I don't believe that the Father ever told Jesus, "Don't climb up on the top of the Temple and jump off, assuming that the angels will catch you."

That sounds kind of like trying to make rules for every bad thing a six-year-old could come up with, and every parent knows that doesn't work. So I have to believe that God knows it doesn't work.

No, Jesus knew that was the wrong path.

Before the incident of the fruit, Adam and Eve knew who they were and knew that they were in relationship with God. They were not God, but they knew God.

The serpent tempts them with something that has been a human temptation ever since. He tempts them with knowledge, and, in particular, with the idea of being like God.

They fall for that temptation. They eat the fruit. And "the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves."

And, then, when God was walking in the Garden, Adam and Eve try to hide from God! They have gone from being beloved children of God to no longer being children, at least in the same way. Their response was childlike, though. There's a stage in children's development

where, if they know they've done something bad, they'll try to hide from the grownups, and not very well. That's what Adam and Eve do here.

Adam and Eve tried to change who and what they were. They managed to change how they related to God and the world around them. But they did not change who they were. They were still children of God.

Jesus, when He was tempted, knew exactly who He was. He was the Son of God, and he knew that that meant. He refused to let the tempter tell him that being the Son of God was about using power for his own ends. He knew that being the Son of God was about love. He remembered who he was and what it meant. That's how he could resist the temptation.

So what?

Well, we get tempted, too, don't we? We are tempted to hoard the blessings we have received from God for ourselves. We are tempted to be cruel, or at least uncaring, to others. We are tempted to judge some people deserving of help and others unworthy, as if we know enough about other people to make those judgments.

I think we all agree that everyone would be better off if we could resist temptation, wouldn't we? And wouldn't everyone around us be better off, too?

So, when we are tempted, let's try to follow the example of Jesus, rather than that of Adam and Eve.

Remember who we are.

We are children of God.

We are not supposed to be neutral between good and evil.

We are not supposed to stay on the sidelines.

As Archbishop Desmond Tutu put it, “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse, and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.”

Don't let the world out there tell you what being a Christian is. They'll tell you that being a Christian should mean you're only concerned with saving your own soul, and forget anyone and everyone else. Or they will tell you that being a Christian means you have to be full of hate for other people, and that you have to want to control other people and make them be just like you.

The world is tempting you.

We are children of God. We are blessed. But we are blessed so that we can be a blessing to the world around us.

That's the key to resisting temptation. Remembering who we are.

Amen.