

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 30 – CONFRONTING THE DEVIL]

Last time we talked in more detail about the representation principle and how critical it is to our understanding Jesus' role in saving us.

- ◆ Jesus' official ministry begins with Jesus asking John the Baptist to baptise him.
- ◆ We saw Jesus did not just "die" for us, he also "lived" for us.
- ◆ At his baptism, Jesus stepped into the role of being our representative by identifying himself with sinners so he could vicariously live the perfect life you and I are incapable of living and overcome our fallen human nature in order to redeem it by wrestling it to the ground, defeating it and restoring it to God's original intention.

With His baptism Jesus begins his official ministry.

- ◆ As He begins His ministry it's important to note that for the first time there is a human acknowledging God as Lord by putting his complete trust in God and living a life truly in God's image.
- ◆ This is in contrast to the life of independence humanity has chosen in rejecting God's invitation to trust Him with their lives.
- ◆ But his baptism is also the beginning of a new age, the age of the New Creation.
- ◆ At Jesus' baptism we see God pronouncing his "well pleased" on his Son in much the same way He announced His "very good" at the original creation.
- ◆ We also see the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the new creation as it descends like a dove upon Jesus.
- ◆ As mentioned earlier, the Holy Spirit is prominent in all new beginnings, e.g., original creation, Jesus' birth and baptism, and the birth of the church at Pentecost.
- ◆ The striking aspect of this display of the Holy Spirit is significant in that it has been poured out on a human being. Humanity is now drawn into and included in the circle of life and love of the Trinity.
- ◆ As we saw in an earlier session, Jesus as our Mediator as both God and man establishes a direct connection between God and humanity that allows us to participate in the life of the Trinity. We are drawn into "Holy Communion" with the Trinity.

But there is another striking similarity with the original creation and that is the temptation from Satan that signifies a new start or a new creation.

- ◆ As we saw earlier in the cases of Adam, Job, Abraham, Israel, David, there comes a time in the lives of God's people when their allegiance is put to the test.
- ◆ What we see now is the "second" Adam being subjected to the same conditions as the "first" Adam.
- ◆ But the test the second Adam is subjected to is much more menacing than the original Adam.
- ◆ In this encounter Jesus faces the full onslaught of the principalities and powers of the evil side of the spiritual realm.
- ◆ Right from the start, beginning with his birth when Herod sought to kill all the newborns, and now at the start of His official ministry, the devil tries to derail God's plan of redemption.
- ◆ This is a burden that will plague Jesus throughout his ministry and reach its climax at the cross.
- ◆ And the goal of Satan and his evil powers is to somehow break that hypostatic union between the divine and the flesh by luring Jesus into sin.
- ◆ In other words to give in to the self-will of the flesh rather than trust the leading of the Spirit.
- ◆ Surrendering to the selfish desires of the flesh would disqualify Jesus from becoming our Savior.

But there is a major difference in the temptation Jesus willingly subjected himself to and the one Adam and Eve were subjected to.

- ◆ While Adam and Eve were enjoying the pleasures of Eden with a full stomach in a beautiful surrounding with an unfallen nature when temptation nuzzled up to them in the form of a serpent, Jesus had an entirely different experience.
- ◆ It was not in the cool Garden of Eden, it was the heat of the desert. He faced temptation battling the desires of the flesh with an empty stomach after fasting for 40 days.
- ◆ And He went voluntarily to the fray with a fallen human nature that is hostile to God and a human will that resent any external interference especially from God.
- ◆ He is then confronted with a not so subtle serpent as in the case of Eve, but with the most malevolent creature in all creation, the roaring lion of Satan himself.

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- ◆ Yet we don't see any hesitation in Jesus going forth on our behalf to confront Satan and his evil forces, such is His confidence in His heavenly Father and His desire to take personal responsibility for releasing humanity from the full depth of human depravity.
- ◆ **Mark 1:9-12** *At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." 12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, 13 and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan.*
- ◆ In the midst of human frailty, Jesus willingly confronts the devil's temptations.
- ◆ And the strategy used by Satan are attempts to get Jesus in his weakened human condition to resort to using the God-ordained powers available to him, to live if you like as the all-powerful Son of God rather than the frail Son of man.
- ◆ That is why Satan begins each temptation with the phrase, "If you are the Son of God."
- ◆ It would have been easy for Jesus to use His divine powers to turn rocks into bread.
- ◆ Bread however is of little use to the man who has betrayed his soul even if he is currently starving (Genesis 25:29-34).
- ◆ The answer, Jesus gives Satan, to human problems is not more physical bread, but instead to feast on spiritual bread, the Word of God (Matthew 4:4).
- ◆ In the second temptation, Jesus could have called on God's angels to save Him if He cast Himself off the cliff.
- ◆ Yet God should not be regarded as some sort of divine safety net ready to intervene to rescue us from our irresponsible and reckless decisions.
- ◆ Nor should He be regarded as some sort of ATM machine or magician to be commanded to shower us with health and wealth or be forced to reveal Himself, not even by His own Son.
- ◆ **Matthew 4:7** *Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*
- ◆ But Jesus' mission as our representative was to live a life of overcoming as the Son of Man with all the baggage that implied without resorting to using the overwhelming divine power available to Him as the Son of God.
- ◆ If Jesus was to truly represent us He could have no advantage over us otherwise his representative role would be compromised.
- ◆ Of course Jesus throughout His ministry does use His divine power to help and heal others, but He never uses it to aid Himself even when challenged to do so on the cross. **"He saved others, let him save Himself" (Matthew 27:42).**

The last temptation of the devil is an interesting one as it gives Jesus the opportunity of establishing the Kingdom of God by avoiding the path of the cross.

- ◆ **Matthew 4:8** *Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."*
- ◆ Jesus' mission was to wrest control of God's creation back from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.
- ◆ It is the classic showdown between "good" and "evil."
- ◆ Satan had misused the position of authority delegated to him by God for evil instead of good and had disqualified himself as the legitimate ruler of the earth.
- ◆ Now it was up to Jesus as the legitimate heir to the throne of His forefather King David, to oust this prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2), and restore God's legitimate claim and righteous rule to His created order.
- ◆ Satan with this temptation appeals to two powerful forces of human nature in an attempt to lure Jesus into sin
- ◆ The first is an appeal to the inner darkness of our fallen human nature by using the desire within all of us for domination and control over others.
- ◆ And second, is an appeal to the powerful drive within all humans for the avoidance of pain and the drive for survival.
- ◆ The dark shadow of the looming cross was something Jesus lived with every day.
- ◆ The crafty Satan was offering Jesus an alternative strategy of achieving His goal without going down the road of the cross.

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- ◆ Jesus had to stare down the devil's menacing evil not through the use of raw power but rather through faith, love and righteousness.
- ◆ But the Word did not flinch, and quoted back to Satan the very words he had inspired long ago.
- ◆ **Matthew 4:10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" (Deuteronomy 6:13).**
- ◆ Jesus knew there was no shortcut available to Him, especially by bowing down to the devil, and threw Himself back on the will of His Father.
- ◆ Jesus the rightful King over humanity stares down Satan the usurper this time, but the devil is not finished with Jesus just yet.
- ◆ **Luke 4:13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.**
- ◆ That opportune time would present itself soon enough when Jesus set His face to go up to Jerusalem to pay the penalty for the sins of the world.

An interesting sidebar to this story is it is a rare instance in Scripture where the account of the temptation had to come from Jesus Himself.

- ◆ As no one accompanied Him He would have had to relate the account to the disciples so they could record it.
- ◆ But with the account coming directly from Jesus it makes it difficult for those who don't accept a literal devil to dismiss his existence as mere mythology.
- ◆ The devil seemed real enough to Jesus, so real he even added "**deliver us from the evil one**" in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:13).
- ◆ In addition to defeating and redeeming the fallen nature of mankind, Jesus takes upon Himself in a pure act of grace to free humanity from the evil spiritual forces that hold them captive.
- ◆ The roots of sin are not just confined to the human heart, they are also held captive by the unseen evil forces of the spiritual realm.
- ◆ Humanity on its own is helpless and cannot break free from this influence any more than it can change its sinful heart.
- ◆ It was an integral part of Jesus' ministry to battle these wicked forces and free mankind from the tyranny of evil.
- ◆ Immediately after the temptation, Jesus returns to a synagogue in Nazareth, stands up and proclaims His mission of freeing mankind from the tyranny of evil.
- ◆ **Luke 4:16-21 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, set the oppressed free, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." 20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. 21 He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."**

So beginning with Jesus' baptism, we see three very important aspects of His ministry.

- ◆ We see Jesus systematically addressing and overcoming the evil forces that hold mankind captive.
- ◆ First, He assumed the role of being our representative by identifying Himself with sinners so He could vicariously live the perfect life you and I are incapable of living.
- ◆ Second, He had to assume our fallen human nature in order to redeem it by wrestling it to the ground, defeating it and restoring it to God's original intention.
- ◆ And thirdly we see Jesus confronting and overcoming the power of the evil forces holding mankind captive in order to introduce the Kingdom of God.