**The Breath of God: Presumption**

**7-26-20**

So today we come to the last of the temptations that Satan threw at Jesus following his fasting and praying in the desert.

* In the last couple of weeks we have seen that Jesus was able to rebuff the devil in two earlier temptations by leaning on the Holy Spirit that had filled him and by relying on the Holy Scriptures that he had learned from his youth.
	+ Thus he was able to discern Satan’s real objective in the attack and could counter it with the authoritative Word from God.
* But when it comes to this last temptation, we find Satan changing his tactics by taking a page out of Jesus’ book (literally) and becomes a Bible Scholar himself.
	+ A ploy, BTW, that he uses to great effect in our own day.
	+ But we’re getting ahead of ourselves.

In case you haven’t been with us over the last few weeks, let me help set up this last of the temptations of Christ.

* Jesus, having been anointed and filled with the Holy Spirit at his baptism in the Jordan River, and thus being christened (if you will) “the Christ” (which means “the anointed one”).
	+ Immediately sets off for the wilderness under the powerful leading of the Holy Spirit.
		- Once there, Jesus enters into a prolonged season of fasting and praying that lasts 40 days.
			* A time during which the Greek text tells us he was both under the continual guidance of the Holy Spirit…
			* And the continual pressure of Satan’s temptations.
	+ It was at the end of that time of fasting and prayer that the devil conjures up the three specific temptations we have come to know as the temptations of Christ.
		- The first was the temptation to utilize the good gifts God had given him through the power of the Holy Spirit to advance his own comfort or agenda.
			* Turning stone into bread being only the first of many instances Satan was hoping Jesus would misappropriate the gifts of God.
		- The second temptation was to establish God’s Kingdom but by short-cutting God’s plan, thereby avoiding the pain of crucifixion, but gaining the glory for being King.
			* Satan’s hope here was to sever the relationship between the Father and the Son and thus have Jesus serving his agenda instead.
		- Though tempting, Jesus turned back both of these ploys by applying the truth of God’s Word to the actual point of each temptation.
			* Human beings don’t live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.
			* And, only God is worthy of our worship and service.
* Which brings us to the last temptation – one that is often seen as being a temptation to chose instant popularity over the work of building a true reputation, but is actually something far more sinister.

It all begins with Satan bringing Jesus to what most translations call “the pinnacle” of the Temple.

* First of all, remember that there is nothing in the Biblical text that would suggest that this was an actual “event” where the embodied devil took the physical Jesus and actually placed him on top of the Temple in Jerusalem in the middle of the day.
	+ That’s not to say there wasn’t an actual temptation, but just like for us, the temptation more than likely simply took place in the heart and mind of Jesus.
		- For he was a human being and Satan is not God and teleportation to Jerusalem was not a thing, even as it is not a thing today.
		- Furthermore, going back to the second temptation, there is no single mountain top on the planet from which one can see all the Kingdoms of the earth.
		- And finally, nowhere else in the Scriptures is it even suggested that Satan can take on human form – though a snake is envisioned!
		- No, our idea that this was an actual physical encounter between the devil and Jesus comes to us primarily from works of art and sermons rather than the text of Scripture itself.
* But even if it all took place in the heart and mind of Jesus, it still took shape as a temptation.
	+ And the shape of it was built a little bit like a scientific hypothesis: “IF you are the Son of God, then jump from this building, with the result that God will save you.
		- The hypothesis being, “Jesus is the Son of God”.
			* And Satan suggesting that Jesus test that hypothesis with a measurable experiment.
			* Throw yourself off a tall building (X) and then measure the result.
				+ If Y happens, God saves you (as is established in Scripture to be what would happen for a child of God), then it proves (Z) the hypothesis to be true.
				+ If (Y) does not happen, you are not saved, then (though dead) at least you will know that it was all a lie.
		- All Satan was saying to Jesus was that there needed to be a bit more evidence in order to prove that Jesus was the Son of God.
			* Sure, God SAID you are his Son at your baptism, but how to you know for sure?
			* After all, are you even sure that was God’s voice?
				+ Other people who heard the same sound thought it was just thunder.
				+ No, before you can go any further, you need proof.
	+ And it’s here that devil changes his clothes, exchanging the lab coat of a scientist for the tweed jacket of a Bible Scholar and backs up his suggestion of an experiment with “biblical” argument.
		- Put yourself in a position where only God can save you, and when He does, then you’ll know!
* And so we have the details of experiment laid out in Luke 4:9.

*9 And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here.”*

* + It begins with the devil taking him to that “pinnacle” which is technically not what you think it is.
		- The Greek word that is translated “pinnacle” actually means “a wing” of the Temple.
			* It is not saying “the highest point” of the Temple, but simply on the roof on one of the two wings.
	+ Still, if one were going to throw himself off the roof of one of the wings of the temple in order to give God opportunity to rescue him, then the south wing would have been the way to go.
		- For the south wing of the temple was built on the edge of the Kidron Valley, which was more of a gorge at that point.
			* Josephus, the Hebrew historian who wrote for the Romans, tells us that from the top of that wing of the temple to the floor of the valley was more than 450 feet.
			* To put that in perspective, the Perrine Bridge in Twin Falls is 486 feet above the surface of the Snake River.
		- The point is that the conditions of the test truly rule out all other variables so that the possibility of Jesus surviving without Divine intervention would be practically speaking, nil.
* But if God did intervene, how would that prove that Jesus was the Son of God? Well for that the devil went to the Scriptures. (vs. 10)

*10 for it is written,*

*“‘He will command his angels concerning you,*

 *to guard you,’*

*11 and*

*“‘On their hands they will bear you up,*

 *lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”*

* + Here Satan quotes from Psalm 91:11-12, but in doing so he demonstrates that he is neither a good scientist or biblical scholar – just an ego-maniac with an agenda.
		- For no biblical scholar has ever seen this passage as being a prophecy concerning the Messiah, not even Jewish scholars from Jesus’ day.
		- But Satan uses it in that way, indicating that the Son of God would surely enjoy the same benefits as those promised to the faithful follower of God.
			* Thus he violates the scientific method by introducing an unreliable dependent variable into the measurement of his experiment.
			* And also gives Jesus a Biblical beef to pick with him as he proof-texts scripture in order to prove his desired result.
				+ And Jesus catches him on it.
* You see, Psalm 91, the passage Satan quotes, is all about the security God’s people find in trusting God in all circumstances.
	+ The stage for the whole Psalm in vss. 1-2.

*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High*

 *will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.*

*2 I will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress,*

 *my God, in whom I trust.”*

* + But the thing that Satan is tempting Jesus to do is the opposite of trust.
		- In fact, he’s calling Jesus to question what God plainly said at Jesus’ baptism.
			* *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*
			* Such questions are his M.O.
				+ We saw it before when he inaccurately questioned God’s words to Eve by saying: *Did God really say you may not eat of any tree in the garden?*
			* So here he is calling into question the reliability of God’s words spoken over Jesus.
				+ *Did God really call you his Son? What does that mean, really? How do you know?*
		- So he quotes a Psalm that’s actually all about TRUSTING God to try to get Jesus to demand that God PROVE that he can trust his words.
			* “Jump! And if you can really take God at his word, then he will rescue you.”
				+ “After all, isn’t that what the Bible says?”
			* And in this is revealed the specific sin that Satan is seeking to have Jesus commit – the sin of presumption – which in essence is a sin against faith itself.
				+ For its intent is to force God into a position of proving Himself true.
				+ It is putting God to the test – which, of course, seeks to place us on equal footing with God (or even worse, on a footing of even greater authority).
* But Jesus, being full of the Holy Spirit and well acquainted with the Scriptures quickly discerned just what Satan was trying to do and answered the temptation with a true perspective on trust.
	+ Satan would have Jesus presume upon God, putting himself in harms way in order to force his Father to rescue him.
	+ Jesus replies to this temptation to presumption with Deuteronomy 6:16.

*16 “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you did at Massah.”*

* + - The passage that Jesus quotes actually refers to a story of presumption, where the Israelites wanted Moses to PROVE that God was with them by giving them what they wanted.
			* Even after they had seen the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud leading them and had experienced the Red Sea opening before them.
			* Still, when water began to run short, they complained and would not trust God.
				+ “Oh, if we had only remained as slaves in Egypt, at least we would have water.”
		- Exodus 17 tells us that the people were so upset that they were about to stone Moses – until God provided water.
			* But in vs. 7, Moses commemorates the day not by naming the place after God’s miraculous provision, but by naming it for the faithlessness of God’s people.

*7 And he called the place Massah [which means test] and Meribah [which means quarrel] because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the Lord saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?”*

* + And this is EXACTLY the temptation Jesus was faced with now – “Can I trust God at His word? Is He with me? Shall I test Him?”
	+ But Jesus would not be lured into walking down the same path the Israelites did.
		- He would not put God to the test – he would not demand that He prove to him that he was, in fact, God’s Son.
			* Instead, he would trust God at His word.
				+ *I am His beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased.*
			* And in doing so, he put an end to this round of temptations from the devil.

But in presumption we have a temptation that is common to all of humanity.

* Not that most of us are tempted to jump off the Perrine Bridge – even with a parachute – to prove that God is with us.
	+ But we are tempted, at times, to force God’s hand; to presume upon Him, trying to pressure Him to do the things that we want.
		- Demanding that He bless us, or else we may just walk away.
			* And, oh my, what would God do without us?
		- So before we finish today, I want us to consider how it is we too will fight off the temptation to presume upon God and try to force his hand.

I think the place to begin is to ask what it is about this temptation that gives it such teeth in our lives? What is it that might make us susceptible to the temptation of presumption?

I believe there are at least three reasons we are susceptible to the temptation to presume upon God.

* The first is the same one that what was behind this temptation in Jesus’ case – the need for Proof.
	+ Sometimes, we don’t always recognize God at work in our lives, or maybe we just get tired out and cynical over the years, and we want God to prove that He’s still there – still active.
		- I remember coming to such a point in my life when I was wanting such a “proof”.
			* We had planted a church, saw it grow, built a building; but now I was worn out and feeling like there had to be more to my relationship with God than just work.
				+ But rather than looking at how I was approaching the relationship, I wanted God to do something to prove to me his presence in my life.
				+ So I began hanging around with some Pentecostal brothers, thinking that maybe something like speaking in tongues would satisfy my thirst for “proof” of God’s presence in my life.
				+ I prayed for it, I sought after it, I read about it – but tongues were never given to me.
			* Instead, God taught me (at great effort I might add) to recognize where He WAS working in my life and led me into deeper relationship with him without the visible evidence tongues.
				+ In other words, he grew a faith in me that was not dependent upon what I could see, but rather one built on an ongoing relationship.
	+ Jesus disciple, Thomas, once said:

*25 “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”* (John 20:25)

* + - Thomas needed proof.
			* The promise of Jesus and the testimony of others were not enough to build and maintain his faith.
			* And Jesus provided him with that proof.
		- But then Jesus said,

*29 “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* (Jn 20:29)

* + The promises of Psalm 91 are true and are for you and for me.
		- But God proves Himself true in His ways and in His timing.
		- We are not to demand further proof of His faithfulness before we believe or in order to continue to believe –
			* But rather we are called to trust the word of Him who has already proven his love for us by giving up His Son for our salvation and has made us an eternal promise.
			* Presumption is a sin against faith itself, saying that we will believe ONLY IF we get some more proof.
* A second reason that people are tempted to the sin of presumption is Pride.
	+ We just honestly think we know better and believe that God is sort of obligated to honor our so-called “faith”.
		- It’s a little bit like the story I read recently about a 30 year old man in Texas who was killed by the COVID-19 virus.
			* The very fact that such a young man had succumbed to the disease led me to read further.
			* It turns out that he and his friends thought they knew better than everyone else and decided the whole pandemic was a hoax.
				+ And to prove it, he and his friends decided to go to a COVID-19 party. (Yes, that is a thing).
				+ It’s a thing where people intentionally get together with others who have been infected with COVID-19 to see if anyone else actually gets the virus.
				+ Well, in the end, this hubris and presumption actually killed him.
				+ And his last words reportedly were, “I think I made a mistake.”
		- Now that is a story about “testing fate”, but for many believers, it is an illustration of what some do in “testing faith.”
			* Rather than humbling ourselves before God to discern His leading and direction in our lives, we are tempted to presume upon our relationship with God as a “get out of jail free” card to do whatever it is we want, even if it is risky.
			* That somehow, no matter what we choose, God is under some sort of obligation to bless it.
				+ And if he doesn’t, HE is the one who is being faithless.
	+ While this sometimes happens with risks to one’s physical well-being, I have seen it play out most often in risky relational choices.
		- Unfortunately, over the years I have had a front row seat in watching such presumption play itself out in marriages that were established on the basis of what people wanted rather than where God was leading.
			* Believers marrying non-believers or people of other faiths (such as Islam or Judaism) directly contradicts the guidance of God’s Word, yet over and over again I have seen believers enter such marriages because in their pride they thought they knew better.
			* But most of the time, such presumption has led to either years of familial conflict or the loss of faith in order to keep the peace.
			* This is why I won’t even perform such a marriage, as its chances of success are so very limited.
		- I find the same presumptive pride at play in young people’s choices as to who they will date, whether they will be sexually active, experimentation with sexual orientation and more.
			* We always seem to think we know better than God, but more often than not such presumption leads us to heartbreak, brokenness, loneliness and despair.
	+ But while relational presumption is the most devastating examples I see, we can also presume upon God when it comes to other areas of our lives as well.
		- Many people choose their own desires over God’s leading when it comes to things like credit, major purchases, and job choices.
			* Then they expect God to bless those choices, even though the Scriptures clearly direct them to other choices.
		- We even see it happen in ministry situations where entire churches make decisions based on growth models and business metrics.
			* Many of which are now struggling with gigantic debt loads and are imperiled by our present circumstances.
	+ Please, please, please remember that Jesus was able to withstand the temptation of presumption because he had spent 40 days in fasting and prayer, developing his relationship with the Father through the working of the Holy Spirit within him.
		- He didn’t presume upon God because he was in continual connection with God.
* The last reason people many times will presume upon God is because of Pragmatism – we just want to get things done.
	+ This is closely related to Pride, in that it also is driven by our own desires, but often the desires that drive our pragmatism can be quite noble and even God oriented.
		- We are, after all, a pragmatic, goal-oriented people who like to get things done.
			* Thus, delays and interruptions are seen as obstacles placed by Satan rather than opportunities directed by God.
		- We will almost always assume that if God is leading us to do something, then it is almost certain that he is leading us to do it NOW!
	+ But if the Scriptures teach us anything about God, it is that He is no pragmatist – not in our sense anyway.
		- He is never in a hurry.
		- He is always more concerned with the development of the person than He is with the pace of the plan.
		- He is content will growing things slowly, organically, and methodically.
		- He nearly always takes the long-view.
			* The very fact that Jesus spent his first 40 days following his baptism alone in the wilderness with God before starting his public ministry demonstrates all this and more.
	+ But our pragmatism doesn’t leave room for such slow discernment and relationship building.
		- We want everything to be done yesterday and joke about how we will have time to sleep when we’re dead.
		- So for the sake of the Kingdom, we will launch out in our pragmatism before God calls us to do so and yet still expect God to bless our work.
			* And if he does not, then it is God who is faithless!

I’m out of time here, but are we beginning to see why Satan tempts us with the sin of presumption?

* It attacks our faith, it imperils our lives, and it destroys our relationship with God.
	+ And the only way to avoid it is to learn to trust God – to take him at his word and commit to following His direction long before the temptation to presumption ever takes place.
	+ Jesus did that over his lifetime and especially during those 40 days of listening to the Spirit’s direction, meditating on the Scriptures with which he was so familiar and praying continually to God, His Father.
	+ Because of this time spent with God and His Word, Jesus was able to quickly discern the core of Satan’s attack and reply with truth in the face of deception.
		- He had the Spirit and he had the Word, and He shows us how to walk in both.
		- A believer so equipped will be able to do just as Jesus did and cause the devil to flee as well.

**Benediction**

*Now, Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!*