IT IS WRITTEN

Luke 4:1-13

Key Verse 8, “Jesus answered, It is written: Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.”

We sing the Lord’s prayer at the end of worship service. In the prayer we are taught to pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” What is the definition of the word, “tempt?” According to a dictionary, it means to entice someone to do or acquire something that they find attractive but know to be wrong or not beneficial. In this digital era, people increasingly find their love partners online. Statistics says that one third of couples who married from 2005 to 2012 began their relationship online. Although some people may have benefits through this approach, still people are not honest about their profiles. In the past we had lost more than one of our growing disciples through online dating site. It could be an example among temptations to keep us from growing as a disciple of Jesus for we do not trust in the Lord and His time. 1 Cor 10:13 reads, “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.” So it is good news because every temptation is manageable. Often times we heard, “The Devil made me do it!” “My DNA gene made me do it!” “My bad situation is to be blamed for.” People like to blame something else with such convenient defenses. However the devil or anything can’t make us do anything for we are decision makers. So what really matters? Still we failed with temptations.

Have you been heard of opportunistic infection? It happens only when a person is weak or vulnerable. It doesn’t happen to healthy individual with a healthy immune system. Likewise I would call today’s passage about opportunistic spiritual infection. Jesus had the same weaknesses like us leading to his downfall since he had a fragile human body being vulnerable to hunger, fame, and etc. But he has no opportunistic infection because his relationship with God prevented an infection from occurring. Today’s message also shows how Jesus handles God’s living words in an excellent way. So there are 2 parts in my message. First, What is the meaning of “Jesus’ temptation?” Second, How He defeated the devil.

Part 1. Why Jesus was tempted? (1-2a)

Look at v 1-2a. “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for 40 days he was tempted by the devil.” 2 weeks ago we learned that Jesus was baptized and was praying, the Holy Spirit descended on him and a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” This remark of God’s clear confirmation might have strengthened him. Yet why was he led to be tested by the devil instead of going straight to Jerusalem to proclaim himself as the Son of God? The answer has to do with both who Jesus is and what he came to do. Jesus is not only the Son of God, but he is also the son of Adam. He came into this world as a man. He was subjected to a very humble birth. He was grown up in accordance with the law. He was baptized by John, who preached the forgiveness of sins through repentance. In this way from the beginning Jesus put himself in our place. He was subjected to all sufferings we might have. So now he was even tempted not for a couple of days, but forty days. Jesus was subjected to the temptations of the devil and to confront the power of the devil. So his mission was to crush Satan’s head. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work. (1Jn 3:8b) God wanted his son to succeed exactly from where the first man had failed from the beginning. It’s a mandatory step. In soccer game the first 5 mins is the best time to make goals when the opposing team is not quite ready. Likewise Jesus wasted no time to attack the devil from the early stage of his ministry.

Both Adam and Jesus are the representatives or the ancestors of the human race. When Adam failed, all of humanity fell with him. When Jesus won the victory, all of humanity won the victory. Rom5:19 says, “For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.” Did you hear about a recent news about Dr. Kent B. who had been contracted with Ebola virus in the line of duty while he served Ebola patients? Miraculously he was cured. He said, “Today it is a miraculous day. It is thrilled to be alive.” It’s a good news because a new medication was tried and it worked! Until that time people were scared and talking about this invisible enemy. Likewise, the devil is unseen. Just as Dr. Kent’s case became a silver lining for all Ebola patients, Jesus’ victory gives us hope to win our invisible enemy, the devil. In Gen 3, we heard excuses from Adam and his wife. But Jesus does not make any excuse. Rather despite temptations in very vulnerable situations, he overcame them. Nobody can make excuse before Him. Also if he could not overcome the temptation, he could not help us to overcome either. Jesus was tempted so that, as God, he could understand and sympathize with us. Let’s read Heb 4:15, 16. “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are- yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Part 2. Jesus defeats the devil with the words of God

There are 3 temptations from the devil. First, man does not live on bread alone. Second, Worship the Lord only, Third, Throw yourself. Look at V2, “where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.” I don’t know how long you can fast. As far as I remembered, as a skinny guy I’ve never fasted more than 2 meals for I think that it’s too risky. To have fasted for 40 days means that Jesus must have reached to the point of near organ failures. Jesus’ situation was critical. When he was alone and exhausted, the devil plays hard ball.

Look at v 3. The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” The devil do not say, “If you are the son of Adam,” rather, “if you are the Son of God.” It sounds, he is trying to convince Jesus to not suffer like a man but do something to escape this suffering easily. As a matter of fact what Satan is saying here sounds practical and reasonable. It seems that he needs to eat to get his strength back to serve the ministry. After all, it’s not a sin to eat. What was Satan’s trap? How was he testing Jesus? First, at issue was how and when Jesus must use his divine power. In Jn 5:19 Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.” Although he is the Son of God, Jesus used his power only according to God’s will and leading. Like a beautiful synchronized swimming team shown, Jesus synchronized with his Father in heaven and the Holy Spirit. Jesus never used his miraculous power to satisfy his own appetites. This would not have pleased the Father and it would have violated the principle of incarnation as the Son of God. Jesus trusted his Father and followed God’s ways at such an extreme condition instead of using his divine power for him. We’re living in the humanistic society where our individual rights are considered holy. “Whatever you want, do it. You are just fine!” But Jesus draws the line about what to do as the Son of God and wants to use his power in the boundary of God’s will in order to please Him only.

Here I’d like to think about further about 2 important points. First, it has to do with priority in life. The devil is telling Jesus, “Jesus, place first priority on solving your hunger then you can think about God’s word or your mission.” This may be the same kind of temptation by which the devil had Esau give up his birthright. Heb 12:17 reads, “Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done.” Later when Jesus fed the hungry crowds with 5 loaves and 2 fish, Jesus was in danger of becoming a bread messiah for people would follow him for bread. Jesus resisted the temptation by offering them only His flesh and blood. However many deserted him. Still Jesus kept going the way of God in raising disciples by faith and offered high priesthood prayer in John 17. “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me.” Sometimes our life in pleasing God could be misunderstood from human point of view because of conflict of interest or other seemingly urgent problems, but it is a good testing ground to put our priority in serving the Lord by trusting in Him only. When Jesus denies himself from the beginning, he finished his mission on the cross by saying, “It is finished.” In this way he glorified His Father in heaven.

Secondly, this temptation goes to the heart of what a man lives for. Since Adam’s sin, man has had to toil just to survive. From that time until now we have been tempted to live for bread rather than to live for God. Here bread or money is considered the same and they have to do with our security issue. In our society, there is a constant pressure to earn money for security. The devil keeps saying to insecure people, “You have to eat,” “Bible study really guarantees your security?” “What is more important than life security?” “What are you going to do when you get married and have kids?” “What will your security be as you retire?” Under the pressure of this unpredictable time, people become more fearful about just to surviving. Living in this way, people develop anxieties and stress. In reality, all who live in this way have slaved to the devil. Thank God for Sh. William’s testimonial message about how to overcome his temptations and remain in Jesus’ love continually. It was a good example! Often times I have heard that I am one of the luckiest men on earth for my wife is a bread winner. I couldn’t agree more. However still I’ve had my agony that is to overcome my desire to choose an alternative way to overcome this stigma. But this is a deception, although it seems quite tangible. I am very thankful to my God who chose me to serve His kingdom purpose wholeheartedly.

Look at v 4. Jesus answered, “It is written: Man does not live on bread alone.” Jesus said more words in Mt 4:4, “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Jesus’ answer stems from Dt 8:3. “He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” He's simply saying a man doesn't live because he eats bread, rather a man lives because he obeys God and God provides his bread. This is the principle. I will trust God and God will let me live as long as God wants me to live. In today’s daily bread although the prophet Jonah blurted out 3 times with his anger by saying, “I want to die,” God did not allow him to die. Likewise my life is in His hands. I am under His control. I am under His power. I will not act independently of God. God purposely caused the Israelites to hunger for a while to teach them the lesson that God is the sole source of abundant life. His word is what sustained them for man is uniquely created as a living being carrying the image of God. Did you happen to see a recent movie, “Dawn of the Planet of the Apes?” It is about the smart apes, finding themselves at a critical point with the human race. Although some people go ape over this movie, in reality human beings are unique creatures before our living God.

A man is greater and nobler than any creatures for he is a soul and he has God’s life in himself and he was made for a great purpose of God. So the more we think about Jesus’ words from this perspective, the more we become free from the devil’s lies. And we can put God and his word first in our lives. When we live obediently, you seek first God’s Kingdom and His righteousness and what happens? Everything else gets added. We live according to this promise of God instead of our demanding situations.

It can be applicable to our nation too. There are still confusions and experimental stage in many piled issues despite American promises. The mere shifting of control of the government back and force between Republicans and Democrats resulted in an endless debate over government role in domestic and international roles. For example, on this last Friday a top news of cnn.com was about Russian pres. Putin’s remark, “Do not mess with Russia, We are a powerful nuclear nation.” Also our president Obama said, “we do not have a strategy yet on ISIS in Syria.” Immediately Republicans criticized that our president is incapable and still lacked any solid foreign policies. But looking back at the puritans; some of the 1st Christians living in N. America who became richly blessed by God when they were seeking God’s kingdom first, we have an answer. We better follow Jesus’ example who put His deep trust in God’s word of promise and obeyed God’s word at the cost of his life.

Second, worship God only (5-8).

Look at v5-7, “The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, I will give you all their authority and splendour; for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me it will all be yours.” The devil did not give up easily. He kept coming with his bait with 2nd temptation. The devil showed Jesus a powerful image of all the kingdoms of the world in an instant. We can only imagine what flashed before Jesus, but we can be sure it was the most alluring and amazing image the devil could offer. The devil claimed that the world belonged to him and that he could give it to anyone he wanted. And the devil said, “So if you worship me, it will all be yours.” Jesus called the devil is a liar, (Jn 8:44) and the prince of this world (Jn 12:31). The devil has authority over rebellious men (Eph 2:2) and fallen angels. But the truth is, the earth is the Lord’s. God alone is almighty. The time is coming when the devil will be thrown into the lake of burning sulphur to be tormented day and night forever (Rev 20:10). Though this devil makes big empty promises by saying, it will all be yours, he cannot keep them.

Nevertheless, there was appeal in this temptation. It is, in fact, a temptation to compromise. As we know, Jesus had come to establish God’s kingdom by rescuing men from the power of the devil. To do so meant for Jesus to go to the cross. It was the most painful way. The devil was proposing that Jesus take an easier way. “Jesus come on, take easy!” The devil made it sound easy and painless. He didn’t say, “don’t worship God,” he just said, “worship me as well.” But it was utter lie. If Jesus had bowed to him, he would have lost everything. How did Jesus answer the devil?

Look at v 8. Jesus answered, “It is written: Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.” Again Jesus quoted the word of God as the right prescription from Dt 6:5. Jesus summarized the most basic and fundamental teaching in the Bible about man’s duty to God. It is to worship God alone with all one’s heart, soul, and strength. It is to accept God’s sovereignty, and to believe his love and goodness, and to commit oneself to him without any compromise. Jesus knew that this meant taking up his cross and shedding his blood for the sins of the world. But Jesus was willing to do so. Daily there are so many intoxicating ambitions and things to do and lucrative images before us, constantly stealing our love for God.

Personally ten years ago when real estate business is promising, I was literally enslaved by intoxicating ambitions to become a real estate mogul like Donald Trump. Day and night I glue online and was fascinated with so many opportunities and drive all the way to Texas and fly to the cities of east coast to shop around for real estate. What a crazy guy I was! I was looking for gold rush in modern term traveling nationwide without tiring, draining out my strength as a young man. Crazy! Crazy! Don’t you agree with me? But looking back on my past decade, it turned out to be completely empty life full of despair, wounds, and scars. So I painfully learned that in this world I must be careful not to waste my short life and not to lose my love for God.

What is the very purpose God placed us on this earth? Is it? to serve our own ambitions or the desires of other people even including our family members? Today Jesus teaches we are created to worship God and serve him. We seek God’s recognition like Jesus. This should be the number 1 compelling purpose behind all human desires without compromise at any situations. We are eternally thankful to Jesus who rescued us from empty worldly ambition and helped us worship Him and serve His world mission purpose. Whatever we do it should provide a way for us to worship God and serve him only. When this becomes our daily life goal we will not bow down and worship the devil. Jesus proclaims that God is worthy of his life sacrifice. Jesus is willing to give everything to God without hesitation. In this way Jesus overcomes the devil’s temptation.

Third, throw yourself.

Look at v 9. The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God, he said, throw yourself down from here.” This time the devil took Jesus to the highest point of the temple and tempted Jesus to throw himself from there like a Spider man. The Devil also quoted the word of God from Ps 91. Look at v 10-11. “For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” The devil used God’s word to tempt Jesus to throw himself down because God promised to guard him. However this was out of context. The theme of Psalm 91 is that when we follow God faithfully and trust in him he protect us. It does not tell us to test God. It is important to understand the word of God in context.

Look at v12. Jesus answered, “It is said: Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” Testing God is demanding God to prove his power and faithfulness. There are many people who test God, trying to force God according to their immediate need. Instead of humbly standing under the authority of God’s word, they want to command God to do this and that according to what they want. But Jesus overcame devil’s temptation by trusting God’s love. He didn’t have to put God to the test, rather he fully trusted His Father. Jesus shows his intimate relationship with His Father that can never be disturbed by anything. His relationship with His Father is like an invincible fortress that nobody can intrude. Jesus has a complete unity with His Father and is ready to serve God according to God’s will.

I think that this last temptation was to persuade Jesus again to find a more efficient, easy, or spectacular way to fulfill his Messianic ministry than that of denying himself and taking up his own cross to obey the will of God for world salvation. When the devil tempted him by saying, “No, don’t take up your cross!” To this subtle devil, Jesus answered, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” Jesus did not doubt the way of the cross, the way which God chose for world mission. We must love the way of the cross. We must love Jesus who took up his cross of mission. We earnestly pray that we may continue to raise up disciples and serve world mission purpose by taking cross daily.

I have propensity to imagine that there must be an alternative way to serve the Lord when I met difficulty. When I hate the way of cross, I became burdened easily and double minded and ended up losing my spirit. But I learned from Jesus taking up his cross and trust in His Father to the end. May the Lord help me to go through the life of cross with love relationship with my God.

Look at v 13. “When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.” The devil had done his best to get Jesus to disobey God’s word. But he failed. Jesus won the victory. There would be further encounters in the future. Margaret Thatcher, the first woman prime minister of England stated, “You may have to fight a battle more than once to win it.” It is true the Devil keeps tempting Jesus, even on the cross. One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at Jesus by saying, “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But Jesus won the final victory over them all. There is no opportunistic spiritual infection in Him. So do we as we rely on Him and His stronghold, His living words!

In conclusion All 3 temptations have something in common. They attempted to distract Jesus from his mission by destroying his personal relationship with His heavenly Father. However in this passage we learn that Jesus defeated the devil’s temptation by standing on the absolute word of God by saying “It is written.” Isn’t it amazing for Jesus as the Son of God quoted the Bible? Not only was He himself the Living Word of God, but also God’s Word lived in Him. He was strong and overcame the devil by the Word of God. How much more should we do so? 1Jn 2:14b says, “I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.” Let us come to Jesus and ask him to share his victory with us through following his example in trusting God’s word. May the Lord help us to grow as disciples of Jesus who can overcome all kinds of Satan’s lies and to rescue others with God’s words.

One word: It is written!