

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: Choosing God in the Small Things

Lesson: Matthew 4:1-11

4 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." 4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" 5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6 "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" 7 Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 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." 10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" 11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Friends, When we hear the word “temptation,” we often imagine something dramatic. We think of life-changing crises, moments that shake everything, decisions that change the entire course of a life.

But when we honestly look at our own lives, we realize that most of life is not dramatic. Most of our days are made up of simple routines. We wake up in the morning. We eat our meals. We talk with people. We watch television. We wind down at the end of the day and go to bed. Simple, simple moments.

And yet, in those simple moments, we are constantly making choices. We choose what thoughts to hold onto. We choose which emotions to nurture. We choose how to respond to someone’s words. We choose whose voice we will follow.

Today’s passage tells us about Jesus being tempted in the wilderness. At first glance, it may seem far removed from our daily lives. A wilderness. Forty days of fasting. The devil speaking directly to Him.

It feels distant. But if we slow down and look carefully, we begin to see that this story is deeply connected to our own lives.

Jesus had fasted for forty days, and He was very hungry. Then the tempter came and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” It sounds simple. “You can do it. Why suffer? Fix it right now.”

His hunger was real. His need was not just in his mind. He truly was hungry. And our needs are real too.

Physical tiredness. Loneliness in the heart. Disappointment in relationships. Anxiety about the future. Financial concerns. These are not made-up struggles. They are real burdens we carry.

And when we feel them, a whisper often rises inside us: “Make yourself comfortable right now.” “Do whatever feels good.” “Just this once—it’s fine.”

For example, when someone says something that hurts us, we immediately want to respond. “I’ll say something back.” “They need to know how that feels.”

Or when we feel empty or tired, instead of turning toward God, we try to fill the space with something else. We eat more than we need. We scroll longer than we planned. We talk just to avoid the silence.

But Jesus answered, “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Jesus did not deny His hunger. But He refused to let hunger define Him. And that raises a question for us: What are we living on?

Sometimes it seems as though we live on food, or money, or other people’s approval. But what truly sustains us is God’s Word, God’s will, and God’s faithfulness.

Sometimes faith means waiting instead of rushing. Praying instead of reacting. Remaining silent instead of defending ourselves. Enduring just a little longer instead of escaping immediately.

In the second temptation, Jesus stands at the highest point of the temple. And He hears these words: “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. God will command His angels to catch you.”

This was not simply an invitation to do something dangerous. It was a challenge: “Prove it. Show them. Let everyone see that God is on your side.”

We may not stand on temple rooftops, but deep inside, we understand that longing. We want to be recognized. We want someone to say, “You’ve done well.” We want assurance that our lives have mattered.

When we feel overlooked or ignored, we sometimes ask God:

“Why is nothing happening?” “Why do others seem blessed while I remain unnoticed?”

And in those moments, we can begin to test God: “Lord, show me a sign.” “Prove that I am right.” “Demonstrate that You are with me.”

But Jesus responds, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”

Faith does not place God on trial. Faith trusts God—even when He seems silent.

Even when prayers are not answered immediately. Even when our good deeds go unnoticed. Even when no one applauds.

The depth of faith is revealed not when people cheer, but when no one sees.

The third temptation is even clearer.

“All this I will give you,” the tempter says, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

Power. Success. Visible results.

But there is one condition: “Worship me.”

In our lives, it may not sound so obvious. It sounds more subtle:

“Compromise just a little.” “It’s not that serious.” “Skip worship this week.” “You don’t have to take your faith that far.”

Faith rarely falls apart in one dramatic moment. It slowly shifts direction through small compromises.

When we hold onto worry longer than prayer, when we protect pride more than we practice forgiveness, when other priorities consistently come before worship, our trust slowly begins to move.

Jesus answers firmly, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.”

Worship is not just sitting in a church building on Sunday. Worship is about the center of our hearts.

What sits at the center of your life? Fear? Security? Pride? Comfort? Or God?

Jesus’ wilderness was a visible desert. Ours often is not.

It may be the quiet house when no one else is there. It may be the long wait for medical results. It may be the silence of a phone that does not ring. It may be the private thoughts we wrestle with at night.

The wilderness is not a place where God is absent. It is often where God shapes us most deeply.

In the wilderness we ask: Do I truly trust God? What am I living on? Who do I worship?

After the wilderness, Jesus began His ministry. The wilderness was preparation. It clarified His identity.

Friends, Today we will face small choices.

How to respond to someone's words. Whether to hold onto worry or hand it to God. Whether to revisit old wounds or release them. Whether to pray—or simply move on.

All of these can be temptations.

The presence of temptation does not mean we are abandoned. It may mean God is forming us.

In temptation, we discover our weakness. And we return again to God's Word.

Friends, May we choose the Word over hunger. Trust over recognition. Worship over success.

Not through grand, dramatic gestures, but through one more prayer today, one more act of patience, one more kind word.

Those small choices, repeated day after day, draw our lives closer to God.

Even when we feel we are walking through a wilderness, we are not alone.

The Lord who overcame temptation stands beside us.

And even now He says, "Trust Me. Worship Me. I am with you." Amen.