

How do you test a cake? It's a pretty simple test, isn't it? You stick a fork into it, and if the fork comes out dirty, the cakes needs to bake a little longer. And if the fork comes out clean, then you're good to go. Take it out of the oven. It's done. And the truth be told, Christians, is tests are like that in general, aren't they? Tests are meant to find out the truth of something that we can't immediately see. So if we're testing a metal, for example, like gold, we test for its quality. Or if we test grain, for example, we test for its purity. Or if we test ourselves, we test ourselves to find out what we know. Tests are meant to discover the truth of something that can't be immediately seen.

And temptation is actually the same way. Temptation is a test, a test to discover the truth of our hearts, to discover whether we are going to listen to God or not. And so when we are tempted, when we are tested, we are tested with a question, whether we are going to listen to God in whatever it might be, or whether we are going to go on our own way. Now the problem, Christians, is that even though testing in general is kind of a neutral thing, kind of something that you just take it or leave it, when we are tempted, when we are tested to see whether we will follow God, we are tempted in a way that's not entirely neutral. We are tempted in a way that means that we are very likely going to fail that test. Because honestly our hearts are sinful. We are sinful from birth, sinful from the very beginning, and when the idea to sin comes into our minds, it entangles itself. It gets caught up, so that when we are tempted, we are tempted with something in a sense we already want to do. We already want to listen to that temptation rather than listen to whatever it is that God wants us to do. And so temptation for us is very often a trial, a contest, a struggle, because we are struggling against ourselves. That's why we so often fail temptations and fall into sin.

But Jesus on the other hand does not fail this test, because Jesus has nothing within himself to get caught up in, to get entangled in. Jesus has no sin. So when the thought of sin enters into his mind--and it did, because the thought of sin is not itself sin--when the thought to go against what God wanted him to do entered into his mind, he resisted it. He fought back against it, so that he was able to stand when the trial came. Jesus passes the test that we were not able to pass. Jesus stands fast when we so frequently fail.

And we see that in our lesson for today in the Gospel, Jesus being tempted in ways that we are, and yet he passes the test. Because Jesus by the time we get to our Gospel reading has been in the wilderness for forty days. He hasn't had a thing to eat in all of that time, so you can imagine the kind of hunger that he had, the kind of hunger and pains that he was suffering as a result of not having eaten anything for forty days. This is a case of starvation. Jesus needs to eat something. So then, when the devil comes to him and tempts him by saying, "If you are the son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread," that's a very real temptation for him, a very real struggle that he's going to have to go through. But we need to understand something here. The question that the devil is posing to Jesus and to us as well is not about bread in itself. The question has to do with, are we going to trust God to provide for us, even when it seems like there is no other help? Are we going to trust that God is going to take care of us, even in the most dire circumstance?

But how often do we fail that test, Christians? How often does that temptation come to us, and we struggle with it and fail? Because when we are dealing with things that God gives to us and we wonder whether were going to have enough, we so often turn to something other than God to find relief. Maybe we are wondering how we're going to take care of the bills from month to month. It doesn't seem like we have enough money to cover everything, and so we're struggling and wondering, is God going to take care of me? Or maybe we wonder about food, something that God is going to give to us and give us the very basic necessities of life, and maybe we don't have enough this month for our family or whoever it might be. Are we going to trust that God is going to provide these things for us, even when

it seems like help is so far away? That's where we so often fall, Christians. This is where we so often fail the test, because we want to look to anything else, our own work, our own two hands, the money which we have, whatever it might be, thinking that these things are the reason why we have enough to eat, thinking that these things are the reason why we have anything at all.

But Christians, Jesus does not fail this test. Because what does he say to the devil? He says, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Yes, Jesus remembers that his Father is going to take care of him no matter what. God will provide for him in those darkest moments. God is going to give him the things that he needs. Even if it's something as basic as food, God will not fail. God will provide in every moment, in every circumstance, in every point in our lives. So Christians, even though we so often fail this test, Jesus trusts in his Father to provide for him and to take care of him, even when it seems like no earthly help is left.

The second temptation that Jesus goes through is when the devil takes him to Jerusalem, and he sets him up on the highest point of the temple, the very top of the building, the highest point in the city too. And he says to him, "Throw yourself down. For it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, and on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" The devil knows the Bible apparently. He's quoting the words of Psalm 91 which we've been singing this morning. But he's quoting it in a way to get Jesus to put God to the test, to put his Father to the test, and this is where the problem comes in. Because this isn't about throwing himself down. This is about putting God to those little tests to find out whether he's going to be truthful to his promises in the way that we want him to be truthful, in the way that we want him to answer. But how often do we do that too, Christians? How often do we put God to these little tests to determine whether he's going to answer or not? God, my family member is sick. If you just heal them this once and make them better, I'll never ask you for anything again. Or God, please do this one thing for me, just this one thing this one time I'm asking, and I won't ask for anything else again, and then I will know that you are true to your word. That's really the problem, isn't it, Christians? That when we put God to these little tests, what we're really questioning is whether God is truthful or not, whether God will keep his promises or not, and that's a sin. It really is. And that's why we so often fail in this place too, because we want God to answer us in the way that we want him to answer and not to answer us in the way that he chooses to answer.

But Jesus does not fail this test either. Jesus says to the devil, "Again, it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" He trusts his Father. He trusts that he is going to keep his word, trusts that he will not fail him. And even if he has to do things that he might not want, like enduring the cross, yet he submits himself in trust to the Father above all things. Jesus passes this test too where we so often fail.

And the last temptation that the devil presents to Jesus is a temptation of glory and riches beyond his imagination, because the devil takes him to a very high mountain and shows him all of the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he says to him, "You can have all of this that you see. All you have to do is fall down and worship me." But how often are we tempted with the same thing, Christians? Tempted to want things that God has not given to us, and yet we'll turn to anything else in the hopes of finding it? Do you want fame? Turn to the Internet. The Internet will give you fame. Do you want money? Turn to your job. Your job will give you money. Do you want some kind of security? Turn to some politician or the government. They'll give you the things that you want, right? But the problem with false idols, Christians, is that false idols do not give us the things that only God can give us. False idols promise a lot, just like the devil promises a lot, that don't actually belong to them. They promise you fame and fortune and glory, all for turning towards them rather than towards God. But idols cannot speak or see

or breathe or anything. Idols are not God. Only God can provide for us those things which he chooses to give.

But Jesus doesn't fail this test either, Christians. Jesus stands firm. In fact so firm that he's become annoyed. He says, "Be gone, Satan! For you shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve." God alone is worthy of our worship and trust, and nothing else. Jesus passes this test too, even where we so frequently fail.

But the trouble with all of this, Christians, for us, is that because we are so entangled in sin, because we are so caught up in our own sinful hearts, temptation very often causes us to stumble and fall. But it did not cause Jesus to stumble and fall. He has overcome temptation. He has overcome every assault of the devil. And he stood firm even when we fell away. Jesus is the one who has overcome all things for you, so that when you stumble and fall, and when you fall into temptation, Jesus forgives you and strengthens you, so that you are now able to stand in him. Apart from God, you would not be able to. Apart from him, you would have no strength at all. But in him and in him alone, you have the ability to withstand in the day of temptation and trial. Jesus holds you up so that you can now resist temptation in him.

And in one final passing note, it's worth noting here how Jesus resists this temptation in our reading for today. Because he could've done it just by himself. He's God, after all. He could've just resisted the temptation and that would've been the end of it. He's not a sinner like us. He can do it without having to do anything. But Jesus resists temptation here today through prayer, through fasting, and through the Word of God. Because our Master is giving us an example to follow, to imitate. Because when we stand against temptation, Christians, we're not doing so by our own power or our own will or anything in us. We do it because we have God, and we have the things of God to put on in the day of trial. So when we pray, we are trusting in God. When we engage in things like fasting, we are relying on God. When we take up the Word of God, the very Scriptures themselves, we are taking up the sword of the Spirit, the only weapon that will give us the ability to fight back against whatever temptation might come to us.

So let us be diligent in prayer. It is our strength. Let us take up the armor of God, putting on all of these pieces in prayer. And let us take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the living Word of God, because in them and them alone, which come only from God, are we able to stand in the day of trial. Stand in him, Christians, for he will not fail you, and he will give you the strength to resist every temptation towards sin.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.