

“Missing the Mark”

March 10th, 2019
Luke 4: 1-13

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Today is the first Sunday of Lent. How many of you have given something up for Lent? Anyone care to share?

The whole practice of giving something up for Lent came from the time Jesus fasted in the desert for 40 days and 40 nights. And while he was in the desert, he was tempted by the Devil three times.

I'd like to explain what temptation is, but in order to do that, I need to explain what sin is. But first, let me explain what it's not: Sin is not a behaviour. That's the biggest misconception about sin. When you were growing up, sin was probably explained to you as some behaviour, something you do. "Don't do that, that's a sin!" "If you do that, you'll be sinning!" We were taught this because for many centuries that's how the Catholic church explained what sin is: it was a behaviour, or not following the rules. But the truth is, that doesn't fit with scripture.

The original Greek word for sin is Hamarta. It literally means "missing the mark." The best analogy is archery — you're either hitting the mark, or you're missing it. If you're hitting the mark, you are completely in tune with God. You are walking with God, feeling his will, and you are being everything that you can be in life. The question is this — how far off the mark are you? Sin is, therefore, a disconnect with God, a separation from God.

Think of sin this way: everything you do — all of your actions, thoughts, attitudes — are they helping you to grow in your relationship with God, or are they creating more distance between you and God? Are you building relationships with the people around you? Or are you harming relationships around you? Are you helping to spread love? Or are you spreading fear, anger, and lies?

And here's another thing about sin — we are all in sin. Romans 3:23: "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." None of us are hitting the mark 100% of the time.

Temptations are the crossroads in our lives. The turning points. They are decisions that we face. Are we serving God, or are we serving ourselves?

Now let's look at these three famous temptations of Christ:

#1 The Devil says 'If you are the Son of God, turn that rock into bread'.

At its core, this temptation represents having things, or simply put, its material wealth. It's food, and it's money. Jesus recognizes this right away, and he responds, "Man cannot live on bread alone". In other words, he's saying that bread is good, wealth and things are fine. But we need more in our life. Imagine that you had all the things in the world that you desire: a big house, cars, boats, great food, everything ... but had no friends, family, or loved ones. Imagine a life with no love. You'd lead a very lonely and depressed life. We need love in our lives. We need God in our lives.

#2) The view from a high hill where Satan says, "All of this can be yours, if you worship me."

This is the temptation of power. In this case it's political power, so while you can appreciate this temptation, I'm going to guess that none of us here this morning has ever been a world leader. So, you might not completely relate to this temptation. But the temptation of power doesn't have to be political or military power ... it's simply having power over others. If you are a boss or a manager, you have power over others. If you have a volunteer position on a board, you have power.

And just like money, power in and of itself is not bad. The test is this — are you using that power to serve others? Or are you using it to serve your own ends? Are you serving God? Or are you serving yourself?

#3) Satan takes Jesus to the apex – the highest point of the temple at Jerusalem

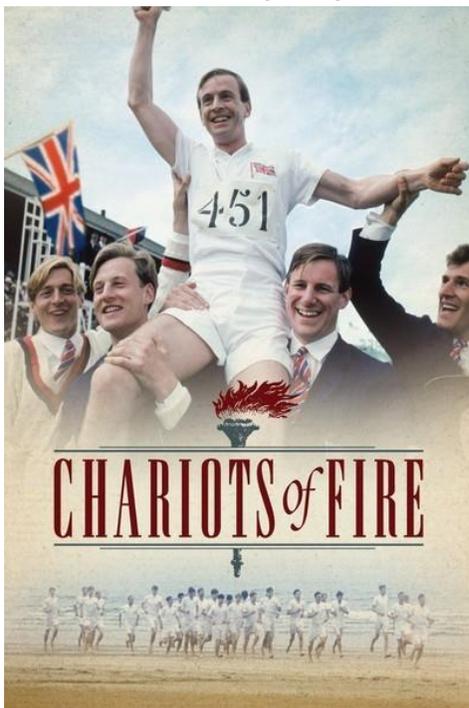
"If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here, and the angels will lift you up." In this temptation, he tempts Jesus to become God himself... to replace God, and to be God. You might not be able to relate to this one on the surface. I know I've never woken up one morning and thought, "You know, one day I'd like to be God." But think of it this way: have you ever desired to be praised by others, and to be worshiped by others?

In a survey of millennials, 50% of young adults said that a major life goal was to become famous. In the past, people wanted to be famous for doing something. Now, celebrity has become an end in and of itself. It has attained a 'god-like' status. And not only do people want to become famous — they idolize people who are famous.

And just like the others, celebrity in and of itself is not a bad thing ... it's what you're doing with it. Are you serving and honouring God? Or are you serving and honouring yourself?

So you've got three major temptations: 1) Material wealth 2) Power, and 3) Being like God. In all of these temptations, none of them are permanent. If you have a piece of bread, you will eat it, you'll enjoy it, and then it's gone, and sooner or later, you'll be hungry again. If you have power, you won't have it forever. If you are a celebrity and are worshiped by millions, one day it'll all be gone. That's the thing about life. These things are constantly moving and changing. But the love that God is offering you is constant and does not change. While everything else is moving and changing constantly, God's love is at the center. And it fills you entirely so that you can be the best person that you can be, and that you're meant to be.

How many of you remember the movie Chariots of Fire? This is the



movie that won best picture in 1981. The movie is based on a true story of two of Britain's best sprinters in the early 1920s: Eric Liddell and Harold Abrahams. It takes place in the UK in the years leading up to the 1924 Olympic Games.

Eric Liddell was from Scotland and attended the University of Edinburgh. Eric was a devout Christian, and never missed church. He grew up in China where his parents were missionaries. His plans after university were to return to China to be a missionary, but while he was at university he ran. And as he saw it, he ran for the glory of God.

There's a great scene when Eric is talking with his sister as they walk on Arthur's Seat, a beautiful hill that overlooks Edinburgh — and his sister thinks that all this running business was a distraction from God's work, and possibly a temptation that was taking Eric away from God.

And Eric says to her, "I believe that God made me for a purpose. But He also made me fast, and when I run, I feel His pleasure. To win is to honour Him."

Eric Liddell used his running and his fame to preach, and to spread the word of God throughout the UK, and he would give sermons after his races.

Harold, from England, went to Cambridge. And while also being a man of faith, (he was Jewish), Harold was far more focused on running, and on being the fastest man in the world. His dream was to win the Gold Medal for the 100m dash at the Olympics. He put all of his energies and resources into his sprinting. Because of this, Harold struggled with relationships around him. His entire life was about running.

They were both selected to compete in the 1924 Olympics for Britain in the 100m dash. However, when the schedule was published, the 100m heats were held on a Sunday, and Liddell refused to race on a Sunday. And I am sure that he felt great temptation to not go to church that day and to run. But something inside him told him to stick to his faith, and to follow what God was telling him.

His decision not to run made huge headlines across the world.

So instead, they entered Liddell into the 400m race, which he hadn't been training for.

At the Olympics, Harold Abrahams ended up winning the 100m dash, winning that coveted Gold Medal. There's a great scene in the movie after he wins the gold medal. After the accolades, after the crush of press taking his picture, he's in the dressing room and he's sad. He's quiet. He'd finally achieved his dream, and yet it didn't bring him the happiness that he thought it would.

A few days later Eric won the gold medal, shattering the world record for the 400m race. (the race he had not trained for)

After the Olympics Harold Abrahams turned his attention to other things in life. He became an Olympic coach, and a promotor for track and field, and being Jewish himself, he encouraged young Jewish athletes to get involved in athletics. He fell in love and married. During WWII he and his wife fostered Jewish children from Europe.

Eric Liddell returned to China and served as a missionary. During WWII, he died in a Japanese internment camp. But while he was alive Eric Liddell lifted the spirits of the people in that internment camp — he helped the elderly, he led Bible Studies, he organized games and competitions. He walked with Christ and lived life to the fullest.

The last thing I want to say is this. We have all faced temptations in our lives, and at one time or another, we've all made that decision to turn our backs on God and to serve ourselves. But don't dwell in guilt. Don't go down the path of thinking and believing that you're a bad person. Pastor

Kim uses that great saying, “God loves you just the way you are, but loves you so much that he won’t leave you that way.”

Some of the temptations that we have in life are great and can be overwhelming. But you’re not alone. God is with you. Christ is with you. If you seek a relationship with Christ, if you serve Christ, you will be able to swat those temptations away, like Christ did in the desert.

Aim for that bull’s eye. Do your best every day to hit that mark every day. And know this — Jesus is with you.

Thanks Be to God, Amen

Prayer:

Lord we pray that you will walk with us this day. Enter into our lives. Touch our hearts. Help us to see clearly the paths before us, taking our hand and guiding us. Transform our lives so that we can run, and fly on wings of eagles. Amen.