

## THE BON AIR PULPIT

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Scripture: Matthew 4:5-7

Sermon: *The Temptation of Security*

We have begun a year long journey on developing in our relationship to God. We have adopted a theme for this year that is from the New Testament: *We are to fan the flame that is within us.* I want to challenge you to go on the journey with us. Of course, the only way that is going to happen is that you are going to have to be intentional in decisions that you make. Christian growth doesn't happen automatically. It doesn't happen unless you make some decisions that you are going to have some changes in your life, some new openness in your life. I want to ask you today if you wouldn't join us. I want to ask you if you wouldn't set the goal where you could look back and say that 1998 was the year that helped to make a tremendous difference in your life.

Last week I mentioned to you that, if we are going to begin this journey of growth, then we are going to have to begin where Jesus began. As Jesus got ready to begin to His ministry, he had to undergo three temptations. Those temptations are really model temptations. Jesus is our pioneer. We have to go through those same temptations. Unless we understand these foundational principles, then what we are going to find later on is that we are not going to have the strength we need to be able to meet the challenges God gives us.

Last week we read the first one. You recall Jesus had not eaten for many days. Then the devil came to him and said, "It doesn't seem like God is going to take care of you. It looks like you are going to have to take matters into your own hands. Why don't you take your power and turn these rocks into bread?" I said to you that all of us have to face the same temptation. We have to come to the understanding that God is going to provide for our material blessings. Until we can have a trust in him in the basic elements of life, we will never be able to trust him in the other elements of life. I need to remind you that the devil didn't come to Jesus and first talk to him about prayer or first talk to him about the

kingdom, he talked to him about just the basic things of life. He talked to him about "do you have anything to eat?" Until you and I deal with just the material things of life, then we are never going to be able to develop and grow.

Now the second one is in the Book of Matthew. It is Chapter 4. Let me begin reading for you verse 5:

*The devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written (isn't it interesting that the devil can even quote the Bible?) "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." Jesus understood that if the devil can quote scripture out of context, than you better learn to quote scripture in context. So Jesus quoted scripture: Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

This temptation has to do with what kind of relationship you want with God. Do you want God to control your life, or do you want God simply to take care of the consequences of your actions? Do you want to jump in life, and all you want from God is that when you get ready to hit the bottom that he is there to give you a soft landing? Is God only the emergency call on your life that when everything else fails, "Oh, God, I need you!"

I am reminded of a man who was in the hospital. He was in a big ward. He had had tests. The doctor came to him and said, "Sir, I have done everything I know to do for you. You are going to have to depend upon God." The man said, "My goodness! Has it gotten that bad?" Some of us feel like it is only in the emergency, the extremities of life, the 911 calls of life, that we say, "God, I need you, I am getting ready to hit the bottom, and I need you in my life."

Many times people come to me and ask me to pray for them. In fact, the question that is most asked me is, "Will you pray for me?" But many times people come and ask me to pray for them to be able to escape the consequences of their actions. "Pastor, will you pray that Mother will not find out." "Pastor, will you pray to the Lord that I'll be able to pass this test even though I haven't studied." And I am frank with you. I don't know how to pray like that, because God has put inside

of this universe consequences when we do certain things. I don't know how to pray, "God, just change all the way in which you have made the world so people will not have to face the consequences of their actions." Sometimes I do, but I don't know how God relates to that kind of prayer. You and I are living in a world where many, many times all we want is for God to take care of the consequences of our actions. We want to do what we want to do, and then we pray, "God, somehow keep my head from hitting when I jump."

For example, the Bible is very clear that sex is saved for marriage. I could spend a whole sermon telling you why that is true. It is not because God is mean. It is because God is good. It is not because he is trying to keep you from something. He is trying to keep you for something. But we live in a society that says here are the methods that you can have safe sex. What that simply means is you can do what you want, but you don't have to worry about the consequences. On all of the television ads you will hear, "Friends don't let friends drive drunk." Well, you see, there is a bigger truth than that. Friends don't let friends drink. So we spend most of our life trying to figure out how we can do whatever we want to, and then when the consequences that God has ordained come to us, we say, "Oh, my goodness, God, don't let my head hit the rock."

It goes further than that. When He doesn't keep the consequences from coming to us, then we feel like that He is of no use to us. How many times have we said, "God, I have prayed, I have prayed for you to take care of this, and you didn't take care of this. Now if you are not going to take care of the big problems of my life, if you are not going to take care of these consequences, then what use do I have for you?" Today all over the world there are people who refuse to go to church because they started out with a relationship with God in which God simply was the 911 of their life. He didn't meet their need. He didn't take care of their problem, so they say, "Well, why go to church if he isn't going to make life easier and make life more comfortable?" So we begin almost immediately to sense that somehow in our life God is not necessary, and God isn't good. I can't tell you the number of people who have just said to me, "I don't want anything else to do with God. You know, I got in a tight spot. God didn't get me out. So, my goodness, what good is God?"

We need to ask ourselves. Do we want God to

control our life, or do we want him to simply take care of the consequences of our actions? Do we want God to be our servant, or do we want to be his? Do we want to always say, "God, this is what you can do for me," and never ask the question, "What can I do for you?" Do we want to say to God, "I want to do what is right," or do we say, "God, I want to do what I want to do, and you take care of the consequences of my actions." And if I begin to walk in my life and build that kind of relationship with God, I am always going to have trouble because I can assure you God will not always keep your head from hitting the rock. If you want that kind of relationship in your life, then what you are going to find are so many difficulties that will always pull you away from him.

Jesus came back with an answer. He came back to help us to understand a very vital principle. He gave us a word. This is what he said, "What you need to understand is that you are not to tempt God." So I want to put it in quotation marks, what does it mean to "tempt God?" The answer to the question is that you try to depend upon God to take care of something He has not promised. In this Book there are over 3,200 promises. If you were to claim a promise a day, you could claim promises for 10 years and never claim the same promise. God is wonderfully generous in what he offers to us and what he wants to give to us. But there are some things God does not promise. When I begin to build my life on things He does not promise, the Bible calls that tempting God. That is presumption. What all of us need to ask is this: "Am I dependent upon the promises of God, or am I acting in presumption."

Let me show you some of the ways in which we tempt God, some of the ways in which we presume on God that he has never promised for your life. If you build your life on promises, then you are ready to grow in him. If you build your life on presumptions, you are always going to fail. *Presumption No. 1: God does not promise you tomorrow.* In fact, you recall in the Book of James, there is this whole statement. It says you make your plans tomorrow I am going to do this, tomorrow I am going to do this in my business, tomorrow I am going to take to go shopping, tomorrow I am going to do this... and he said, "Don't you know that your

life is but a vapor. It is here today and gone tomorrow. Therefore, whatever you know to do that is good, you need to do it today and not presume that you can put it off and do it tomorrow.” So what that simply means is that every day of my life if I wake up, I am to say, “God, this is gift. Whatever opportunities come to do something that is right, then I need to do it today because I can't presume I am going to have the opportunity to do it tomorrow.”

Every Sunday in this church, people act on presumption. Every Sunday people say to me, “You know, I am going to do that for God.” And they don't. The presumption is well, if I don't do it today I can do it tomorrow. I'll do it next week. I can do it some other time. Don't you understand that if you begin to build your Christian life assuming God is going to give you something he has not promised, you are always in trouble.

I always remember a man in our congregation by the name of Sam. Sam lived his life on presumptions. He lived his life on something he was always going to do. I have never talked to a man who made more promises of what he was going to do tomorrow. Sam had a heart attack. I saw him in the hospital. On his hospital bed with the oxygen going in, he was making all these promises. Sam recovered. One day I was going down to the church. I looked over on the side of the road. There was Sam. He had a flat. He had heart difficulty. He couldn't change his tire. I stopped, changed his tire. Promises again. Three weeks later Sam had his second heart attack, and he didn't have any more. I never think of that passage in James without thinking of Sam.

Some of you are here this morning making presumptions of what you are going to do for God sometime in the future. What I am saying to you is that if you are ever going to be helpful to that child, you had better be helpful today. If you are ever going to say the encouraging words to that person who is going through difficulty, say it today. If you are ever going to write that letter, write it today. If you are ever going to make the call, make it today. If you are ever going to do anything for God, then do it today. Don't make presumptions! Don't tempt God!

*We presume sometimes on temptation.* God promises that, whenever temptation comes your way, He will always give you a way to escape. So you are going

down the road and all of a sudden temptation comes. Then you need to claim 1st Corinthians 10:13. *There is no temptation taken you but such that is common to man. But God is faithful, and will with every temptation, give you a way to escape.* I just quote that all the time because God said whenever that comes, I'll give you another road to take. But suppose. Suppose I begin to think well, you know I am a pretty good Christian. I am pretty strong. I can take care of myself. And I go walking into temptation. I believe I can handle the situations of life.

The best illustration in the Bible, of course, is Sampson. Sampson was big and strong. He got messed up with a woman named Delilah. Every time Delilah would find the secret of his strength, old Sampson would say that is not it. Then, like a dunce, he would go right back into it. When life ended for him, there he was defeated, weak, and finally died. Why was that true? Was it because he wasn't strong enough? No, it was because he was just dumb. The dumb part of life is to somehow feel that I can take care of every situation of my life. Some sit down, go in places they ought not to go. There are men and women in this church who are alcoholics who know there are some places they cannot go. There are people in this community who are addicted to gambling. They know they can't buy a lottery ticket. They are addicted to pornography. They know they can't go to Blockbusters. They are going to be in trouble. If somehow you feel you can handle every circumstance of life and you just go walking in there, you are presuming on something you have no right to presume on.

One day one of the angels who was protecting one of God's children said to the devil, “I thought you and I had made a pact that you wouldn't tempt him today.” The devil said, “I didn't tempt him. He came to my house. I just sat down and ate with him.” You see. We end up at the wrong place at the wrong time, presuming upon ourselves.

The third thing we often make presumptions on is that *we presume on the mercy of God.* The mercy of God is beyond our comprehension. But some of us think we can just disobey God, disobey his commandments, turn from him, and lie. We can just always come running back, and God, the good old God, is always there. You need to be careful that you do not enter into that which is wrong with the presumption that he is always going to be there to take care of the

circumstances in your life.

Let me mention the last one. *We often make presumptions that we don't have to get our lives right with God in this life. We can get our lives right with God in the next life.* What that simply means we take all of God's blessings. We receive all of his gifts. We see his Son. But we don't really worry about it. We'll take care of that on the other side. You need to understand that God promises to every person who believes in his Son that when you enter into the next life, He will take care of you. There is no way in the Bible that God will ever give you another opportunity when you go in to the next life. If you somehow think that the prayers of others, the concerns of others, that there is going to be another opportunity....

One man said to me this way. Well, when I go to hell before I go into the gate I am going to say whew! I made a mistake. And God is just going to take me on to glory. No, you need to understand. Never presume on that which God has never promised. Do not tempt God. You are getting ready to start on this journey with him. What kind of relationship is it going to be? Is it Lord, I want to do what is right? Not, Lord, I want you to twist the circumstances of life that I don't have to have a result of what I have done that is wrong.