

**THE  
BON AIR  
PULPIT**

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Scripture: *Matthew 4:8-11*

Sermon: *The Temptation of Prestige*

In the month of January we have been reading in the fourth chapter of Matthew about the temptations of Jesus. Jesus had just been baptized. He was ready to begin his public ministry, but there was a need for him to undergo a refining of his thoughts and his principles. He was taken out alone in the desert to be with God. While He was there, He began to sense, very much, the power of evil. The reason we have turned to the temptations of Jesus is because we understand that what He faced, we all must face. We must have the opportunity to see these principles worked out in our life if we are to be useable to God.

Let me remind you of the first two temptations before we read the third one. The first one was that Jesus was tempted to doubt the provision of God for His life. The devil came to him and said, “I don’t think God is going to give you anything to eat.” All of us face the same temptation. Can we trust God to provide the basic necessities of life or do we have to take matters into our own hands and take care of ourselves?

The second one was that he took him on top of the temple and asked him to look down and said, “Would you jump? Your God is the kind of God who will be there to catch you in His arms.” We ask the question. What kind of God do you want? Do you want a God who is in control of your life, or do you want a God who is there to catch you when you jump and do stupid things? Do you want a God who is only taking care of the consequences of your actions?

The third temptation begins at verse eight. The devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world with their entire splendor. There are people who sell their souls for a few dollars or for a little pleasure. Suppose he said, “You can have everything.” It was Kissinger who

said power was the ultimate come on. Suppose you were just given the key to everything. *Satan said, “All that I ask is that you bow down and worship me.” Jesus said, “Away from me Satan, for it is written worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.” Then the devil left him and the angels came and attended to him.*

In just a few moments we are going to learn a very basic lesson in life that all of us need to understand if we are going to be useable for God. We are often tripped up in our spiritual walk because we think that the devil is only interested in our having wrong objectives. But evil is not that simplistic. The devil does not mind you having worthy goals for your life. All he asks is to help you achieve them. What you need today is the understanding that the devil does not mind you having worthy, noble, right ambitions for your life; all he wants to do is corrupt the way in which you achieve them. Someone has said that if he cannot get you to do wrong things, he will get you to do right things but in the wrong way. You need to understand how he tempted Jesus and what that meant to Him and then understand what that means to your own life.

In the first two temptations, he came with that big two-letter word “if.” “If you are the Son of God,” which he said to try to tempt Jesus to question his relationship with God. That is the way he attacks all of us. If he can get you to doubt that you are one of God’s children, if he can get you to doubt that He is watching and providing for you, then he can defeat you. Faith cannot grow in perpetual fear and doubt.

In the third temptation, he takes Him up on to a high mountain and he says, “I assume you are who you say you are. I know why you came. You came to win the whole world to yourself.” I need to say that, if you think Christianity is some little penny-ante game in the back rooms of the world, then you misunderstand it completely. The message of Jesus Christ is for the whole world, every hurting person. Jesus came to win the whole world to himself. If you are going to understand Him, you will join Him in His task. Satan said, “I understand that, but let me work out something with you. I will give you the whole world, I just ask one thing. I just ask that when you go home at night and close the door, you acknowledge that I helped you to get it. I ask that you worship me for you recognize that all that you have I ultimately helped you to achieve.”

Now hear it again. The devil does not mind Jesus having the dream of winning the whole world to

Himself. All that he wants is just to help him accomplish His dreams. God does not mind you having noble, right, spiritual goals in your life, but again what He wants is to help you achieve it. When it is done, you acknowledge that He helped you to attain it.

Let me list for you some of the goals that all of us have that are right, good and noble and show you how he works in our own life. Everybody wants to be accepted. I am aware there are a few people who are mentally ill, who don’t care what other people think about them, but most of you do. You got up and combed your hair this morning, if you have some. You are interested in how you appear to others. Nobody likes to walk into a group and be an odd ball. You don’t want to be out there by yourself.

It is a normal thing to want to be accepted. However, as a new person, you move to a new town and meet the gang and you want to be a part of this group. They say to you that what they do on weekends is rent a motel room and get drunk. They are happy to have you as part of their group, but you have to understand that you are going to have to participate in what they do. Or somebody slips up beside you and hands you a little packet of material and says “If you want to be in with us, you will have to take some of this and boy you will love everybody and have a good time.” Is there anything wrong in wanting to be accepted? Of course not. What is wrong is how you get there.

So what you are willing to do is bend, twist and pervert the principles that God uses to guide your life so that you can achieve a noble goal in your life. Everybody wants to be loved and for most people it would be wonderful if they had somebody special to love them. So Satan comes to you and says it is just normal for you to want to be loved. It is normal for you to want to give love. You hear this little voice that says, “If you will do anything I want you to do, I will love you.” You say, “My goal is to be loved. If he says that if I do anything he wants me to do, I can be loved, then it can’t be bad for I am trying to reach my goal.

Or you go to work and there is a man in the room and you are aware that it would be wonderful if you could spend the rest of your life with him. There is just one little problem with that. He is married and has three kids. But why let a small thing like that stand in your way? So you do everything you can to try and reach this noble dream of your life, to have a wonderful man to share your life with. Then you begin to understand that

the Bible says that, while you would never think to break into someone’s house and steal their VCR, you would break into his home and steal him from his children. *Then you would begin to understand that while you had a worthy goal, the way you were getting there was wrong.*

Everybody wants to be provided for. I don’t think any of you would think it was a goal of your life to spend last night in a homeless shelter. You certainly want enough to eat. When your kids have needs you want to be able to provide for them. Everybody wants to have enough to get by. But you see in the matter of provisions for our life, God has a very clear accounting system. It simply says you give to me the first ten percent that you make and I will enter into an economic partnership with you. I will enable you to live off the ninety percent. But you say, “God, I want to be secure and if I do want you want me to do, I may not be able to get things as fast as I wanted to.” He says “I know that, but don’t you understand that being somebody is more important than having things.” “But Lord, if I give this to you than I may not be able to provide for my children.” Then He is going to come to you and say, “You say you want what is best for your children, then define for me what is best.” You see, to have a goal to be taken care of is noble and right, nobody wants to be a failure in life. But the question is how do you get there? Can you get there by being obedient to God?

Everybody wants to be a success. There is a fire in most of us in that we want to drive and we want to get to the top. That is normal and right. Bob was one of the most successful salesmen I have ever known. He worked for one of the biggest companies in America and he was at the top in the southeast for years. He walked into me one day and said, “I am in a real bind. It looks like I am going to have to quit my job.” I said “Quit your job?” He said, “Yes,” and reminded me of how successful he had been. He said, “We have a new boss, and the new boss said, ‘You have been successful but you can do more.’ Then he told me how I could do more. It was by manipulating people, shading the truth and presenting things that aren’t really true. I can’t do that. The man came to me with that old American axiom ‘all that matters is the bottom line.’ There is more to me that matters than the

bottom line. Things like integrity, truth, and presenting things that are right. I can't do that." Now did Bob want to be successful? Of course he did. The question was, how do you become successful?

It even affects us at church. We need to remind ourselves that the devil comes to church like we do, but he usually doesn't come with his horns and his tails. He usually comes with nice clothes and looks very normal and right. He just comes in and says, "You have a goal, this church. You are trying to minister to people and help people. I will just help you to do it."

I always remember a man who came to me one day and said, "I figured out how we can get more money at the church." (To tell a Baptist preacher that is like saying, "Sic 'em.") He said, "I was at this church the other day and they had a fair. They had this big sheet. The preacher put his head through this sheet and for twenty-five cents you could throw a little balloon with water in it at the preacher and if you hit him, you won a big cake." I said "I don't think I want to do that." He said, "You would make a lot of money." It makes you wonder how many people would want to buy that balloon?

Listen. All of us understand what the goal is, but we must understand that if we don't honor God with how we reach the goal, it is not worth getting to the end of the road. Do you understand this is the way in which Satan comes? He comes to you and says, "Everything you want is good, right, normal, wonderful, even Christian. Just let me help you, I will work it out for you."

You have so many wonderful illustrations in the Bible. There was a prophet by the name of Balaam. The children of Israel were on their way from Egypt to the promised land. There was a group of people who said, "They are going to overrun us." They went to Balaam and said, "Why don't you ask God to curse these people?" Balaam said, "I can't do that." They came to him two or three times and asked him to do that and he said, "No, I can't do that." Then one day they came to him and said, "Balaam, will you look outside your tent?" Outside his tent were a bunch of donkeys and on them was a bunch of valuables, money. Balaam said, "Oh, that puts new light on the subject. I can't curse them, but I will tell you that they are the people of God. God has said He would not bless them unless they were

holy unto Him. I tell you what to do. Round up all the prostitutes in the whole country, bring them down and put them into the camp. The men will sleep with the prostitutes and God will deny them what He had promised them." Balaam got his money and he did not curse the people, but he accomplished what they wanted him to accomplish. Everybody went away feeling happy, even the devil.

I remind you that it was because of this sin that Jesus was ultimately crucified. They brought him before Pilate and said, "Here is the evidence." Pilate, trained in the Roman law, said, "Not guilty." Then they said, "If you don't crucify him, then you are not the friend of Caesar." He began to quake because he knew which side his bread was buttered on. He said, "I'll tell you what I will do. I won't condemn him. I just wash my hands and you all do whatever you want to do." Pilate had a noble goal. He wanted to do what was right. He would not say, "He is guilty," He just washed his hands and said, "You do whatever you want to do." Pilate walked away feeling that he was noble, but Jesus was on the cross.

I want to tell you the same temptation comes to you every day. "Let me help you, let me help you." In my home state of Louisiana we have had some colorful politicians. That is probably the understatement of the week. The man who was probably the most colorful was Hughie B. Long. He was governor just before I was born. Hughie came out of the center of the state. It was during the depth of the depression. People were poor and out of work. Mr. Long said, "I will bring this state up. We have so many rivers in Louisiana and you can't get your crops to the market because there are no bridges. I will put a bridge across every major river," and he did. He said, "Your kids go to school and they keep asking for money. I will give you free education and you won't have to pay a dime." In Louisiana, you never pay a dime to go to school. He said, "I will give it to you." He said, "You don't have enough money when you get sick. In every major city of this state, I will build a charity hospital and you can come in and get medical care free." In Louisiana, in every major city, one of the biggest hospitals is a charity hospital, and you can get medical care for free, even if you don't have a dime.

When he was assassinated, he was getting ready to run for president of the United States. He was the new deal before they ever heard of the new deal. They thought that maybe he would be elected. In the thirty-four-story state capital that was built as a monument to

his ingenuity and power, he was walking down the hall one day and he was assassinated. Even today when you go to Baton Rouge, there is a light that comes from the top of the state capital. It shines down onto a beautiful garden and in it is a triple life-sized statue of Heuy B. Long with his arms open. Sixty years after he died, the light is still on him. The reason somebody assassinated him was because he was willing to give you everything you wanted so long as you did anything he wanted you to do. If you dared to question him, then you began to understand what a political juggernaut really meant. The man who wrote a biography of his life said this about this politician "I will give you anything you want, all I ask is your soul."

The devil comes and says, "I'll help you get anything. All I want is that, in the quiet of your heart, you know you bowed down to me to get where you thought you wanted to go." Now if you haven't found it out, let me remind you that the devil is the greatest snake oil salesman the universe has ever known, because he promises what he cannot deliver. He says, "I will give you the world." The problem is he doesn't have the world to give to you. "I will give you success. I will give you acceptance. I will give you love. I will give you everything." Then you get in your car and you end up in a ditch on the side of the road, for you listened to somebody who promised you something he can't give you.

Let me tell you what Jesus said. Jesus said, "I would rather do what is right and have nothing than to do what you want me to do and have everything." There are big words that come flowing out of the life of Jesus. Honesty, integrity, character. "I would rather be right than listen to your propaganda." In that day Jesus made a big decision. I want to close by telling you the big decision He made. It was not to disagree with Satan and the understanding of his goals. His goal is to win everything to himself. So let me make it personal.

*The goal of Jesus Christ is to so impact your life that you will live for Him, honor Him and serve Him.* The question is how He chooses to do it. Not that the goal is wrong, how did He get there? The devil said, "No need to make it hard. I will give it to you." But how could he give it to him? The only way he could give it to him is the same way he tries to give it to people all around the world and that is you can rule if you are strong and if you are in control. All around this world today are petty man on big thrones who say, "I am in

charge, you will do what I say and if you dare to disagree I will get rid of you." There are petty dictators all around this world who have listened to Satan who have said, "I will give it to you, if you will just do it my way." Jesus said, "No."

Well then, how is He going to win? He is going to win because He will be honest, have integrity and trust God to work out the details of the big plan. Ultimately, He ended up not on a throne but on a cross. He said, "I will not come as a mighty king and say, 'Do what I say.' I will come as a broken servant and I will say, 'I love you.'" There are more people around the world who worship Him than any person who has ever lived. There are more people who are Christians than the next two major religions put together. While I am standing here in Richmond, Virginia, there are people all around the world on their faces in adoration to Him. They are doing it for something stronger than, "This is what you have to do." They are there because they love Him and they want to do it.