

GALILEO WAS RIGHT

March 13, 2011

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.

Now there is nothing, absolutely nothing, that is more satisfying than the cold, creamy sweetness of ice cream. That is an objective fact. And you also need to know that flavors are fine – well, flavors like Mackinaw Island Fudge and Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough – but certainly not Butter Brickle or Butter Pecan! – flavors are fine, but the delicate deliciousness of vanilla is best of all. And you also need to know that it's been 70 days for me...70 days since I experienced that sublime indulgence. It's my own personal fast, imposed by Weight Watchers and, on Friday, it was 10 pounds—10 pounds less! Amen!

There are, you know, two kinds of people in this world: those who eat to live and those who live to eat. I am in the second category. Anybody with me? Some of us live to eat. And, for me, the gastronomic seduction does not end with ice cream. How about a fresh-baked slice of home-made bread drenched in butter...or how about a piece of apple pie still warm from the oven...or maybe a steak sizzling and smoking on the grill?

My self-imposed ice cream-free fast is in its 70th day. (Believe me, I'm counting.) For Jesus, his self-imposed wilderness fast was only in its 40th day. But 40 days is a long time when it's not just ice cream that you're giving up. So, at the end of those 40 days—40 food-free days—the Devil came to Jesus to offer him three temptations. Now the Devil, you see, had a bread machine. Do any of you still have bread machines in your cabinets? Do any of you still use those machines? Well, the Devil was using his this day and the smell of baking bread was wafting its irresistible aroma around Jesus, and the Devil said to Jesus:

Hey, Jesus, don't touch my machine, but you can turn those stones into bread!

In other words, the Devil said to Jesus:

You are what you eat! Indulge your appetite! Satisfy your desire!

What a temptation; the temptation of acquiring and consuming...and we know how good it feels those of us who live to eat. But it's not just food. It's cars, and it's technology, and it's travel, and it's the houses we build that are more than shelter...houses that make a statement about who we are.

Then Jesus was snatched up by the Devil and taken to the dizzying height of the pinnacle of the temple. And you've got to know that Jesus was a little more queasy sitting up there on that pinnacle than He ever expected to be. So there He sat, His stomach churning and the Devil saying to Him:

Jesus, throw yourself down. God will protect you! Jesus, said the Devil, You can be the boy who cried wolf. You can test out this theory we've got about you of divine favoritism. You can create a trumped-up crisis. And you know what God's going to

do. God's going to catch you. You're not even going to stub your little toe on one stone.

In other words, the Devil was saying to Jesus: ***Let your prayers be focused only on your own little world.*** And we know how easy that temptation is to fall victim to, don't we?—to be seduced by prayers that are myopic...that are nearsighted...to forget the misery of the world that is beyond our view...in the face of horrific tragedy in Japan to still say to ourselves, *but that's a long way away*...to judge God's providence only close up in my own world. That's the second temptation the Devil gave to Jesus.

And then the third was this: From the pinnacle of the temple, the Devil took Jesus to the peak of a high mountain...and there, from that mountain, the Devil and Jesus could see in panorama spread out before them all the kingdoms of the world. And the Devil said to Jesus:

Hey, all you've got to do is worship me, Jesus, and these kingdoms...they're all going to be yours!

In other words, the Devil said to Jesus:

You can be Bruce Almighty! All the power, and all the prominence, and all the dominance of the world can be at your fingertips. Admit it! You do want to lasso the moon and reel it in real close to impress your girlfriend, don't you?

To wallow in our own greatness and glory: we know how much of a temptation that is for us, don't we?

Well, these were the three temptations that the Devil gave to Jesus that day after Jesus had been fasting for 40 days in the wilderness. And here are the answers that Jesus gave back.

First of all, Mr. Devil, we do not live by what we consume. We live by every word that comes from the mouth of God...we live by every word that comes from the mouth of God because God's word is God's will, and it's God's wisdom, and it's God's way. And, this is life: the will, the wisdom, the word, and the way of our God!

Next, Jesus said:

You know, we're not validated by our ability to manipulate God to fulfill our whims. No, we're validated when we embrace God and become God's witnesses. This is love, that we love God and God's children!

And finally, said Jesus:

We're not important because of the ones we dominate. We're important because of the ones we care for. This is service, to serve all those around us!

More simply, Jesus very clearly tells us in the face of these three temptations that it's all about this: ***to live, to love, and to serve.***

Fulfillment is living God's word. Satisfaction is loving God and God's children. And meaning and purpose are found in serving God's will.

Three temptations...simply three different facets of the one temptation that the Devil served up to Eve in the Garden of Eden...the Devil who slithered up to Eve in the form of a serpent and said to her:

You will not die if you eat of this tree; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God.

Did you hear that? All you have to do is eat this fruit and you'll be like God. How many products in our world are sold with that promise? You'll be like God, knowing good and evil. Our greatest human temptation is this: to be like God...to take God's place...to say to God, *You know, I'm here now! You can go away. I will take my place on the throne of the universe.* That is the great idolatry.

In 1633—it's a long time ago—but, in 1633, Galileo Galilei was accused of heresy by his friend, Pope Urban VIII...the great scientist accused of heresy by the Pope. Why? Well, the answer is because Galileo was the leading personality in a controversy that was ripping at the fabric of the church. You see, the church always has had a problem with progress and science, and this is one of the earlier examples than we generally think of. This wasn't a controversy about sexual orientation. This wasn't a controversy about when the world was created. No, this was a controversy about what happens to be the center of the universe.

The church taught a theory titled ***geocentrism***. That theory simply says that the earth never moves; that the whole universe moves around it. But Galileo was teaching a theory called ***heliocentrism***. That theory is that the sun does not move, but the earth and all the other planets move around it. And that was the crisis. It was such a severe crisis that Galileo was forced to recant of his heresy. Yet, as the story goes, even when he recanted, under his breath, he muttered, ***Yet it moves!***

What is the center of the Universe? That's the question that Satan used to tempt Jesus after 40 days in the wilderness. What is the center...what is the focus...what is the fulcrum...what is the pivot of your life?

Satan was counting on Jesus saying that Jesus' needs, and Jesus' desires, and Jesus' power and Jesus' glory was the center. Instead, Jesus did not yield or waver. He simply answered, three times over, that the center is ever and always God.

Now the question is ours: Who is the center...who is the focus...who is the fulcrum...who is the pivot of your life? Galileo was right! The sun is the center of the universe: not the S U N, but the S O N! The Son is the center of the universe. So you see, it's all about Jesus. Jesus is God...and we're not: easy to say, but hard to live. Jesus is God...and we're not.

Too often, you know, we live by the tyranny of the ***I***. It's the smallest letter in the alphabet. So my challenge to you today is to count how many times you say ***I***. How many times do you say ***I*** today? When you're ready for bed, know the number. And then, this Lent, do what you can to give it up...not chocolate, not ice cream, but give up the ***I***...and replace it with Jesus. Yes, it's

all about Jesus. And the truth is, you know, the gracious truth is that the more we let go of the idolatry of our self, the stronger and more centered we become.

The hymn that we're going to sing in just a moment is all about Jesus: "***Are ye able,***" ***said the Master, to be crucified with me?*** It's a hymn that teaches us that it's all about Jesus, and that we find our fulfillment when we live, and when we love, and when we serve. Are ye able...to live in the wisdom of God's will? Are ye able...to walk in the path of Jesus' love? Are ye able...to serve others in the power of the Holy Spirit?

There's an old prayer from the history of the United Church of Christ. Let me pray it with you, and so we let us pray:

Lord Jesus, for thee we live, for thee we suffer, for thee we die. Thine will we be in life and in death. Grant us, O Lord, the justice and the mercy, the healing and the peace of Your kingdom. Amen.

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