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Lent I
February 22, 2026
Text: Matthew 4:1 – 11
Title: Parallels

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. The text for today's sermon is the Gospel lesson which was read just a few minutes ago. It's the traditional Gospel reading to begin Lent. Jesus has been baptized by John the Baptist and now He faces a time of temptation as the Holy Spirit leads Him into the wilderness. With his Gospel account, St. Matthew shows us how the Lord's life parallels the history of the Israelites in the Old Testament, and how He remains perfectly faithful in every way that they failed to. By the time of His birth, Jesus is the entire nation of Israel reduced to one person.

When they left Egypt, the Israelites were led by the Lord to the shore of the Red Sea. While they were there the Pharaoh's army arrived, and the people panicked, sure that they would be slaughtered. But God protected His people by blocking the Egyptians, and then parting the waters of the Red Sea so every Israelite was able to walk through on dry ground. When the last person had crossed, the Egyptians were allowed to continue their pursuit, but God used the water to drown the Egyptians, saving His chosen people again.

With this miracle, God showed how far He was willing to go to save the Israelites, removing any doubt that they were His chosen people brought out of Egypt as Jesus lived in Egypt for the first few years of His earthly life. Now, with the work of John the Baptist in the wilderness, God has once again paralleled the history of the nation of Israel, but reduced down to the one person, Jesus. The Lord goes into the water to be baptized, and when John is finished, the Holy Spirit descends on Him in the form of a dove. At the same time, the Father's voice declares to everyone around that, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." With

these words, the Father is removing any doubt about who Jesus, His chosen One is, and through Jesus He will show the world just how far He is willing to go to save it.

Immediately, Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted. This is also a parallel of what happened after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea. They passed through the water into the wilderness, and there God would test them to see if they would be faithful to Him. The Israelites would repeatedly sin and repeatedly fail the Lord's tests miserably. One of my former professors, Dr. Jeff Gibbs, writes in his commentary on Matthew, "Jesus enters the desert to play the role of champion for Israel...In their place, it is God's will that Jesus the Son, be tempted, and so prove himself to be the one who will overcome Satan in the place of...God's people...Now that the true Son has come in the place of Israel, He will be tempted to sin by Satan himself...and this Son will show his perfect Sonship by perfect obedience."

The first temptation that the devil throws at Jesus comes after He has fasted for 40 days and nights. He goes without food for each of those days, and when it is done, Jesus is obviously hungry. It isn't until He has been weakened by hunger that the devil makes his first move to tempt Jesus. "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." It's a pretty obvious move. Jesus hasn't eaten in 40 days, and He knows that He is the Son of God, what would be the harm in making a little food for Himself? The devil doesn't even try to deny the Lord's power; he just tries to get Jesus to abuse it for His own comfort and gain.

The Israelites were tested in a similar way from the beginning of their time in the wilderness, and that testing would continue 40 years. They had not even reached Mount Sinai where God would deliver the Ten Commandments, and the people began to wish that they were back in Egypt because of the food that they had there. The nation was being tested to see if they would trust in the Lord to provide for their needs, and they failed the test from the beginning.

They had more trust in their Egyptian slave masters to provide them food, than they did in Yahweh who had just freed them from slavery. They fell far short of the Lord's expectations.

And we fail to meet His expectations just like the Israelites did. God wants us to trust Him to provide for all of our needs, but we spend our days worrying about where those things will come from. We'll trust in just about anything other than God, and even though we are richly blessed by Him, we rarely acknowledge His gifts with even so much as a "Thank You."

So we fail like the Israelites failed in the face of this temptation from the devil, but Jesus does not fail. He uses the greatest weapon He has, the Word of God, to combat the devil's temptation, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Jesus knows full well how all people have failed the Lord's tests, but unlike Israel, Jesus passes His Father's tests Faithfully. In spite of the days of fasting, Jesus doesn't complain or reject God's will for Him. Instead, He lives by His Father's will. His relationship to the Father is perfect, and He knows that perfection only comes from what God provides. He especially knows that it comes from what God says, "...every word that comes from the mouth of God." Jesus resisted this first temptation, and He didn't abuse His power in the process. He kept the Father's will when no one else could, and His perfection covers us all.

The second temptation that the devil attempts in Matthew is to take Jesus up to the highest point of the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was built on the highest point in the city, and the city was located on the highest summit in the area. So, this is a major height that Jesus has been taken too. From this great high place, the devil tells Jesus to throw Himself down because, "If you are the Son of God... '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 is trying to use Jesus' weapon against Him. He quotes from Psalm 91, but he twists it to His own

purposes. The temptation is to put God to the test. Will He really keep His Word concerning Jesus? Can He fully trust His heavenly Father?

Again, the Israelites were tempted in the same way, but they weren't able to resist the devil's cunning tricks. During their time in the wilderness, they regularly tested God. They wanted meat, and He provided them with quail. They needed water, and the Lord provided more than enough for them by having Moses strike a rock with his staff. And after everything that they had seen God do, these people still failed to trust God. Their lack of faith caused them to wander around the wilderness for forty years so that almost none of the adults who left Egypt would enter the Promised Land that Yahweh was giving them.

We also put God to the test far too often. How many times have you uttered a prayer that went something like this, "God if you just get me out of this, then I'll..." (fill in the blank). We're trying to bargain with and test God. We make Him responsible for whatever happens, even if it's the direct consequences of our own sinful actions. Our lack of faith leads us to test God time and again as if our Creator has to somehow prove Himself to us, His creatures.

Jesus resists this temptation just as He does the first one, and He uses the same weapon to do it. "Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" He does not doubt the Father's power or His purposes even though the devil is tempting Him to test those very things. Will Jesus completely trust His Father? He is the perfect Son of God, and He trusts Him perfectly. There is no doubt. There is only complete faith. Jesus fulfills the demands of the Law to trust in God above all things when all of humanity could not, and our faith in Him counts as righteousness for us too.

The final temptation of the devil is to take Jesus to a very high mountain, and he shows Jesus images of the richest parts of the kingdoms of the world. He promises Jesus that he will

give all of these kingdoms to Him if Jesus will fall down and worship him. Here the devil is far less subtle about his goal. He wants Jesus to commit to him before His heavenly Father and to commit idolatry outright.

The people of Israel gave into this temptation too. Before God had even brought them away from Mt. Sinai, they were making an idol in the shape of a calf and worshipping it. And once they entered into the land of Canaan, their idolatry got even worse. They joined in the worship of the false gods of the land, and they suffered God's wrath because of it.

Our guilt in this area is just as bad. We easily fall into the sin of idolatry by letting all kinds of things take priority over our relationship with God. We put our own will over and above His Will, and we refuse to listen to the truth of who God is and choose to believe false teachings about Him. As a result, we create our own god that is completely different than the One True God as He has revealed Himself to us.

Jesus has the last Word here as He always does against sin and evil, and with it He puts an end to His temptation in the wilderness. "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" As Jesus is poised to enter the land as the Messiah to save His people, He will do so as God's perfect and perfectly obedient Son. He is not a Messiah of power or a Messiah who abuses God's power, but He is a Messiah of faithful obedience and service to His Father and the Father's people. By resisting the temptations of the devil, Jesus fulfills every demand of the Law that Israel was supposed to do, and He fulfills it for you also. His perfection is credited to us through faith, and we are declared perfect and holy because of Him. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.