

## FREED TO RECALL SCRIPTURE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST TEMPTATION

Hear the Word of God for this *Invocabit* Sunday as you are freed to invoke Scripture in the fight against temptation:

*Then, coming alongside, the tempting one said to Him, "If Son, You remain, of the God, You must say that these stones loaves may become."*

*But He answering, said, "It has been written, 'Not by loaf alone lives the man, but by all sayings coming out through the mouth of God.'"<sup>1</sup>*

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

*It is important for the Christian not only to read God's Word daily, but to commit to his memory as many Scripture texts as possible, so that he will be ready to repel the attacks of the flesh, the world, and the devil with the Word of Scripture, whenever and wherever they occur.<sup>2</sup>*

So wrote the President of Concordia Seminary in 1887 and President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States from 1899 – 1911 (today's LCMS). If you have never heard of Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, that is fine. You still know his teaching. Virtually every LCMS pastor for more than a century has studied his writings to some extent. His comments cited today are still valid. Hear them again:

*It is important for the Christian not only to read God's Word daily, but to commit to his memory as many Scripture texts as possible, so that he will be ready to repel the attacks of the flesh, the world, and the devil with the Word of Scripture, whenever and wherever they occur.<sup>3</sup>*

To that end, God has moved this congregation to provide you with many biblical helps. First, we work to ensure you have the Bible in your homes in a language you can understand. Second, we offer a number of Bible studies to enhance your remembrance of various Scripture texts. Third, you have *Dr. Luther's Small Catechism* available. It is full of Scripture quotes you may memorize, particularly in the large explanation sections. Fourth, we have placed an hymnal in front of you full of Scripture. From it, you have committed a lot to memory. If you doubt that, think of all the scriptural responses you routinely make when you hear certain passages from the Bible, like these:

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<sup>1</sup> *Matthew* 4:3-4, cf. *Deuteronomy* 8:3.

<sup>2</sup> Pieper, Francis. *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 3, Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 1953, 17f.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

*Lord, have mercy upon us....*

*The Lord be with you...*

*Lift up your hearts... and so many more...*

Those public worship texts have become so much a part of God's service to you that you may not even consider most of them as available to you when you are faced with some temptation. While they are part of the consistent and stable words which are given by God in His services to you, they are also His Word you are free to use daily.

In addition to the treasury of the Word which you have memorized from the Lord's Divine Services, Vespers, Matins and so forth, you have other Scriptural memorization sources offered to you. Some of you use Portals of Prayer, Higher Things, or some other form of daily devotional. Beginning this Wednesday, God through this congregation will provide you more scriptural helps. You will see images of Jesus' Way of Sorrow. They will be accompanied by the Scriptures from which they have been drawn. They will be first revealed in public worship. But then the Stations will be available for that which they have been intended. They have been drawn from personal devotional Christian practices in the ancient city of Jerusalem at least from the AD 300s.

All of those resources, and more, are available to you. This is so that the Holy Spirit might use God's Word in your life to rightly respond to the temptations of the devil, the world and your own sinful flesh. The believer's right use of Scripture in times of pressure, trial, and even testing (which is NOT temptation, for *God tempts no one...* (You likely know that comes from the explanation to the Sixth Petition of the *Our Father*)). Now, return your thoughts to the Gospel text for the day, which begins like this:

*Then Jesus was led up into the desert by the Spirit to be tempted by the deceiver.<sup>4</sup>*

What came before the opening word of today's text, "then?" Those who were present in the Lord's services here just seven weeks ago, along with those who have memorized the texts, have the answer. From that we remember that today, the first

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<sup>4</sup> *Matthew 4:1.*

Sunday in (but not of) Lent is directly tied to the first Sunday of the Epiphany Season. So the Temptation of Jesus is tied to the \_\_\_\_\_ of Jesus... (The Baptism of our Lord).

Just so, we have heard and learned and believe that Jesus was baptized into our sins to bear them into death and the grave for us. So, it is no mere coincidence that Jesus, having been washed in the sins of the whole world, immediately faces temptation by the one who deceived Mother Eve and motivated Father Adam into bringing sin and death into God's good creation – as you heard recorded in the Genesis reading for today.

Unlike Eve, who was clearly by biblical evidence tricked by the deceiver into eating, out of lust for beauty and desire for the forbidden thing, Jesus' withstands not just a temptation to relieve His hunger pangs, but also temptations to test the Word of God, and to begin His earthly reign apart from the Father. St. Matthew's record continues:

*And, fasting forty days and nights forty, afterward He was hungry.<sup>5</sup>*

Jesus, covered in the sins of all people, faced an immense hunger. The nature of that has been researched and reportedly comes back with a vengeance on the 40th day of a fast. In such a state, Jesus is presented with temptation to that which was fully in the power of His divine nature to perform. Hear again our day's theme verse, that which sets the pattern for Jesus' conquering all temptations for us, for you:

*Then, coming alongside, the tempting one said to Him, "If Son, You remain, of the God, You must say that these stones loaves may become."*

*But He answering, said, "It has been written, 'Not by loaf alone lives the man, but by all sayings coming out through the mouth of God.'"<sup>6</sup>*

By the time the devil gets to Jesus, the evil one has had millennia of practice at turning the faithful from holding fast to the pure Word of God. He who had become, and is even more so now familiar with the revealed Word – for he has had 2,000 more years of practice at tempting humans – uses the Scripture to try to trap his Hearer into falling. The first part of the temptation comes in the deceiver's opening words, *if You are the Son*

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 4:2.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 4:3-4, cf. Deuteronomy 8:3.

of God... (The “are” in these temptations indicated Jesus’ state of Being, and could be stated, *if Son You are and remain, of the God...*).

As you will recall, at His Baptism, Jesus had been declared by the Voice from heaven to be the Father’s beloved Son. So, the old serpent who is, after all, the prince of this fallen world, was surely aware of the Father’s testimony. That devil first begins his testing by giving Jesus the opportunity to deny His eternal Sonship. If the only-begotten Son of the Father from all eternity would just deny that divine revelation, the devil’s deceit would have succeeded. In fact, in two out of the three temptations, the devil says to Jesus, *if You are and remain the Son of God*. So, in these attempts, the deceiver of mankind is attempting to trick Jesus into denying the Father’s Voice.

That is just what the devil did to Eve, when he asked, “For says Elohim not you may eat from all trees of the garden?”<sup>7</sup> He attempted to get her to deny God’s command. He actually declared to Adam that he could eat from all the trees of the Garden, except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.<sup>8</sup>

Suffice it to say that the deceiver was up to the same tricks he used on our first Mother in His temptation of our perfect Brother. If Jesus would simply have denied that He was and is and ever shall be the Son of God, the time of trial would have been over for Him. Most people, facing what was surely going to be a trial of wits, if they denied that they were the right persons for the test, could simply avoid all the pressure. But Jesus does not deny the title and Office given to Him by the Father.

So, having missed the opportunity to get Jesus to deny His Person, the deceiver goes on to tempt Him into using His creative and re-creative powers to turn stones into bread. (This is my opinion as a life-long student of Scripture: part of Jesus’ testing was likely for the devil’s own benefit. It is true that the deceiver of man is not all-knowing. He surely wanted to ensure he had the right Man to deceive away from the way that would

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<sup>7</sup> Genesis 3:2.

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 2:16-17.

lead to His bruising that serpent's head). We return to the proclamation of the text, as the temptation continues... *You must say that these stones loaves may become.*

Jesus, as you know, is the Word who was with the Father and the Spirit in the creation. He is the One God Who took the dust of the earth, formed it into man and breathed Life into him. The Son, with the Father and the Spirit, took bone from the side of Adam and formed woman. Since He is the Father's declared Son, Jesus could very well command the rocks to become bread. The elements would change.

Yet Jesus, the incarnate Word, knew the Word to respond to the temptation of the deceiver. He reminds the devil of a time, recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy, of an account of human events which the devil well knew by then. There, to the Israelites who had recently received the Ten Words, God reminded them that He had humbled them on account of their sins. That is when He first told them,

*Not by loaf alone lives the man, but by all sayings coming out through (the) Mouth of God.<sup>9</sup>*

Strike one is counted against the devil. Jesus, Who had been fasting on account of the world's sins, does not fall into sin against the Father's Word. The deception that worked on the wife of Adam failed on Jesus.

Yet, the devil is not through; he is a quick study of those he is tempting. It appears that his reasoning went like this: if Jesus is not willing to succumb to mortal fleshly needs and deny God's Word, perhaps the Word itself can be used to entrap Him. After all, the devil had tried a worldly temptation and Jesus had countered with the Word of God. So, the deceiver turns to the Word – which, dear ones, he has had many millennia to study, far surpassing the 90 or so years some of you have had. The deceiver, in his follow-on temptation, uses the Word of God to say to the Word incarnate:

*If You are and remain (the) Son of God, You must cast Yourself down; for it has been written: "The angels of Him He will command concerning You, and upon hands they will lift You, lest You might strike with stone Your foot."*

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew 4:4.

Again Jesus is given the opportunity to deny His eternal Sonship. And, that having failed, He is now tempted to show that He trusts the Word of God – for the devil quotes it fine – though out of context. Yet this would display trust in the Word through a test that the Father had not authorized. Further, if Jesus were to fall that the Father might save Him, the devil might avoid the words that follow that quote He used against Jesus:

*You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent  
You shall trample underfoot.<sup>10</sup>*

Well, Jesus knew that, for He, with the Father, through the Spirit, inspired it to be written. The devil is called both lion and serpent. So, rather than show that He had authority over the Word of the Father, Jesus again responds with the Word in context:

*Not shall you test the Lord the God of you!<sup>11</sup>*

Strike two is counted against the deceiver. The Word uses the Word and defeats the tempter's power. Are you beginning to understand how important it is for you to not only hear the Word of God, but to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest it? This is our call to memorization of the Word for our benefit in time of temptation. Jesus simply states the Word, using the right context, which you are free too to do.

If you have been lax in your attentiveness to the Word, repent, and believe that Jesus bore your sins into death and the grave. Turn, and return to the Lord your God in His Word. In that Word, you are given the power of God to face the Tempter's power – even as you have sung today, “one little Word shall fell Him.”

Now, turn your thoughts to the final temptation recorded by St. Matthew. The devil has two strikes against him. Now he swings at a final pitch. The devil offers that which is actually his to give. He says, upon showing all the glory of the world:

*These things to You, all I will give, if, having fallen down, You may worship  
me.<sup>12</sup>*

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<sup>10</sup> Psalm 91:13.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 4:7; Deuteronomy 6:16.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 4: 9

The devil tries upon Jesus that which may very well be the greatest temptation for humans, a desire for power. Yet, Jesus shows real power in His response,

*The Lord, the God of you, you must worship, and to Him alone you will give religious service.*<sup>13</sup>

Strike three! In His response, the Word declares that the one called the, “Prince of the Power of this Air” has a greater Lord. God is Lord to Whom even the most beautiful of the angels must fall down before. With that, the Accuser of the Man must leave the stadium. He will get another turn at bat – Good Friday is coming. Until then,

*Then the slanderer continued to forsake [Jesus], and behold, angels came and ministered to Him”<sup>14</sup>*

Those angels still continue to minister to Jesus. Since you are connected to Him as parts of His Body on earth, they are here to minister to you. You are free to think of that reality in a short while when you quote Scripture many of you have memorized. There you will confess that true worship of right religion is found in the presence of the Lord of the Angel Hosts. He will be with you, Body and Blood, through earthly elements. There, He takes that which can be simple food for mortals, and, with His Word, displays real power over created elements. God gives you God as food for forgiveness and strengthening to life everlasting. But you know that, because you know a lot of scripture. Even so, in the fights against temptation, you are free to memorize even more!

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

Lent I, *Invocabit* (Historic One-year series)

Psalm 118:1-13; Genesis 3:1-21; II Corinthians 6:1-10; Matthew 4:1-11

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***Soli Deo Gloria***

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<sup>13</sup> *Matthew* 4:10.

<sup>14</sup> *Matthew* 4:11.