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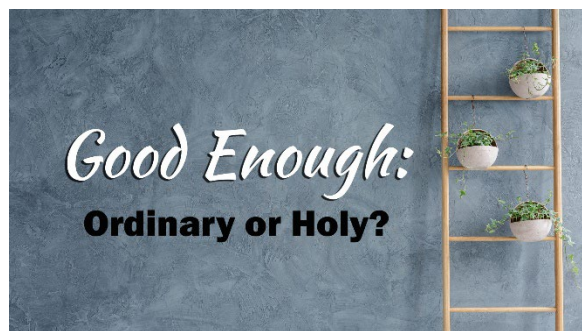
Title: Good Enough: Ordinary or Holy?

Preaching: Ryan Hazen, Lead Pastor, Mud Creek Campus

Text: [Luke 4:1-13](#)

E-mail: [Ryan Hazen](#)

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Some of you who are at least as old as I am will remember Flip Wilson. He was an African-American comedian who was wildly popular in the late 1960s and early 70s even hosting his own TV variety show – a first. Those who remember him will likely remember his signature phrase – "the devil made me do it."¹ The devil for Flip was this voice

in your head - prompting, encouraging, prodding - you to do something you shouldn't. He worked the phrase into almost every show or act that he did. In my warped mind, it's where I went when I began to think about this passage. The most famous was the devil trying to persuade the minister – "Rev's" – wife to buy a new dress. "Go on, try it on, it looks fabulous on you, those colors are perfect on you, you still have room in your closet," the devil would say.

There are two places in scripture where people are put to memorable tests by the devil. The first is the temptation by the serpent to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They are told not to eat from one tree in the middle of the garden. Adam and Eve get an "F" – they flunk the first test and eat from the tree.

Next up for the devil is Jesus. Only two of the four gospels give the long version of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. John leaves it out altogether and Mark's gospel covers the whole thing in two sentences: the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness, he was there forty days, Satan tempted him, wild beasts kept him company, and angels waited on him. That's it; that's all Mark knew - or that's all he thought we needed to know - about what happened between Jesus and Satan in the wilderness.

Anyone who remembers more than that is remembering Matthew or Luke because those are the only two who go into any detail about what the devil said and what Jesus said back. What this dialog proves, among other things, is that the devil is biblically literate. He knows exactly where to find the Bible verses he needs to put Jesus to the test, but Jesus knows more than just

what the Bible says.² Jesus knows how to do what the Bible says, which allows him to pass his exam. Jesus gets an "A+."

In this story of the temptation of Jesus, there are three temptations until, as the story says, "the devil departed from him until an opportune time." The first temptation is to turn stones into bread. This one must be read with the memory of verse three in our head. It tells us that Jesus hadn't eaten in forty days and he was famished. When you haven't had breakfast, even things you don't care for start to sound good. If you haven't eaten for a day, you would consider yourself famished but forty days, and Jesus could turn this stone into bread. That's temptation. If the thought of that leftover dessert that I have in my freezer crosses my mind, I can suddenly think of nothing else but that lonely piece of dessert.

But to each of these three temptations, Jesus has a response and it's not just any response but it's a Biblical response – all from Deuteronomy. Jesus knew his scripture. "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" (Deuteronomy 8:3). In Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the people of Israel that God tested them in the wilderness by hunger, but he fed them with manna to make them understand that one does not live by bread alone.

The second temptation that the devil offered was to rule all the kingdoms of the world. Again, Jesus answers temptation with scripture. "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" (Deuteronomy 6:13). This is Moses as he addresses the people of Israel before entering the land of promise. He calls upon the people to fear and love the Lord always. He provides a creed for them, the Shema, "Hear, O Israel: the LORD is our God, the LORD is one," tells them not to forget who gave the land and admonishes them to worship and serve the Lord.

The third temptation is for Jesus to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem. This time the devil is going to quote scripture himself to make his case and add to the lure of the temptation. Psalm 91:11-12, which the devil quotes, basically says that the angels of God will protect him so the devil wants Jesus to put that to the test. Again, Jesus from Deuteronomy. "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Deuteronomy 6:16). Here, Moses exhorts the people not to test the Lord as they did at Massah, a place of quarreling, where the people of Israel demanded water from Moses, which he finally obtained by striking a rock.

So first, the devil tempts Jesus to exploit his identity as the Son of God and exert his power over the things of the world - stones into bread. Then, the devil tempts Jesus to take hold of his power and destiny now by using the devil's means for ruling on earth – ruling the kingdoms through ill-gotten

gains. Finally, the devil tempts Jesus to test God's promise of protection – jump and let the angels protect you.

The devil's choices of content are not out of thin air. They are all things that truly and rightly belong to the Son of God. Jesus already has ultimate authority and power, it has been given to him by God; he can work miracles. The devil wants him to exploit that power. Jesus is already the Prince of Peace and the ruler of the Kingdom of this world. The devil wants him to abuse that power for his pleasure. Jesus is the beloved Son of God, in whom the Father is well pleased; he has God's heart. The devil wants him to distrust that love and make God prove it.

By refusing the temptations of the devil, Jesus remained faithful to his vocation, given to him at his baptism. He would not be the messiah that some would have wanted, including the devil. Some wanted a king that would rule an earthly kingdom. We see that most pointedly on Palm Sunday when Jesus picks to ride into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey rather than a powerful stallion. All three of the temptations of the devil want Jesus to be an earthly king.

It's just a guess – correct me if I'm wrong - that you've never been tempted in the exact ways that Jesus was tempted. Turn these stones into bread - claim your kingdoms - throw yourself off the church steeple expecting angels to catch you. Even though those exact temptations may not apply, everyone is tempted. The point isn't the specific temptations, but rather the underlying nature of temptation itself.

We learn it early. Several years ago, a Canadian researcher conducted a marshmallow test. Four children – two age four and two age five - sat at a table and were given a large marshmallow. Then they were told that they could eat the marshmallow whenever they wanted, BUT if they could wait and hold off on not eating the marshmallow until the adult came back in 15 minutes, they would be given a second marshmallow to enjoy. Watch what happens.³

VIDEO CLIP HERE - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4L-n8Z7G0ic>

Though there is a distinct promise for something more and better if they can hold their desires in check, it's a real struggle for the kids to not succumb to at least a little nibble right now. The same is true for us, isn't it? Just a little nibble. From Adam and Eve until now, we've struggled to not give in to temptation.

For most of us, temptation is not so often temptation TOWARD something – usually portrayed as doing something you shouldn’t – but rather is usually the temptation AWAY from something – namely, our relationship with God and the identity we receive in and through that relationship.⁴

Too often Christians have focused on all the things we shouldn’t do, instead of pointing us to the gift and grace of our identity as children of God. Even in the story of the temptations of Jesus, notice how each of the temptations seeks to erode and undercut Jesus’ confidence in his relationship with God.

We are under assault every single day by tempting messages that seek to draw our allegiance from the God who created and redeemed us toward some meager substitute. And in response we are called to remind the tempter that God loves them more than anything, loves them – and all of us – enough to send God’s only Son into the world to take on our lot and life, to suffer the same temptations and wants, to be rejected as we often feel rejected and to die as we will die, all so that we may know God is with us and for us forever. God raised Jesus from the dead to demonstrate that God’s love is more powerful than all the hate in the world and that the life God offers is more powerful even than death.

What if...what if this week, this season, we could see our temptations as portals to a spiritual discipline. What if we redefined that which is tempting us to have more and greater things and instead work with what we have – the ordinary stuff of life. The Latin “sacramentum” where we get the word “sacrament” is an inbreaking of the divine and holy into the everyday and ordinary. Think bread and cup, when on our own table is ordinary but on this table is holy. Think water which we drink and in which we shower, placed in a baptistry becomes holy water. This week, this season, I challenge you to find those things in your life that you might see as ordinary but becomes holy when placed in God’s hands.

Adam and Eve already had everything they could ever need, and yet they gave in to temptation because they believed that it would give them more of what God had already promised them—everything they could ever need! God loves us and will keep loving us no matter what, and for this reason, we are enough. We are ordinary but holy when God is involved. I know that I need to hear this declared again and again and I declare this to you as well. In the face of all the messages to the contrary, that promise can seem so difficult to believe. Give voice to this message of courage, confidence, and hope, and remember as you do so that you, also, are a beloved child of God and are holy in God’s sight.

¹ Dates and other information from Wikipedia article on Flip Wilson.

² Commentary from The Wilderness Exam, February 21, 2010, Barbara Brown Taylor found at www.day1.org.

³ Video found at Parenting Science - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4L-n8Z7G0ic>

⁴ This idea from David Lose, Identity Theft, posted March 7, 2019 at www.davidlose.net.