

Locked For Life With God

By: Keith Holte

March 9, 2014. Jesus died to show us that God loves us and has declared that we are not just acceptable, but we are treasured and priceless beyond measure. Pastor Keith preaches on Jesus' temptation in the desert and how he withstood it. Just as Jesus was baptized, we are baptized too. Just as he was tempted then as the Son of God, so we are tempted now as children of God. And just as Jesus successfully carried out his mission, as God's children we continue to carry on the mission, locked for life with God.

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We continue to look at our text about the temptation of Jesus. We begin in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Well, several of our youth spent most of the weekend enduring a 30-hour famine. They chose to fast for 30 hours so they could identify with those who are hungry most of the time. They became more aware of world hunger and food distribution issues, and of hunger in our area. I haven't been able to talk with any of them since they came back, so I'm not sure how that all went. But maybe we can all chat with some of those who went to this famine, and we can find out how they dealt with the hunger and how they dealt with the time. Maybe everybody who went should hold up their hands. Okay, Ray did. I guess we've got Ray here today. Others are maybe — I don't know — recovering? But okay, talk to Ray. Okay.

Well, while 30 hours seems like a long time to us, that was only a fraction of the time that Jesus was fasting. Jesus had just been baptized. And as prophets and other spiritual leaders often did after, when they were ready to start their life's work they would go off to a desert or wilderness to be there for some time, to engage in a kind of meditation time before they were to engage in the ministry — because usually their ministry involved a lot of very rigorous activity and challenges. It was a time to become connected to God, so that one had a connection that would stay during this challenging ministry ahead. And so, while Jesus was in this time of fasting for some 40 days, the devil sees this as an opportune time to come to Jesus and tempt Jesus from his mission. He thought Jesus might be getting desperate, I suppose, at this time to break his fast and saw it as the good time. And while the temptations may have been for certain things, the key to the temptation is in how the question is stated to Jesus, how the devil talks to Jesus. "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." He doesn't say: I dare you to turn these stones into bread, or wouldn't you like to turn these stones into bread. Rather it is, "If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread." The temptation is about who Jesus is. Will he keep his identity as a son of God and be true to the Father, or will he become someone else, give up on the mission, and not go through with God's plan for his life and kind of change his life's direction?

I was recently at a conference where research was quoted that says that the two things people want most in life are meaning in life, and connections. And it occurred to me that I think the two go together. It may not be true in every little bit of the way life works, but much of our meaning, a great deal of our meaning, comes from the people we are associated with, the people we are connected to. The connections we have in life give this life meaning. How the people react to us, and how we relate to them, says much about who we are. We gain our identity and likely our meaning from the people we are connected to. We can't be fathers or mothers, which is identity for some of us, without children.

We're all a child to a parent. We may be a husband or a wife to someone. We're connected to people at work. And all that is part of who we are. We have neighbors. We have friends. We're all citizens with one another in a country. All these are different connections that we have, and all these things work together to give us meaning for who we are. We have an array of relationships, and these tell us, and make us, and define us who we are. They give us our identity.

Well in the story of the Temptation, the devil begins by trying to undermine the identity of Jesus, who had just received his baptism from God. And God has just said, "This is my Son with whom I am well pleased." Now, the devil comes and tempts Jesus, and says if you are God's son then turn these stones into bread. The devil seeks to rob Jesus of his God-given identity, and to replace it with a false one of his own making. Jesus resists this temptation, but not by brute force — knocking the devil out or something like that — or by sheer will. But he takes refuge in his identity, and that's where he gets the strength to withstand this temptation. It's his identity that's grounded in his relationship with God. That's his main connection. He's connected to God. He has a relationship with God, so he turns to that relationship with God for his ability to withstand this temptation. It's the relationship that involves his complete dependence upon God. But even as he does that, he identifies with all other human beings. Keeping within who he is, Jesus doesn't get out of himself but stays within his own person. Jesus will be hungry as other people are hungry. He will be beat, dependent upon the will and grace of God. So he identifies with human beings and he identifies with God. As he identifies with people, he will be at risk or be vulnerable as other people are. But he will always find his safety, his strength, and his relationship with his Father. He will refuse to say no, I'm going to go another direction, I'm going to get my power over here. He continues always to be in relationship with his Father.

Well as Jesus had just been baptized, he was baptized because he wanted to show that he was one of us, that he identified completely with us. So he became human as we are, and the baptism was a way to show his humanity. So in his baptism, he is one of us. And just as he was tempted then as Son of God, so we are tempted as children of God. And so we share this identity with Jesus. In baptism we've been declared children of God. We're tempted also. We're challenged to find our wherewithal to withstand temptations in our relationship with God. Just as Jesus used that means, that's the resource we have for fighting temptation ourselves. We are connected to God. We keep that connection because that is our very strength.

Sometimes we fall into doubt though. That's what the original temptation was in the garden. The devil approached Adam and Eve, as we heard a little bit ago in the first lesson, and established doubt. Did God really say that? Do you think God really meant that, that if you eat that fruit things will fall apart? Was that really what God had in mind? Eat the tempting fruit and find out, was the temptation — who you can really be. You can really be so much better. You don't know how good you can be if you don't go beyond the limits God has put on you. You can be like God in fact, the devil said. So doubt was created about who they were and whether God was really for them or not. They lost track of themselves. They lost their perfect relationship with God.

So the devil comes to us and creates doubt also. Are you really who you think you are? Can you really survive in your current state? Aren't you being held back from your potential? Maybe you could do better if you went another direction. If you get out of your current self, and kind of shed it like a snake would shed its skin, wouldn't you be much more successful and happy? That's the kind of doubt that seeps into our mind as we're tempted. In each day we're besieged by countless ads that seek to create in us a sense that we're lacking something. A sense of insecurity is planted in us. And that sense puts a plant in us that we're inadequate. We need something more. And our God-given identity is undermined with the thought that if we buy this car, or improve our smell, or make our teeth whiter, somehow we

will be more acceptable. They say we hear some 18,000 messages a day just kind of picking away at us, saying do this, do that, and you'll be better if you get this product. All these are always saying to us: you're not good enough the way you are. You're not skinny enough, you're not smart enough, or you're not pretty enough, or you're not strong enough, or you're not rich enough to deserve the love and respect and acceptance (which really we already have from God) but they say there could be more if you buy into these things. We're told always you need something more. You can get LifeLock or other products to supposedly keep your identity from being stolen. But the temptation to let our trust in God be co-opted is a far worse threat than identity theft happening for us. If we let our identity as a person of God, fully reliant on God for what we need, be taken from us by trusting in something else, then something far worse has happened to us than what has happened to our credit card if it got compromised at Schnuck's or Target or something like that. Then a key relationship is threatened and we risk losing our soul, the soul of who we are. We need to stay locked tight with God.

We're tempted by the quick fixes. We would like to have plenty so we'd never have to worry about having plenty. We'd like to have superpowers that we could rescue maybe an inadequate paycheck or too short a retirement account, and just have powers to take care of that. We'd like to be king of the hill, as the devil tempted Jesus, or we'd like to rule the world. We'd like those things. And in our desperate moments — our times when it seems that we're famished, or we have just no more energy, or no more fuel to go on — when it seems like we're all alone and we have no relationships to remind us of who we are, and we feel like a homeless person who has nowhere to go except around the corner, hoping that corner will block the wind for us, we're challenged to keep trusting, not to lose our connection, and to remember who we are as ones connected to God.

Just as Jesus was baptized, we are baptized. We are marked by God, as we were created by God. We are put in a life locked with God. The same Jesus who withstood the temptation in the wilderness would be tempted again. The devil would speak through criminals, through soldiers, through the people gathered at the foot of the cross while Jesus was there, and they would tempt him with the same kinds of words: "If you think you are the messiah, if you are the Son of God, come down off the cross." Always tempting Jesus. "Are you who you think you are, or are you someone else?" To the very end he was tempted, and to the very end Jesus remembered who he was. He was God's son, and so in his last words he says, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." He knew who he was because of the one he was connected to.

Well, this work of Jesus is our way to come through our times of desperation, our temptations to lose sight of who we are, to go off some other direction trying to find quick relief. Jesus offers us a way to safeguard our identity by locking it in God's good gift and promise. Jesus died to show us that God already loves us and has declared that we are not just acceptable, but we are treasured and we are priceless beyond measure. Think about this last week. Was there a time maybe when your identity was threatened, that you were tempted to live outside yourself? Was there a time when you felt inadequate or unworthy? How did it go? Were you able to remember and believe the promise of the one you are connected to, the promise of God in Jesus that you are enough — not just enough, more than enough — and accepted as God's own child? I hope so.

When Jesus was hungry, it was preparation for his mission. He completed that mission in the coming months and years as he succeeded in doing what he needed to do, and even suffered unto death for it. When our youth were on this hunger famine time, yesterday on their fast, they did not just sit around thinking about how hungry they were or how nice it would be to have food, or play games to divert themselves, to think about other things. Rather, they were involved in a service project with Humanitree, learning about people who live in hard situations much of the time. Knowing who they

were as children of God, they were on mission in God's name. So we, as we allow God to keep us connected, know who we are as God's children, locked for life with God, and we carry on the mission — even willing to pay the cost that we incur doing that — because we know whose we are. Amen.

Now, may the peace of God which passes all human understanding keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

*** Keywords ***

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