Matthew 4:1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil.

As we get ready to contemplate what it is that has happened in all our text I will start out by pointing out to you a rather simple, but in my estimation, a rather important fact of this one verse. Despite what the world might say and what many so called Christian denominations say, there is a Devil.

Just let that sink in for a moment. Let the idea that there is no “devil,” no personal being who is bent on evil and bent on destroying anything and everything that is of God, let that idea sink in because if you do I hope you realize the same thing I do. If you are going to claim there is no devil, if your church is going to teach there is no devil, then please note that you cannot claim to believe that Jesus is the Son of God and our Savior! That simple. Here is why.

Scripture, the Bible, is God’s Word. Though written by men, it was written under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity of God, so written, inspired if you would, by God. Point blank: God’s Word. Add to this idea that Matthew is the writer here and that Luke and Mark include in their gospel accounts of Jesus this very same history. In other words, not only are they “inspired,” given the very words they are to write by the Holy Spirit, but in all probability Jesus himself relayed, conveyed and shared with them the events that transpired in the wilderness. Boil it down. If there is no devil then God’s Word, specifically Matthew, Mark and Luke are wrong, they have recorded a falsehood. In that same vein of thought, Jesus told them a whopper of a lie which would make Jesus a total imposter. In one fell swoop, you have just gutted the Christian faith.

Because if there is no devil then there was no temptation. If there was no temptation then there was no Holy Spirit who prompted Jesus into the wilderness. What you are left with is the fact that all you can claim is true in this statement is…there is a wilderness in the land of Israel.

You can try and dress this any way you want. You can claim that Jesus was a very religious man, who put himself through this wilderness camping trip and then the struggles he had, evidently because he went unprepared, and this trip got embellished because the true story was boring and does nothing but show the ineptitude of Jesus. So, Matthew, Mark and Luke have all agreed to dress up Jesus’ camping trip to the south, because the way it is written now works better in trying to establish the “new religion” they want to start. (All you have to do is go back and reread that paragraph and you will realize that the end result is still that there is no devil, Son of God, Savior or verbally inspired book of God, just a phony and false religion started by men for their personal gain. Never mind that they were persecuted and died for this religion they knew was false.)

Here’s a real kicker. Many liberal churches of today teach the basics of what that last paragraph said. Seriously, if they do that, what makes you think they are going to teach you about God, salvation and goodness?

This one little sentence proclaims a few awesome truths that we must believe, we must accept in order to call ourselves Christian. Fact. The Bible is true and factual in all that is says and reveals and is totally trustworthy. Fact. Jesus is a real person, the Son of God who came into this world to take on the Devil and sin for us. Fact. The Holy Spirit is a real person of the Trinity of God and leads and guides Jesus to this extraordinary challenge for our souls’ sake. Fact. The Devil is a real person, a spiritual entity who appeared to Jesus to try and stop what Jesus had come to do. Fact. Your faith and eternal salvation rests on the truths of these facts!

Isn’t it awesome how just one sentence in God’s Word can cause so much thought and soul searching!

Our theme for today will be: **UNDERSTANDING THE BATTLE SATAN BRINGS!**

I want to start out by first getting across one very simple truth I don’t think we can afford to overlook. The question of why this takes place in the way that it does? Ask yourself this, “In the entire revelation of the Bible when and where do the most actual attacks of Satan take place?” How about this: “How many times do you hear of ‘demon possession’ in the Old Testament?” Actually if you search the Old Testament you will only find two passages, very similar passages, concerning demons. Both passages reveal that Israel in its godlessness **“sacrificed to demons that are not gods.”** Israel did evil in this but there is no mention of “demon possession” as it is found in the New Testament.

I would submit to you that Satan is not dumb enough to manifest himself in the world today. If he does, then people will know he is a real being to be avoided. I would submit that Satan likes to stay in the background, using the world and its unbelievers in order to tempt and destroy us. It is spiritual warfare that God tells us about but that we don’t necessarily see because Satan is just not foolish enough to actually reveal himself. So why does all of this activity, this “demon possession” and actual confrontation with Satan occur in the New Testament, specifically during the ministry of Jesus?

Answer: Because there was out and out war between heaven and hell going on! Jesus had come into our world to be our Savior, to be holy and perfect that He might be the holy and perfect sacrifice for our sins. Jesus came into the world to go head to head, face to face, toe to toe with Satan for the sake of our eternal souls. In other words, spiritual activities are cut loose just because Jesus is in the world. And yet, on the whole there are not that many direct confrontations with Satan and demons. We have this instance here. We have a few other demon possessions that Jesus dealt with, but other than that not really a whole lot of such activity. And yet, Satan is out there. He is working to destroy Jesus and his message. He is working to destroy our souls in whatever way he can. But his work, except in the time of Jesus, is a hidden attack, brutal, tempting, devastating, but nevertheless hidden. Because it just won’t do for Satan to reveal himself as true and real in this world. I think it would undermine everything he is working to do. So how does Satan work?

That’s where our history comes in. Our history really serves two great purposes, important for us to grasp.

Purpose one. Our history is given because it is a face to face, toe to toe battle between Jesus, God’s Son, potential Savior of the world and Satan, God’s sworn enemy and liar from the beginning. This history is here so that you can see that unlike Adam and Eve who were deceived and lead into sin, Jesus is not deceived and does not give into sin and temptation.

Mind you, these are not the only temptations that Jesus faced in his life. Jesus is already some 30 years old when he begins his ministry and in order to begin his ministry he needed to prove himself faithful and true to His Father in every way. Hebrews 4:15 makes this pointed statement of fact concerning Jesus: **“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, and yet was without sin.”** Those words tell us that that the whole life of Jesus was filled with temptations. He had to endure everything we get confronted with and he did that so far for the 30 years he lived in this world of ours. Confronted sin, confronted trail and tribulation, confronted problems and woes his entire life and did it without once sinning in thought, word or deed.

Think of all that you endured as a kid. So did Jesus, but maybe even more so because he was God’s Son. Think of all the temptations and trials you wrestled with as an adolescent. So did Jesus! I have no doubt Jesus was tempted to complain about doing the dishes, cleaning up the work shop or that he had to deal with the absolute cruelty and biting words of other kids. Do you remember the hormone struggles? I have no doubt that Jesus had to endure the problems of being a teen and then a young adult, even the trials that beset a man until he is a thirty something. This history is not Jesus’ first ride in the rodeo of sin. Make sure you grasp and understand that.

But now, as Jesus begins his ministry, the battle has been elevated. Jesus goes to the wilderness, not just for three temptations but rather for forty days and forty nights of direct attacks from Satan in order to get Jesus to falter, stumble or even have a shadow of doubt pass over his mind. So purpose one is so that we can understand that Jesus, even when directly and viciously attacked by Satan, he does not sin! It is possible that we only hear of these three sins because the other 39 days’ worth of temptations are just to brutal and scary, perhaps to spiritual for us to grasp. And again, Jesus was without sin.

Purpose two. We are given these three instances because these are the three temptations that teach us the most about how Satan is going to attack us. These three are revealed to us because Satan’s strategies are most clearly revealed. Here are quick lessons on how Satan works, revealed in this history.

Satan likes to twist and misuse God’s Word. Where he can, he will lead you away from God by leading you to think you see clearer and grasp better the things of God, why even better than God himself has revealed. Satan twists, misuses, and if you pay attention to Jesus’ answers, it is clear that Satan will spout Scripture and declare it truth even though what he teaches is a direct contradiction to the truth. I know of many such instances of this in today’s world. Lies like: “You don’t have to go to church to be a believer…I can worship God better in my own way (even though God set up and gave the church, that’s His way)…This sin is okay because God made me this way…Men wrote the Bible so there must be mistakes…Why would God put his Son to death, what a horrid Father he is!” Seriously, I can go on and on with how Satan likes to get the world and people to misuse and misbelieve God’s Word.

Satan likes to attack us at our weak points, not our strong points. After fasting for quite some time and filled with hunger, that’s when Satan will confront with bread. I even read one point of view that suggested that as Satan is presenting this temptation he fills the air with the sweet smell of fresh baked bread. Yep, he is going to attack at your weak point. That’s how people become addicts to all sorts of behaviors and things, weak points. That’s how families get destroyed with betrayals, harsh words, angry clashes, the grass is greener on the other side wishes, and just good ole blindness to our sinful thoughts and ways. Weak points. That’s how our kids, though meant to be blessings, end up our destruction. Weak points.

Satan likes to present the world as a great place, a place where you can be in charge and you can be king or queen of your own little space. You can have it all if you just give up those foolish ideas about serving God and doing it God’s way. “You bet, take that girl out for a two year test drive before you marry her, that’s best. Drugs won’t hurt you, they will give you greater insight into the wonder of God. Go ahead, drink yourself silly, you’ve got this, you’re above what happens to others. If you don’t go to church, think of all the money you save because you don’t give an offering. Follow the world, get involved with the world, because the world really cares, the world has your good and happiness in mind, the world will bring you better things than Jesus.” Again we could go on and on. Satan likes to deceive with the things of the world.

There are probably a few other lessons in these words for us, but that should suffice for now. Actually, for now, thank God for Jesus. Thank God that Jesus did not sin and that Jesus, as the perfect and holy Son of God ended up on the cross to be the atoning sacrifice for us and the world. Thank God for the truth of his Word and the revelation of sins forgiven because Jesus did win the battle. Not just the battle that went on for forty days and nights in the wilderness, but the battle with death that surely took place on the cross for your sake and mine. Thank God for Jesus our Savior and our victory over the sins that Satan will tempt us with. And please, don’t use Jesus victory as the excuse for your defeat. Amen.