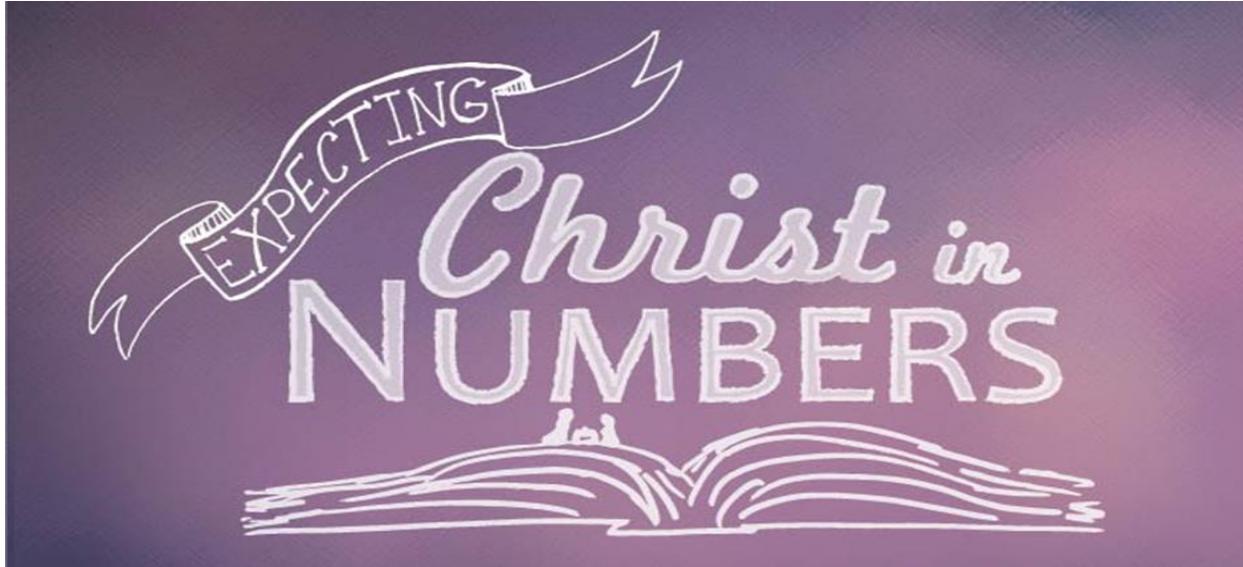


***He Will Be Faithful in the Wilderness***  
Advent Sermon Series on Expecting Christ in Numbers  
Kenwood Baptist Church  
Pastor David Palmer  
December 4, 2016

**TEXT:** Luke 4:1-13



We continue in our Advent series, *Expecting Christ in the Book of Numbers*, and this morning we look at the second week of Advent, the theme of love. Jesus says: "If you love Me, you will keep My commands," and this week we look at this portion of Scripture at what happens to Jesus after His baptism, where we ended last week. The Spirit of the Lord leads Jesus into the wilderness, into a time of testing for 40 days. It is this wilderness temptation and Jesus' faithfulness in this moment that is the certainty for us of His faithfulness to God, that He is a pure and spotless Lamb offered for you and for me. This morning we want to see the connection of Jesus' activity, His successful triumph over the serpent in the wilderness where we see Jesus victorious over the same temptations that you and I face, over the very temptations that Israel faced in the wilderness, and over the very same temptations that reverberate back all the way to the Garden of Eden. When we see Jesus this morning, we see Him triumph to the glory of God for your sake and for mine. Let's look at this narrative together, a striking, important portion which is central to the Christmas story.

As we follow the narrative, we will see that the story of Jesus' faithfulness in the wilderness manifests the love of God for humanity and is really a story inside of another story. Keep your Bibles open to Luke 4 and prepare to be fed from God's Word. I've been fed from this portion,

and I trust this will be true for you as well. Luke 4 tells us what happens after the Holy Spirit comes down upon Jesus. If you ever want to know if the Holy Spirit is working in your life, then notice how the Holy Spirit leads Jesus out into the wilderness. Sometimes we imagine that the sure sign or evidence of the Spirit of God in our life is victory upon victory, just cruise-controlling along for the glory of God. Yet the Spirit here takes Jesus from the Jordan into the wilderness area. This language of “into the wilderness” connects us immediately with that great portion of Scripture we explored this fall—that God often meets with His people in the wilderness to reveal and to refine the heart of faith. Luke tells us that Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days, and this time period is also significant. You will remember from our study this fall that the wilderness wandering took place over 40 years. It was an extended period of time, and now Jesus comes into this same area. He does not eat during this period, but fasts, and Luke, as the physician, tells us with one of the great understatements of the New Testament that He became hungry. Forty days of not eating, and Jesus became hungry. He meets in the wilderness our ancient foe, the serpent, whom we meet in the Garden of Eden, who tempts and tries God's people from the very beginning. This confrontation in the wilderness is a confrontation that has to do with Jesus' place as Son of God. Remember the voice from heaven at Jesus' baptism said: *“This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him.”* Jesus goes into the wilderness bearing the title “the beloved Son of God.” In Scripture, this title is applied to Israel at the Exodus. In Exodus 4:22, Moses says to Pharaoh:

*“Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, ‘Let my son go that he may serve Me.’”*

Hosea 11:1 says:

*“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.”*

Luke's arrangement of the gospel narrative wants to remind us that not only does Jesus bear the story of Israel in His own person, but Jesus also carries the story of our shared humanity in Himself. The incarnation is the mystery of God's becoming real human flesh. In Luke's arrangement of the story, right after the baptism, Luke tells us this vast genealogy. Many of us get lost here. Genealogical lists of the Bible are an acquired taste, but once you have that taste, you become riveted. We had some entry-level get-our-appetite-together-for-genealogies in Numbers, but these genealogies are critical for describing the movement of the story. Matthew gives us the genealogy of Jesus forwards, from Abraham leading up to Christ. Luke gives us the genealogy of Jesus backwards, and he is revealed to be the One who carries the destiny of the humanity of Adam, the son of God, as we see in the verse immediately preceding our narrative this morning. Jesus carries with Him our destiny. He carries with Him the story of Israel, the story of Adam. He goes into the wilderness, and the ancient serpent tempts Him and says in Luke 4:3:

*“If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.”*

For many of us, we read this passage and it seems like the devil is asking Jesus to perform a magic trick, to use His power as incarnate Son of God to do something miraculous. But that is not what's at stake here. The devil is inviting Jesus as Son of God to satisfy His own craving, to meet His own needs. This is the drama that we experience in the narrative of Scripture when Israel leaves from Egypt and journeys in the wilderness. We saw this fall that one of the first things that happens to us is that we become hungry. God has designed you and designed me to desire and need regular nourishment, and the Lord tells His people that He allowed them to be hungry in the wilderness to humble them, to test them, to know what was in their heart, whether they would keep His commands or not. The Lord says He humbles you and fed you with manna. The temptation to satisfy our own cravings, to use our God-given capacity to meet our own needs, is very real. You will find cravings within you as a human being, and you will identify the satisfaction of those cravings as the key to your happiness: “If I could just have that and eat it!” or “If I could just have that and drink it, I would be happy, my needs, my central most fundamental needs will be met!” This temptation reverberates not only of Israel's wandering in the wilderness, but this goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden.

In Genesis 3:1, the serpent asked the question:

*“Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?”*

The prohibition of eating, the restraint of our appetite, will manifest for us the opportunity to obey God. God gave to our ancestors one command, and that one command defined good and evil, not in abstract definition, but in relation to God. Good and evil in the Bible is directly related to obedience or disobedience to God, and this command to refrain from eating gives our ancestors an opportunity to obey the Lord and to know Him. And yet Adam and Eve yield to the serpent's temptations and take and eat. It is a death-dealing blow. Israel falls in a similar way in the wilderness. Remember the anguish for the melons and the cucumbers and all that we had in Egypt and allowing our earthly appetite to drive a wedge between us and our heavenly Father.

Jesus goes into this very wilderness, experiences the very same temptations, and He resoundingly answers the serpent's charge: “If you are really the Son of God, then meet your own needs, be self-sufficient, decide for Yourself the good and take it,” and Jesus instead replies by quoting God's Word from Deuteronomy 8:3, and He says in Luke 4:4:

*“It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'”*

Matthew 4:4 gives the full quotation: “. . .but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” What do you need to live? Is it a Cinnabon? Is it your favorite holiday wine? Is it the meal

that you crave that you think: "I'm so hungry. If I could just eat; if I could just drink that, then I won't need God." Jesus says we're not living by bread alone. We live by the Word of God. Let nothing separate you as son of God from the relationship with your heavenly Father. Jesus' answer, His quote from Scripture, is a resounding: "Yes, I am the Son of God, but because I am the Son of God, I will not seek to meet My own needs. Because I am the Son of God, I will not live independent of My heavenly Father. Because I am the Son of God, I will not be self-reliant but God-reliant, and I will allow no appetite, no craving to separate Me and drive a wedge between Me and my heavenly Father." That's what you need to live. What you need to live is this relationship with your heavenly Father, the sustaining grace of His manna provided to you, the life-giving nourishment of His Word. This is what's at stake.

What does it mean to be the Son of God? Jesus triumphs over this first temptation of our appetites, and now the second round takes place. The devil takes Jesus up, Matthew tells us, to a high place. Luke 4:5 tells us:

*"And the devil took Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time."*

I don't know what kind of download speed is required for this display, but it must be the highest ever registered! Can you imagine seeing the authority and the glory and the wealth and the fame and the accomplishments and the provision and the subservience of nations, all that this world has to offer? The devil shows it to Jesus in a flash. In a single moment of time, He sees all that this world has to offer—all authority, all glory. Then the devil says something peculiar. He says in Luke 4:6:

*"To You I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will."*

As I worked through this passage, my first instinct was to say that's a total lie. The devil is a liar; he lies. This feels like a lie, and yet, as we probe into it a little bit further, I think it's possible that what the devil is referring to here is the worldly expression of culture, of civilization, of power. Being made in God's image and likeness, we are sons of the Most High. We have a tremendous capacity to create culture and civilization. We are made in God's image, to know Him and to reflect Him, and we were given this commission in the Garden to fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of God—to fill the earth with image-bearing likeness of God. That means we create music. That means we create art. That means we create culture, and that is to display and reflect the glory. You see this in humanity, and yet you also see in fallen humanity a demonic expression of culture, of music, of art, of government, that subjugates, defaces, and defames the image. I think that is what the devil is saying belongs to him, and he is trying to deceive Christ. He is trying to offer a false promise, just like our ancestors in the Garden of Eden. When the devil said: *"If you eat this, then you will become like God,"* our ancestors should

have looked at that ancient serpent said: “We have already been made like God.” The devil always offer you something, actually a twisted, distorted version of what God really intends to give you. The devil has no creative power, only distorting capabilities. He says: “It has been delivered to me. I’ll give it to whom I will, if you will just worship me.” The devil offers to Jesus a temptation for power, glory, wealth, adoration, and fame while severing the connection between Jesus, the Son of God, and His heavenly Father. It is a temptation to forget who we are, who made us, where we come from, to whom we owe our allegiance, thanks, and gratitude, and the expression of our service and work in the world. Jesus answers the devil again from Scripture. Jesus quotes again from Deuteronomy and says in Luke 4:8:

*“You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve.”*

Deuteronomy 6 contains Israel's great confession of faith and says in 6:4-5:

*“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”*

This is what we were made for. Deuteronomy 6, after this great confession of faith, continues and says in Deuteronomy 6:10-13

*“And when the LORD your God brings you into the land that He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by His name you shall swear.”*

Take care lest you forget the Lord. It is the Lord your God you shall fear. It is the Lord you shall serve.

Jesus does not allow any temptation for worldly fame or success to enter into His being. Instead, He quotes the Scripture that you and I as sons of God are to maintain this relationship with the Father, to live out this beautiful expression of culture and civilization that we have been designed for, what we were commissioned for in the Garden of Eden. The Lord took our ancestors and set them there. Jesus, the Son of God, is faithful, where Israelite had stumbled. He is faithful, where Adam and Eve had stumbled, and as this rising confrontation continues in the wilderness, Jesus, the Son of God, prepares for the third and final round. Luke has a different order than Matthew, each author seeking to make a climactic point. Luke arranges for the third temptation to be the one when the devil takes Jesus to Jerusalem and sets Him on what is literally the wing of the temple. This is at the highest point, the southeast corner of the temple. The devil takes Jesus up to this pinnacle of the temple, and it is very, very high. The

Kidron Valley is beneath this area. The walls of the temple mount rise to a great height on top of these walls. It is Herod's Royal Stoa. Josephus, as a first-century eyewitness, tells us that if you stood at this corner, it was 450 feet down, and just to look at it you become dizzy. When we were there just a couple weeks ago, coming up to the temple mount and seeing the Herodian column capitals strewn about, our guide said: "If you look closely, you can still see the gold plating from Herod's Temple Mount capitals. I thought: "Are you kidding me, 2000 years?" I had the temptation to scrape off some gold, but I'm thankful I did not. You can still see the gold. Well, the devil takes Jesus up to this high place and again challenges his Sonship. You see, that is what is at stake in the temptations. What's at stake is your identity. What's at stake here is: will you exchange the identity as sons and daughters of the most high God for a pot of stew as Esau did? Will you exchange your identity for glory, honor, and fame at the cost of severing relationship with God? We see what's at stake in this third, climactic temptation when the devil takes Jesus up and says: "Now, if you're going to defeat me with Scripture, let me give You some Scripture." The devil says in Luke 4:9:

*"If you are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command His angels concerning You, to guard You,' and 'On their hands they will bear You up, lest You strike Your foot against a stone.'"*

The devil seeks to tempt Jesus, to test the Father, to upend the relationship of Father to Son. The Son does not test the Father. The Father is faithful to the Son. The Son's relationship to the Father is one of humility, obedience, and faithfulness. The devil is seeking yet again to drive a wedge, because if he can separate, even for a moment, that relationship with Father to Son, then the Eden narrative will replay. The judgment that comes upon Israel in the wilderness for tempting God will replay. What's at stake here is severing that relationship. The devil tries to entice Jesus to cut that relationship off, and whenever you cut that relationship off, it is always death-dealing. The devil invites Jesus throw Himself down, in a sense to take His life.

I want to tell you, just as a side note, that any thought of ending your life will never come from your heavenly Father. He will never lead you into that thought. That temptation to hurt yourself, injure yourself, throw yourself down, that always comes from the pit of hell, because it is always a desire to deface, defame, degrade the image. The Son of God does not yield. The Son of God may have said to the serpent: "You know, that's a selective quotation from Scripture." The devil omits the opening of Psalm that says in Psalm 91:1-2:

*"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD, 'My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.' For He will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence."*

The Lord promises His loving care, His loving protection. The devil stops at Psalm 91:12 for good reason. It says:

*"On their hands they will bear You up, lest You strike your foot against a stone."*

He stops says there because he cannot bear Psalm 91:13:

*"You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent You will trample underfoot."*

The devil cannot bear this line and so he omits it. He cannot bear Psalm 91:14-15, either:

*"Because He holds fast to Me in love, I will deliver Him; I will protect Him, because He knows My name. When He calls to Me, I will answer Him; I will be with Him in trouble; I will rescue Him and honor Him."*

Jesus does not allow the temptation to gain a foothold, and replies to the serpent, again from Scripture. He says in Luke 4:12:

*"It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:16:

*"You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah."*

Israel's testing of the Lord at Massah is reported to us in Exodus 17. Just after the parting of the waters and moving in the wilderness towards the base of Mount Sinai, the people thirst. They again panic and question: "Is the Lord among us?" The Lord instructs Moses to strike the rock and not the people. The Lord says in Exodus 17:5-6:

*"Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink."*

The Lord God Almighty takes the blow of our disobedience and water comes forth. That is why Moses is barred from entering the land after the account in Numbers 20 when he struck the rock a second time instead of speaking to it as God had directed him, because you cannot crucify the Son of God twice. The Lord takes the blow for your disobedience and mine, and Jesus triumphs in the wilderness for your sake and for mine.

At Christmas time, we remember the hope of the world. It is the hope that we talked about last Sunday. We are the only ones on the planet with this hope. We are the only ones who have the hope of a coming Savior who would fulfill God's promises of old. We said last week that Jesus' coming is heralded by the prophets and climactically heralded by John the Baptist, a Nazarite in the wilderness. This week we look at the love that is central to Christmas. The love of Christ is manifest in His glad obedience to the Father, His willingness, not only to take on human flesh, but to live the life that you are designed to live, to willingly undergo every temptation that you

and I might face. We do not have a High Priest who was ignorant of what we would face. We do not have a Savior who has not walked where we walk. We have a Savior who manifests the love of God and willingly submits Himself to these temptations in the wilderness, and they are the very same temptations that the devil brings in the Garden of Eden. The devil has no new ideas. There are some new presentations, some new delivery systems, but they are all garden-variety, and unlike our ancestors in the Garden, and unlike our ancestors in the wilderness, Jesus, the beloved Son of God, triumphs in the wilderness through His faithfulness. When He emerges from this temptation, the angels rush to minister to Him. He comes forth in the Spirit and power of the Lord and begins to preach publicly. The triumph over the devil in the wilderness is the prelude to His public ministry, and He begins to proclaim in Mark 1:15:

*“The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”*

Jesus then drives out demonic power. I love Luke 11:20 where Jesus says:

*“But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you.”*

Jesus tells this short, little parable about this victory. It is one of the underreported images of the gospels. Jesus compares Himself to a divine warrior. Jesus says in Luke 11:21:

*“When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe.”*

He speaks of a strong man clothed with the weapons of war, strolling about his palace, protecting his goods. The Greek expression signals the armor of a *hoplite*. Our son Jonathan is reading through the *Iliad* right now. There is always fighting, weaponry, battles. You can see a warrior like Achilles with all of his armor, and Jesus says his goods are safe when a strong man, fully armed, is guarding them. But, when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides the spoils.

Some of you feel like you are being hassled with the same temptations, the temptation to deny your identity in Jesus Christ, to reject your sonship of the Most High and yield to an appetite, saying that is where my happiness is from, where my peace comes from. So you're tempted to grasp for worldly success at the cost of severing your relationship with your heavenly Father. Some of you are haunted by thoughts of maybe taking your life, doing yourself harm, or putting God to the test in a way that He has not designed you to do, and you feel like there is a heavily armed man keeping you in bonds. I have good news. One much, much stronger has taken the field. One much, much stronger has come on your behalf and mine. He has come up to that warrior, who seems so much stronger in his weaponry, in his appearance, than any Goliath. Notice that He has attacked him and He has overcome him and He has stripped him of his armor and taken His possession, which is you and me.

Christmas is not only about a Baby born in a manger in fulfillment of God's promises, but it is about a Baby that grows up into a warrior and who goes out into the wilderness to triumph over our enemies and to rescue us from his power. Luke tells us that the devil left after this defeat. He comes back in Luke's narrative in Luke 22. Apparently it takes him 18 chapters to recover! He comes back into the scene for a moment, just as Jesus is preparing to celebrate with His disciples. He comes back into the scene to try to divert this final blow of victory, and again he is unsuccessful.

Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father, so that when He came to celebrate Passover with His disciples and told them that "this bread is My body which is broken for you, do this in remembrance of Me," it was the offering of a perfect, spotless Lamb. When He took the cup and said: "This cup is the cup of the New Covenant in My blood poured out for you. Do this in remembrance of Me," it was the shed blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, perfect in His obedience, triumphing over the devil in the wilderness, and now calling all of us to believe. Let's prepare our hearts to partake of this victory celebration and to know that the power of darkness is broken in your life now. Hallelujah! Amen! Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we worship You this morning. We thank You that You have triumphed on our behalf. We thank You, Lord, that You have taken up the story of Scripture in Your own Person, that You have been faithful in the wilderness, where Israel had tested the Lord ten times. You have been faithful in the wilderness in exchange for the disobedience of our first ancestors, and Lord, Your full obedience now sets us free. I pray, Lord, that we would live in this freedom now. We worship You, Son of God, Holy One, who calls us sons through faith.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.