

Matthew 4:1-11 (Genesis 3:1-21)

Not everyone is happy about the red-light cameras which have been installed at two intersections in Washington. One person responded that he feels as if he is constantly being watched. "It's like having a policeman there 24 hours a day...if you try and go through as the light is turning red, the camera will catch you in the act."

By nature we don't want someone watching over us, unless we're in trouble and need help; then we welcome it. At a previous congregation the members would fill out attendance cards so that the pastor and elders could keep track of who was in church each Sunday. One man, however, refused to sign a card. When asked about it, he said that he did not want anyone watching over him. He did not like the idea of being held accountable to someone else.

Satan is delighted when we have this attitude. His temptations, in fact, are designed to make us think that we can take care of ourselves just fine; that we shouldn't have to be accountable to anyone; that you and I can pretty much be our own elder, our own pastor, our own god. That's why Adam and Eve fell in the Garden of Eden. "Be your own god," was the devil's temptation. "Just do it," as the Nike slogan tells us. "Take a bite of the fruit and you will be like God."

Satan's temptation worked well that day, and it has worked ever since. The reason why parenting is no easy task is because children are constantly tempted by Satan to ignore what their parents tell them to do, and to be their own parent; to be accountable only to themselves. The reason why churches lose so many teenagers after confirmation is because they fall for Satan's temptation. They've had their years of training. They've put in their time. Now they want to take charge of their own spiritual life. They don't want someone else to be accountable for them anymore. The reason why churches struggle to pay their bills is because so many of the members fall for Satan's temptation. They don't want to be held accountable for what they give. "Since I'm basically my own god, I'll do what I want with my money."

It's difficult for anyone today who is in a position of authority. Satan tempts us to do our own thing—live how we want—please ourselves. "It's my body, so don't tell me what I should or should not do!" "If I want to have an abortion, it's my choice!" "If I want to have sex before marriage, keep your rules to yourself!" "If I want to attend church only when it's convenient for me, what's it to you?" "If I don't want to do the class assignment, you can't make me!"

The problem with this attitude is that it leads to death. In eating the fruit, Adam and Eve rejected their loving God and they brought death to themselves and to the entire world. It is death for us to go our own way in life. It is death for us to be our own god. It is death for us to constantly fall for Satan's temptation. And yet we still do it day after day. You do it. I do it. We who claim to be God's people are continually rejecting our loving God; rebelling against His will for our life and living for ourselves. We don't want to be accountable to Him and to those in authority whom He has placed over us. And so you and I will die...and not just in our bodies. Unless we repent, our eternal soul will die.

Adam and Eve died the day they fell away from God. They were lost in spiritual death—until God found them and told them the good news that He was going to send a Savior. And this good news is for you. Since you and I have lived for ourselves, Jesus lived for you. Because you and I have refused to be accountable to God, He became accountable for you. Since you and I continually fall for Satan's temptation, He faced Satan for you and did not fall. Because you and I do not want to be tied down to rules and laws, Jesus placed Himself under God's Law for you.

When God found Adam and Eve they refused to be held accountable for their sin. "It wasn't my fault...don't blame me" was their reply. And because God is merciful, He did not. He did not blame them—He blamed Himself. His own Son would take the blame upon Himself. He would die so that they would live. And this is just as true for you. When your child disobeys you, you do not need to place the blame on your child. Discipline your child out of love, yes...but remember that Jesus took your child's blame to His cross. He was punished for what your child did. When you feel tremendous guilt as a parent, or as a spouse, a child, a brother or sister, a child of God—look to Jesus. He took your blame, your guilt. He was held accountable for the wrong that you did. There is no more blame for you. The punishment fell upon Him.

You see, Jesus did not face Satan in the desert for His own sake. He squared off against the devil for you. He was tempted just as you are, and He didn't defeat Satan in the desert to show you how; He defeated him in your place. Jesus fasted forty days and nights for you. He became physically weak because you and I are weak. He faced Satan alone because you and I try and go alone in life without Him. That wasn't just Jesus there in the desert...it was you, and you, and you. You were there in Christ because He was there for you. That's why you can sing in our last hymn: "Tho devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us; we tremble not, we fear no ill, they shall not overpower us." Because one little Word, even though He was hungry, and tired, and sore, and sweaty...one little Word, Christ, defeated Satan for you.

And that one little Word is now here with you. He doesn't leave you alone in the desert, even though we prefer to go alone without Him. He puts His word into our ears when it is preached. He puts His word into our heart when it is read. The same Word that defeated Satan in the desert; the same Word that died an awful death on the cross—that Word is here now for you so that you don't have to face Satan alone; so that when you and I fall, that Word bespeaks us righteous.

Friend, that word for you means forgiveness and life. You, dear child, are forgiven. For disobeying your parents, for rebelling against their authority over you, God forgives you. You, dear parent, are forgiven. For becoming angry with your child, for failing to be the parent God has asked you to be, God forgives you. You, you, and you are forgiven. For falling for Satan's temptation, for desiring to be your own god, God forgives you. How can I say this? Because your God took your blame. He was counted as the Sinner in your place. Jesus was nailed to the cross for each one of you, and so each one of you is forgiven.

Don't listen to Satan. Run from him and from his temptations. Run to your baptism. Run to God's altar. Run to His Word of Forgiveness. Satan wants you, but Jesus has you. He claimed you through Water and Word. Satan did nothing for you, but Jesus died for you. And He lives now for you so that you may live, not for yourself, but for Him. And you

know that Jesus watches over you not to pounce on you when you mess up, but to take care of you and to love you. He doesn't blame you; He forgives you. Even though we deserve the blame, He forgives you...because He was blamed for you. With that Word of Forgiveness in your ears, Satan has no chance—he is defeated. Go in peace, friend, Christ is for you; He is on your side. Amen.