

“No ‘Ifs’”

Luke 4:1-13

“If” is a powerful word. “If” can be the focal point of a contract or agreement. “If you provide certain materials or services, I will pay you “x” amount of money.” God said to the Israelites, “If you keep My commandments and worship no other gods, I will bless you and you will live long in the land of Israel. If you do not keep My commandments and go chasing after other gods, I will send famine, war, and enemies will tear you out of the land.” That is a brief summary of God’s Deuteronomic promises.

“If” is a powerful word. “If” can also be a dangerous word. The devil loves to use “if.” Look at the three temptations of Jesus. Satan uses “if” in all three. “If you are the Son of God . . .” Right there he calls into question what God the Father had just said at the Jordan River. You have to remember that Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness took place immediately after Jesus’ Baptism.

Jesus is baptized. God the Father speaks from heaven and says, “This is My Son whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.” And the Holy Spirit descends upon Him and He is led by the Holy Spirit into the

wilderness for 40 days. And the devil comes along and says, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.”

Last week, Jonathan Fisk spoke of the current spirituality of America especially age 30 and younger. The term currently used to describe it is “Moralistic, Therapeutic, Deism.” You can watch his entire presentation online. In the first temptation, we have already heard the Deism – recognizing the reality of God, but calling into question how the persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are separate, and equal, and yet are one God. Deism likes a god who is vague and impersonal. Satan wants to muddy the waters of who Jesus truly is with his cleverly placed “if.”

We also see the “Therapeutic” part. The presence of God is desired when we need Him. By the power of God, you can feel better. After all, this is what God wants for you. Our sinful nature loves this. I want to feel good and the more immediate the gratification the better.

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism – I will believe in a god, but not be highly concerned with the ins and out of every letter of doctrine. And I will be happy with this god and live a moral life – as I define morality. Don’t place your rules on me. And I will be happy with this god as long as he keeps my belly full and makes me feel good. And the vast majority of Americans 30 and younger are very comfortable with this presentation of their God who is vague and impersonal even though they call Him Jesus.

As Satan tests the real Jesus in the wilderness, this is the same sort of testing of your resolve that Satan still uses today. He only has one trick, but he is very good at it, and he has had lots of practice. You need to know how to answer him. Jesus answers him with the Word of God from the book of Deuteronomy. When Satan tests the resolve of your faith with the “ifs” of life, what do you use to answer him? It is important to be in the Word. It is important to actually know what the Bible says.

Just like with Jesus, if Satan doesn't destroy you with the first temptation, you know he will be back. And he is seeking to destroy you. That is what this is about. This is not a game. There are eternal consequences. So he tells Jesus, “If you worship me, I will give you all the authority and glory of all the kingdoms of the world.” Isn't it funny that it is not his authority to give but he promises it anyway?

Satan whispers in your ears the same empty promises of “if.” How many times have you said to yourself, “If only I had ‘this’, then I would be content; then I would be happy.” When you hear that hopeful “if” as the source of your peace and contentment, know that this is Satan whispering in your ear. And learn from experience that when you acquire that “if” it doesn't bring the contentment you expected. I was watching a show and a lady said, “When I am feeling bad I go out and buy a new cute outfit and it makes me feel good.” Someone asked, “What do you do when that feeling wears off and you realize

that you still have all the same problems?” She said, “Then I go buy some shoes.” There is only One source of peace and contentment. The forgiveness of sins in the broken body and shed blood of the Son of God is the only place you will find any peace or rest in this world.

When John D. Rockefeller was the wealthiest man in the world and by today’s standard would have had 10 times as much money as Bill Gates, he was asked how much money was enough. He famously answered, “Just a little more.” All of Satan’s empty promises, all the “ifs”, even if they were all in your possession, it would not bring you the peace that God has brought through the sending of His Son.

The covenant in Christ’s blood is a promise that does not contain any “ifs.” This is not like the land contract that God made with Moses and the Israelites: “If you keep my commandments, you will live long in the land.”

Christ died for you. No “ifs.” Christ poured out His blood as the ransom price to purchase you out of the slavery to sin. No “ifs.” Christ washed you clean in the waters of Baptism. No “ifs.” Christ gives you His broken body and shed blood for you to eat and drink. No “ifs.” Christ rose from the dead, and so will you. No “ifs.”

Notice that your salvation is not your work. You are not saved only “if” you do enough. The Gospel, the good news is that Christ has done it all: “It is finished,” Jesus proclaims from the cross. No “ifs.” Amen.