



## ***From Here to Eternity - Part 2***

**A Sermon by Rev. Rich Brasher**

**Cleora United Methodist Church**

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Open your Bible to the book of Luke, Chapter 4.

Today is the first Sunday of the season of the church year we call Lent. Lent is the 40 days (not including Sundays) before Easter Sunday, and it's a time of preparation for our celebration of the resurrection of Christ. Lent is a time in which the church examines itself and its ministries, and it's a time when we each, as Christians, do a lot of self-examination. It's a time when we seek God's grace and mercy for the sin in our lives. It is a time of penitence and prayer. A time of seeking God's will for our daily lives, remembering the grace we received at our baptism, and praying as David did in Psalm 51:

*Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

*Do not cast me from your presence  
or take your Holy Spirit from me.*

*Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*

(Psalm 51:10-12 NIV)

Today we are continuing with part 2 of a 6 part message series called "*From Here to Eternity*." We did Part 1 on Ash Wednesday and you can read that online by accessing our website ([www.cleoraumc.org](http://www.cleoraumc.org)) and clicking on the link provided on the home page. I borrowed the title from a novel published in the 1950's which later became a movie and a TV series. The story really has little to do with the scriptures we will be studying (except perhaps in providing some examples of what not to do) but the title, when taken in a different context, is really quite appropriate to our observance of the Lenten Season. You see, "*From Here to Eternity*" is a story set in Hawaii just prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor. It is a story about personal

and human conflict, and it's a story about love (some of it misguided), and it's a story about people who had no idea what was just about to happen to them and the role that event would play for each of them.

The story of Jesus' birth, life, ministry, even His death and resurrection is also a story about personal and human conflict. It's also a story about love, and it's a story about us - a people who can't fully know or understand the full importance of what's will eventually to happen each of us and the role that eventuality will play for us in eternity. And after all, isn't that the reason Jesus came to earth in the first place - to lead us *from here to eternity*?

The challenge for us is that there are those earthly desires we must deal with. Things we get temporary pleasure from that we know aren't best for us, and things that we know aren't pleasing to God. In the church we call those *temptations*, and they seem to be with us all the time. How do we resist those temptations? How can we be pleasing to God at all times? Do we have the will power to control ourselves in every situation? We're only human, how can we be expected to be perfect Christians?

The best answer to those questions is found in Luke 4:1-13:

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.*

*The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."*

*Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'"*

*The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given*

*to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours."*

*Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"*

*The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written:*

*"He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."*

*Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

*When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time. (Luke 4:1-13 NIV)*

The reason 40 days was selected as the duration of the Lenten Season is to mark the 40 days Jesus was in the wilderness, and the reason that Sundays are excluded is because every Sunday is supposed to be a resurrection celebration - like "mini" Easters, if you will.

So, here we have Jesus, led by the Spirit to the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. You can read the same story in Matthew 4:1-11. and Mark simply says, "*At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.*" (Mark 1:12-13 NIV)

The account is set in the wilderness, the kind of place where prophets like Moses and Elijah also began their ministries. It is the kind of place where Israel itself was birthed as a people on their trek to the land that had been promised to them. Jesus' time there was a time of fasting and presumably of prayer.

It's interesting how temptation works. You see Jesus wasn't tempted the way you and I often are. That is to see whether we will eat that extra piece of cake, or whether we'll have that

alcoholic drink or whatever. The devil wanted to see whether even good things could lure Jesus from a focus on God's will. Just like for us, he is ever trying to lure us into believing in a more comfortable messiah.

The devil's challenges to Jesus are not to do bad things, rather he tests Him with things that are good.

Look at the three things the enemy used to test Jesus:

### **1. To Feed the Hungry:**

First, turning a stone into a loaf of bread, would assuage his hunger after the long fast. By implication, if He can do that, He can also turn the abundant stones that cover Israel's landscape into ample food to feed the many hungry people in a land often wracked by famine. The challenge is to be a new Moses for the people. Jesus' reply draws on Moses himself, by citing Deuteronomy 8:3. Bread is good, but not sufficient to define Jesus' mission.

### **2. To Rule the World:**

The 2nd test in Luke's account portrays the devil in the role of "ruler of this world," which is a theme in the book of John (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), who can manage the governance of the world's kingdoms. For the price of worshiping or honoring that authority, the devil will hand it all to Jesus. Remember that most of the known world in Luke's day was under the heavy-handed control of Rome and its economic, administrative, and military empire. Surely a change of regime can only be for the good of the world! It comes as an opportunity for Jesus to rule the world in love and with justice.

Yet again Jesus' answer is no. The price is too high, even to acknowledge the self-evident power of the devil in the political arena. Jesus' reply is from Deuteronomy 6:13. All authority belongs to only to God. Implicitly, even playing the world's game for a good purpose would be to risk serving something less than God.

### 3. **To Prove Who He Is by Throwing Himself Off the Highest Point of the Temple:**

Luke's sequence of tests concludes in Jerusalem, the place where Jesus' ministry will culminate in His passion and resurrection appearances, and where the church will begin (Acts 1). The devil's challenge is compounded by a quotation from Psalm 91: 11-12, which promises God's protection to those who are righteous. The temple is the place where the presumably most righteous - priests - carry out their work. "Go there," the devil challenges, "and test it!"

Many of those professionally righteous folks in Jesus' day, however, were living out their role among Israel's elites by working hand in glove with Roman occupiers, to the detriment of Israel's poor and suffering. Surely reform is in order! Again, Jesus' reply comes from Deuteronomy: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test" (Deuteronomy 6:16).

For us, just like with Jesus, temptation can use something that basically seems good, to distract us from focusing on what God would have for us, or what He has for us to do. The enemy will lie, but he often mixes lies with truth, and we can be led astray.

How do we deal with that?

1. First let's take a look at what Jesus did. Notice that Jesus, each time He was tested began His reply with, "*It is written.*" Now for Jesus, this is not like us saying, "I read somewhere that..." No for Jesus who had a firm understanding of the ways of God, this was God's law he quoted to the tempter. This was the very Word of the very God!

For us, we need to do the same thing. We need to rely on the Word of God, so we can identify the will of God in every situation we face, just like Jesus did. But before we can do that, we need to **know** the Word of God. Notice that Jesus didn't say, "*Oh, wait, I know I heard*

*some scripture about that somewhere, let me call my preacher and ask him or her about where that is, and I'll get back to you.*" No. Jesus had that scripture written on and hidden in His heart. It was there and ready for Him to reference in times of trial. If we don't have a good knowledge of the Word of God, then we give the tempter a great advantage.

2. Secondly, we need to pray. Without a personal relationship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, we cannot possibly stand up to the tests and temptations we face. Jesus knew that. It's why He spent his last few hours as a free man praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was about to face something horrible, and He didn't want to do it, but in the end He prayed to God, "*not my will, but yours be done.*" (Luke 22:42 NIV).

Whenever we are tempted, God calls each of us to pray that same prayer. I said on Ash Wednesday that I felt that God was calling us to pray Psalm 51:10-12 every day during the season of Lent: for God to make our hearts clean, and for Him to restore to us the joy of our salvation. To help us remember the grace we received at our baptism and continue to receive since that time. Remembering all that God has done for each of us, will give us power and strength to apply the Word of God against the temptations in our lives, and keep us focused on God's will in any situation.

Knowing that God answers prayer and praying those two prayers will keep us out of trouble from *here to eternity.*

3. Always remember what Jesus has done for you. If He can suffer all He had to endure for me, surely I can suffer what little bit He calls me to suffer for His purposes.

4. And remember what's truly important. The characters in the novel *From Here to Eternity* had no idea that the events at Pearl Harbor were about to launch them and their country into a world war. If they had, they would have known that their little problems were not as important as they thought they were. Such knowledge would have completely changed their focus, and adjusted the lenses through which they viewed those problems.

Likewise, if we could see everyday situations from an eternal prospective then we could stay focused on what is really most important and best for us.

I was at the grocery store last summer when the check-out girl gave me change for a \$20 bill when I'd actually only given her a \$10 bill. I didn't even notice it until I was in the car. I went back inside and explained the situation and gave her the money back. Needless to say she seemed pretty surprised that I would do that. She said that most people would have just kept the money and been happy. But I told her that money might make me happy now, but I'm more concerned with where I might spend eternity than how much money I have.

Eternal prospective.

The title of the novel *From Here to Eternity* was inspired by a Rudyard Kipling poem, which speaks of those who are "*dammned from here to eternity.*" But Jesus came to rescue us *from here to eternity.* And in order for Him to do that, we must accept the grace and mercy He came to offer us, and to examine our hearts.

And here is the good news! 1 John 1:9 says, "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness*" (NIV)

The Lenten Season is a season of penitence. Let us pray today and every day that God will give us clean hearts, and help us to resist the tempter.