

## The Bait

When I was about 13, I got interested in fly fishing. I'm not exactly sure how it happened, but it did, and unless you're made of money one of the by-products of fly fishing is learning to actually "tie flies," which you might think is actually trying to tie a bug onto a hook, but actually it's rather more difficult than that, it's trying to make things that aren't bugs look like bugs. That's part of the mystique of fly fishing, you start with a hook and some fur and feathers and you create something that mimics the natural food that fish eat in the wild. Fly fishing is elegant, but it requires that you know stuff, I think it might just be a gateway drug for entomologists. You have to learn about bugs, and in some cases other small aquatic creatures, to be able to catch a trout. Because while trout can be a sucker for an actual worm or a hunk of cheese on a hook, they get rather more finicky when you're trying to trick them with something that is not actually food. However, fly fishing is actually the best way to catch the really challenging fish, the ones who have gotten big enough and wily enough to command a deep pool in a brook or a prime spot in a river. I tell you all this, because we're going to talk about the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, and the techniques the Devil uses are essentially bait, and his tackle box is full of stuff that we need to be know how to spot.

For all the attention the Devil gets from us, his actual appearances in the Bible are actually fairly rare. The Hebrew word *Satan*, means accuser or adversary, which comes into full view in the temptation of Jesus. It's also reflected in the book of Job, which is probably the most ancient appearance of this character. The Accuser comes to do his work when Jesus is weak and hungry and accordingly his opening gambit is an appeal to hunger, to physical need: make stones bread. On the surface this might look like the Accuser is resorting to live bait, just going after hunger pure and simple. But look at the actual temptation: you make the stones bread, the temptation is not just the indulgence of physical desire, but the ego-satisfaction of showing this tempter who you really are.

Remember, the Satan's goal is not so simple as just trying to get Jesus to trip up, it's to get him thoroughly enthralled to his power. There are a couple of things going on here, the first is an exploration, it's sparring. The Adversary is trying to figure out exactly what is going on with this character who just showed up and got the whole "voice from heaven" treatment. I think there is at least some skepticism on the part of the Tempter here about who and what Jesus actually is. Would God actually take his love for humans this far, to actually show up as one? Seems unlikely, but then again... Satan has probably underestimated God's love before.

The temptations therefore, even the one about bread, are all about getting God to take the bait and use power that a human would not have. Break the natural order of things, violate the laws of Creation, prove a point, that's what the Devil wants, and that is what Jesus refuses to get involved in. Keep this in mind, none of the real temptations in life are really about things, they are about power. Every sort of sin, from the beginning to the end is about us desiring to be in control and to have power. The first one, remember? The temptation wasn't that the fruit was good, it was that it would make you like God.

See I don't think the Devil is particularly interested in getting us to trip up now and again with failures of our will power. I do not believe that the Adversary really sees us cheating on our diet and thinks, "Ha, Gotcha Now!" I don't think that even things we consider more serious sins are really cause for triumph in the infernal realm, because God is so merciful and forgiving and, even when we mess up so bad that we surely think we're lost, we find that Father welcoming home the prodigal instead of an angry and vengeful god. Stuff doesn't work, but if the Accuser can get us so wrapped up in our own ego that we

grab for the power that should belong to God, then he's got us. We cease trusting God as a loving Creator and start fearing God as an angry judge. It's not a lack of God's mercy that keeps us away, it's our ego telling us that we can't possibly be forgiven, we think we're actually powerful enough to resist God's grace. Whether it is Adam and Eve in the Garden, or Lucifer in *Paradise Lost*, or Goethe's *Faust*, the trouble comes when we grab for power that we should leave in God's hands.

Want to know what sin you need to root out in your life? It's the stuff where you are trying to do God's job, you know like judging others, or deciding who is worthy of blessings. The thing is people always, always do that wrong. We take the bait, we make ourselves gods and in doing so we fall into the very same trap that Lucifer did. Imagine, thinking that you were such a powerfully evil force that you could test God's grace, that is diabolical indeed. It's diabolical to make God's grace such a small thing that your stubbornness could overcome it.

There are maybe a few other observations to be made here, but keep in mind that the bait is always power. The most obvious temptation is to satisfy your wants, it's the sin that we all start pretty much from the time we are born, but it's not just the cravings or the hungers that get us, it's when we make those things idols and give them the power that should be given to God. Then there is the actual lust for power, the near megalomaniacal desire most of us have to rule whatever world we think we can, even if it's just a relationship or a family, it doesn't need to be the world. Remember Love and Control are opposing forces. Finally, there is the temptation of raw ego, pride that would rather die than be humbled. It is essentially not only grabbing for God's power, but also making yourself into a god, and therefore an idol. Here we need to remember always that the Devil can quote Scripture too, there a lot of religious folks who jump off of that high tower of their own ego with absolute certainty that angels will bear them up because they believed a verse of the Scripture without paying attention to the whole thing.

Think about it, does God hate the same things you hate? Does God only love what you love? If the answer to either one of those is yes, I'm warning you, don't jump, the angels aren't going to catch you. All of Jesus answers to the temptations point us to the solution: trust God. "One does not live by bread alone," the completion of that thought is, "but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." The second: "Worship the Lord your God and serve only him," the first commandment and pretty much the gist of all of Hebrew Scripture. The third, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test," in other words don't ever assume that your will and God's will are the same. Remember that God's blessings can be upside down, and that God has options for how to solve problems (resurrection) that are unavailable to us.

The Accuser will offer you all kinds of bait, he will dangle things you want, he will offer you power, and he will flatter your ego, with Scripture if need be. Don't take it. Instead look at Jesus' example in how to deal with these things, know that they are not real food, know that there is a hook in them, and understand that your own pride will set the hook deep. Just don't take the bait.