

A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church
By Chris Fillingham
“The Driver’s Seat”
Matthew 4:1-11
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A strange thing happens some days when I get behind the wheel of a car. It’s like another person shows up in my skin. And this person is not always a nice person... especially if I’m alone in the car.

This person may just yell at other drivers... and, yes, even drop a few choice words... because this person doesn’t have any patience.

He’s kind of irritable, and his anger lashes out at other drivers without any filter.

And when I get out of the car and look back, I sometimes find myself wondering: **who in the world was in the driver seat?** It’s not someone I think I’d want to be around very much.

Maybe that happens to you too... you’re going along and suddenly you hardly recognize who is in the driver’s seat... You surprise yourself a little by what you say, or what you did, or how you reacted in some situation in your day.

Truth be told, even when we’re being polite and kind, courteous and gracious, there’s often something in the driver’s seat that we don’t recognize.

It’s true for us all...something, or someone, is always trying to get in the driver’s seat.

It was even true for Jesus.

And that’s what Jesus faces down in the wilderness.

In fact, this story is the key moment between his baptism and the start of his ministry... It’s a season in which he would have to face down those things that are in the driver’s seat of his soul.

And notice how this story starts,

“Jesus **was led**
by the Spirit into the wilderness
to be tempted.”

In other words, this whole temptation story... isn’t just some coincidence. It’s not random. It’s intentional work of the Spirit in Jesus.

The Gospel of Mark actually says Jesus was **driven by the Spirit** into the wilderness.

So, you might say, Jesus was **driven by the Spirit...**

to get honest about the things that **have been driving him.**

And it was essential that he did this before he could begin his public ministry. He needed to face these things before he went out preaching in the crowds,

healing people,

confronting the political and religious systems of his day.

Before Jesus could help others connect with God’s healing and grace,

and before he could confront the problems of his day in a transformational way,

and before Jesus could help enact the Kingdom of God, the Shalom of God...

Jesus had to get honest about the things that were driving him.

Which says something important to us all... because... honestly, you and I are not always so honest about who or what is in the driver's seat of our lives, are we? In fact, a lot of times we don't even recognize who is in the driver's seat.

We are just a passenger busy getting things done,
unaware of who or what is driving us around...

But if we took some time to look in the driver's seat...
if we set aside the regular time to explore the deep contours of our hearts...
we might be surprised to find what's there.

We might just find we've been driven around a long time by all kinds of things that we'd rather not acknowledge:

maybe things like our need to be the best, to win, to come out on top.
Or things like good grades, getting another pay raise...

Those things aren't necessarily bad, are they? The problem is, they are so automatic we don't realize how reckless those drivers can be when they are let loose... They may just cause some real damage... In fact, they may even cause a wreck in your own soul, damaging those around you.

But those may not be in your driver's seat at all.
Maybe you're driven more by self-protection,
keeping everyone at a safe distance,
avoiding any possibility of shame or vulnerability.

Or maybe you're mostly driven by the desire to always be the one in the driver's seat. To be the decision maker. To have things a certain way... that is, ***your*** way.

**The truth is, we're driven by all kinds of things...
some of them we could probably recognize,
many... we probably don't recognize.**

In fact, you might be driven to keep some part of you locked up behind a closed door because you can't stand that part of yourself... only you don't realize you're doing it.

Maybe it's some raging anger that you've kept locked away,
afraid of what might happen if it was let out.

Maybe some deep shame, or disappointment, or hurt that you won't let see the light of day so that you can't be hurt again... only, in the process, without realizing it, you're holding back part of yourself from knowing love.

There are all kinds of things that drive us... and if we're paying attention, we may just realize that those things that drive us, underneath them are the ***very things Jesus had to wrestle with in the wilderness.***

Jesus was led by the Spirit
into the wilderness

to be tempted...
to face these things.

This isn't a test that Jesus had to pass...
this is a process he had to go through...
It was the way to become really honest about himself...
to begin to recognize what was trying to get in the driver's seat of his life...

And it came in three basic temptations.

Now here's what's fascinating about these three temptations. They aren't random. They are archetypal temptations.

In other words, Jesus' temptations represent the same three great temptations and the three great lies that are always trying to get into the driver's seat for all of us.

But to make sense of that, I need to explain a bit about human growth and development. When we are first born, there are three basic needs that we all have:

the need for security /survival,
for affection/esteem,
and for power/control –
and the need of our mind.
the need of our heart,
it's the need of our body,

If these needs aren't met, we can't grow in a healthy way. In fact, sometimes if these needs aren't met, an infant will die. We have to have these.

And so, these three instinctual needs become what Thomas Keating calls our **"program for happiness."**

In other words, something deep in our body has learned that we will only be happy when we have more power/control,

and something deep in our heart believes it can only be happy when we have more affection/esteem,

and something deep in our spinning thoughts and mind believes we will only be happy when it has more security, and its survival is guaranteed.

So, our ego is always trying to get those in one way or another.... which is to say... ***these needs are in the driver's seat for most of our lives...***

It's what pushes us to achieve, accomplish, make friends, and make money.
They drive us to sometimes hide, and other times take over, and other times run away...
They drive us to be defensive, to be easily hurt,
They drive us to envy and jealousy...
to self-righteousness.

And it's with these same three basic ego needs that Jesus has to wrestle... It's these three programs for happiness that he has to face down before he can faithfully live out his ministry and calling with the Spirit in the driver's seat, rather than his ego.

And so, it begins:

- 1) The need for power and control tells him, “Turn these stones into bread...” “If you are the Son of God, let’s see your power. Let’s see what you can do. Turn these stones into bread.” It’s **the desire of the body** to take over, to control, to do, to show its power.

Jesus feels the pull deep in his desire... and says no.

“I will not live by bread alone...

I will not live by my own power to control my environment alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Jesus sees the temptation. And he turns away from his own need for power and control.

- 2) But the voice doesn’t stop there... **The desire of the heart comes...** this time at the top of the temple... saying... “If God really loves you, why not make God prove it? Throw yourself down from the top of the temple and see if God will protect you. Besides...” the voice says, “let all these people see God’s great love for you... and they will adore you...”

It’s the voice of affection and esteem... the affection of God, the esteem of the crowds...it’s **the desire of the heart** that wants to know it is loved.

Jesus wants to know he’s loved just like you and I do... and I imagine it was hard for him to trust it sometimes... just like it can be for us...

And the desire to experience God’s love... and the esteem of the crowd pulls on him... and tells him to jump...

But he remembers “It is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Don’t test God’s love... again, and again. You have to learn to trust that it’s true, even when you don’t feel it.

And that deep need to experience again affection and esteem... Jesus lets go of.

- 3) But as he begins to think about all that he is being called to be and do in the world... of all that will be asked of him, and all that he will have to face...the **fears begin to stir in his mind...**

and the need of his **mind** for a plan... a plan to be successful in all this... and to take the safe road grows stronger: **It’s his need for security and survival...**

And a voice whispers... “I will give you the whole world... You can have it all and won’t have to worry about a thing... if you’ll just bow down to me.”

The **desire for security and survival...** pulls on him in the deepest places...

But Jesus makes a conscious choice not to worship the things of this world, and the safety and security that those things offer, but to worship God alone.

And in a profound act of freedom, Jesus relinquishes his need for security and survival... into the hands of God’s power, God’s love, God’s ultimate hope and promise.

One by one, Jesus faced off against all the programs for happiness that are in the driver’s seat of our lives...in order to be driven by something different... by the Spirit of God... by a power, and love, and security that can only be found in the upside-down ways of God.

These three temptations: turning stones into bread, jumping off the top of the temple, and

And the ego need, the program for happiness that lies underneath them: the need for

They also correspond to the three great lies we tell ourselves about who we are... about where we and worth come from.

The lie that says:

- These identities are so often in the driver's seat. Something deep in us believes:

- In one way or another, these are driving all of us... all of the time...

I am what others say about me.

They drive us...just as they were trying to drive Jesus.

and these same ego needs... that we all have...

And that takes profound courage!

But if we want to become like Jesus...

then that's exactly where we have to go...

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And here's the thing... This was not the last time Jesus was tempted by these same impulses. We hear echoes of it again as the gospel story progresses...

Like when Peter tries to tell Jesus that he doesn't have to face a cross and Jesus says, "get behind me Satan." It was those temptations for power and control again... for security and survival again.

And then, later when Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane praying for God to take the cup of suffering away. It was that profound need to know again that God actually cared about him, a need for God's love and affection.... And yet he prays "But not my will, your will be done."

These temptations didn't stop after Jesus left the wilderness... and they won't ever go completely away for you either. They will come up again and again, in different ways in each season of life.

There will be something in you that longs **for power and control** and will tell you, "You are what you do. Take the reins." You'd better get the grades.

You'd better be successful in your job.

You'd better be successful as a parent.

You better... the lie says.

And then again later in life it will say, "If you retire, who will you be? If you're not accomplishing something... you're nothing."

And you'll have to face that demon down again and tell it, "I will not let what I do define me or drive me... Instead I will let my identity as a child of God be the thing that drives me."

And there will always be something in you that longs for **affection and esteem**... something that tells you, "You are what other people say about you. Will you make your parents happy? Will your kids like you? Will you have friends? Will you be liked? Or respected?"

And it will happen again... late in life... as your friends die and loved ones die... and you'll hear that voice, "Your life is nothing without them..."

And you'll have to wrestle with that demon again... and face down that demon again and say again, "I will not be defined by the shifting opinions of those around me... I won't jump to the applause of people. And I will not test God's love. I will simply trust that voice I heard long again in the baptismal waters that said, 'You are my beloved.' I will remember that. And I will trust it. And that will be enough."

And yes, there will always be something in you that longs for **security and to guarantee your survival**... something that tells you, "You are what you have. What house you live in. What vacations you take. What investments you've made. What clothes you wear. What car you drive. **And right now... what you have is not quite enough...**" the voice will always say.

And that lie about who you are... will have to be faced too... or it will be in the driver's seat. You'll have to look it square in the face and say, "Away with you! For it is written, 'Worship God and serve God only!' I won't serve my need for more security. I will serve God alone. God's promises are enough for me."

These seasons of facing down our demons... the lies that want to define us, they will come again and again, and they won't be easy. They may just be as desolate as the wilderness...

But they can set you free.

Because when you face them, they will make room for the Spirit of God... to move into the driver's seat of your life, the way the Spirit of God seemed to always be leading and driving Jesus in all he said and did.

And you will discover again and again that this Spirit
brings a different kind of power...
and an awareness of the abiding, unchanging affection of God
and a peace and security that surpasses understanding.

So, listen for the Divine voice, the voice from the baptismal waters that is saying again:

“You are my Child, the one I love. The one in whom I delight.
So, move over, and let Me be in the driver’s seat.”

Amen.