

“The Good Basket of Fruit”

When Israel of old finally made it to the Promised Land – that land flowing with milk and honey – they were to take a basket full of the fruit of the land and bring it before the Lord. In their worship they were to declare – “A wandering Aramean was my father” – confess the toil and oppression of the years of slavery in Egypt – confess that the Lord, by His grace, had brought them through all that – to stand before Him that very day.

The basket full of fruit was evidence of the Lord’s faithfulness – how He was present with them throughout their years of slavery, and wandering in the wilderness. “And you shall set [the basket full of fruit] down before the Lord your God. And you shall rejoice in all the GOOD that the Lord your God has given to you ...”

Their worship was to rejoice in all the GOOD the Lord had given to them. So, what is your basket full of fruit? What is the GOOD that you rejoice in, even as you stand before the Lord your God this very day?

Like Israel of old, who wandered in the wilderness for 40 years – Jesus is in the wilderness for a period of 40 days – and He’s there for one reason, “for you.” Jesus has come to take your place in the wilderness of this world – to endure the harsh treatment, the humiliation, the hard labor, the affliction, toil and oppression. He has come to face the devil, and all his temptations, “for you.”

Fresh off His Baptism in the Jordan River, Jesus is in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by the devil. Just as Israel of old passed through the waters of the Red Sea to find themselves in the wilderness – so also you, the baptized children of God, now find yourself wandering the in wilderness of this world.

To see Jesus in the wilderness is to see your life. He is all Israel reduced to One. So pay attention to Him, following our Savior as we walk through the wilderness toward the glory of the world to come.

Is it a sin to eat bread – or to exercise authority – or to trust the Word of the Lord? Of course not – so why are these the temptations that Jesus endures from the devil?

In each and every one of these – the temptation is to do the will of the devil, not the Father’s will. It is Satanic worship, as opposed to true worship. It is a matter of what the Lord says is GOOD, and what the devil says is GOOD.

As you well know, life in the wilderness is hard. The three great enemies – the devil, the world, and your sinful nature – are constantly pressing the attack. They are relentless. They don’t give up. Jesus knows this as well.

At His Baptism the Father declared that He is His “beloved Son.” Jesus is “full of the Holy Spirit.” But He’s in the wilderness – “and He ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, He was hungry” – and the devil is right there, at that opportune time, and he attacks.

“If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” Jesus is hungry – and bread is good. After all, the Lord is constantly feeding His people – giving Adam and Eve to eat of all the trees in the garden (except one) – feeding Jacob and his family during the great famine – feeding Israel with manna and quail in the wilderness.

Food is good – but the devil uses a good thing to tempt Jesus to do evil, to do his will. “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’” There is something better. What is good is for man to deny himself and trust in the Lord to provide that which is needed.

The devil uses the desires God created as GOOD – for food and drink, for sexual relations, for peace and safety – he takes these good things and twists them, perverts them, uses them to draw us away and into that which is not good. He uses them to get us to worship him – to listen to his voice and follow him. And all this he does – not for our GOOD – but ultimately for our destruction.

All authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Jesus – but that doesn’t stop the devil from using this GOOD authority to tempt Jesus. And so he tempts us as well – to use the authority given to us by God for our own benefit – or, to usurp authority that God hasn’t given to us – saying, “just think of all the GOOD you could do” with that authority?

Jesus has only one thing in mind – the Father’s will. It is not the Father’s will for Jesus to use His divine power and authority at this point in time – but rather, to trust the Father to provide in His time of need. And remember, He does this “for you.”

“If you are the Son of God” – over and over again the devil throws this in Jesus’ face – trying to wear Him down. The temptation is for Jesus to become impatient, to show the devil once and for all who He is – to shut him up – to be done with the temptations. Just do it – throw yourself down.

The devil quotes God’s Word – a Word that is faithful and true – except in the hands of the devil, who uses it against God Himself. However, there’s no need for Jesus to prove that He is the Son of God – the Father’s, “You are my beloved Son” is still ringing in His ears.

There is no need to prove anything, to test God. Jesus IS the Son of God – who proves Himself by not doing what the devil suggests – and who will, when the time comes, trust His Father’s Word to deliver Him from death.

Dearly beloved, the devil is constantly dangling things before your eyes saying that they are GOOD – the desires of your flesh – position, authority, influence – even the Word of God – all good things, but the temptation is to use them according to his will, his wicked will – thereby deceiving you into worshipping him.

The wilderness has been hard on you. You stand here today, guilty of falling prey to the devils lies. And yet, you stand here with a basket full of fruit that confesses that Jesus was in the wilderness “for you” – a basket full of His obedience, not your disobedience – a basket full of His grace, not your merit.

You stand before the Lord today to rejoice and worship Him – by continuing to receive what He promises and offers you. He absolves you of all your sin – and you say “amen” – that is true, that is what is truly GOOD – God’s grace and forgiveness poured out on me through Jesus Christ my Savior.

It is in and by this grace, that we follow our Savior through the wilderness of this world, until we reach the glory of the world to come. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.