

February 21, 2010
Matthew 4:1-11
Creekside COB

“Spin Doctor”

Former President Jimmy Carter had a reputation for honesty that was unique among politicians. In fact, that he was able to maintain this reputation was a topic of curiosity for reporters. Once, when his mother, Miss Lillian, was being interviewed by a particularly aggressive female reporter on network television, she was asked about Carter's honesty. "Is it true," asked the reporter, "That your son doesn't lie? Can you tell me he has never told a lie?" Miss Lillian replied, "Well, I reckon he might have told a little white lie now and then " The reporter jumped at the opening. "I thought you said he didn't lie!" she exclaimed. "Are you telling me that white lies aren't as bad as black lies? Just what do you mean by a white lie?" "Well," drawled Miss Lillian, "do you remember when you came in this morning and I told you how nice you looked and how glad I was to see you...?"

A few years back, advice columnist Ann Landers challenged her readers to come up with the world's third-biggest lie--right after "The check is in the mail," and "I'm from the government and I'm here to help you." Here is a sampling from the thousands she received: "You gained five pounds? That's nothing on a person of your height." "You made it yourself? I never would have guessed." "You don't look a day over 40." "Dad, I need to move out of the dorm into an apartment of my own so I can have some peace and quiet when I study." "The puppy won't be any trouble, Mom. I promise I'll take care of it myself." "Your hair looks just fine." "Put away the map. I know exactly how to get there." "You don't need it in writing. You have my personal guarantee."

Lies we all have heard them and probably have lied a few times ourselves. But some times lies are labeled with different names. One of them that come to mind when reading this passage today is the word spin. Oh, the world of spin. Spin is a term used to define the

twisted, manipulation of the news and politics. You know what I mean. The candidates say one thing and the news media spins it into words that are molded for the network's outcome.

ILLUSTRATION:

I once attended a rally. I don't remember what the rally was for but I do remember listening to the speaker and then that evening I saw it covered on the evening news. The network reported on one sound bite from the entire speech and changed the context of the meaning. This was spin. There was a certain agenda that the network wanted the audience to see as truth. This is the world of spin and the people who spin are known as 'spin doctors.'

Spin doctors are good at what they do. They are master manipulators as they twist the truth to fit their needs.

Satan is a master manipulator, a twister of the truth. He is first spin doctor and has practiced his lies since the beginning of time.

You remember Eve. Satan twists the truth so that Eve will eat of the apple. Satan twists what God says. Eve is tempted and succumbs.

Satan is good at what he does. He is the master of spin. The master manipulator. Manipulating the truth to fit his agenda.

In our Bible passage today, Satan is doing just that. He is trying to manipulate Jesus, the Truth in the flesh, to choose Satan's will instead of the will of God.

Today, the Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the desert . He fasts for forty days and he is weak. Satan is good at that. He attacks when we are the weakest. So, Satan begins to tempt Jesus.

FIRST TEMPTATION

Satan begins his spin. And He says, "If you are the Son of God . . . Now he is playing, as he knows who Jesus is. But Satan in his manipulation game wants to put a hint of doubt in Jesus. If YOU are the Son of God, YOU could change this rock into bread." IF YOU WERE THE SON OF GOD.

Well, any of you that have fasted knows what it is like. I am sure plenty of you have. When you are hungry, anything looks good and really Jesus could have turned those rocks into stone. I know when I am on a fast, I know I would look at those stones in a different way. Hmmm. They sure look good. Satan tries to plant a seed of doubt. But Jesus knows Satan's spin and He is ready for Him.

SECOND TEMPTATION

Satan again spins the truth into a lie when he says throw yourself off of this temple and the angels will protect you. IF YOU ARE WHO YOU SAY YOU ARE. See in early rabbinical writings, a passage read like this, "King Messiah reveals himself, then He comes and stands on the roof of the Holy Place." See, if Jesus would have proved His Messiahship this way, many would have believed because of this miracle but His work would have not been finished. Satan casts doubt again but Jesus is ready for Him.

THIRD TEMPTATION

Satan spins the truth a third time when he offers Jesus the world and all its glory. He tempts Jesus with need for power over all. He is tempting Jesus by implying if you bow to me, if you will worship me, I will be out of the picture. Jesus can easily see it through his compassionate eyes. As the Son of God, Jesus already owned all the kingdoms of the world. Satan was offering to remove his own power of evil from those kingdoms. This would mean no more corrupt governments, no more oppressions by evil rulers, no more war . . . at least for a time. Surely this approach would appeal to Jesus' compassion. Satan casts doubts that Jesus can fulfill his purpose another way.

Jesus is ready for Him.

Satan our Great Spin Doctor spins the truth and makes it look feasible. He attacks the very core of who Jesus is. He tempts Jesus.

Jesus is tempted and so are we.

ILLUSTRATION:

Vince Lombardi, the legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers, uses a strategy much like Satan in preparing game plans. He studied the opponent's defensive unit until he could identify their four best defenders. Then, Lombardi designed Green Bay's first six plays of the game to be run directly at those four players. That's right. Lombardi opened the game by directing Green Bay's offense at the strength of his opponent. His theory was simple. Attack the other team's heart. If you can take away your opponent's spirit, you can win every time.

That is how Satan tempts all of us. He attacks the very heart. At our very strength. He attacks what is important to us. The things that are most valuable to us - our children and families, our livelihood, our identities, our church, even our personal faith. He plants seeds of doubt into our minds and causes us to lose confidence. He is wiley.

EXPECT TEMPTATION

Jesus is tempted and so are we.

Expect spin to come your way.

Expect temptation. If Jesus was tempted, we will be. No one gets around it.

But we have a way out. Paul says in 1Corinthians 10, God always provides a way out of our temptation. Our way out is our walk with God.

At the end of the passage, God sends ministering angels to be with Jesus. It is darned hard fighting a spiritual battle, isn't it? We need ministered to. When we are tempted we are to do what Jesus does, we give Satan the Truth about our God and who He is to us. How so we know that truth, we know it from our own faith journey. We know it from being near to God. You know I am sure that Jesus was never as close to His Heavenly father as He was during that time in the desert. When temptation comes for us, we draw near. We go into those sacred places where we know we can go and we hunker down for nourishment and spiritual renewal. We keep our focus on the One who was tempted for us.

Jesus was hungry and weak during this temptation but I want you to notice that it is right after Jesus is baptized that he is tempted. You know Satan not only gets us when we are down but when we are on a spiritual high as well. It is often when we are growing in grace and our faith feels in penetrable and our souls are prospering that Satan takes us off guard.

ILLUSTRATION

That reminds me of a story about a little girl who got mad at her younger brother. She pushed him down, called him a name, and then spat on him. Her father got onto her and said, "Honey, I think the devil made you do that." The little girl answered, "The devil might have made me push him down and call him names, but I thought of spittin' on him all by myself!"

Sometimes we succumb to temptation, the best of us does you know. We hear it all the time. People we know and love. Celebrities and well-known pastors are tempted and fall. The Spin Doctor is subtle.

I can't tell you about temptation without telling you the Good News about it.

GOOD NEWS ABOUT TEMPTATION

Even though we may be tempted and fail. We are forgiven.

Jesus was tempted so we would be redeemed. Jesus was tempted so He would be the perfect sacrifice - the perfect Lamb of God. Jesus was tempted so we would have freedom from sin and death. That we may be forgiven.

You see, if Jesus had chosen Satan's way, he could have been a Messiah without all the mess. He could have had the temporary pleasure of power and popularity. He wouldn't have had to be humiliated and persecuted. He wouldn't have had to suffer and die. But God's plan for the world would not have been fulfilled--and we would still be lost in our sins.

In all of your temptations and trials. Draw Near to God and remember what Paul says in Romans 8:38-39. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.