

GIVING UP CONTROL**Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7; Matthew 4:1-11****(Read Matthew 4:1-11)**

Intro: A few weeks back, when we were in the midst of the long cold spell that most of the nation experienced, I watched a video of a crazy rider on a snowmobile as he flew across the ice on Lake Erie toward Turtle Island which is kind of equidistant between Toledo, Ohio and Monroe, Michigan and is on the boundary between the two states. It's tiny at only an acre and a half, but for some reason this person and a friend on another sled were motoring their way toward it. Fortunately the ice was thick enough, because it was very cold, and he was traveling at an amazing rate of speed. I've heard that there are snowmobilers on the Great Lakes who travel at speeds of 140 to 160 miles per hour and it seemed that was nearly what this guy was in the video and it's just mind-blowing for me.

It brought back to memory the very first time I took a snowmobile ride. In my home church the Landis boys were into snowmobiling, and back in those days we had enough snow to make it worthwhile. One day they came by on their snowmobiles and we rode back through the farm fields behind our property. I was riding behind the oldest brother, Richie, as we went screaming across that field. I mean, I wasn't screaming, but I felt like it, because he had that Ski-Doo pegged to the metal. I have no idea how fast we were going. If it was 150 miles per hour I wouldn't have been surprised, but I probably would have been equally frightened even if it was 35 miles an hour. This was because I was not in control. Richie was driving the sled and I was not.

Being in control is important for me. I love the mountains – if I'm driving, because I can look all I want and know that I'll stay on the road. That does not make my family feel very good. I recall a time when we were driving on Route 1 on the California Coast where there is a straight drop-off of hundreds and sometimes thousands of feet. They were certain I would drive us off the cliff as I looked at a condor out over the Pacific. What they didn't understand was that I was in perfect control. I can look all I want. But they don't like that, because they're not in control. And they think I'm not in control.

As Christ followers, God must have control of our lives the problem is, as humans, we want control. In our series for Lent, beginning today, we are embarking on a series entitled Giving It Up. Many people give something up for Lent. They give up chocolate, or TV, or alcohol, or Facebook. Historically it has meant a physical fast as the faithful follower of Jesus submitted to deep introspection in the weeks leading up to Easter. In our BIC tradition, we did not historically make this a practice, but we have seen there is great benefit in observing the disciplines of some kind of Lenten fast. To that end some of us have given something up at our own prerogative.

Seeing as this theme occurs during this season it makes for a good series topic, thus the title – Giving it Up. The idea is not original with me since it is something I found as I searched for helpful material for Lent. The topics, titles, and the scriptures, are from a pastor by the name of Michael Kelly. I'm sure if I would have requested of him he would have provided his sermons as well, but I have devised my own sermons for this series. Today's topic is Giving Up Control as you may have deduced from my opening intro.

Jake read to you from Genesis 2 and 3 which talks about the serenity of the Garden of Eden before the Fall of Adam and Eve and then the horror of the Fall as they gave in to the temptation of the serpent. Everything was perfect, and then it wasn't. They discovered as many of us have through the millennia . . .

There's a fatal danger in thinking we know better than God

- It's very frustrating when I hear so-called scholars saying that God didn't need to do something in the way he did it. They have suggestions on how it would have been much better if he would have just done what they think is best. To me that's terrifying. It's very frightening to believe that we can know more than the One who knows everything.
- Adam and Eve thought they knew better than God. Think back to our text from Chapter 2. The Garden was filled with trees and vegetation that were for the pleasure of man and woman. Not only was it beautiful, but it provided food. God clearly informed Adam, (Eve had not been created yet at this point), that every one of the trees were available for food except one, The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The other tree what was mentioned by name was the Tree of Life and they could obviously eat from it – and they did and they experienced life and death was an unknown concept. When they chose to eat from the other tree death came in. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

- In chapter 3, we find the serpent. Notice, that he's not called Satan, or the Devil, but we know who he is. He approaches Eve, maybe because he thought she was the weaker sex, but more likely because he knew that she had received her instruction on which tree was off limits from Adam since she was provided for him AFTER he had received the instruction from God. Also, it shouldn't be puzzling that she's speaking to the animals, because there was probably some kind of communication between the lower animals and humans before the Fall.
- The serpent addresses Eve, and he asks, "*Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?*" Genesis 3: 2. Did he **REALLY** say that? This is how the evil one works so it's good for us to take notice of it – he's putting doubt in her mind. Did God *really* say that? **Are you sure?**
- To her credit she responds. Yep! He did! Actually, our text puts it this way, "*We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'*" Genesis 3:2b – 3. But this was not an exact quote because, remember, she got the information, second hand from Adam. Adam got the message that they were not to eat from that tree and God never said anything about touching it. Eve had it a bit mixed up and the serpent plays on that technicality.
- This is where the seed of doubt begins to germinate and she begins to question "But why? Why should I not eat from this tree? They're all wonderful but we've never tasted this particular one and it looks beautiful."
- And just like the serpent he is, he strikes and says "*You Will surely not die!*" Genesis 3:4b. And, of course he doesn't stop there – he goes in for the kill with, "*For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*" Genesis 3:5. The serpent is cultivating this developing thought in her mind that the tree looks good for food and is more delightful the more she looks at it. And, after all, if it was about the knowledge of good and evil, it was going to make her wise.
- So she ate and her death began. She ate, and then he ate. But Adam ate with his eyes wide open. He'd been there for the initial directive from God himself. Eve needed to be convinced by the serpent, but Adam took the delicious looking fruit and he bit right into it. It was just like a red delicious apple. They're really, really, really beautiful, but they don't taste nearly as good as a honeycrisp or an evercrisp.
- For Adam and Eve the fruit looked wonderful, but it didn't even come close to being as good as it looked, and now that . . .

They knew Good and Evil

- It wasn't at all what they expected or what the serpent had promised. They had never experienced fear or shame, but they did now. They now knew lots of things and they asked for the first time but not for the last, "What have we done?!"
- Adam and Eve disobeyed God thinking that they knew better than him. But the consequences were disastrous – not just for them, but for all humanity! Adam and Eve took control, and they lost everything. We are still dealing with it. That's why we need Jesus and it's why he came.
- So it's fortunate that . . .

We have the example of Jesus

- In the text I read as I opened this talk we see Jesus in the wilderness. He's God the Son, in the flesh and at the same time the perfect example of how to deal with temptation. He gave up control to his Father. He did not submit to the tempter. In Genesis 3 he is the serpent – here he is the tempter – but we know who he is.
- Jesus resisted the temptation and the inherent danger that follows it and he surrenders to God's will. The tempter threw everything at him. After all, these things had worked before with Adam and Eve and all their descendants. He began with physical temptation then spiritual temptation and then he attacked Jesus's aspirations – that is, what he thought would wear down God's Son now that he was bandying about as a human being. But he didn't know, truly, who he was messing with. . . .

Jesus had the only defense that works

- We need to do what Jesus did. He said "NO!" But he didn't do it in the most powerful way.

- A very quick but absolutely essential aside: We need to realize that temptation is not sin. There is far too much guilt that goes on because people are tempted. We need to know that sin happens when we give in to temptation.
- Now back to Jesus's response to the tempter. Here it is: Jesus responded to every temptation with the Word of God. When we are tempted go to the Word. That requires something of great significance: We need to know the Word of God well!
- But while we're at it, we need to recognize when the Word of God is being misused. The serpent blatantly misused the God's instructions in his temptation of Eve and the tempter tries the same thing here with Jesus. He takes scripture out of context and he twists it in a sleazy effort to make Jesus stumble. But, like I said, he didn't realize Who he was messing with. So once again, we need to know scripture. WE NEED TO KNOW IT WELL!
- The tempter threw the human need for sustenance at Jesus who had been without food for 40 days. Jesus replied with scripture from Deuteronomy 8:3, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*" Matthew 4:4 Next the evil one plays on the human need of assurance. In a way, it's like when he asked Eve, Did God REEEEEALLY, say that. And he twists scripture to do it, "*He will command his angels concerning you, and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'*" Psalm 91:11-12. Jesus replies with his own scripture – from Deuteronomy again, *You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.*" Matthew 4:7 Finally the tempter tries something laughable with God's Son – he offers him . . . *all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.* Matthew 4:8 if only Jesus would bow down and worship him. Jesus's reply could have been Paul's words from some 30 years later when he proclaimed . . . *at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* Philippians 2:10-11. But his words were from Deuteronomy and 1 Samuel, "*You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.*" Matthew 4:10 But that was only after he told the tempter *Be gone Satan!* There he did it! He named names!
- Notice Jesus didn't give Satan anything more than scripture. He didn't carry on a conversation with him – he didn't entertain him with debate – he told him to beat it! That was Eve's first mistake. She responded. David Guzik puts it this way, Eve's first mistake was in even carrying on a discussion with the serpent. We are called to talk to the devil, but never to have a discussion with him. We simply and strongly tell him, "The Lord rebuke you!" (Jude 1:9). Here's the point, don't give Satan and his temptations the time of day – tell him where to go – literally.
- We must not give into anything but full surrender to God. Give it up. Give up control to the one who will not spin us out of control, but will keep us in the palm of his hand. Amen.