

"I Am or I Feel?"

Text: Matthew 4:1-11

May grace, mercy and peace be poured out to you from our Triune God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

It seems to be official. America has a new god. Not a *new* god, really, so much as an old god that has recently gained vastly more influence, power, and acclaim. In fact this god seems to have supplanted the Triune God as the ultimate source of truth and light. It is by this deity that decisions are made. It is this god that is consulted when questions of right and wrong are raised. This god is the final authority that directs our actions and forms our thoughts. The new god is human emotion.

Where once our society looked to the great "I Am" – the name God gave to himself when talking to Moses prior to the exodus from Egypt – most now pay homage to "I Feel."

The change from the "I Am" to "I Feel" is infinitely more radical than the name might imply. Where the "I" once referred to something outside of ourselves – something infinitely more powerful, noble, and pure – now the "I" refers to something within ourselves, something that mankind has tragically come to regard as sacred and holy. Where once man looked to the sacred writings of the great I Am to gain direction, wisdom, and truth, now man looks inside of himself for that direction. The results were painfully predictable.

As we enter the season of Lent, it is fitting that we examine this shift in allegiance on the basis of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Would Jesus approve of this change? Would he embrace it if he were standing here with us today? Did he come to suffer and die so horribly to open *this* path that our society has chosen? More to the point of our text for this morning, would or did Jesus himself hold to this view?

The text that will guide our examination of this current shift in our society, along with Jesus' opinion of this change, is found in the Gospel of Matthew, the Fourth Chapter:

ESV Matthew 4:1-11 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become

loaves of bread." ⁴ But he answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" ⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶ and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you,' and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" ⁷ Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

So far the very words of the One who identified himself as the "**I Am.**" May that same God who gave us these words fill us with proper reverence for them, never for a moment doubting that they are what they claim to be – God's verbally inspired words to mankind and the only sure source of all that is true. Even so we pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord; your Word is truth!**" Amen.

The catastrophic nature of our national shift from I Am to I Feel – from the Triune God of the Bible to the god of our own human feelings and emotion – cannot be overstated. I suspect many of you have heard the prideful proclamation that someone "*could never believe in a God who was so obviously lacking in compassion that he ordered the destruction of entire cities – men, women, and children.*" If we are to both understand and to be able to answer such charges, we need to step back and understand both sin and temptation.

The more we study God's Word - really dig into it - the more we come to appreciate the depth and wisdom contained therein. Our text for this morning is no exception. It is a masterpiece of divine wisdom and revelation. In these few short verses is contained, among many other things, all the truth we need to know about sin and temptation, together with how the child of God can emerge from both victorious.

Yet even in that we are getting ahead of ourselves, aren't we? We are making assumptions where we should be asking questions, the first of which is whether or not we even have the desire to emerge from temptations victorious. The second is just what that actually means to us, individually. In other words, every single one of us needs to start by

asking himself a simple, two-part question: "*Just what does it mean to conquer temptation, and is that something that I even want?*"

The first part of that question is relatively easy. It's the second part that can give us trouble. To conquer temptation is to resist it, to not yield to it. Victory means that we avoid the sin – for the right reason. Our text provides the perfect example of just what that means.

The more difficult question is whether or not that is what you and I always want. There is, in fact, a wickedness in us that longs for a different reality; one that tells us that victory over temptation means giving in to it, and then asking for forgiveness afterwards.

This is exactly why the new god of our society, the "I Feel," has risen to such prominence and power. Man naturally longs to give in to temptation, and yet even with those who reject Jesus Christ there is that stubborn conscience that gives them such fits. Enter the great "I Feel," which cleverly justifies even that which man obviously knows to be wrong. In its own twisted way it's all actually rather seductive and convenient. Man has finally found a way to make that original temptation of Satan in the Garden of Eden come true. He's finally discovered the means whereby he can "**Be like God, knowing good and evil.**" That's what the great "I Feel" offers. Man gets to be the one that decides what is right and what is wrong. Better still, as far as sinful man is concerned, that means that man gets to do whatever he wants *and* gets to feel good about it. He gets to justify it – even label it as good and right, at least in his particular case.

So then we return to our text, and to the sentiment that the Triune God is cold and merciless. In what sense is that statement true, and in what sense or context is it not?

Satan brought several temptations before Jesus. In fact I am convinced that the full nature or character of each temptation probably escapes us, even today. How, for example, would it have been a sin for Jesus to turn stones into bread and to thereby feed himself? Couldn't he have justified jumping off of the pinnacle of the temple as evidence of his implicit, unwavering trust in God the Father to preserve and protect him?

The fact is had Jesus bought into the "I Feel" religion of today, he could have done all those things. This is the sense in which it is true that our God does not operate according to "feelings." Jesus did not allow his own personal feelings to play a role in his determination of right and wrong. As a human being, of course he was hungry – having not eaten for forty days. As a human being of course there was a part of him that longed to prove

the Psalmist's inspired words: "**He will command his angels concerning you, and On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.**" Or do you suppose that when he hung on the cross and heard the godless shout to him, "**Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!**" that he did not long to do just that, and to thereby offer obvious proof that he was who and what he said he was and that his enemies were damnably wrong? Don't you suppose that such a demonstration would have *felt* really good and really right? The feeling didn't make it so.

By refusing, Jesus himself demonstrated that human *feelings* and *emotions* don't get to decide right or wrong. So also he answered every single temptation not with "*I feel*" but with "**It is written...**" Look again. Every single time, without exception, his reply was the same: "**It is written...**" By doing so he proved several facts. The first is the inspiration of Scripture, for why would Jesus quote the Bible unless he believed it to be infallible? The second is the fact that the Scriptures apply to every aspect of our lives, in every age, or Jesus wouldn't have quoted words written thousands of years before he was born. And the third is that truth is always and only determined by God himself. Truth is never established by how man feels. It can never be based on that which is *within* man.

Think for a moment of just how out of place – how *wrong* it would have been – for Jesus to use some of the common rationalizations that have become so popular among the followers of "I Feel" today. In fact had he done so, you and I and the rest of mankind would be damned to hell for all eternity. This would have been the case had he, for example, decided that "*God just wants me to be happy,*" and that what would make him happy would have been to give in to temptation and sin. Suppose he had boldly declared, "*I don't care what man thinks of me, I care what God thinks*" and then done the very thing that his God had commanded him not to do.

Yet those are the very justifications for sin offered by those who believe in the "I Feel." "*I don't care what you think about the fact that I am living in sin. It's what I feel like doing – which means it is right according to my god.*" Only if your god is "I Feel." What mankind feels has no bearing whatsoever on God's definition of right and wrong. God defines sin not on the basis of what we think or feel, but on the basis of his Word and will. Anything and everything contrary to God's Word and will is sin. Nor does it matter how we feel about that. It is true because God says so. In fact if sin could be defined any other way, we wouldn't need

a savior; we wouldn't need Jesus Christ. We would just need someone to help us come to grips with how we feel.

Yet while Jesus didn't consider "I Feel" when it came to determining right from wrong, he most certainly did demonstrate what he felt when he left heaven to win our salvation. Jesus, knowing how thoroughly sinful every single human being was, also knew that he was man's only hope for salvation. Though there was nothing in it for him, in purest love and compassion he sacrificed himself so that you and I might be spared the eternal misery we had earned by our sin. In this Jesus most certainly did have feelings – *for us*. Among those feelings were love, compassion, mercy, self-sacrifice, and tenderness – all feelings we in no way deserved. Our Epistle Lesson put is so well, as it ties together our Old Testament lesson (Satan's successful temptation of man) and our sermon text (his unsuccessful temptation of Jesus) when it says: "***Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.***" (Romans 5:18-19)

Our Old Testament lesson and our sermon text give examples of two rather similar events, but with two very different results. You and I ought to be intensely interested in how and why Adam and Eve failed miserably; and even more interested in how and why Jesus was so successful. The key difference is that Eve's actions were based on her own thoughts and desires, while Jesus' actions were based on the Word and will of God the Father, as revealed in the inspired Scriptures. Where Eve saw the forbidden fruit as the means to satisfy her desires, Jesus condemned the devil's temptations on the basis of *his Father's* desires. Every temptation was met with a Bible passage that set down God's holy will and therefore answered the temptation. Even when Satan tried to twist that same Word of God into a distorted half-truth, Jesus successfully countered with the Word of God. And nothing but the Word of God. That means he never allowed his gaze to linger on that which was forbidden. He never entertained fantasies about how much fun it would be to succumb to the temptation. In fact some of the temptations were so subtle that only a thorough understanding of the Scriptures and a careful application of the same saw him through.

Or, more to the point, saw us through. Ours were the souls that hung in the balance. Had Jesus failed, our only hope would have been lost forever. The souls of all mankind depended on the correct understanding and application of God's Word. The notion that that Word of God could contain

errors never even entered the picture. Let that same confidence be your rock, even as the success of Jesus Christ is your hope and joy.

As we walk again through the season of Lent, we give special thanks to our God, who has taken care of our sin problem by punishing his own Son in our place. How blessed we are (even beyond our ability to fully comprehend) that we now stand perfect, holy, and victorious through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. These things we know to be true only because we have God's verbally inspired Word to teach us that it is so. God grant that we highly prize that Word of God, study it faithfully, trust it implicitly, and defend it tirelessly from all enemies, both without and within. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV **Genesis 3:1-7** Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" ² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ 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.'" ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

ESV **Romans 5:12-19** Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned-- ¹³ for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. ¹⁵ ¶ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. ¹⁷ For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ ¶ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

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The First Sunday in Lent – March 1, 2020

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 8 (Red Hymnal)

"Father Who the Light This Day"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Genesis 3:1-7) As we enter the Lenten season it is fitting that we examine the cause for the suffering of our Lord Jesus. The cause was sin, brought into the world through Adam and Eve and passed from them to all mankind. Yet blame is not limited to Adam and Eve. Our sin too had to be carried by Jesus. Lent is therefore a time to reflect on just what Jesus has done not just for others, but for me.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 85 (Page 40) (Read Responsively)

The New Testament Lesson: (Romans 5:12-19) Sin was and is the cause for all trouble in this world. It was the reason Christ had to be born, suffer, and die. Yet we make a mistake if we regard sin as someone else's problem. It was *our* sin that separated us from our God. In Adam *we all* sinned, yet in Christ Jesus *we all* have been given Life.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn –777 (Brown Hymnal)

"Amazing Grace"

The Sermon – Text: Matthew 4:1-11 (Printed on the back page)

"I Am or I Feel?"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 36 (Red Hymnal)

"Now Thank We All Our God"

The Prayers of the Day

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 50 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (24) Average (40) Wednesday (14)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship hour
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship hour

CLC News – Pastor Michael Gurath has returned the call to Berea of Sioux Falls. That congregation has now applied for a seminary graduate. Teacher Andrew Roehl has returned the call to Holy Trinity of West Columbia. That school has now called Teacher Neil Bernthal. Pastor Terrel Kesterson has returned the calls to Redeemer of Bowdle and Zion of Ipswich. Pastor Peter Evensen has returned the call to Bethel of Morris. Teacher Joshua Ohlmann is considering the call to Redeemer of Cheyenne. Pastor Matthew Hanel is considering the call to Living Savior of Eden Prairie. Faith of Markesan School has called Mrs. Sara Ude.

Midweek Lenten Services – Lent is a special and spiritually unique and valuable time. Prayerfully consider the benefits of our midweek Lenten services, and consider availing yourself and your family of those benefits.

ILC Tour Choir – The touring choir from Immanuel Lutheran College will be taking a southerly route this spring, including three concerts in Texas. The closest their itinerary takes them to Bismarck is a 7pm concert in Sioux Falls on March 20.

Lighting Project – The lights in the sanctuary, classrooms, and fellowship hall have all now been converted to LED, as have the florescent lights in the steeple. In addition to substantial cost savings going forward, the changeover has eliminated both the flicker and the buzz of the original florescent lighting.