

# Failure Is Not An Option – Matthew 4:1-11

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ March 9, 2014

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” <sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. <sup>6</sup> “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” <sup>7</sup> Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” <sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. <sup>9</sup> “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” <sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.



Dear fellow redeemed,

Gene Kranz was a key member in NASA’s manned space program for three decades. From the early days of the Mercury program, through many of the Apollo missions. He served as flight director for several of the Apollo missions. He was the flight director for the infamous Apollo XIII mission. The Apollo 13 service module exploded, leaving three men wondering if they were ever going to make it back to earth or not. Kranz’s goal was to get those three men home, doing whatever it takes. FAILURE WAS NOT AN OPTION. Even though the *Apollo 13* movie attributes him as saying this, he never did, but you can imagine these thoughts were constantly on his mind. He would later go on to write a book about his time at NASA entitled *FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION*.

A saying like that is hard to come by in real life. ‘FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION’ means you will look for any way possible to succeed, you will not fail. When it is the lives of three astronauts at stake, this phrase takes on even more meaning. And while I’m sure you can think of other situations where FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION, I would like to focus on arguably the most important situation where FAILURE WAS NOT AN OPTION. That would be in our gospel for this morning, when Jesus was led out into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. FAILURE WAS NOT AN OPTION.

1. For him
2. For us

(1)

We must go back to the beginning to understand this completely. Not just to the beginning of the gospel, not just to the beginning of Jesus’ life, but to the very beginning, creation. In Genesis 1 and 2, God tells us that he created the entire universe in six days, and he created it good (or perfect). He placed Adam in the Garden of Eden, created Eve from Adam’s rib, and told them to care for the Garden. At this

point in history, everything was good. But then we heard about Genesis 3, our first lesson for this morning.

Satan came in the form of a snake and placed doubt into the hearts of Adam and Eve about the goodness of God and his creation. Adam and Eve succumbed to this doubt, questioned God, and placed their trust in a snake they hardly knew. BANG! The first sin. And this sin changed everything. Our other Scripture lesson from Romans tells us, **“sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.”** It wasn’t just that Adam and Eve sinned when they were tempted to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree. That sin set off a chain reaction of sin. It was the first domino to fall, and because of that sin, we went from being born in the image of God to being born in the image of Adam – unable to not sin.

And we see this script play out across all of human history – sin and death. The Biblical history of Adam and Eve’s children: Cain and Abel, Cain murders Abel. God sends a flood over the world because it is so wicked. Look back to the wicked dictators of history and the wars that have been fought. They are all a part of the chain reaction, sin and death. No one is immune. For all of human history the theme was not so much FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION, but rather failure is the *only* option. Failure to obey God, failure to acknowledge him, failure to love him.

I said all of human history had the theme of failure, I misspoke, there was one glimmer of light surrounding the failure of darkness. That glimmer of light was Jesus Christ. He was the fulfillment of the promise God made all the way back in the Garden of Eden, the promise to crush the serpent’s head. Now we are in the season of the church year called Lent, when we take a serious reflection on the magnitude of Jesus’ mission, what he did for us. This morning the focus rests on Jesus’ temptations after 40 days of fasting in the wilderness.

Temptation #1 – **“The tempter came to him and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread. Jesus answered, ‘It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”** I have to

admit, at first glance this doesn’t seem like much of a temptation. Make bread out of few stones, what’s wrong with that? It’s not like Satan is asking Jesus to kill anybody. A few things to note, and they apply to all the

temptations Jesus endured. These were temptations specifically geared for Jesus. The devil knew who Jesus was and was going to throw nothing but his best stuff at Jesus. That being said, why was this tough? First of all, Jesus had been fasting for 40 days, like Moses on Mt. Sinai, Jesus would have been hungry. Secondly, was it a sin to make food for himself? From Jesus’ response he indicates his complete trust and reliance on God. God led him out into the wilderness, and God would sustain him.



Temptation #2 – **“Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ‘If you are the Son of God,’ he said, ‘throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will**

**not strike your foot against a stone.’ Jesus answered him, ‘It is also written: Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”**

Once again, the devil sets forth a challenge, he starts, “If you are the Son of God...prove it by doing this,” He even used God’s Word as a reason to jump, let God fulfill his promise. But Jesus did not need to prove anything to the devil, but that wasn’t the reason Jesus didn’t jump, and it wasn’t because he was scared either. He didn’t fall for the devil setting Scripture up against Scripture, instead turned to a passage that actually applied. **“Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”** Just because Jesus was the Son of God and needed to go to the cross for our salvation, didn’t mean he could throw himself in harm’s way and expect to live.

Temptation #3 – **“Again the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ‘All this I will give you,’ he said, ‘if you will bow down and worship me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me Satan! For it is written; ‘worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”** We might say this is the easiest temptation of all to overcome. We know better than to worship anybody other than God. But it wasn’t quite so simple as that. God the Father had a mission for Jesus, a mission that would result in him reigning over all creation, but that would also result in him going to the cross. The devil was offering Jesus the kingdoms of the world without all that suffering, without all that pain. How tempting an offer that would have been. And yet here too, Jesus never doubted God’s plan. He rebuked the devil and bids him depart.

FAILURE WAS NOT AN OPTION for Jesus. Something to keep in mind with all three of these temptations. Again, these temptations were designed and tailored for Jesus, designed to create doubt in Jesus’ mind about God the Father’s mission for him, tailored to avoid God’s plan for the cross. But not only did Jesus not sin, as true God he couldn’t sin. As a human being he was able to not sin, but as true God he was not able to sin. So for Jesus FAILURE WAS NOT AN OPTION.

(2)

And Jesus’ failure to sin is intimately tied to us today, living 2,000 years after Jesus. Because had Jesus sinned by not trusting his heavenly Father completely, life for us right now probably wouldn’t be too much different, we would continue to live our lives. But what would happen after our life on this earth is done would change dramatically. There would be no waiting room for us to get to heaven, only a one-way ticket straight to hell. And it all ties back to that first sin in the Garden of Eden – **“sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.”** The very reason we die is because of sin, not Adam’s first sin, but our own sin. In fact the Bible describes our state right now as dead – **“we are dead in our sins.”** What does this mean? We have no power or ability to choose to become alive again.

But what Jesus accomplished, as demonstrated in this one instance of temptation, was bringing us back to life. We just heard in Romans, **“Just as the one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.”** So Jesus’ temptations in the desert are not for us to look at as an example of how we might fight the devil, but it is a way for us to see how Jesus did. “For us fights the valiant one” as the hymn we just sang said.

So FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION for us. What was once an expectation for getting into heaven, now is a reality. FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION for us because Jesus Christ has gone to war and defeated the devil. The promise God made in the Garden of Eden to Adam and Eve has been fulfilled, Satan's head has been crushed. It is the wonderful comfort we have as believers, there is nothing we need to do to get to heaven, Jesus did it for us.

But while our victory is assured, the devil still prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. He has nothing to lose, he has lost everything already, his only hope is to drag as many people down to hell with him by causing them to doubt God's promise of free salvation. He does this by tailoring temptations for individuals, to hit them when they're weakest, and then say God couldn't possibly forgive that. He does that by giving us everything our hearts desire, making us forget about God. He does that by convincing the world he doesn't exist, and if he doesn't exist, God and the church are just making empty threats about hell.

But Satan is the father of lies, he has been lying from the beginning, and it's no wonder they sound so convincing, it's because he has a lot of practice with it. But whenever those empty promises and empty threats start wearing on your soul, remember the words of Martin Luther: "So when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this, 'I admit that I deserve death and hell, but what of it? For I know one who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where he is there I shall be also.'" The devil's empty promises and threats hold no power over us.

Now there will certainly be times when we will meet with failure, where we will disappoint, where we will fall flat on our faces. Maybe you're dealing with one of those times right now. And that's not to say failure is a completely bad thing. At a time like this you can learn from your failures and pick yourself back up. Those are situations where failure is OK. But picking ourselves back up after failure was not good enough for God. That's why he sent Jesus. Our failures led Jesus to come down to succeed where we have failed. And so for him FAILURE WAS NOT AN OPTION. And because he did not fail here, or ever, he has won the victory for us, so FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION for heaven. Amen.

