

**Airplane Mode: Silencing the Noise to Amplify God  
The Temptation of Jesus (1st Sunday in Lent)**

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Matthew 4:1-11 (read earlier in service)

*1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. 3 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, "One does 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 placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 saying 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, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" 7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, "Do 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 splendor; 9 and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10 Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" 11 Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.*

Today, on this first Sunday in Lent, we begin a series of messages about “Silencing the noise to amplify God.” We’re calling it “Airplane Mode.” If you’ve flown in recent years, you know what that means: When you enter an aircraft and prepare to take off, you’re instructed to set your cell phone to the “airplane mode” setting. This means that your phone will no longer receive calls, or texts, or other notifications. In essence, it forces your phone to be silent so that it won’t be a distraction or hindrance.

But what does that have to do with Lent? Well, let’s start by remembering what the season of Lent is all about. As we look forward to Easter morning and celebrating that Jesus lives and provides each of us with new life, Lent is the season of preparation when we look inward and reflect on how much we need Jesus in our lives. This is the perfect opportunity for us to think about and deal with how we “fall short” in our lives. To say it another way, it’s the season in which we’re reminded to focus on the sin in our lives. And there is no other way to do that but to listen intently and intentionally to God’s voice in our lives. When we listen to God, at some point or another it leads us to deal with sin in our lives. But, there are many distractions that

can keep us from doing that. There's lots of other "noise" or even other "voices" in this world that are trying to get our attention – which can make it difficult to hear God's voice.

Dealing with our own sin is never a pleasant or easy thing to do, but it's important. As I talked about during our Ash Wednesday services a few days ago, sin is destructive when we allow it to enter our lives – and it can often sneak in without us even noticing it. But sin pollutes our thoughts and darkens our heart... It damages our relationships, and it also makes it much harder for us to stay connected to God and hear God's voice in our lives.

And that last part – HEARING GOD'S VOICE – is the focus of what we're going to think about together today and the Sundays between now and Easter. I've noticed more and more just how many different sources of "noise" are competing for my attention in this world – and how they too often push God's voice off to the side or to the backburner in my life.

Sometimes these sources of noise in our lives aren't necessarily bad – they may relate to how we relax, or find entertainment, or what we do with our spare time – but unless we're very intentional in making God's voice a part of our lives every day, then they can often become the only noise we pay attention to.

Let's look at this morning's Bible passage together and see how Jesus dealt with the "noise" that was a distraction during a certain point in his life, and how he responded to it. And in reality, it was more than a distraction that he dealt with; it was a spiritual battle of immense proportions. I won't re-read Matthew 4:1-11, but feel free to pull it up and review those verses in the next few minutes as you like.

**The first thing** that is so foundational is tied to what happened just prior to this passage:

Jesus has just been baptized. He shown everyone that was paying attention that he was living his life for God. For the purposes of this morning's sermon, Jesus was listening to and following God's voice. There was no question that Jesus was doing what God wanted him to do – and in fact that very last sentence of Matthew chapter 3 says, "17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (NIV).

And what happened immediately after he was baptized... immediately after God proclaimed that Jesus was doing exactly what he was supposed to be doing? As it was written in Matt. 4, verse 1: "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."

I've talked about many months ago, but it's a truth that can sometimes confuse us as we do our best to follow Jesus every day. We must remember that it is very possible – maybe even likely – that when we listen to God's voice and follow God's leading in our lives, it sometimes leads us to the "wilderness"... or to situations where we're "tempted" or tested – just as Jesus was in

this story. And on the surface that doesn't seem or feel right. We have this tendency to wish that when we're doing what God wants us to do, then God will smooth everything out and make everything easy and good. But that's not reality.

In his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren wrote some things that relate to this that I try to remember when I feel like I'm doing my best to follow God, but life seems harder than it should. Warren wrote:

*"Why is this happening to me? Why am I having such a difficult time? One answer is that life is supposed to be difficult! It's what enables us to grow. Remember, earth is not heaven!"*

Enduring difficult times allows us to deepen our roots and experience God's faithfulness in ways we wouldn't see otherwise. And as much as we all wished that earth was perfect and like heaven, it's just not.

**The second thing** we can learn comes at the end of this story, in verse 11: "Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him." This time of testing didn't last forever for Jesus. So if you are in the middle of a wilderness experience right now, be encouraged by the truth that it won't last forever. And when you stay close to God through it, you'll come through it on the other side not only with a deeper faith for yourself, but with an even more powerful and encouraging testimony for others to see.

**And now look at the meat – the main point – of this story:** Jesus, who was all alone in the wilderness, spent 40 days not eating anything. And then the Bible says, "he was famished." Uh, you think? So, as Jesus was dealing very much with the basic human need for something to eat... for a nice juicy cheeseburger to fill his empty belly – the enemy, the tempter, the devil showed up. It wasn't by chance that the enemy showed up at just this time. It is often when we are at our most vulnerable moments that the enemy comes to attack us... when we're exhausted; when we're extremely mad or extremely sad; it's most often when we're all alone – but it can also be when our only company is a person or group of people who are more concerned about themselves than about God or anything else.

And the enemy begins tempting Jesus. The way I look at this, the enemy tries to persuade Jesus to stop living for God, and start living for himself. The enemy wants Jesus to stop looking to God and listening to God and following God... and instead start listening to the noise – the other temptations that are so prevalent not only in Jesus' time, but in our world today.

In so many words, the enemy tempted Jesus...

*To use his power to take care of himself and only himself ("turn these stones to bread")*

*To prove himself, to show that he was better than everyone else ("throw yourself down...")*

*his angels”)*

*To have more power, to own more stuff, and control more things in this world (“All these I will give you”)*

But in all three of instances, I bet you noticed how Jesus responded. He didn't respond with how he felt. Jesus did NOT say...

*Yeah, I am really hungry so I'll go ahead and abuse my power to feed myself.*

*Or, you're right, devil. I need to show you who I really am and then that'll put you in your place.*

*Or finally, yeah, I really need more power in this world to feel good about myself.*

Jesus didn't say or do any of those things. Instead, he responded to the noise - to the temptations - by remembering God's promises that were made through the Scriptures.

And that's the ultimate point in this for today. To hear God's voice in our lives in the midst of so much “noise” and the other “voices” vying for our attention, it's so critically important for us to be connected to God through scripture. To spend time in the Bible, listening to what God wants to tell us through it. And I know that can sometimes be intimidating, or we struggle to know where to start. That's why it's always best to do with at least one other person or a group. That's why the Lenten small groups that start meeting this week are so important. (And if you haven't signed up for one yet, talk to me after the service, because there's room in my group!)

During the times in my life when I've felt the most connected to God, it was due in large part because I was intentional about knowing what God said to me through the Bible, and then putting those things into practice as I went about my business every day. I'll give you one example. I think my now, those of you who have listened to me preach a few times know very well that I have a lot of problems and issues. And this will just be one more example of that.

When I was in college, I was fortunate to connect with a couple of guys who introduced to memorizing Bible verses – and it wasn't just about memorizing them so I could recite them perfectly and impress my Christian friends. It was much more about having them in my mind so that when I walked to class or waited in the lunch line, I could bring them to mind and meditate on what God wanted me to hear.

One of the verses I memorized was 2 Corinthians 10:5 (NIV) – “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

And it just so happened to be a little bit later in the spring of the year... when the weather was really warming up, and college students – especially college girls – changed what they wore (or

didn't wear) accordingly. So it became a daily struggle for me – or to use the words from our scripture passage this morning – a test or temptation – every time I stepped out of my room and went anywhere on campus. It seemed like everywhere my eyes looked, there was temptation. But in those moments, I held this verse in my mind – I “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” and found strength and guidance to navigate those temptations.

But I also have to say that during that stage in my life, when I was memorizing new Bible verses every week and doing my best to apply them to my life, a different kind of “noise” and temptation entered my life... And it looked like self-righteousness, and spiritual pride, and judging others who weren't as spiritual as I was.

So here is the ultimate question today: Which “voice” is the loudest in your life? Which source of “noise” gets your attention and pushes everything else to the side?

I'll tell one more story as we wrap this up: My son, Andrew, has noise-cancelling ear buds that he uses whenever he's listening to music or watching video on his phone. Now this picture of this boy with his ear buds isn't my son Andrew – in case you're confused about that – but I want you to see it because of that sly smile this kid has on his face. Do you notice that? I'm convinced he has that smile on his face because someone is speaking to him – probably a parent or a teacher or maybe even a younger sibling – and he can't hear them because these special ear buds “cancel out” or tune out any noise outside of themselves. He can “tune them out” and they can't do anything about it! He is in control of the “voice” or “noise” that he is going to pay attention to.

So for us today and throughout this season of Lent, I encourage you to find a way to put on your own noise cancelling ear buds so that you are able to hear God's voice more clearly. You can do that each day by spending time alone with God and the Bible. You can do that weekly with another person or a group. And of course you can do that by continuing to be a part of this Sunday morning worship gathering. But the reality is that you can't leave it to chance; it's something you have to be intentional about because the other noise in this world is just too strong. Like the boy with the noise cancelling ear buds, they only work when he chooses to put them in.