

# "The Great I Am or the Great I Feel?"

Text: Matthew 4:1-11

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

Dear Fellow Christians, it seems America has a new god. Not a *new* god, really, so much as an old idol 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 to settle questions of right and wrong. This god is the final authority that directs society's actions and forms society's thoughts. The idol that now reigns supreme in the hearts of our world is human emotion, the great I Feel.

Where once our society looked to the great "I Am" – the name God gave to himself when speaking to Moses prior to the exodus from Egypt – now the great "I Feel" guides and directs mankind.

This 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 vulgar 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 – within 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? What would have been the point?

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. <sup>2</sup> And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." <sup>4</sup> But he answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from*

*the mouth of God.'"* <sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple <sup>6</sup> 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.'" <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall 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 glory. <sup>9</sup> And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." <sup>10</sup> 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.'" <sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

This is God's Word - 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. To that end we pray, **"Sanctify us in the truth, O Lord; your Word is truth!"** Amen.

The catastrophic nature of our society's 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 must first 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 overcome both.

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 overcome temptation. The second is just what that actually means to us, individually. In other words, every single one of us needs to start by asking 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. To conquer temptation is to resist it, to not yield to it. Victory means that we avoid the sin – for the right reason. It's the second part that can give us trouble, since 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 to find a way to give in to temptation while at the same time providing some sort of comfort for our consciences when we do. There is an evil in us that wants to believe that victory over temptation can mean simply 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, to yield to sin. The only struggle is how to justify that desire. 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 god – gets to decide 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* feel good about it. If it feels right, it is right.

So then we return to our text, and the first thing that we notice is that if Jesus had bought into the "I Feel" religion of today, he could have done all the things that the devil suggested. But our God does not operate according to "feelings." Jesus did not allow his own personal desires or emotions 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. On that basis, why *not* do what Satan suggested? Who would have been harmed? The fact is Jesus did not. He refused to turn his eyes inward, refused to be guided by his desires.

Understand that this was not a one-time temptation. It was a life-long struggle for our Savior. Even when he hung on the cross and heard the godless taunt, **"Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"** wouldn't it have felt so good to do just that, and to thereby silence their arrogant tongues and offer obvious and irrefutable proof that he was who and what he said he was and thereby prove his enemies 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 demonstrated that human *feelings* and *emotions* don't get to decide right or wrong. On the contrary, 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 things. The first is the inspiration of Scripture, for why would Jesus quote the Bible unless he believed it to be both infallible and authoritative? 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 therefore 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 know what God said, but I just feel like that doesn't apply to me"* 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."* Obviously 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 some sort of "life coach" to help us to get in touch with our feelings.

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. That's how Jesus

demonstrated his love, yet love can never be pitted against obedience. Jesus demonstrated his love and compassion for us *by* his obedience. He demonstrated his mercy not by doing what felt right to him but by obeying his Father's holy will. 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 (Satan's unsuccessful temptation of Jesus): "***Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. <sup>19</sup> 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 succeeded. 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 that Word of God 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 you walk again through the season of Lent, 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 forgiven, 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, and trust it implicitly to guard and defend our eternal souls. Amen.

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'?" <sup>2</sup> And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> 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.'" <sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. <sup>5</sup> For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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 - <sup>13</sup> for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> ¶ 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. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> ¶ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. <sup>19</sup> 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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# ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

**ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501  
Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483  
Website: [www.bismarcklutheran.org](http://www.bismarcklutheran.org)  
Mick Johnson, President      Angela Pfennig, Organist  
Michael Roehl, Pastor

**The First Sunday in Lent – February 22, 2026**

**The Opening Prayer by the Pastor**

**The Opening Hymn – 159**

"Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven"

**The Order of Service – Hymnal page 31ff.**

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

**The First 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.

**Psalms 22** *(Hymnal page 62)*

**The Second 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 Nicene Creed *(Projected on Screens)*

**The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 307**

"Cross of Jesus, Cross of Sorrow"

**The Sermon – Text: Matthew 4:1-11** *(See back page)*

**"The Great I Am or the Great I Feel"**

**The Offertory –** *(Projected on Screens)*

**The Post-Sermon Hymn – 510** *(Stanzas 1 & 3)*

"O Lord, We Praise You"

**The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer**

**The Preparation for Holy Communion** *(Hymnal page 38)*

**The Distribution**

**The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving** *(Hymnal page 41)*

**The Benediction**

**The Closing Hymn – 187**

"On What Has Now Been Sown"

**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.

**A note on Communion:** It is a matter of conscience among us, drawn from God's Word, that communing together is an intimate expression of confessional fellowship based on shared beliefs. We therefore ask those who have not publicly declared their unity of faith with us to first meet with the pastor for the information you would need and want before communing. Please understand that we seek only to follow the Word and will of God and are in no way judging your Christian faith.

**Attendance –** Sunday (32) Average (38) Wednesday (16)

**This Week at St. Paul:**

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service with Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>- 7:00 p.m.</b>	– Midweek Lenten Service
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>- 9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour

**CLC News –** Pastor Aaron Ude has returned the call to Holy Cross of Phoenix. The CLC Call Committee for Educational Institutions has called Dr. Daniel Sullivan to fill the vacant position on the ILC faculty. Grace of Fridley, MN has called Pastor Tom Naumann. Pastor Emeritus John Schierenbeck has accepted the vacancy call to Our Redeemer's of Red Wing, MN. Living Hope of Appleton, WI has called Pastor Stefan Sonnenfeld.

**Called Home –** Eugene (Butch) Lang, longtime member of St Paul, was called home to his Savior's side on Saturday, February 14<sup>th</sup>. *"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."*

**Lenten Season –** A reminder that we have entered the season of Lent, with midweek services each Wednesday through Easter. All are encouraged to share in the blessings of these special midweek services.

**Church Council Meeting Notes –** The Council met on 2/15. Offerings for January were \$2,151 below budgeted needs and expenses were \$1,149 over budget for a net decline of \$3,300. The Council voted to switch property insurance carriers from Church Mutual to Brotherhood Mutual. The Annual Men's Breakfast was approved for Easter Sunday, April 5<sup>th</sup>. The next Council meeting is scheduled for March 29<sup>th</sup>.