

“Who You Gonna’ Please?”
Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Matthew 4:1-11

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Let me tell you a story. Some of you will know it but for others it will be new. It’s a story about St. Augustine. St Augustine was born in 350 AD in what is now Algeria and lived there most of his life.

The story is, when Augustine was about 17 years old, he and some friends were out one night, looking for trouble. On a whim, they climbed over a fence into an orchard and stole some pears.

Years later, Augustine wrote he never wanted to steal those pears. He wasn’t hungry. The pears weren’t even ripe. They threw them at some pigs just for fun. But he said he couldn’t help himself. He knew he shouldn’t, but just couldn’t stop himself.

Have we been there? You and me? Do we know what that’s like? Have we ever done the wrong thing, even though we knew we shouldn’t? We knew we shouldn’t do it. We didn’t want to do it! But it was like something grabbed a hold of us and we just couldn’t stop.

Or maybe, maybe, we knew we shouldn’t do it, but we really wanted to, so we piled up so many good reasons we talked ourselves into it. We made up so many reasons we had to do it. ‘It won’t hurt anyone. See how nice it looks on me? They’ll never know. It’s for the best!’

We’ve been there. We didn’t want to do it but couldn’t help ourselves. Or, we wanted to do it so bad we invented reasons to let us off the hook.

Either way, one day our eyes were opened, and we saw what we had done. And no amount of fig leaves would cover it up.

Jesus is tempted. He is tempted to indulge his body. But he says, no. He is tempted to test how much God loves him. But he says, no. He is tempted to worship at the feet of wealth, fame, and power. But he says, no.

In each instance, he thinks of God first. In each instance, he's thinking, "Will this please God? If I do this, will it please God?" That's what Jesus cares about. Will this please God?

What if Augustine had asked that question before he climbed the fence and stole those pears. What if he had asked himself, "Will this please God?"

What if the woman had asked that question? What if the man had asked that question? What if they had both asked, "If we do this, will it please God?"

What if you and I ask that question? Before we tell that harmless lie. Before we pick up that little trinket that's just so cute and they'll never miss it. Before we explode in anger over some minor issue. Before we let that innocent flirtation go beyond innocent? What if we ask, "Will this please God?" What if we ask, "Will this please God?"

Two thoughts, briefly, before we close. First, asking "Will this please God", presupposes we know what pleases God. It assumes we know what God wants. If we're not sure, go back to the Matthew passage we've been working on. Chapters 5, 6 and 7. It's pretty much all there. Take care of the poor and powerless. Be a peacemaker. Live our faith like a city on a hill, shining for all to see. Don't be satisfied with everyday morality. Strive for a higher righteousness. Do that, and we'll be on our way to answering, "Will this please God?"

Second, sometimes we really don't want to do something, but we positively cannot stop. We're trying to stop but we just can't. It's like we're caught up in a demonic power that won't let us go. If you know what I'm talking about – addiction, compulsion, obsession – find help. Talk to someone. Talk to me. Take the first step to driving out that demon by sharing your pain with someone.

Friends, none of us are perfect. We all, we all, make mistakes. And it hurts. It hurts when our eyes open and we see the pain we've caused ourselves, the pain we've caused our loved ones, the pain we've caused innocent bystanders. The pain we've caused God. It hurts, and no amount of fig leaves will make it better.

But if we can, if we can, if we pray to God and find the courage and the strength, let's ask that important question: "Will this please God? Will this please God?" Amen.