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*"The Hills We Die On"*

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Sermon Text: Psalm 130 / Matthew 4:1-11 / Romans 5:12-19  
Mariner Sands Chapel: First Sunday of Lent

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This week begins our season of Lent. Last week we talked about Jesus with three of His disciples being transfigured high up on Mount Hermon. I have been thinking about hills for the past few weeks. . . Where I lived in Colorado Springs, there were hiking trails up a mountain just a few miles from my house, called Mt Hermon. Walking along the path, where the air is crisp and the views are so enjoyable, it gives the mind and the soul time to relax and ponder whatever you want. If life is a journey, sometimes the path is difficult and uphill, and at times it's a gentle slope downhill. The goals we make for ourselves are like mountains we climb. When we reach one goal we pause to enjoy the moment and then set out to reach another. Goals; we all have them. We spend a lot of time, money, and attention on achieving them. Sometimes they become addictive. Sometimes in our pursuit of a lofty goal, we are tempted to take shortcuts or make small compromises to our values and our character, thinking that as long as we hit the goal, does it really matter how you got there?

This is one of the observations of our text today. In Matthew chapter 4, Jesus begins His earthly ministry in a wilderness. It reminds me of a reverse graduate school education where on the first day of class, you're given the final exam. The test is pass/fail, there is nothing to study for. In the passage, Satan, the accuser, takes Jesus up to a high mountain, showing Him all the kingdoms of the world in all their splendor. The devil poses a test to Jesus' commitment to being a Servant-Messiah. The goal of the Messiah was to become king of all the kingdoms of the world. The devil offered Jesus the ultimate goal of the Messiah without having to pay the price of being a suffering servant. The price demanded by the devil was worship. Jesus resisted this temptation, this lure of idolatry, and chose instead to worship the Lord, His Father, only (using a quote from Deut. 6:18). Seeing all that beauty from that high mountain was pretty nice, but redeeming the world from sin and death was His goal. That mountain, on that day, was not the one Jesus was willing to take a shortcut. To use one of our own idioms, It was "not a mountain to die on."

In Romans chapter 5, the Apostle Paul makes a reference to another man who faced a similar temptation. Adam was high up on a mountain plateau, known as Eden. The lush garden had everything for Adam. And on the day of his testing, Adam made a choice that impacted all of us. He chose to disobey God. And so sin entered the human race, and with sin came death. Adam's choice brought us death, Jesus' choice brought us life. Adam's choice was a trespass, Jesus' choice was called a gift. It was the gift of forgiveness and the gift of eternal life. In Adam was the life you never wanted. In Jesus is the life you've always wanted. Both of these stories take place on a mountain, a place known for splendor and beauty. Both of these places were the testing centers of our soul. The devil invites us to try the easy way. Cheat now, take the shortcut, no one is looking. To Adam, he says eat this fruit and you'll be like God. To Jesus, he says worship me and you'll be like God.

Sin is a mountain we all die on. Death is the inevitable result. But wait! There is good news. Jesus obeyed His heavenly Father. He chose to live a life that is holy, and gave Himself as an offering for sin. It was something so important that it had to be dealt with, despite the difficulty which would cost Jesus his own life, on a cross. Jesus had another hill, called Calvary, on which to die, for our salvation. As a result of the choice on another mountain, death was defeated, and God's grace was provided. Restoring fellowship, forgiving our sin, making us holy, was God's single-minded focus throughout history. Indeed, the battle for your soul was a mountain that God WAS willing to die on.