

Matthew 4:1-11 – “The Temptation of Jesus”

1. Thoughts About Temptation – 4:1-2

4:1 - *Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*

Jesus has come and identified with sinful humanity in His baptism, and it's there He was filled with the Holy Spirit. Now we often think that Jesus could just handle the pressures and pains of life because He was the Son of God. That He wasn't really affected by these things. Like He had some divine force shield around Him and couldn't really feel the gravity of this situation or temptation.

But understand, though He was fully God and never ceased being God, He came and emptied Himself of the benefits of God.

Philippians 2:6–7, *"who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men."*

So in Jesus' identity He was God, but in His form He was a man.

In other words, Jesus, though fully God, came as fully man. He experienced this temptation as a man would. And He's being empowered by the Holy Spirit in this situation. The very same resource and help we have in time of need.

And this temptation was to further bring Jesus into identification with humanity. He has fully experienced what we ourselves experience in this world.

We can think, *'Nobody knows the kind of temptation and trial that I go through. Jesus certainly can't understand.'*

Yet we read in **Hebrews 2:17–18**, *"Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted."*

And in **Hebrews 4:15**, *"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."*

How many people feel weak? And yet, we have a Saviour who not only recognizes that, but sympathizes with us in this. He knows what it's like because He's been there! How sweet and comforting that is. Don't let your weakness be

cause to hide in shame, but come all the more to a Saviour who understands and is there to help.

Hebrews 4:16, *"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*

Now before we continue in this passage, let me just clear up a few things about temptation:

1. Temptation is not from God. **James 1:13**, *"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone."*

Now that might be confusing because we read in Matt 4:1 that Jesus was led up by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil. Almost as though God was orchestrating all this. And yes, He was. God is Sovereign and in control of all things. But He does not tempt anyone. Satan does that. But God in His Sovereignty allows that not to hinder us but to refine us. He works through it to bring about His purposes in our lives and to make us more like His Son.

2. Your temptation is not unique. **1 Corinthians 10:13**, *"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."*

Sometimes we can think that no one could understand or relate to our kind of temptation. Like we're so special that the enemy is reserving only one particular unique tactic against us. Not true. Your temptation is actually common. Others have experienced it, battled through it, and come out victorious. And so can you!

In fact we're told that God won't allow anything beyond what you can handle. So when you succumb to temptation thinking you had no other option, you're calling God a liar. Because He has said He's provided a way out. I'm not saying it's easy, I'm just saying it's possible. All things are possible with God.

3. Temptation is not sin. **James 1:14–15**, *"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."*

Having thoughts or being tempted does not mean we're sinning. It's what we do with those thought and temptation. This is what Satan uses to lead us

into sin. But be careful to take every thought captive unto the obedience of Christ as 2 Corinthians 10:5 says.

4:2 - *And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.*

Now this is significant. Jesus has been fasting for 40 days. 40 days is the Biblical number for testing. Jesus is truly being tested here. Not to see if He can sin, but to show that He won't sin. He's God and could not sin, but He's man and felt the full effect of this temptation and testing.

Now this is the understatement of this passage – ***afterward He was hungry.*** I know when I've fasted for 40 days, I experience hunger (I've fasted between lunch and dinner for 40 days 😊).

- But when you fast this long, you initially experience hunger for a number of days, but then you kind of settle in and your body begins to feed off the fat and such that's stored up where you don't experience the extreme hunger pains. But then after a period of time your body runs out of these things and it starts to let you know you're in need of food. And you experience some strong hunger pangs. This is where Jesus is at right now.
- This is where the devil often wants to strike you; when you're weak and tired. Those are times we need to be aware of the devil's schemes and be sure we're standing guard and armored up.

So as we get into this, we'll see that the devil is going to have three opportunities to tempt Jesus into disqualifying Him as our Redeemer and Saviour. If Satan can make Jesus sin or go against God's will, then Jesus will not be able to be our perfect sacrifice to atone for our sin. So, this is an opportunity for Satan to gain a potential victory.

But this is also an opportunity for Jesus to chart a new course for humanity. A course that was originally derailed by Adam.

And to make sure that we have no doubt concerning Jesus' worthiness, the Father has stacked the deck against Jesus. In fact, it's interesting to compare Him to Adam:

- Adam had it all going for him, nice garden, walking among the cool of the day, with plenty of fruit to eat.
- Jesus on the other hand is sent into the hot, dry, wilderness. This was rugged terrain. Lots of rocks with not much shelter. And Jesus has been

fasting for 40 days! Jesus is at His weakest state when He has to deal with the devil.

2. First Temptation: The Lust of the Flesh – 4:3-4

4:3 - *Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”*

Satan’s first attack was to have Jesus satisfy His own needs independent of His Father. It’s not so much about trying to prove Jesus is the Son of God. Satan knows this. The way this verse is constructed in the Greek isn’t so much Satan saying, ***If*** you are the Son of God, but rather, ***since*** you are the Son of God (much like, *If God is for us, who can be against us?* Means, *since* God is for us.).

Satan is challenging Jesus to act outside of the will of God. Since you’re the Son of God, You have the power to turn these stones to bread. Just do it!

And what a fitting miraculous act this would be. Not only would it show the power of Jesus as God, but this would solve Jesus’ hunger issue. I mean this is cruel to talk about bread at a time like this. This is a dirty play.

Satan is a master manipulator and schemer. He’s shrewd. He’ll come at you in ways that almost seem to be justified. Almost as though it could be God’s will to do what he’s tempting you to do.

- Jesus was hungry, feeding himself seemed like the wise thing. Perhaps Jesus could have thought this is what God would want for Him. In fact, was it sin to turn those stones into bread? Nope!
But Jesus knew this was not the will of God for this time.
- We need to be sure we don’t succumb to sin through a false justification. We have the Word of God to reveal God’s will. Don’t contradict that. I’ve heard Christians justify getting a divorce because God just wants them to be happy. False! He wants you to be holy, set apart to Him and walking in obedience to His word. Doing so will ensure your happiness.

Now some rabbi’s believed that when the Messiah comes on the scene, the miracle of the manna would start up again. This is why in John 6 many begin to follow after Jesus after the feeding of the 5000. They thought, this guy is providing the bread, this is significant. Until they began to hear what Jesus was really calling them to.

Satan's hope here in this temptation is to persuade Jesus to act independently of the Father. It was the Father's will to have Jesus fast until the appointed time. To submit to Satan's temptation and satisfy His hunger would have been to circumvent the will of God.

So what does Jesus do?

4:4 - *But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'* "

Jesus quotes Scripture. He quotes from Deuteronomy 8:3. The context of that passage is the Israelites in the wilderness who tested God with their complaining over food and drink. God provided manna for them, but it was also that they may know that they're not to live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. Obedience to the Father was the most important thing in life. Something the Israelites struggled with. But here we see Jesus succeeding where Israel failed.

Jesus quotes this to show that He isn't going to submit to the flesh, but rather submit to the will of God. He will choose to follow in obedience to God's Word.

- **Hebrews 5:8**, *"though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered."*

Are you feasting on His Word in your life? Are you desiring to walk in obedience to the will of the Father? Then we need to know the Word. And we need to allow the Word to nourish us and strengthen us to walk in the ways of the Lord and avoid the traps of the enemy.

- We wouldn't give much thought to going a day without actual food right? We know we would get cranky and moody. Well, I think there's a lot of Christians who take on these sorts of attributes because they've been away from the Word of God.

Notice, Jesus is going to be tempted in 3 ways, and each time Jesus is going to resist it by quoting Scripture – ***It is written...***

What does that tell you? You've got to know the Word. Jesus was able to just rattle this Scripture off from Deuteronomy. It was in His heart. *'Well no fair', you may say, 'He's God, didn't He write this thing?'* Well yes, but He gives to us the principle and importance of having the Word in your heart.

- The Psalmist would say, *“Your Word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” Psalm 119:11.*
- I mean if your being spared from sin depended on your ability to quote from Deuteronomy how would you do? Especially after 40 days of fasting? I think we’d be, Deute-who, Deute-what, Deute-where... I’m in a lot of Do-do!

Be in the Word and ensure the Word is in you. Let it strengthen and lead you.

In the next temptation, Satan tries to tempt Jesus to test God’s faithfulness...

3. Second Temptation: The Pride of Life – 4:5-7

4:5-6 - *Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’ ”*

Satan brings Jesus up to a high point of the temple. Again He’s challenging Jesus not to prove He’s the Son of God, but rather, since you’re the Son of God, nothing will harm you. If God really loves you, then He wouldn’t allow anything to happen to you.

- Isn’t this the way that Satan loves to put doubts in your mind. *If God really loved you, would He allow you to go through this? Or, If God were real, wouldn’t He help you in this situation?*
- Jesus has just gone through a 40 day fast. He’s weak, perhaps He’s wondering, *‘How much longer Father?’* But God’s not trying to hurt Jesus or inflict pain, He’s allowing Jesus to go through a trial to prove Him, test Him, and prepare Him for what’s ahead. God is always faithful to do for us that which will ultimately better us and help us. We may not always see it at the time, but we need to trust Him in it.

And notice, not only does Jesus know the Word, but Satan knows the Word and he uses it here against Jesus (or so he tries). He quotes from Psalm 91:11-12. However, he leaves some of it out. It says, *“For He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you in all your ways” (Psalm 91:11)*

- In other words, when we are following God’s ways, God will uphold us. We however try to get our ways fulfilled, which when they’re outside of God’s will, not gonna happen. Or at least it won’t happen with God’s blessing.

Now what's interesting is that there was a belief among the rabbi's that the Messiah would appear from the temple (Malachi 3:1). Satan is throwing this at Jesus like there would be no more spectacular way for You to reveal Yourself than for You to launch Yourself from the temple roof and see God's provision to just let You float down to the ground like a feather.

That would be a real attention grabber.

But look at how Jesus responds...

4:7 - *Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'* "

Jesus knew that we are not to put God to the test. We're not to challenge God's faithfulness by demanding our interests be met on our terms. We're to simply trust God and obey Him.

Jesus quoted from **Deuteronomy 6:16–17**, "*You shall not tempt the LORD your God as you tempted Him in Massah (Reference: Exodus 17:7). ¹⁷ You shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, His testimonies, and His statutes which He has commanded you.*"

We may have Scriptures that sound very positive and seem like launching points to, well... launch yourself off the roof thinking that God will spare you. But Scripture is always the best interpreter of Scripture. And it will not contradict itself, but it will further explain itself.

Jesus knew that though God will uphold us, we are not to challenge Him to do so on our own terms.

4. Third Temptation: The Lust of the Eyes – 4:8-11

4:8-9 - *Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."*

In the next temptation, Satan tried to entice Jesus with a kingdom. Now you may ask, isn't this already the Lord's? Notice that Jesus doesn't refute him on this. You see, all that was in the world was given to Adam to have stewardship over. Man handed that right over to Satan when they sinned. Jesus even called Satan the ruler of the world (John 12:31).

God is allowing this temporarily. But understand, Satan is defeated, God is in control, Satan is operating on borrowed time, for there is coming a day when Jesus will lay hold of that which is rightfully His. Revelation 5 reveals Jesus opening up the scroll in heaven which nobody else was found worthy to open. Many see this scroll as the title deed to the earth. Jesus opens it up and God begins again to deal directly with affairs on earth.

And what Satan is essentially attempting to say is, You don't have to go to the cross to redeem the world. I'll give it to You. But at a cost: allegiance and worship to me.

- And that's the problem when we give in to temptation, it comes at a cost. We may not see it immediately, but there is a price to pay for sin. The Bible tells us that the price of sin is death. If we don't nip it in the bud, that's where it leads.

4:10 - *Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'*"

Jesus again quotes Deuteronomy. This must have been where Jesus was camped out in His quiet time during this week. **Deuteronomy 6:13**, "*You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name.*"

God is the only that deserves our worship and allegiance. And when we serve Him only, we will be living a life most pleasing to our Father, and most satisfying to us.

Satan tempted Jesus in the same way he does to us, the same tactic he's always used:

1 John 2:16, "*For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.*"

- Self-gratification; self-protection; self-exaltation.

With Adam and Eve, the temptation to self-gratification was: "*Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"*" (Genesis 3:1).

For Jesus it was, "*command that these stones become bread*" (Matthew 4:3).

- That's the lust of the flesh.

With Adam and Eve, the temptation to self-protection was: *“You will not surely die...”* (Genesis 3:4).

For Jesus it was, *“All these things I will give You if you will fall down and worship me”* (Matthew 4:9).

- That’s the lust of the eyes.

With Adam and Eve, the temptation to self-exaltation was: *“For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”* (Genesis 3:5).

For Jesus it was, *“... throw Yourself down. For it is written: He shall give His angels charge over you”* (Matthew 4:6). *Luke records this as the third temptation and he wrote more of a chronological account of Jesus.

- That’s the pride of life.

4:11 - *Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.*

I can imagine that the angels came and laid out an entire buffet for Jesus and just blessed Him.

Now Luke tells us that the devil *“departed from Him until an opportune time”* (Luke 4:13). In other words, the devil left Him... for now.

We must always be on guard.

Now what do we learn in all of this? There is a devil. He is out to take you down. But he is not omniscient, omnipresent, or omnipotent. Those are qualities only reserved for God. The devil is not reading your thoughts, or constantly berating you. He’s not everywhere at once. But he has systems in place (and demons carrying out his work) that are going to seek to tempt us. It’s our own desires that lead us into temptation and sin most of the time (James 1:14). Don’t blame everything on the devil and use him as an excuse, half the time he’s saying, *‘I wasn’t even there.’*

But again, we don’t have to fall prey to the attacks against our flesh. Know the Word. **Ephesians 6:17**, *“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;”* The only offensive weapon is the Word of God! But the Word is not a magical formula that causes Satan to run. He will keep coming. Don’t just speak the Word, live the Word.

Let it be the principles you live by. This is what ensures victory.

James 4:7, *“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”*