

## ***Jesus' Temptation and Our Temptations***

*Matthew 4:1-11*

I think that each of us would say that we have a hard time relating to people who seem to “have it all together.” I can’t tell you how many times people have told me that they’ve come to Faith E Free, looked around, and thought, “These people have it all together. . . I’m not sure I fit in here. . .” You know who they’re talking about, don’t you? They’re talking about YOU and me. We know better, don’t we? Most people look “together” from a distance. But when people get close and learn about our lives, they learn that that’s not the case.

Needtobreathe has a song called *Wasteland* that includes these words:

All of these people I meet, it seems like they’re fine.  
In some ways I hope that they’re not, that their hearts are like mine.

That’s an honest expression. I don’t really want people to be more sinful than they already are just so that I can feel better about myself; I mainly want to know that I’m not part of a small minority who struggles with fears and temptations and sin and shame. I want some sense that we’re all together in this life we’re called to live. I want to be part of a church family in which each person knows that the command, “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed,” applies to each of us (not just “that guy over there”).

Sometimes we might even have a hard time relating to Jesus for similar reasons. We have a hard time believing that He really “gets” what we’re going through or believing that we could ever live the type of life that He lived. After all He was sinless; in a sense He really did “have it all together.”

If we allow it to, today’s passage can change our minds about these things. Today we are going to consider Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4). Last week Brian taught from Matthew 3. There we saw that after Jesus was baptized by John that the heavens opened up and God pronounced, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” After that pronouncement, we might have expected Jesus to head west back to Jerusalem to begin His public ministry. But He didn’t. Instead, the Holy Spirit led Jesus to travel east, into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. This account tells us a couple of things about Jesus that confirm that He is Someone who really “gets” what we’re going through.

When I say the word “temptation” something immediately comes to mind for most of us. Your temptation might have to do with finances, sexuality, anxiety, anger, or some other self-destructive behavior. Or perhaps you’re consumed by a critical spirit; you find that you’re tempted to judge everyone and everything around you. Whatever your temptation, keep it in mind as we work our way through Matthew 4:1-11. Notice how His temptations are like yours. And consider the possibility of imitating His approach to temptation.

### ***Jesus' Temptation in the Wilderness.*** (Matthew 4:1–11)

Let's notice how Matthew sets up Jesus' experience in the wilderness in verses 1 and 2.

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry.

Verse 1 reflects what all of Scripture says about the relationship between God and the devil: God is sovereign, so sovereign that He can use the devil for His purposes. Here God uses the devil's temptations of Jesus to prove that He really was the Son of God who would be faithful to His Father.

We immediately see parallels with the children of Israel. Just as God led the children of Israel into the wilderness for 40 years (see Deut. 8:2), the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness for 40 days. The children of Israel became hungry and were tempted, and Jesus became hungry and was tempted. In terms of the circumstances, there were great similarities; in terms of the response to those circumstances, there were great differences. And that's the point: ***Israel was the disobedient "son," Jesus was an obedient Son*** (see Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:15).

We see throughout Matthew's gospel that Jesus recapitulated the history of Israel, living the type of life that Israel should have lived (but didn't). In this way, Jesus "fulfilled" many Scriptures; He gave fullest expression to the things that God wanted for Israel.

After fasting for 40 days, Jesus "became hungry." When Israel became hungry in the wilderness, she grumbled and rebelled against God; her hunger revealed that her devotion to God was very shallow, very tied to her circumstances. Let's see what Jesus' hunger and subsequent temptations revealed.

#### **Temptation #1** (Matthew 4:3-4)

In this first temptation, the devil seizes upon the pronouncement at His baptism that Jesus is the "Son of God."

3 And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"

The devil is called "the tempter" because that's what he does; he entices people away from the will of God. The devil is suggesting that Jesus use His status as the Son of God in an illegitimate way. The temptation is, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." Why would it have been wrong for Jesus to turn stones into bread? On other occasions, Jesus supernaturally multiplied bread and fish to meet the legitimate need to feed the crowds.

In each of these three temptations, Jesus' response exposes the core issue behind each temptation. Jesus answers the tempter by quoting a portion of Deuteronomy 8:3. If you go back and read the entire verse, you will find this.

3 "He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord."

The children of Israel needed to learn that it wasn't really the bread that was keeping them alive. It was actually the word of God that kept them alive; if God didn't speak the manna into existence each morning, they wouldn't eat. The manna was a parable about how essential God's words were for their lives.

Jesus understood this lesson in a way the children of Israel didn't. When Jesus took on humanity, He became just as dependent on God's provision as the children of Israel. Unlike the children of Israel, Jesus trusted that God would meet His needs. To turn stones into bread would have required Jesus to abandon a life of humble dependence upon the Father.

What was at stake was whether or not Jesus would live by "every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." If He didn't trust God when He was hungry, He surely wouldn't trust God when He was betrayed and crucified as a criminal.

### **Temptation #2** (Matthew 4:5-7)

In the second and third temptations, Matthew records that the devil "took" Jesus to the temple and to a very high mountain.

5 Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand 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 will command His angels concerning You';  
and 'On their hands they will bear You up,  
So that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.' "

Here the devil uses a type of logic that distorts the meaning of Scripture. He quotes a couple of verses from Psalm 91 which speaks about the protection that God provides for those who trust in Him. Psalm 91 speaks of dwelling "in the shelter of the Most High" and taking "refuge" in Him. It speaks about how "no evil will befall you, nor will any plague come near your tent" (Psalm 91:10). In Psalm 91:11-12 we read this:

11 For He will give His angels charge concerning you,  
To guard you in all your ways.  
12 They will bear you up in their hands,  
That you do not strike your foot against a stone.

The devil's logic is that since Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, one who trusted fully in God, He should be able to throw Himself off of the temple because God was on record that He would send angels to those who trust Him. They would catch Him in midair so that He would land safely and not even cut His feet on the stones below.

Jesus' answer makes clear that individual Scriptures need to be interpreted in light of the rest of Scripture. Psalm 91 was true, but the devil's logic was false. Psalm 91 promises God's protection and deliverance to the righteous when they are in trouble. But this psalm isn't an absolute guarantee against suffering, much less an invitation to put yourself in danger on purpose so that God has to rescue you.

7 Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.' "

Jesus is quoting from Deuteronomy 6:16 which says:

16 "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah.

At Massah the children of Israel tested God by demanding water (so Moo, p. 114). Instead of trusting in God's provision they rebelled against Him. Even though God had a solid track record of delivering them and providing for them, they accused Him of being indifferent to their needs. Instead of trusting God, they tested Him.

In a similar way Jesus would have "tested the Lord" by throwing Himself off the temple. He would have tested God by deliberately putting Himself in danger and demanding that He perform a miraculous feat in keeping Him safe. We are supposed to ask God to meet our needs, but we are not supposed to demand that He perform tricks like a seal at the circus. Jesus' response to the devil suggests that we should never interpret one Scripture in a way that contradicts another Scripture.

### Temptation #3 (Matthew 4:8-11)

In the third temptation, the devil abandons clever logic and tempts Jesus with a bold, brazen offer that would allow Jesus to avoid the cross.

8 Again, the devil took Him to a very 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 fall down and worship me."

Since the devil is described as "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31, 16:11), there's a sense in which he could have legitimately offered the kingdoms of the world to Jesus. The plan of God involved Jesus eventually ruling over the kingdoms of this world. But the devil's offer would give Jesus the kingdoms of the world without going to the cross. All He would have to do was "fall down and worship" the devil.

10 Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.' "

Jesus responds first by banishing Satan from His presence and second by quoting from Deuteronomy 6:13. There Moses warned the children of Israel not to become complacent and idolatrous by worshiping the gods of the people they displaced. They needed to avoid the pattern of looking to God when they needed something from Him and then forgetting Him when their lives were comfortable. Whether they had a little or a lot, they were to worship and serve God alone.

Whereas the children of Israel bowed down and worshiped the golden calf, Jesus refused to worship Satan. Again, Jesus embodied everything that should have been true about Israel but wasn't. In the way He responded to His temptations in the wilderness Jesus fulfilled the history of Israel.

Notice how Matthew ends this account:

11 Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.

Satan would return to tempt Jesus in various ways throughout His ministry, but for now He left Him. The angels now "came and began to minister to Him." Perhaps they brought Him food (we don't really know). At the very least they nourished Him spiritually. Having been baptized and having been tested and found faithful in the wilderness, Jesus is now ready for His public ministry. Next week we'll consider a couple of passages in John that speak about the transition that certain disciples made from following John the Baptist to following Jesus.

***Jesus' temptation in the wilderness suggests that we face temptation in light of these truths:***

***Jesus has provided everything we need for "life and godliness."*** First and foremost, this account assures us that Jesus would fulfill His calling no matter what the cost. His temptations in the wilderness confirm that nothing would dissuade Jesus from going to the cross to pay for our sins. Through His blood, we enter into the new covenant with God. In this covenant God provides everything we need for "life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3) - including freedom from the guilt of sin and freedom from the power of sin (i.e., facing temptation without sinning). God gives us the Spirit, God writes His word on our hearts, God forgives our sin, God promises that He will be our God and that we will be His people.

When temptations come, this is where we start. The tendency is to look at ourselves and conclude, "I'm way too weak/lame/fickle/double-minded/luke-warm to be obedient in this situation. . . I just know I'm going to give in to temptation." Instead of looking at ourselves, we should fix our eyes on Jesus and remember that He was baptized for us, went into the wilderness for us, lived a sinless life for us, taught about God's reign for us, was crucified for us, and then rose again for us. A Christian is someone who actually trusts that what Jesus accomplished on this earth was effective and sufficient.

When you think about your specific temptation, you need to be convinced that Jesus has provided everything you need for life and godliness. Have you ever found yourself thinking, "My temptations are unique"? Have you ever looked around and thought, "If I had their life I wouldn't struggle in my walk with God. They don't know how easy they've got it." That may or may not be the case, but that's really beside the point. The primary thing to consider is whether or not Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are effective and sufficient for **your** life.

The Scriptures teach that God could never do anything greater than sending His one and only Son for us. Believing that Jesus has provided everything we need for life and godliness is foundational for dealing with temptation.

***Jesus has provided a reliable pattern for us to follow.*** One of the core things we remember during Advent is that Jesus is fully human. He is fully God, but He is also fully human. One implication of Jesus being fully human is that He showed us how it is possible for humans (you and me) to live. In the wilderness Jesus showed us how we can effectively deal with the temptations we face. Ultimately this will mean adopting the same habits of life as Jesus, not merely quoting a verse of Scripture here and there.

Let me give an analogy. When I was in college I bought a guitar. I even took three guitar lessons. I really didn't have any objective for guitar playing; I just thought it would be cool. I practiced whenever I felt like it, which wasn't very often. I peaked about 3 months into my guitar playing career. I had learned about six chords - enough to play every song Bob Dylan had recorded. As the years went by I picked up my guitar less and less. Now I pick it up about every 5 years. Not surprisingly, I'm worse now than I was three months after I bought my guitar.

It's no mystery why Logan, for example, is a better guitar player than me. He has a vision for playing guitar (it helps him lead worship), over the years he has had every intention of getting better, and he has thousands of hours of practice behind him. I don't have any of those things. Dallas Willard calls this process of learning VIM - Vision, Intention, and Means. If you want to learn something new - whether playing guitar, speaking a different language, shooting a basketball, or dealing with temptation - you need these three things. You need a compelling **vision** for what learning this skill will accomplish. You need a steadfast **intention** to pursue this goal; you decide to pursue it (instead of saying, "uh, we'll see"). And you need reliable **means** of training yourself: drills, regimens, disciplines that have proved to be effective. Over time, if you have vision, intention, and means you can learn to do almost anything. It's certainly not easy, but it's possible.

Jesus' experience in the wilderness suggests that He had vision, intention, and means. The reason He could respond to His temptations so decisively and effectively is because He had a compelling vision for His life as the Son of God; He saw very clearly what God wanted Him to accomplish on earth. Jesus had a steadfast intention to pursue this vision; there was nothing tentative about the way He pursued His vocation as the Son of God. And Jesus employed effective means of training Himself. Today we've seen that Jesus had saturated His life with Scripture. When He quoted from Deuteronomy, it

came from a deep, deep place. He also trained Himself through fasting. What kind of person can respond to the devil like Jesus did? The kind of person who fasts for 40 days and 40 nights. Since He was in the habit of denying Himself legitimate pleasures, He also knew how to deny Himself illegitimate pleasures.

If you and I are going to be able to face our temptations the way Jesus faced His, we will have to adopt the same habit of organizing our lives around the will of God. We will need a compelling vision for what our lives should be like as sons and daughters of the Most High God. We will need the steadfast intention to pursue that vision. And we will need to employ effective means: spiritual disciplines/habits that can shape our thinking and feeling and behavior. In other words, ***we need to live as Jesus' apprentices, learning from Him how to live our lives.***