

Jesus' Temptation and Our Temptation *Matthew 4:1-4*

During the Advent season we focus our minds on the incarnation, Jesus taking on flesh and blood. We remember that Jesus became one of us so that He could die for us. This year we are going to focus on one aspect of Jesus' incarnation: ***His experience of being tempted***. We're told in Hebrews 2 that "He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered." We're told in Hebrews 4 that He was "tempted in all things as we are, yet *without sin*." Jesus' experience of being tempted makes Him uniquely able to come to our aid when we are tempted.

We will take three weeks to study the most explicit account of Jesus being tempted: His temptation in the wilderness before His public ministry. Then we'll look at the passages in Hebrews that reflect on Jesus' entire experience of being tempted. Of course this study should be more than an academic exercise. This study should help us grow in our love and adoration for Jesus and in our confidence that Jesus can help us in specific temptations we face. The two really go hand in hand: the more we love and adore Jesus, the more we will trust Him in our everyday living.

Today we'll consider Jesus' first temptation in the wilderness, the temptation to turn stones to bread. Please stand, if you're able, as we read the account of Jesus temptation in the wilderness in Matthew 4:1–11.

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. 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.' "

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.' "

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

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

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

We'll engage this passage on a couple of levels. First, we'll seek to understand what this passage tells us about Jesus. Second, we'll ask how Jesus' experience serves as an example for us to imitate when we face temptation.

The Context of Jesus' Temptation in the Wilderness (Matthew 4:1-2) Matthew sets the context for Jesus' temptations in the first couple of verses in Matthew 4.

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.

These two verses pick up a couple of themes already introduced in Matthew. The first theme is that of **Jesus as God's Son** who would rescue His people from their sin. The mention of the Holy Spirit recalls the events recorded in the previous chapter (Matthew 3). There we read that Jesus went to be baptized by John at the Jordan River. John initially protested, saying that Jesus should baptize **him**. Jesus told him that it was fitting for John to baptize Him "to fulfill all righteousness": given Jesus' role in securing the righteousness of the people, it was appropriate for Jesus to fully identify with humanity through baptism. Even though Jesus didn't need to "repent and be baptized," He submitted to baptism as a way to identify with the people for whom He would die.

After His baptism we read this in Matthew 3:16-17:

16 After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, 17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

The Spirit descending on Jesus and God's voice from heaven bring to mind Isaiah 42:1 where God spoke about His "servant" who would ultimately be sacrificed for the sins of the people.

1 "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold;
My chosen one in whom My soul delights.
I have put My Spirit upon Him;
He will bring forth justice to the nations.

When the Spirit descended upon Jesus after His baptism and when God pronounced that He was "well-pleased" in Him, we naturally see an allusion to the suffering Servant of Isaiah 42 and Isaiah 53. Jesus, the Son of God would be the One who suffered as a substitute for the people.

In the wilderness, Satan will directly attack Jesus as the Son of God. In the first two temptations, the tempter will say, "If you are the Son of God, turn these stones to break. . . If you are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. . ." Satan wanted to lure Jesus away from His mission of going to the cross and **then** be glorified as King and the Exalted One.

The second theme Matthew picks up is that of **Jesus as the "true Israel."** When Matthew mentions that Jesus went "into the wilderness to be tempted," that He was there "forty days and forty nights," and that He "became hungry," we can't help but think of Israel's experience in the wilderness. Israel was tempted in the wilderness; she was there forty years; there she became hungry.

Matthew already introduced this theme back in chapter 2. You may remember how an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, telling him to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt because Herod wanted to destroy Jesus (when he learned that He would be the “king of the Jews”). We read in Matthew 2:15 this:

15 He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called My Son.”

Matthew quotes from Hosea 11:1. There God described “the exodus” as calling His Son, the nation of Israel, out of slavery in Egypt. Since Jesus was also the Son of God, being called out of Egypt after Herod’s death was a fulfillment of Hosea 11:1 in the sense that He gave that Scripture its fullest expression. Jesus recapitulated the history of Israel. Matthew is going to show that whereas Israel was the unfaithful Son who was called out of Egypt, Jesus was the faithful Son who was called out of Egypt. Whereas Israel was in the wilderness 40 years and succumbed to her temptations, Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days and remained obedient.

The theme of Jesus being the “true Israel” points to Jesus fulfilling every aspiration and hope of the old covenant. With these themes in mind, let’s consider Jesus’ first temptation in Matthew 4:3-4.

Jesus’ First Temptation: “. . .command that these stones become bread.” (Matthew 4:3-4) In verse 3 Satan is called “the tempter” because he tries to lure people away from God with half-truths and lies.

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.’ ”

We learned in verse 2 that Jesus had fasted for 40 days “He then became hungry.” The tempter perceives Jesus’ hunger and tempts Him to use His power as the Son of God: “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” This suggestion seems rather benign, doesn’t it? On other occasions Jesus miraculously satisfied people’s hunger; Luke 9 records that Jesus fed the 5,000 by multiplying five loaves and two fish. What would be wrong with miraculously turning stones to bread to satisfy His own hunger?

In all three temptations Jesus answers the tempter by quoting from the book of Deuteronomy. (By the way, we’ll be teaching from Deuteronomy after the first of the year; we’ll take about five months to study some of the key passages in that book.) Here Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 8: *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.’ ”* In order to understand the significance of what Jesus is saying, let’s turn back to Deuteronomy 8. As we’ll see, Jesus clearly saw Himself as replicating the experience of Israel in the wilderness. What was at stake was His calling as the unique Son of God and as the true Israel.

In Deuteronomy 8 Moses is summarizing what God had taught the children of Israel in the wilderness.

1 "All the commandments that I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to give to your forefathers. 2 "You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.

During "these forty years," the people had a different explanation for what was happening to them. They believed that Moses (and God) had brought them out into the wilderness so they could die; they didn't think God was very competent or trustworthy. That's why they grumbled and why they turned to other gods in their impatience. Moses tells them, however, that God was actually "leading" them these forty years. He was humbling and testing them to expose what was in their hearts - whether they would keep His commandments or not. God's test yielded conclusive results: they were disobedient and prone to think the worst about God and His commandments.

The parallels with Jesus are obvious. Jesus too was "led" up by the Spirit into the wilderness. Whereas Satan was tempting Him, God was testing Jesus to prove that He was an obedient Son who would keep His commandments no matter what the cost.

The parallels with us (and our lives) might not be so obvious, but they are very real. For believers in Jesus this life is a wilderness of sorts. We've been delivered from our slavery to sin but we haven't fully entered the promised land; at times it feels like we are wandering in the wilderness. The tempter might suggest that God has abandoned us, that He is incompetent and indifferent to our plight. But God is testing us to reveal what is in our hearts.

Notice how Moses continue explaining their experience. This is the verse Jesus quoted.

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.

Providing manna in the wilderness wasn't an afterthought because He forgot to plan for food needs. He intentionally humbled them and let them become hungry so that He could provide the manna (a flaky, bread-like substance) every morning. The first time they saw it, they asked "What is it?" (Hebrew: *manna*) because neither they nor their fathers had known anything like it. The manna showed up because God spoke it into existence every morning. The children of Israel were supposed to understand that it wasn't the manna that was keeping them alive; it was ultimately the word of God that kept them alive. If God didn't speak each morning, they wouldn't eat. They were supposed to conclude, "We do not live by bread alone, but by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord."

Jesus quoted this verse because He had just replicated the experience of Israel in the wilderness. For forty days and nights He had been sustained - not by food, but by His fellowship with God. Jesus dismissed the tempter's suggestion that He turn stones to bread because He, like Israel, would be sustained by God's word. When God spoke He would have food. In verse 11 we read that after Jesus had been tempted three times the devil left Him and angels came and began ministering to Him. The term used for "minister" is often associated with providing food (see 8:15, 25:44, etc.). As with Israel, God provided food for Jesus after He had been tested and become hungry.

We see in Jesus a radical reliance on the word of God. Because He became one of us, He would need to trust God and His Word just as we do. He wouldn't turn stones to bread, He wouldn't call down legions of angels to rescue Him from being arrested (Matthew 26:53), and He wouldn't "come down from the cross" (Matthew 27:40).

We learn at least two things from this first temptation of Jesus. First, ***nothing would dissuade Jesus from fulfilling His God-appointed mission*** of dying for the sins of the people. We'll see this in each of the three temptations: Jesus was God's faithful Son who had a fierce devotion to this mission. Any suggestion that He take a short-cut or that He avoid being sacrificed on the cross was met with resistance.

In Matthew 16 we read that Jesus explained to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things, be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Peter couldn't comprehend how Jesus' death could possibly be the will of God.

22 Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." 23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

Peter's suggestion that Jesus avoid the cross was the same suggestion Satan was making in the wilderness. Jesus wouldn't be dissuaded then and He wouldn't be dissuaded now.

Realizing that *nothing could dissuade Jesus from fulfilling His God-appointed mission* should fill us with awe and wonder and should lead to worship. Who are we that the sinless Son of God should have such a fierce commitment to our salvation? I'd encourage you not to squander the opportunity to go deeper in worship this Advent season.

Second, ***resisting temptation requires a radical reliance on the word of God***. We saw this in Jesus' response to the tempter. For example, Jesus was so immersed in the truths of the book of Deuteronomy (it's plot/story) that He recognized that when the tempter said, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread," that He was facing the same temptation as the children of Israel in the wilderness. He was able to respond from a deep place in His spirit, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'" He wasn't

merely quoting a Bible verse as if it were a magic bullet. He was speaking from a deep, substantive understanding of God's Word. He was basically saying, "As with the children of Israel, I will eat when God speaks and provides bread."

Of course Jesus' understanding of Scripture was more comprehensive than ours will ever be. Because of His union with God the Father and with the Holy Spirit, He had a unique experience with the truths of Scripture. And yet in foundational ways we can and should imitate His radical reliance on the word of God. We'll talk about this more in the next few weeks, but for now I would have you consider your heart's attitude toward Scripture.

Are you convinced that God's word is essential for your life? Do you treat it like food - something you cannot live without? Or do you view God's word as optional and non-essential for your well-being? Like Jesus we need a long-term commitment to read and understand and memorize Scripture. Only then will we be able to recall it and employ it in times of temptation. Without this commitment we're pretty much stuck in our current conditions. With this commitment, our knowledge of Scripture (our knowledge of God, really) will increasingly provide wisdom and power in times of temptation. We'll be talking about this more in coming weeks.

We've provided a reading guide that goes along with this sermon series. Each week you will find five Scriptures that reinforce the message from the previous Sunday. We hope you'll put this guide in your Bible and take the time to read and meditate on these Scriptures. This is a tangible way you can cultivate a radical reliance on God's Word.