

Jesus' Second Temptation

Matthew 4:5–7

In his book entitled, *Men at Work: The Craft of Baseball*, George Will takes a look at some of the deeper intricacies of the game of baseball by looking at the four core areas of baseball: managing, hitting, fielding and pitching. He wrote the book in 1990 and so when it came to pitching, Orel Hershiser was the pitcher he focused on since Hershiser was at the top of the game at that time. As some of you remember, Hershiser was a three-time all-star with the Dodgers. In 1988 he set a major league record by pitching 59 consecutive innings without allowing a run. He won the MVP of the World Series in '88 as well as the National League Cy Young Award. In other words, he was really good.

In the book, Hershiser makes this comment about his philosophy of pitching:

“There are two theories of pitching . . . One is that you try to convince the batter that a particular pitch is coming and you throw something different. The other theory, that you don't hear as much, but that I use, is that if the batter expects a particular pitch, you throw it, but you throw it in a place where he can't hit it.”

Will goes on to clarify the point:

That is: Know what a batter wants or expects and throw the ball *almost* there. If he is a highball hitter, throw it a bit too high. His eagerness will prevent him from laying off it, but it will be hard to hit well.

(Men at Work, 146)

Like a great pitcher, the devil knows our bents, our tendencies, and he comes to us with temptations that he knows will be hard for us to lay off of.

That's the approach that he uses with the temptations that puts before Jesus in Matthew 4. He is coming to Jesus in ways designed to offer the strongest temptation. He did that when he encouraged Jesus to turn stones into bread. And he will do it again as he comes to Jesus with a second temptation that we will look at today.

Before we look at this second temptation, I want to remind us of what Steve said last week about what each of these temptations reveal. Each one reveals: (1) A core temptation that we face in life; (2) Jesus' identity as the Son of God who could not be dissuaded from going to the cross; and, (3) a skillful use of Scripture in facing temptation. And so I want to look at this second temptation and then we will come back to these three things at the end.

Last week we looked at the first temptation to turn stones into bread. After 40 days of fasting, Jesus was hungry. But he was unwilling to run ahead of his Father's provision. But the devil does not give up. He comes at Jesus with a second temptation.

I. Jesus' Second Temptation: *Throw Yourself Down*

Let's read starting in verse 5:

*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;*

The holy city, of course, is Jerusalem. The devil takes him there and has Jesus *stand on the pinnacle of the temple*. We don't know exactly what is meant by this phrase except that he has Jesus stand on some high point of the temple complex. And from that point the devil suggests to Jesus that, since he is the Son of God, he should throw himself down. And then he gives a biblical argument for what he suggests. He quotes from Psalm 91:11-12:

*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.'* ”

What exactly is the nature of this temptation? Some believe that it is the temptation for Jesus to perform a kind of miraculous sign before the people that would cause them to follow Him (Stein, *Jesus the Messiah*, 107). If the people saw angels swoop in and keep Jesus from getting hurt when he threw himself off of the temple that would create quite a stir. But in light of the fact that there are no people mentioned in the account it seems to suggest that the nature of this temptation is something else.

Psalm 91 is all about God's protection. If you read the psalm, it is a statement of God's protection on those who trust Him. And so the devil is essentially saying to Jesus, "If God promises to protect those who trust Him, then wouldn't it be ESPECIALLY true that he would protect you, since You are the Son of God? And so throw yourself down and make Him prove it!" The devil is suggesting to Jesus that he should seek further confirmation of something that God has already promised. He is telling Jesus to make God prove Himself.

Why would this be tempting to Jesus? I think it can be easy to dismiss the intensity of these temptations because we think, "Jesus is God. Why would he really be tempted to do this?" But he was also fully man and so he is experiencing this temptation as a true human. And here he is at the initiation of his ministry that would ultimately take him to the cross and so if there was ever a time of looking for some extra assurance that God would be with him it was now.

It is a very real temptation. It is also a very subtle temptation as the devil offers biblical support. Jesus feels the pull of this. But Jesus, replies to the devil:

⁷ *Jesus said to him, “On the other hand, it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ”*

Just like he did with the first temptation, Jesus turns to the Scripture. He quotes Deuteronomy 6:16. In Deuteronomy 6 Moses is standing before the children of Israel giving his final words of instructions to them as they prepare to go into the Promised Land after the 40 years of wilderness wandering. Moses is speaking of how they need to have their lives oriented around the word of God and how they need to obey God. And that if they do so they will prosper. It is in that context that Moses tells the children of Israel:

¹⁶ *“You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah.*

Jesus doesn't quote the last part of verse 16, which includes *as you tested Him at Massah*, but no doubt Jesus had the context of the full verse in His mind.

What happened at Massah? Exodus 17 records that as the children of Israel were led out of slavery from Egypt and into the wilderness on their journey to the Promised Land, they came to a place that had no water. And so what did they do? They grumbled at Moses. We read this in Exodus 17:2:

² *Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water that we may drink.” And Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?”*³ *But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, “Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”*

God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt. He had parted the waters of the sea and destroyed Pharaoh's army. He had already miraculously provided water one other time for them and he had been feeding them with manna from heaven. And on top of this God had said that he would bring them to the Promised Land. And yet though God had said and had demonstrated that he was with them to deliver them from every threat, they put Him to the test yet again. And so we read this in verse 7:

⁷ *He named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD among us, or not?”*

Massah means, “test.” And so this is the context of what Moses is telling the people in Deuteronomy 6:16. Don't be like your fathers in the wilderness when they tested God. They tested whether God was among them or not.

And so all of this is in Jesus' mind as he quotes this Scripture to the devil. To throw himself down and make God prove Himself, would be like the children of Israel testing God and wondering if he was really among them or not. God had said that he would

protect those who trust Him. Jesus chooses to trust what God has said. He refuses to put God to the test and make Him demonstrate the truth of what he has said.

And so again, Jesus proves himself to be God's faithful Son. Israel failed in the wilderness. Jesus did not fail. Israel did not have faith. Jesus had faith. Jesus trusts what God had already said and he refuses to be like the children of Israel saying, "Prove it."

This second temptation that Jesus faces and overcomes, gives us some insight into temptation that we will face and how to deal with it. As well, it reveals again Jesus' commitment to going to the cross. And so let's look at the three things I mentioned at the start of the sermon that Jesus' temptation and his response to this temptation reveals.

II. Three Lessons from Jesus' Second Temptation

First, the core temptation that is revealed here is the temptation to test God. **We all face the temptation to make God "prove it."** We all face the temptation at times to want God to do something more to demonstrate something that he has already said.

And so for instance, Scripture communicates with great clarity that God loves us. We have the clearest demonstration of His love for us in the crucifixion. And yet, sometimes we want God to do something else to prove it. "If God loves me he will bring that special person into my life." Or, "God I'll believe you love me if you give me my dream job." Prove it!

Scripture teaches that God is good. Over and over again that truth is affirmed. But sometimes we test God by thinking, "I'll believe God is good, when he removes this difficulty from my life." Or we think, "I will believe God is good if he heals me or a person I love." Prove it!

Scripture teaches that God knows our needs. We are told in Matthew 6 to not be anxious about what we will eat or drink or about what we will wear, because God knows we need these things even before we ask. And yet, I know in my own heart, I can have food and drink and clothing and still be anxious in my heart. Is God going to provide? I can test God by my worry and anxiousness that he isn't going to provide.

I could go on and on, but you get the point. We can put God to the test in these things. He has made promises to us about who he is and what he will do and yet we can say to him in our heart at times, "Prove it." Do sometime more to show me.

We need to follow Jesus' example here and stand on what God has said. We need to walk in the truth that God has already communicated to us. This is the faith that is commended in Hebrews 11, right? *Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen* (Heb. 11:1). We need to resist this temptation to make God "prove it."

Now, before we move on to the next lesson we see in this passage, I wanted to mention that there is one time when God does invite us to test him. Do you know what is? It's in our giving. In Malachi 3:10 he invites the people to bring their full tithe to the temple and then he says, "test me now in this . . . if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows." So, if you want to test God, that is the one the area in which he says it is okay.

The second lesson we see illustrated here is that **we need a comprehensive understanding of Scripture to battle temptation.** The devil is a deceiver. And he is so subtle in his deceptions. He throws his temptation "pitch" at us to look so close to the truth that we are tempted to believe it. That's what he does with Jesus. He comes to him WITH Scripture. But Jesus has this comprehensive understanding of Scripture and he doesn't allow the devil to rip Psalm 91 out of context to lead him astray. We need this comprehensive understanding of Scripture as well in our battle against temptation.

Psalm 19 declares this about Scripture:

*⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.
⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.*

We need to be made wise. We need our eyes enlightened.

And so, though we will never know Scripture as well as Jesus did, we need to pursue a lifestyle of growing in our understanding of God's Word. This happens as we consistently spend time in God's word. It needs to be more than just a Sunday morning thing. Last week Steve mentioned the Advent reading guide. If you are not doing anything in terms of reading the Bible, let me encourage you to do this as a start. Read the Bible every day. Pray for understanding. If you will do this day in and day out, you will develop a growing comprehensive understanding of Scripture that will make you wise, that will enlighten your eyes and help guard you from temptation.

But here's the deal, it doesn't have to all be on you to have this comprehensive understanding of Scripture. You can lean into the body of Christ for this. If you will surround yourself with biblical community and walk in humility with them, the body of Christ can help you have a broader understanding of Scripture.

Colossians 3:16 says:

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another

The "you" there is plural. This is a command to the church to *let the word of Christ richly dwell* within us. As the body of Christ we are to have this comprehensive understanding of Scripture. And so none of us has to feel like it is all up to us. Rather we can pursue

living in true biblical community that can help us have the understanding of Scripture that we need.

Finally, the last lesson we see illustrated in this passage is that **Jesus could not be dissuaded from going to the cross**. Do you remember what Jesus said to Peter when Peter drew the sword and tried to protect Jesus from the mob that came to arrest him before His crucifixion? Jesus said,

Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?

Matt. 26:53

At that moment, Jesus knew that if he wanted to he could call out to God to send angels to rescue him from going to the cross. But he refused to do so because he understood that his mission was to suffer and die for the sins of the world. His commitment to that path was set here in his refusal to give in to Satan's temptation. In refusing to give in to this temptation, Jesus determines the kind of Messiah he would be. He would be the Suffering Servant according to God's will. He would not use the powers at His disposal to invoke miraculous deliverances – not here and not on the cross. Rather he chose the path of faith and obedience. Jesus could not be dissuaded from going to the cross.

Transition to Communion: Today as we celebrate communion, be reminded of this great truth. Jesus was not dissuaded from going to the cross because he was fully committed to the Father's will. He was a faithful Son in all things. And because he could not be dissuaded from going to the cross, a payment for sin was made. Jesus died for you. Jesus died for me. On this second Sunday of Advent, as we prepare to celebrate the coming of Christ into the world, give thanks that he came and was a fully faithful Son who went to the cross to pay for your sin. He did so out of love.