

Lessons from Christ's Temptation for Our Resisting the Devil's Attacks

Matthew 4:1-11; 1 John 2:15-17

As we open in our Bibles to Matthew 4, we look today at Christ's temptation. Jesus was tempted and resisted sin; we do not¹. We are tempted and sin because we have sin dwelling within us.

Sin Still Dwells in Us

Paul testified that sin still dwells in us, in his greatest doctrinal epistle, Romans 7:20. Paul affirms that horrible truth, after his glorious conversion on the road to Damascus, after his personal tutelage by Christ in the wilderness, after his years of ministry as an apostle preaching, planting churches, and after writing almost half of our New Testament under the inspiration of God, for almost 20 years: Paul declares: "...*sin [still] dwells in me.*"

Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. (NJKV)

Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. (NIV)

But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. (NAS)

We Need God to Deliver Us

This morning we are to regularly ask for God's protection (the sixth petition, Mt. 6:13) because sin is still in all of us who are saved, and that is why we still sin.

We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners.

We are thieves at heart though we may not steal;

We are liars at heart even when we do not lie;

We are murderers at heart even when we do not kill;

We are adulterers at heart though we may not commit adultery.

But just as bleak as that truth may be, the glorious truth is that salvation united us to Jesus Christ—and He defeated sin not only once and for all as our substitute on the cross, but also he triumphed in the wilderness, facing Satan.

That brings us to our target in God's Word today. We are seeking:

¹ 070415AM

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Here in Matthew 4 this morning we are opening to the greatest truth that all of us who are saved, yet who are tempted to sin, can learn.

Jesus defeated each of Satan's greatest temptations--not in His Omnipotence as God the Son, but in complete weakness as a man. After 40 days of no food and no rest from attack. Jesus defeated Satan in perfectly yielded, 100% humanity as a man, the Last Adam.

At the start of His Earthly ministry, Jesus met and defeated Satan as a man. And against the bleak panorama of the Judean Wilderness we see this beautiful sight, a totally obedient servant who wins the battle because He obeys the Word of His Father in Heaven. So can we!

Jesus Defeated Satan

Satan the enemy of God and man is alive and well on planet earth; but God's Word assures us that we are "more than conquerors through Christ". Satan is a defeated foe, a weakened adversary and crushed enemy. We have the victory through Jesus who lived the perfect life.

Jesus left the perfect example. God's Word records the ultimate method for resisting Satan's attacks—the model Jesus left for us, the secret of how to resist the attacks of Satan like Jesus did.

Jesus spent 40 days alone. Always remember as we read this account that our character is what we are when we are alone. The real you, is most evident, when you are alone. Satan must have repeatedly said through those 40 days, "It's okay, no one will ever know!"

Now in Matthew 4:1-11 (NKJV), let's stand and listen to God.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.² And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. ³ Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "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 by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

⁵ 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.'"

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

⁸ 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."

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.'"

¹¹ Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

Pray

Two Gardens, Two Temptations

The parallel to the Garden of Eden in Christ's temptation can't be overlooked. The first Adam met Satan in the perfection and safety of the Garden of God and failed, plunging all of humanity into sin. The Last Adam (I Corinthians 15:45) faced Satan in the demon filled dangers of the wilderness and triumphed. How unlike the first Adam is this last Adam.

The Devil challenged the first man. The Last Man challenged the Devil.

The Devil ruined the first Adam. The Last Adam spoiled the Devil.

The First Adam involved the Race in his defeat. The Last Adam included the Race in His victory.

The First Adam stood as the head of the race and falling, dragged the race down with him. The Last Adam stood as the Head of the new race, and being victorious, lifted that race with Him." ²

In Matthew 3, Heaven had opened at His baptism, and now in Matthew 4, the powers of Hell opens at His temptation.

Jesus Was Alone in the Wilderness

What Matthew calls *the wilderness* is the 525 square mile (15x35 mile) region between Jerusalem, on the central hills that form the backbone of Israel, and the Dead Sea. This bleak and barren area of wilderness is called **Jeshimmon** in the Old Testament.

Jeshimmon means The Devastation, and this area fits the name. One early Bible geographer named Sir George Adam Smith, in the late 19th century described it in his journals:

It is an area of yellow sand, of crumbling limestone, and contorted strata, where the ridges run in all directions as if they were warped and twisted. The hills are like dust heaps; the limestone is blistered and peeling; rocks are bare and jagged; often the very ground sounds hollow when a foot or a horse's hoof falls upon it. It glows and shimmers with heat like some vast furnace. It runs right out towards the Dead Sea, and then there comes a drop of twelve hundred feet, a drop of limestone, flint, and marl, through crags and precipices down to the Dead Sea³.

The wilderness Christ entered was the same one into which the scapegoat pre-figuring Christ, was released to wander and die on the Day of Atonement, carrying away the sin of the nation into that place of evil spirits.

So Jesus, hungry to the point of starvation, thirsty to the point of death, weakened to the point of helplessness—Jesus, meets the fallen glistening cherub, the fallen anointed one, Satan the adversary.

Lessons from Christ's Temptation

Christ's temptation was real; it was real physically, it was real emotionally, and it was real

² Morgan, Crises of the Christ.

³ Barclay, William, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Matthew - Volume 1 Chapters 1-10 (Revised Edition)*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press) 2000, c1975.

spiritually. Jesus felt every pain, every attack, and every pressure.

But, as **Christ's temptation shows us—Satan can only persuade, he can't push.**

The Devil tempts, but it is we who transgress.

The Devil doesn't make us do it, we do it ourselves.

Jesus shows us we are responsible for our sins because of the sin we have within. Jesus didn't sin although He was completely tempted, because He has no sin within. But, a tempted Christ always understands His tempted people.

The essence of Christ's temptation in all three versions was to act independent of God. It is okay to be hungry and want food, tired and want rest, weary and want an end to the attacks—but it is wrong to get anything apart from God's way, God's timing, and God's blessing!

Three Gospels Record One Event

In all three Synoptic Gospels we see the same event.

- **The Arena was the Wilderness:** (Matthew 4; Mark 1; Luke 4); Christ was with wild beasts (Mark 1:13); He was 40 Days without food (Matthew 4; Luke 4)
- **The Adversary was Satan.** Christ met the Devil, that Dragon and slanderous fallen Lucifer, the father of sin, lies, murder, and death. The very powerful King of Darkness.
- **The Account is Christ's personal and private eyewitness Account.** It is so special because only He was there. The fact that we have it speaks to His personal desire that we have it to help us as we face the same adversary. May we likewise conquer in His power!

Jesus met Satan as a man. This is highlighted by Satan's first attack when he said, "If you are the Son of God..." to which Jesus responds very clearly, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word of God..." (Matthew 4:3-4). Jesus met Satan in the power of a weakened man, not in the awesome, blinding Omnipotence of Almighty God.

Three Areas Satan Always Targets

The Apostle John in 1 John 2:15-17 explains the world we are not to befriend or love is all the lusts and evil desires packaged in varied shapes, sizes, and colors...that always fall into one of three categories:

1 John 2:15-17 (NKJV) **Do not love** [present active imperative] the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 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. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

The world operates by sending us temptations packaged as enticements from our lusts.

“Lust of flesh⁴”

We are tempted by the flesh to chase pleasures: this equals the cravings of the body. *These are all of the sensual temptations.*

Whether for food, pleasure, or fun: our bodies are built to crave and God says don't allow your flesh to control your cravings.

God says those fleshly desires are worldly; and He is against that lust in any form in our lives.

“Lust of the eyes”

We are tempted by our eyes to chase stuff: this equals the lusting of the eyes. *These are all of the material temptations.*

This is lust for things. The things may be as large as a house or as small as a ring, as bright and dazzling as a new sports car or as dull and dusty as a two-hundred-year-old antique dresser.

Lest we think that this is not as bad as the lusts of the flesh, remember that covetousness (insatiable longing for more things) is as damnable as idol worship. That means that the lust for possessions is as wicked as the lust for immorality.

Beware of both, they are deadly!

“Pride of life”

We are tempted by pride to chase status: this equals the boasting of the mouth. *These are all of the personal temptation.*

This is selfishness because I'm most important.

This is irritableness because life revolves around me.

This is untruthfulness because I need to protect myself.

This is laziness because I want to rest and comfort myself.

All of these are pride as well as obvious lust for status and special recognition. Pride also shows up as lust for the status of fame, fortune, power, or authority. Pride may also be wanting a title that makes heads turn, like “top executive” or “president” or “executive director” or even “doctor”. In the Scriptures this was Satan's sin.

Pride in all its forms is heinous to God.

When Jesus met the Devil in the wilderness His only resource was God's Word—and that is the weapon Satan fears. After the 40 days, as Christ was at His weakest state physically, Satan moves in to confront Him.

In three swift tests we could call—instant food, instant fame, and instant fortune, watch Christ's response.

First, there was the Physical Attack (Mt. 4:3-4):

⁴ 030319; 051120; 110522

I like to call this-- *Instant Food* (stones into bread) was targeting Christ's physical desires or by example our appetites. (Mt. 4:2-4; Luke. 4:2-4; I John 2:16 'lust flesh').

Satan wants us to question or doubt God's goodness when we are suffering.

Satan was asking, "Will you fulfill your legitimate desires in an illegitimate way?"

Christ shows us we need to totally depend on God's provision.

In the Bread into stones temptation Satan attacks Christ at the point of submission to the will of God. Would Christ submit and obey the Father at all costs or not.

Satan was in effect saying, "You need to take matters into your own hands. God is allowing you to suffer this hunger needlessly. Why go on suffering. Just get what you need now. No one will know and it is okay. If you have the power, use it for yourself. Don't wait, do it now—you deserve it!" Satan wants us to question or doubt God's provision of our basic needs and make us take our own life into our own hands—and out of God's!

This attack was the temptation to satisfy a legitimate desire by illegitimate means. This is the whole realm of sensual things, drugs, and alcohol. Trying to get what only God can give. Filling that God shaped vacuum in our lives with pleasure over worship.

Christ's ANSWER: we need to totally depend on God's provision.

Deuteronomy 8:3 "So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every [word] that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD. (NKJV)

Resist the temptations to fulfill legitimate desires in illegitimate ways.

Second there was the Mental Attack (Mt. 4:5-7):

I like to call this *Instant Fame* (throw yourself down to the crowds below) was targeting Christ's emotional or psychological desires or by example our need for acceptance, approval or applause. (Mt. 4:5-6; Luke. 4:9-11; I John 2:16 'pride of life'.)

It was Satan in effect saying, "Jesus you've been at this thirty years, and what do you have? Nothing. You are a no-one, going no-where, and having no-thing! Just listen to me, do what I say and I'll give you everything. I'll make you an overnight sensation, (or to use a current theme) you'll be the American Idol..." Satan wants us to question or doubt God's timing when we are waiting.

Cast self down was literally Satan saying will you produce spiritual results in an unspiritual way. Therefore, Christ shows us we need to totally depend on God's timing.

This attack was the temptation to produce spiritual results in an unspiritual way. This is the whole realm of rivalry, externalism, pride, haughtiness and self-reliance.

Christ's ANSWER: we need to totally depend on God's timing.

Deuteronomy 6:16 You must not provoke him and try his patience as you did when you complained against him at Massah.

Resist the temptations to do God's Will on your own schedule.

Finally, there was the Spiritual Attack (Mt. 4:8-11):

I like to call this one *Instant Fortune* (bow and get all the world's kingdoms) was targeting Christ's spiritual desires or by example our ambitions (Matthew 4:8-11; Luke 4:5-7; I John 2:16 'lust of eyes').

This was the throne without the cross.

Ambition is a spiritual temptation because so easily our ambitions align with our pride and cause a rivalry with God for the control of our lives.

Satan wants us to question or doubt God's plan when we are waiting.

Therefore, Christ shows us we need to totally depend on God's method.

The Devil was offering the possibility of Christ circumventing the Cross and Calvary.

Satan was in effect saying, "It is just too hard to wait for God's will. It is a cross that is unnecessary. Here is a short cut, the quick way to success. Don't sweat the details, just do what gets you to where you want to be."

This attack was the escape pain and suffering route.

Again this was the temptation to obtain a godly end in an ungodly way!

This is the whole realm of materialism, greed, possessiveness, trust in riches and worldliness.

Christ's ANSWER: we need to totally depend on God's method.

Deuteronomy 6:13 "You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name. (NKJV)

Resist the temptations to do God's Will in your own way.

And at that Satan was done, he could not penetrate Christ's defenses in God's Word.

Christ's Perfect Response to the Devil

His answer was Simple: Christ used a simple method when facing temptation: His response was not clever, novel or sophisticated. Even a child could understand exactly what He said.

His answer was Scriptural: Christ used a scriptural method when facing temptation: For each temptation He had discovered an appropriate Scripture. For each temptation He quoted an appropriate Scripture.

His answer was Successful: In relation to Christ, it is a total triumph; He is absolutely seen as pure and empowered by the Spirit. He goes on in ministry enabled and strengthened. In relation to Satan, it is a total defeat; he is absolutely exposed as being in line for his final defeat and destruction in the lake of fire forever. In relation to us as believers it is a source of great assurance; because Christ met and conquered Satan, through our faith in Jesus we are more than conquerors. God is able to give us an exit to escape any temptation that ever comes!

We Have a Sympathizing Savior

The most comforting conclusion to this temptation is written in Hebrews.

"Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (Hebrews 2:18).

Christ's sympathy is a truth especially dear to us as believers. It is a mine of strong consolation each time we remember that we have a mighty Friend in heaven, who feels for us in all our.

Are you ever tempted by Satan to distrust God's care and goodness? **So was Jesus.**

Are you ever tempted to presume on God's mercy, and to run into danger without warrant? **So also was Jesus.**

Are they ever tempted to commit a private sin for the sake of some great apparent advantage? **So also was Jesus.**

Are they ever tempted to listen to some misapplication of Scripture, as an excuse for doing wrong? **So also was Jesus.**

He is just the Savior that tempted people need. Flee to him for help, and spread before him all your troubles. You will find His ear always ready to hear, and His heart always ready to feel. He can understand our sorrows.

May we all come know our sympathizing Savior by experience! There is nothing like it in this cold and deceitful world. Anyone neglecting Jesus, has no idea what true comfort they are missing.⁵

⁵ Adapted from notes by Ryle, J.C., *Matthew: The Crossway Classic Commentaries*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1998, c1993.