

## MATTHEW 4

## THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

In this chapter, we find our King beginning his glorious reign by a combat with none less than the prince of darkness himself! Immediately after His baptism – “then,” we read, “was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.” No sooner was He anointed than He was assailed by His foe. He did not seek temptation; but rather, the devil himself came to the spot where the Master was, and there he tried to work his diabolical arts upon the Man Whose Divinely-ordained mission for coming to earth in the first place was to be his Destroyer! How greatly do we need to pray for grace to be particularly on our guard during seasons of great enjoyment, for that is when Satan is most likely to tempt us. And let us beseech the Lord Jesus to be with us in the hour of our testing, for He alone truly knows how to support us when we are tempted.

See how the evil one adapted the temptation to the circumstances; he tempted a hungry Man with bread. He put it very cunningly, too. Only one single word – and the hard stones of the desert would become biscuits. Herein he was trying to make Jesus undertake to be His own provider, and to use His miraculous power as the Son of God to spread a table for Himself. And see also how the tempter began his suggestion with an “if” about Christ’s Sonship. It is in similar ways that he endeavors to make us doubt our own relationship with God. He bade Jesus to prove His Sonship by catering for Himself, and yet that would have been the surest way to prove that He was *not* the Son of God! Why? Because a true son or daughter will not doubt their father, and undertake to provide their own food; rather, they wait to be fed by their father’s loving hand. So we see that the evil one was really trying to make the only-begotten Son cease to depend upon His Father, and to take matters into His own hands. Temptations for us to resort to unbelieving “self-help” are common enough, but they are very dangerous!

“He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” Out flashed the Sword of the Spirit! For our Lord will fight with no other weapon. He could have spoken new revelations, but He chose to say the old and simple truth: “It is written!” There is a power in the Word of God which even the devil cannot deny. It is true that food nourishes our bodies; but it owes its power to the secret agency of God, and that Divine agency can work as surely *without* the usual means as *with* them. By our Savior’s reply to the tempter’s evil words, He told him that He would not distrust the Providence of God; but instead, He would

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ The temptation of the Lord Jesus in the wilderness – verses 1-11
- ❖ The beginning of His public ministry in Galilee – verses 12-17
- ❖ He calls Peter, Andrew, James, and John to be His disciples – verses 18-22
- ❖ He teaches and works miracles around the Sea of Galilee – verses 23-25

wait for His Father's perfect timing for feeding Him, and He would by no means be driven to an act of unbelief and self-reliance.

The second temptation on the pinnacle of the Temple was a cunning one; the devil cleverly tries to persuade Jesus to believe *too much*, rather than *too little*. He is not now to take care of Himself, but to recklessly presume and trust His Father's promise beyond its true meaning. But notice how this time, Satan borrowed our Lord's own weapon; he said, "It is written" – but he did not use the sword lawfully. It is not in the nature of the false fiend to quote Scripture correctly. See how he left out the necessary words in the original Psalm which he quoted from: "in all thy ways." Thus he made the Lord's promise say what it never meant; and then he boldly prescribed a course which the law of God would condemn, by saying, "Cast thyself down!" Hereby we see how the omission of a word may spoil the meaning of a Scripture text; the omission of a word or two may entirely alter the sense. But our Lord was ready for him! His sword was on guard for all kinds of strokes. May His grace also keep us well-armed against the foe! For although the enemy alters his tactics, we must not cease our resistance nor change our weapon.

"Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God!" "*It is written again.*" One text must not be looked at alone, or magnified out of proportion as if it were the whole Bible; each utterance of the Lord must be taken in connection with other parts of Scripture. How short and decisive was the stroke of our Lord upon the great enemy! He met the falsely-quoted promise with a plain precept which forbids presumption. "Thou shalt not," from the mouth of God, is the shield of conscience against foul temptations. Our rule of action is the clear command of our Lord.

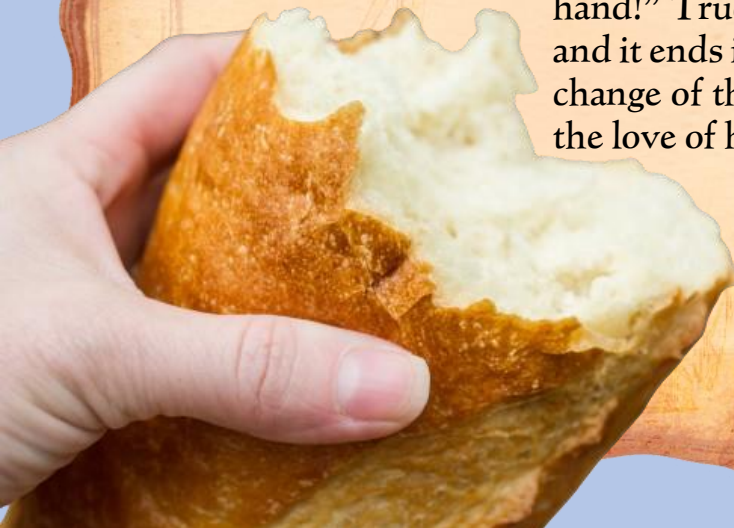
"Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." What a wretched traitor! None of these kingdoms were really his own in the first place! They were, in truth, already the rightful heritage of the Lord Jesus – to whom he pretended that he could give them. How, then, could he open his mouth and say, "All these things will I give thee"? And even if the deceiver *could* have bestowed "all the kingdoms of the world" upon our Savior, it would have been a very poor "all" after all; and it would have been a stolen gift, too. But see how our holy Lord disdained to use the help of evil, even though the master of wickedness promised Him success. How could He bow down to the devil? It was the height of impudence for the false fiend to invite worship from the perfect One. It reminds us of Christianity being supported by questionable means and methods in our own day. We must never yield to the world's ideas by attempting to set up the Kingdom of Christ in a more easy and rapid manner than by the simple preaching of the Gospel!

“Then said Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve!” The Lord spoke very strongly to the tempter. Satan had betrayed his own character, and now he gets his proper name and is ordered into his proper place. How he slunk away in defeat! Our Lord gave him a parting stroke with the Sword of the Spirit; for again, He said, “It is written.” God’s command, which demands all worship and service for our covenant-God alone, was a word for Satan to remember as he was obliged to hide his head in confusion at his complete defeat. He, too, is under the law of God; and try as hard as he may, he cannot cast away His cords from him. O that we may acknowledge the power of this precept and feel that we have nothing to do with winning even the whole world and its glory; for our life’s calling and purpose is to give our entire lives to the service of the Lord alone, and none other!

The enemy left the Lord Jesus when he had shot his last bolt; but even then, he left Him only for a season – intending to return at his first opportunity. It is only when he has tried his utmost and failed that the tempter will leave a child of God alone; but even then, he will watch for another chance to present a new temptation.

Upon hearing of the outrageous imprisonment of John the Baptizer, our Lord Jesus departed from the region of Judea (verses 12-17) – thereby teaching us to avoid danger when we may, as well as to meet it fearlessly when we ought. Arriving back in Galilee, He returned to his own hometown of Nazareth; but He soon departed from there once more after receiving ill-treatment there (Luke 4:16-30). But by coming to dwell at Capernaum, He fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah (9:1), which foretold that “the people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up.” Hence we learn, first of all, that the Gospel was intended to be spread abroad among the Gentiles as well as among the Jews. Second, there is no ignorance so dark, nor iniquity so hardened, that it cannot be enlightened and reformed by the healing influence of that Gospel of light. And just what kind of influence does the Gospel have? The answer to that question may be seen, in some measure, from the chief subject of our Lord’s first teaching. Verse 17 tells us that He “began to preach, and to say, Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at

hand!” True repentance begins in Godly sorrow for sin, and it ends in amendment of life; it consists in a thorough change of the inward disposition, from the love of sin to the love of holiness. It turns our thoughts from this earth unto heaven, and it turns our hearts from this world’s vanities to the great God Who reigns above. Repentance of this kind is the first ray of that light which beams from the Gospel upon the soul.



In order to better spread abroad these Gospel-blessings, the Master appointed Apostles at the very beginning of His ministry. This was so that they might hear all His words and see all His works, and then they might better testify of those things to the world. And whom did the Divine Teacher first select for this noble calling? Not the eloquent, nor the educated, nor the great; but rather, a few ordinary fishermen brothers from Galilee – Peter, Andrew, James, and John (verses 18-22). Christ’s instruments were thus evidently incompetent, in and of themselves; nevertheless, it was by these common men that the idolatry of the Gentiles was overthrown, and the whole world was brought under subjection to the Gospel. This was an outcome that was so strange, so far beyond all reasonable expectation, and so greatly surpassing the means which were visibly seen to be employed, that no other conclusion could be formed except that this was “the finger of God!” (Ex. 8:19)

“They immediately” – that is, James and John – “left the ship and their father, and followed him.” Here we see that there is no duty so sacred as that of following Christ, and no business so important as to serve Him. These fishermen were called to leave the very boat by which they earned their livelihood, and even their very father whom they were dutifully assisting. But they did leave it all behind and followed Christ – even to persecution, disgrace, and death. Far easier is the call of many Christians today! To labor diligently for ourselves, to honor and support our parents, and to live that life of faith and holiness which renders us respected by people as well as esteemed by God for Christ’s sake – this is the sum of what is required from many Christians in our modern society. Therefore, let us not refuse to sacrifice any employments that are profitable, any ties that are dear, or any sins that are habitually indulged, when the Word of Christ plainly requires it for His service and for our eternal good.

This chapter closes (verses 23-25) by recording that Jesus was going around all the region of Galilee, teaching and preaching and healing people. We read that He restored health to all sick and diseased persons who were brought to His feet, and great multitudes followed Him. Alas! We are severely afflicted with many sicknesses that affect our souls, such as fleshly lusts or regard for this world’s pomp and pleasures. But let us imitate the example of the people whom we read of in these verses. Let us come to Him Who freely healed all manner of grievous ailments! We readily attend to each slight sickness of the body; and when we are seriously ill, we spare no pains, cost, self-restraint, or distant consultation with the most eminent and skillful physicians – all with the goal of obtaining recovery for the body. How much more, then, ought we to watch anxiously for the health of the spirit within! And in all its infirmities, let us have recourse with faith to the Great Physician of souls.

*We praise and thank You, Lord Jesus, that You have already won the victory for us over the deceitful tempter; and we praise You also for enabling us, Your people, to be “more than conquerors” over him, through Your grace enabling us! Amen.*