



Matthew 4:1-11 - Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" <sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. <sup>6</sup> "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: " 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" <sup>7</sup> Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" <sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. <sup>9</sup> "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" <sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

## *Jesus' Temptation: A Battle for You*



*To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. (Revelation 1:5b-6).*

It sounds a little unrealistic. It reads almost like a fairy tale. It sounds unbelievable. Hearing about the first man and first woman created by God to live in the perfect paradise of the Garden of Eden – only to have that perfect harmony with God interrupted by the serpent’s whisper, a glance at some eye pleasing fruit, and the first doubt of God’s goodness and provision. With that first temptation and the sin that followed, suddenly a single thought infected mankind forever: *“I must take care of myself.”* This selfishness destroyed Adam and Eve’s perfect relationship with God and, as a result, became the natural born state of every single human born into this world ever since. The account of the Fall into Sin sounds unrealistic and maybe even unbelievable – until it doesn’t. It stops sounding unreasonable and unrealistic when we realize that this is the common experience of every person in this room. There isn’t a day that goes by when we don’t have to face down the enticing lies of the devil. And, it’s sad to say, that the result of that confrontation is so frequently the same as it was for our first parents – sin.

Then what a stark contrast we see in this morning’s gospel lesson as Jesus, the Second Adam, marches out onto the battlefield of temptation to regain all that the first Adam and his children had lost. In this account of the temptation of Jesus, we see a battle – the battle between the Light of the World and the Prince of Darkness. We watch our champion, Jesus, engage in the most authentic battle of good vs. evil the world has ever seen. In the temptation of Jesus, we may not notice immediately the most important battle he fought that day – the battle for you and me.

Matthew tells us, **Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.** Don’t gloss over that introductory statement without stopping to think. Jesus **was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.** What a compelling thought – Jesus was purposefully sent out so that he might be tempted. But why? As true God and true man, it’s not as though Jesus needed to face this temptation for his own benefit. So, then, why? Because we needed it. You and I and every other descendant of Adam and Eve needed our champion, the Second Adam, our Substitute and Savior to go and triumph where we have so often failed – in facing the devil’s temptations. In the account of the temptation of Jesus, we get the impression that the devil was constantly tempting Jesus for those 40 days in the wilderness. Here, in Matthew’s gospel, we have highlighted for us three specific temptations of the devil – which will provide a framework to see the way the devil is operating.

**After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”** Again, it would almost sound unrealistic if it didn’t ring so true: the devil really hasn’t changed his tactics over all these years. What was at the heart and core of this temptation? *You say you’re loved by God – that he cares for you! It doesn’t look like it! You know better what’s good for you – go ahead and do what would make you feel good!* The heart and core of the devil’s temptation is this: to doubt the love of God. It becomes easy to question God’s love and care when I look around and see all the ways I think God should provide for me, but he doesn’t seem to be doing it. The pull of short term pleasure is strong. Jesus ate nothing for 40 days and nights – he could’ve used some food! But instead, he trusted in his Father’s plan and promise in the face of the devil’s lies.



Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” The devil seemed to have a point with this one. Jesus is the eternal Son of God and, as such, it would seem only reasonable that the Father would see to Jesus’ protection. But here’s the devil’s second temptation: to presume the love of God, in other words, to trust God in a false way – to think that his love and promise of protection give me a license to do whatever I want and he’d better come along because, after all, he says he loves me!

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.” Somehow, I don’t know how, the devil pointed out all the splendor and glory of the kingdoms of the world and claimed that Jesus could have it all. Here, the heart and core of the devil’s temptation was this: to shortcut or shortchange the love of God. In other words, the devil came and tried to tell Jesus, “*You can have it all – all the glory, all the power, all the stuff of this world – all without the cross!*”

It shouldn’t surprise us that the devil (the prince of lies) is lying, but this one is a ludicrous statement, isn’t it? **All this I will give you!** Jesus, as true God, already owns everything! So how could the devil try to say that somehow Jesus needed the devil to give it? I suppose it comes to the point that at one and the same time, the devil’s temptations make all the sense in the world and no sense at all. It’s easy for us to buy into his lies, especially when it comes to “stuff.” Here, he lies and offers Jesus earthly power and earthly kingdoms and all the stuff that goes along with them. Jesus knew his kingdom wasn’t of this world, but sometimes we’re not so sure. Sometimes, we buy into the devil’s lies when it comes to earthly power, earthly status, and all the stuff that goes along with it.

It happens when “keeping up with the Joneses” changes from a cutesy phrase into a way of life. It’s easy to buy into the devil’s temptation to think that possessions and money are the paths to status, success, and true happiness. And when that happens, what’s the first thing to go? Usually, it’s God. *How could I ever give 5,7,10% of my income for the work of the gospel when I’ve got so many other financial commitments? Car payments, a mortgage, vacations, clubs, teams, memberships?* Just like the devil twisted the good word of God to suit his purposes, so he still tries to twist and contort God’s good gifts of a home, a car, and recreation into a way of climbing the social ladder, but ultimately shortchanging God. He wants us to put our focus on the things of this world and not on God and the work of the gospel. This was the devil’s temptation to Jesus and it’s his temptation to us today – to shortcut or shortchange the love of God.

Realizing all the different ways the devil tempts us and tries to get us to fall will inevitably lead us to another more sobering realization – just how often we’ve fallen to his lies and trusted his empty promises. That’s how the devil operates, he promises you pleasure, prominence, and a pain-free existence, but when you trust in him you end up empty, broken, and filled with shame. And when you’re there, that’s when the secondary attack of the devil ramps up. The word Matthew uses as the name for the devil here is *diabolos*, or “the slanderer, the accuser.” Isn’t that fitting? The devil lures you into sin with his empty promises, you fall, and then he comes back to accuse you and slander you before a holy God. It’s as if the devil, the accuser is standing next to the throne of God pointing the accusing finger at you and saying, “*You see, God? He doesn’t really belong to you! How could she call herself your child when she did that? He should be sentenced to hell forever for his sins!*” And he’s got a point. God himself says, “**The soul who sins is the one who will die.**” And, “**The wages of sin is death.**”



The account of the temptation of Jesus is a story about Jesus. Sounds obvious. Sounds simple, but don't overlook the profound nature of that simple sentence. The account of the temptation of Jesus is a story about Jesus – and what does this story tell us about Jesus?

\*\*\*For every time you've been in your own wilderness of temptation – whether in a crowd or all alone – Jesus already experienced that. For every time you're tempted by devil's lure of short term pleasure – alone in front of your computer screen, up late thinking about just one more drink, wanting to gossip and squash that so-called friend who hurt you – every time you've failed to resist the devil, Jesus resisted him perfectly because he knew you wouldn't.

\*\*\*For every time you're tempted by the devil's lure to take the easy way out; to not have the hard conversation because you're afraid of the backlash; to keep silent instead of speaking up for those who can't speak for themselves; to believe the devil's lie that somehow God should bend to my will and not the other way around – every time you've failed to resist those temptations of the devil, Jesus resisted him perfectly because he knew you couldn't.

\*\*\*For every time you're tempted by the devil's lure of letting worldly goods define who you are; the lure of making the number in your checking account a direct reflection of your value in God's eyes; the lure of prioritizing every cent and second to serve *things* instead of God; for every time you've failed to resist those temptations of the devil, Jesus resisted the devil perfectly because he knew you couldn't. The temptation of Jesus gives even more weight to what the writer to the Hebrews says, **We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.**

The account of the temptation of Jesus is a story about Jesus – and what does God want to tell us about Jesus? This Jesus is your substitute. He left behind the glory, the power, the praise that were rightfully his and he came to earth live a life of perfect humility and obedience...for you. He came to pay for the sins of the world with his own life...for your sins and mine. He came to defeat death in your place. He came to defeat the devil...for you. Where Adam, Eve, and every other human being in history have failed miserably - your champion, your Savior Jesus is perfectly victorious. And now he gives that perfect victory to you. It's yours. By God's undeserved love and the Holy Spirit's power, it's yours. Jesus' temptation wasn't primarily a battle against the devil; it was a battle for you.

The account of the temptation of Jesus is a story about Jesus. And what does it tell us about Jesus? It tells us that where you fail, he succeeds. It tells us that for your every deficiency, there is fullness in Christ. It tells us that for your every sin, there is forgiveness in this Jesus, the One who marched out to face the devil and defeat him, just for you. Jesus' temptation was a battle for you – a battle he fought and won in your place; and a victory he gives you every day.

Amen

*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.  
(Philippians 4:7)*