

I think we all understand that temptation can lead us into trouble. Such was the plight of a man who was shopping in the mall with his wife, so we know right off that but this is not going to go well for the man – he’s in a place he does not belong. Anyway, in the mall, the man noticed a shapely young woman in a short, form-fitting dress walking by. This man said that as she walked by, his eyes were glued to her, and without looking up from the item his wife was examining, she asked, “Was it worth the trouble that you are now in?” That’s the trouble with temptation – if we are not careful, it can lead us into trouble.

How many of us have shrugged and said, “*The devil made me do it!*” – using that as an excuse when caught doing something we aren’t supposed to do? It’s a convenient defense, but it’s a lame defense because the devil can’t make us do anything. The devil cannot make us sin – he cannot *push* us, but he knows all too well how to *persuade* us – he’s been doing that throughout the course of human history, he’s an expert, and this morning we are going to see Jesus take His turn with the devil.

Now, if you recall from last week, Jesus has just been baptized by John the Baptist, and afterwards, the Holy Spirit comes down out of heaven, in the likeness of a dove, and rests upon Him. Then a voice is heard – it’s God the Father, and He declares His delight for His Son. What an awesome experience that must have been for Jesus, and now, after living in obscurity for 30 years, He’s ready to dive into the public ministry – but not just yet – because for Jesus, after the dove comes the devil – welcome to the ministry.

So, with that, if you have your Bible, turn to **Matthew 4** and we will begin with **verse 1** where we are told:

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.

After His baptism, Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit into the Judean wilderness to face the devil. Jesus is alone in this barren desolate place – a place that is blazingly hot in the day and cold at night, and for **forty days and forty nights**, He has fasted to the point of starvation. Jesus is beyond hungry and physically drained – He’s in a weakened state, and of course, the devil knows that his temptations are the strongest when we are the weakest, and now it’s time to turn up the heat. He took down Adam in the beautiful Garden of Eden where there was plenty of everything,

but here, he's got Jesus in the terrible wastelands where there's nothing, and his plan is to take Jesus out before His ministry ever begins.

Now before we continue, I want to talk a little bit about the devil's tactics when it comes to temptation. Whether it be in the Garden with Adam and Eve, in the wilderness with Jesus, or in our own lives in the here and now, the tactics – which can be packaged in various ways, are generally the same in nature, and if you remember in the first letter from the Apostle John, these tactics were summarized as **the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life.**

In some form or fashion, these tactics have been used since the Garden – they are tried and true, finely tuned and tailor made, and the reason they are still used by the devil is because they are still very effective. It's how the devil destroys man – but here this time, the devil is faced with Jesus – the “*God-man*” and what that means for this situation is this: while being fully God – Jesus cannot sin, and yet while at the same time being fully man – He will experience the full force of the devil's temptations – and in doing so, *reveal* to us who He is, but also *relate* to us as we are.

So, Jesus understands our temptations – He will feel the full force of them, and at some point, later in His earthly ministry, maybe when talking about temptation and sin, Jesus shares with His disciples what happened to Him in the wilderness, so with that, let's see what happened. Beginning with **verse 3**, Matthew tells us,

³And the tempter came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” ⁴But 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.’”

When the **tempter** came, and just so you know, the devil is not omnipresent like God. He can only be at one place at one time, meaning the devil did not leave the war in the Middle East to cause you to lose your temper with your spouse or to eat that donut you shouldn't have had. You did that all by yourself – it's your *flesh* – again the devil didn't make you do it – he can't.

Anyway, the devil knows that Jesus is starving. He knows of the physical weakness of Jesus at this point, and if hunger is His weakness, then bread will be His tailor-made temptation, and so the devil says to Jesus, **“If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”**

Now, at first glance, it seems that the devil has some question as to who Jesus is, but he knows all too well that he is speaking to the Son of God – so this is not a question of doubt, instead the devil is trying to create doubt. In my opinion, using words we might be familiar with, this first temptation goes something like this:

“Since You’re the Son of God and You’re starving – surely Your life is at risk – it would seem that Your Father really doesn’t care about You. I mean He’s obviously holding out on You, so why not use some of Your divine power to help Yourself out and turn a few of these stones into bread.”

In so many words – words we may have heard whispered, the devil was suggesting that God cannot be trusted. *Why are you suffering? Why is this happening to you? You don’t deserve this. Why doesn’t God do something for you? He’s not going to help – He can’t be trusted – just take matters into your own hands and use your power to meet your needs.*

This temptation falls under the *lust of the flesh* – tempting Jesus to do what He should not do to satisfy a need – tempting Jesus to meet a legitimate need in an illegitimate way by misusing His divine power in distrust of His Father.

Well, Jesus had a response for the devil, and He replied, **‘it is written’** – and that’s something to take note of – it is written in Scripture, and it stands written – **‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’** Quoting from **Deuteronomy 8**, where Moses was speaking to the Israelites about the lessons they should have learned regarding God’s care for them in the wilderness for 40 years – with that as the backdrop, Jesus responds this way to the devil and I am paraphrasing:

“Devil, I’m facing you as a man, but not as a defenseless man, for I am led by the Spirit of God and submitted to the Word of God. Yes, I am very hungry, but I know this really isn’t about bread – it’s much more than that, this is about the life that God provides. No, I will not act independently of God. For Me, it’s His will and His timing, and I trust that by His power, He will sustain Me. I will trust in Him for I know He cares for Me.”

Jesus was led into the wilderness and then weakened – this was God’s doing, but Jesus trusted God and He knew there was a greater spiritual purpose behind His circumstances, and Jesus would not misuse His divine powers in distrust of His Father in heaven – instead He fought this temptation, as a man, and used what is available to you and me.

So, one down and two to go. Beginning with **verse 5**, the devil decides to tempt Jesus with a different tactic, and this time since Jesus had previously quoted Scripture – the devil will do the same implying, “*Okay, if You intend to live by the Scriptures, then let me quote You a verse or two and see if You will obey it.*”

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.’”

We are told that the devil takes Jesus into Jerusalem – the holy city, up onto the pinnacle of the temple – God’s house of all places, and it’s from this very high point that the devil says to Jesus, “**If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down.**”

“*Since You are God’s Son and You said You trust God – jump*” – and then to add to his temptation, the devil quotes Scripture – in this case he quotes lines from **Psalm 91, verses 11 and 12.**

**¹¹ For He will give His angels charge concerning you,
To guard you in all your ways.
¹² They will bear you up in their hands,
That you do not strike your foot against a stone.**

Now, I put up what the devil said and what’s really mentioned in **Psalms** for comparison, and if you notice, the devil left a part out – the part in the middle which reads “**To guard you in all your ways**” – in God’s ways. God had a way prepared for Jesus, just as He does for us, and of course the devil left that out. Again, using words we might be familiar with, this second temptation goes something like this:

“*Jesus, Son of God, since You won’t use Your divine power to help Yourself out, lets see if God will use His power to help You. Jesus, just a moment ago, You claimed You could trust God – **can You trust Him now?** If You really trust God and You believe what the Scripture says – then prove it. Prove it to me. Prove it to Yourself. Prove it to Him. Let Your God use His power to fulfill Scripture. So, Jump.*”

With this temptation, the devil swings the pendulum the other way. At first, the devil told Jesus He can't expect *anything* from God, but here the devil is saying just the opposite – expect *everything* – so, go ahead – in an act of pride, force God's hand. Force Him to act on your behalf.

Now, maybe the devil hopes Jesus jumps, and if He does, demons will hinder the angels from helping like we saw in **Daniel**, and splat – Jesus dies. We know the devil wants Jesus dead – he's already tried to kill Him as a child through King Herod – and a jump from several hundred feet would probably do the trick, but I don't think that's what the devil is really hoping for here, instead there's a subtle twist to this temptation, which I think is very interesting and it also appeals to this sin of pride.

The pinnacle of the temple – probably on the southwest corner overlooking the busiest roads and the entrances to the temple on both its southern and western sides – a place to easily attract a large crowd, would be a great opportunity to make a grand entrance and gain instant fame before His ministry begins. If Jesus would have jumped and the angels came to His rescue, it would have surely caused a spectacle, but in doing so – in sinful pride, He would be bypassing God's plan.

Well, Jesus responds to the devil in **verse 7** and He says,

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

Again, Jesus uses Scripture, this time quoting from **Deuteronomy 6** – another quote that comes from Moses to the people of Israel, warning them against their habit of presuming upon God and trying His patience – in other words, instead of cooperating with God, in their pride, they tried to manipulate Him.

So, in a nutshell, Jesus says, *“I'm not going to put God to the test. Devil, what you propose as a simple ‘leap of faith’ is actually a prideful jump to force God's hand – that's manipulation. I don't need to prove that God is with Me, and I'm not going to seek instant fame apart from His plan, instead I will humbly submit to His will and His timing, and follow the way that God has set for Me.”*

I wonder how many foolish things have been done by Christians, who claim to be *“acting in faith”* when in reality, without any direction from God, they are putting Him to the test?

Okay, two down and one to go. Let's continue beginning with **verse 8** where Matthew tells us,

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.'"

In this passage, we are told that the devil takes Jesus to a very high mountain. I don't know what mountain that could be, but where ever it is, the devil shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world at a moment in time. We are not told how this is done by the devil, but maybe it's through some sort of vision.

Anyway, appealing to the lust of the eyes – the devil parades the glory and the splendor and the power of all the kingdoms of the world before Jesus, and then devil essentially says,

"All that You see is mine, and if You will fall down and worship me – which is what I really want from You, I will give You all that You see – I mean, aren't You supposed to be a King? Well, here's Your kingdom – all that You want – instantly."

Well, if you didn't know, the kingdoms of this world belong to the devil. God allows him to function in that capacity, and if you notice, Jesus does not argue that point. Initially, back at creation, this world was given to man. God told man to subdue it and to rule over it – man was given dominion, but when man fell in the Garden, in some respects, the keys to the car were given to the devil – if only temporarily, and if you doubt that, just watch the evening news.

So, the devil tried to disguise this temptation with the lust of the eyes by appealing to the Lord's desire to establish a kingdom, and as a side note, in the future, the devil will give the kingdoms of this world to the Antichrist who will fall down and worship him, and the Antichrist will receive – for a short time, glory and power and fame.

Now, there's something else about this temptation that makes it the most appealing of the three – not by offering the kingdoms of the world – but by offering them to Jesus instantly, and in doing so, the devil was also saying this:

*“You don’t have to go to the cross to get Your promised kingdom. **Why go through all of that?** You can have it all right now. I’m offering You a better way, an easier way, a quicker way – just fall down and worship me this one time.”*

As the prince of this world, the devil offered Jesus a shortcut to His kingdom – a shortcut to glory minus the all the pain and all the suffering. Jesus could have it all if He fell down and worshipped the devil, but Jesus knew there were no shortcuts when it came to the will of God, Jesus already knew the promised kingdom would be His one day, and He knew He was on a mission to seek and to save the lost – that’s why He came, and so He says, **“Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’”**

Here Jesus calls the devil out by name – Satan. Jesus begins with a command **“Go”** and then Jesus gives His reason quoting again from **Deuteronomy 6**. Only God shall you **worship** and **serve**, and if you notice Jesus ties worship together with service, for Jesus knew that whatever we worship, we will also serve, and Jesus had no intention of doing either.

Then in **verse 11**, we are told,

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

The devil left, and the angels showed up to care for Jesus. They had likely been there all along, restrained from interfering, but from a distance watching as a weakened Jesus, who put aside His divine powers, without their angelic help, defeated the devil, and in so doing, Jesus revealed who He is – the victorious King, and yet a King who also relates to us. Jesus wanted us to know this.

Listen, temptation is going to happen. If you are breathing, you will be tempted, and these temptations will come in all shapes and sizes – they come in all sorts of tantalizing packages, tailor-made just for you, but Jesus showed us that a child of God, who is led by the Spirit of God, and submitted to the Word of God can resist the devil and his temptations, and he will flee.

So, we will be engaged in daily battles, and victory in these battles are determined by our choices. Jesus just showed us how to have victory, but when we don’t – and sometimes we won’t, He lovingly picks us up, gently dusts us off, cleanses us from all unrighteousness, reminds us how to resist, and we press on in hope knowing that the final victory has already been won.

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