

Matt. 4:1-11 - Christ Conquers Temptation

Written by Tim Black

Sunday, 18 January 2009 17:09 -

1.

Introduction

1.

Recently a team of Palestinian and Israeli stand-up comedians failed miserably at entertaining people with jokes about the Middle East. One joke hit the funny bone, though: Lots of western franchises have done well in the Middle East—Starbucks, McDonalds, and so on—but can you guess which chain of stores didn't? Target! No one wants a store with a big red bull's eye on the front!

2.

The Devil loves a shining mark. Who are the biggest targets he's taken aim at throughout history? No doubt the biggest ones were Adam and Christ. And because our passage is set in the wilderness, we should remember Israel and the Church as well.

Adam

began life with God in the Garden, and Satan took him down.

Israel

began life with God in the Wilderness, and Satan took Israel down. Now the

Messiah

begins His public ministry. Who will win? Who will be the Ruler of the world? The Truth or the Deceiver? And which spirit is stronger? The Spirit who is Holy or the spirit who is evil?

3.

In today's passage we have the assurance that Satan's attempt to sabotage our redemption truly failed. You can be sure that Jesus Christ has defeated Satan's attacks on Himself, and He will be victorious over Satan's attacks on you

.

Christ conquers temptation

. The world, the flesh, and the Devil are no match for Jesus Christ.

4.

Outline: Satan sought to lead Christ to sin against God by presenting Christ with three temptations

Each follows the same pattern: first, Jesus' situation

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, second, Satan's
temptation
, and third, Jesus'
answer
.

5.

In each temptation Satan's goal was for Jesus to sin against God and so fail forever to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. He aimed for Christ "1. To despair of his Father's goodness" in the first temptation, "2. To presume upon his Father's power" in the second, and in the third, "3. To alienate his Father's honour, by giving it to Satan." ¹ The first two temptations seem innocent, the last one desirable. Just like the forbidden fruit, the temptations seemed " good for food, and desirable to make one wise. " To be faithful in the first two, Christ needed wisdom and careful discernment; in the last one, He needed power.

6.

Body

1.

First Temptation: vv. 1-4

1.

Text. In the first temptation Satan sought to bring Christ to despair of His Father's goodness. Scripture tells us in vv. 1-4,

1.

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

2.

2 And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

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3.

3 And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

4.

4 But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

5.

Introduction

1.

"**Then**" Matthew introduces the account by showing its connection with Christ's inauguration by using the word "then"—Christ was tempted immediately after His inauguration. Why didn't He preach first, or heal first? Because Christ came to battle and defeat Satan, otherwise His preaching and healing would save no one from their sins.

2.

He was "Led up by the Spirit." We pray, "Lead us not into temptation." Some people believe God doesn't lead us into temptation, but in doing so they deny God's sovereignty. Notice that here Jesus was "led up by the Spirit...to be tempted."
Undeniably, God the Spirit led Jesus into temptation.

3.

"Tempted by the devil." But it was not the Spirit, it was not God, who tempted Jesus. He was "tempted by the devil," who is clearly described in v. 3 as "the tempter." God does not tempt us, and God cannot be tempted. A trial is a temptation; they are the same word in the Greek. God's goal in them is for you to prove faithful and obedient to Him, but Satan's goal is for you to sin against God. So God is not guilty for our temptations. God is sovereign, and we are responsible.

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4.

Situation: Hunger

1.

"Wilderness" Matthew tells us the situation in which the first temptation came. The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, where He fasted for 40 days. This is intended to remind you that Jesus represents all of God's people—He represents you before God the Father. Do you remember that the wilderness was where God tested His people for 40 years after the Exodus? Israel was God's son, and God humbled, tested, and disciplined His son in the desert.

2.

Jesus "Fasted."

-

Jesus went into the wilderness to commune more closely with God, but also so the Devil would have a full opportunity to tempt Jesus. Christ gave the Devil the advantage of the desert's solitude, sun and wind, and his own body's hunger. "Satan, bring your worst, and if I beat you here, I'll beat you anywhere."

-

Jesus fasted "40 days." You say "That's impossible! Five days without food and He'd be dead!" But don't you remember that when God fed Elijah he journeyed 40 days on that one meal? You say "That's impossible!" But don't you remember that God fed His people for 40 years in the desert? Jesus' 40 days of fasting were a miracle; He was sustained by God's power, but His hunger afterward was natural human hunger. Man fell by eating the forbidden fruit, so it was appropriate that Jesus would be tempted with hunger.

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Temptation. In v. 3 we learn of the temptation.

1.

Satan is the "tempter." Temptations are his specialty. Satan's words "If you are the Son of God" are like his words in the Garden, "Did God really say?" Jesus relived our father Adam's temptation. Jesus was the last Adam.

Now if Jesus stood in Adam's place, and in Israel's place, and in our place as our Covenant Head, He defeated Satan in a definitive way which we fallen sinners can never do. That is a key difference between Christ's temptations and ours. But I've heard sermons on this passage which said Christ's obedience here does not teach us how to resist temptation. To that idea, I say "Hogwash!" Scripture teaches in **Heb. 2:18** that "

because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. " Will Jesus' help be of a different

nature than was His obedience under God's law in your place

? No, His help is to help you do what He did. He is our forerunner, and we follow Him.

Heb. 4:15

tells us, "

we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

" "

One who in every respect has been tempted as we are

" means that though there are differences between Christ's temptation and ours where His went beyond

ours, nevertheless His temptations were like ours " in every respect

" that is common to man. Therefore the help

" Christ gives must be like His obedience as a man " in every respect,

" or it is no "

help

" at all! In this vein, Calvin says "as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated

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from Him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us."

[2](#)

But now the Spirit applies Christ's obedience by making us obedient, and He uses this passage to show us the way.

-

Nature of the temptation. "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." Satan recognizes that Jesus is God's Son, but challenges Him to prove it in a sinful way.

-

Food – natural desires. Notice that Satan is subtle. He joins the first temptation to the situation Christ is already in. Christ is hungry, so he needs food. What could be wrong with eating bread? And I ask you, are you hungry? Is there something you want? Ask yourself this—do I want it for God's glory, or do I want it at the expense of God's glory? Am I willing to get it through an unlawful means, or am I committed to get it only through the means God approves?

-

Unlawful means. Satan is tempting Jesus to make food for Himself, when God has already provided for Jesus for 40 days. How did God provide for those 40 days? We don't know. Does that matter? Agur says in **Prov. 30:8-9**, "give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God."

Poverty is a great source of temptation. We can think that necessity has no law. That we can provide for ourselves in whatever way we see fit, even by stealing. But stealing is a means God forbids. God didn't give Christ permission to do miracles to feed Himself. To do so would have been to break God's law. To get something good by unlawful means.

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Satan aims for Jesus to despair of God's Fatherly care, God's providence, God's means of providing food and all that Jesus needs, and to believe He owes Satan an answer, as if Satan has authority and is worthy of respect.

-

Answer

1.

Jesus does give Satan an answer, not to please Satan, but to defeat him. "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8, which we read earlier in the service. This was the same temptation God's people faced when God fed them manna in the desert. He gave it to them when they said "

it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.

" (

Ex. 14:11-12

) "

Oh that we had meat to eat!

" (

Num. 11:4-6

)

2.

Psalms 78:18-20

-

18 They tested God in their heart by demanding the food they craved.

-

19 They spoke against God, saying, "Can God spread a table in the wilderness?"

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20 He struck the rock so that water gushed out and streams overflowed. Can he also give bread or provide meat for his people?"

-

He can! Even when you don't know by what means He will provide, "the Lord will provide."
(

Gen. 22:14

) God said "

Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.

" (

Ex. 5:1

)

Will He not bring it to pass

?

You know how to answer this temptation if you are willing to say with Job, "

Though he slay me, I will hope in him.

" (

Job 13:15

) Though God

starve

me, though He appear to be my enemy, I will serve Him as my Friend.

-

When you are tempted to sin, believe God's word, and trust His providence.

-

Second Temptation: vv. 5- 7

1.

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Text. Defeated on his first try, Satan tries again.

1.

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple

2.

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, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

3.

7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

4.

Situation: Pinnacle of Temple

1.

Pinnacle. Note again that Jesus let Satan take Him to the top of the temple. He let Satan try his best, and do his worst. This was a place in Jerusalem where Jesus could perform a miracle to be seen by all, and thereby declare His power and Sonship to all men.

2.

This was the "Holy city." Jerusalem. You cannot escape Satan's temptations in the wilderness, nor can you escape them in the holiest of earthly cities. But there is a Jerusalem above into which no unclean thing will enter, and even now you have access into the Holy of Holies, God's presence, which is the source of all power over temptation.

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3.

Temptation

1.

"Throw yourself down."

-

The temptation itself would have been a challenge of God the Father. It's plain in the first temptation that Christ trusts God's provision, so why not presume upon God now to keep Christ safe? The Devil first tempts to

despair

, then to

presumption

. "You trust God to

feed

you when there's no food? Then trust God to

catch

you when you don't see any angels! Prove to the world that God protects you!"

-

Now what is wrong with doing this? Satan is not encouraging trust in God's ordinary protection as we go about our ordinary

ways, but rather Satan urges a

special test

of God's protection to

prove it is there

.

-

"For it is written." Notice that Satan knows scripture, maybe even better than you do. But he doesn't believe it. He doesn't love it. He doesn't obey it.

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Answer

1.

Jesus replies by quoting Deuteronomy again. Satan says, "Test God." But God says, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."

"Pay close attention to the difference between the passage Satan quoted and the passage Jesus quoted. Satan quoted God's promise

, but Christ quotes God's command

. Which one tells you what to do? God's command. You may make inferences from God's promises, but never in a way that contradicts God's commands. Christ shows that Satan misuses, that Satan misapplies, God's promise, by urging that Christ disobey God's command. Don't presume God's promises apply to you when you're not obeying God's commands.

2.

Our sins of presumption. It's fairly obvious how we can be tempted in a way like Jesus' first temptation—we can be greedy for food, be tempted to steal, despair that we don't have enough and God won't provide. But how are we tempted like this second temptation? It was a temptation to the sin of presumption. I think our most common sins of presumption are along these lines: "God will forgive me for this sin." "I know it's wrong, but it's not that bad." We excuse our sin, thinking God's goodness excuses us from obeying God's commands. But Paul warns you, " Shall we go on sinning that grace may increase? May it never be! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (

Rom. 5:1-2

)

3.

Third Temptation: vv. 8-11

1.

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Text. In the last temptation, Satan throws off all subtlety.

1.

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

2.

9 And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

3.

10 Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"

4.

11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

5.

Situation: Mountaintop

1.

The imagery of the situation is from Deuteronomy. Mountaintops are the "high places" of idolatry, so were the trademarks of worldly kingdoms.

2.

Temptation: Riches & Idolatry

1.

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And so Satan tempts Jesus to trade the world's false worship for the world's wealth and power.

2.

Satan advocates blatant idolatry; Satanism. Satan saves the worst temptation for last.

3.

Now why would Jesus find this temptation attractive? Because He is the King; He is the King of kings; all the cattle on a thousand hills belong to Him, and yet when "He came to His own, His own received Him not.

" "

He was despised and rejected by men.

" "

We esteemed Him not.

" (

Is. 53:3

) But Satan, who for a time has been given power and even worship in this world, offers a shortcut, the fast lane, for Christ to rule the world. "Isn't that why you came here, Jesus?" "

All these I will give you.

" "Everyone will bow their knee to you." Do you not see that it took a greater strength of will than

you

have to resist this temptation?

4.

But it was not a fair trade. 1 **John 2:16** tells us "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.

" Christ would have received evil worship, and evil kingdoms, as His own.

But Christ's kingdom conquers evil

!

5.

Condition.

-

And the condition Satan would have Jesus meet is truly evil. Satan says, "Fall down and

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worship me. "

Here is Satan's real intent. When you greedily desire that food, that pleasure, that possession, which does not rightfully belong to you, which would serve sin and self rather than God, the real result is that you worship Satan. When you say "God will forgive this sin, so I'll keep doing it," you worship Satan.

-

But remember that this truly was a temptation for Jesus. He was tempted, even in this third temptation. The best of saints will be tempted to the worst of sins. This is their affliction. Yet if they do not foster the desire of, approve of, or consent to the sin, then they do not actually sin, for remember, "Christ was tempted to worship Satan." ³ "He was tempted in every respect as we are, yet without sin."

-

Answer

1.

You have served Satan, but there is one, and only one, who can rescue you from the power of sin, the flesh, and the Devil. The one Savior is Jesus Christ. Paul says, "I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

" (

Rom. 8:23-25

)

2.

Christ rejected Satan's temptation "with abhorrence and detestation." ⁴ He said "Be gone, Satan!"

Jesus didn't give in, and the battle is over! Jesus again quotes Deuteronomy, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."

" "

If...your friend...entices you secretly, saying 'Let us go and serve other gods,' " you must not listen to him. (

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Deut. 13:6-8

) Instead, say with Jesus, "God alone deserves all worship and glory and I will not give it to any other!"

3.

The great evil of some temptations is easy to recognize, but in that evil Satan can also place a great temptation. You know which temptations are greater than you. The ones you fall into time and again. Jesus still calls you to repent of those sins, too. And it's there that you need this Jesus who took Satan's worst, and beat him! He conquered Satan, and He lives in you. We have no excuse for our sin. But we also have every encouragement to repent of those we can't defeat. Because Jesus defeated them in Himself, He will defeat them in you.

4.

Conclusion

1.

Do you see the outcome in our passage? The Devil's attempt was vanquished, and so he gives up the battle and runs away! The victory of Christ over Satan's kingdom is ours through Christ and through faith in Him. James says "Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you." (**James 4:7**)

) Resist him with

God's word

. Why else did Jesus say "

It is written

" when He quoted Deuteronomy to the Devil? Christ honored the scripture, and gave us an example. The word of God is the "

sword of the Spirit

" (

Eph. 6:17

), the only offensive weapon in our armor. We must use it when we are tempted! "

Has God really said...?

" Yes, He has!

2.

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Remember that the Devil is your enemy, but he is your conquered enemy. Christ "has defeated and disarmed him; we have nothing to do but pursue the victory." ⁵ Jesus said "the ruler of this world...has no claim on me

" (

John 14:30

); "

the ruler of this world is judged.

" (

John 16:11

)

1.

1 Cor. 10:13

1.

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

2.

And so "we are more than conquerors" through Jesus Christ. (**Rom. 8:37**)

3.

After Jesus was tempted, the angels came and ministered to Him.

1.

Christ defeated the Devil in His own strength. His armies of angels are not necessary for Him to defeat Satan.

2.

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Yet Christ was tempted, and as a man was worn from that temptation. Here you have a reassurance that when you are worn from temptation, God will take care of you. He will renew your strength, He will refresh your soul. Remember with **Psalm 23**,

1.

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

[1](#) Matthew Henry, 32.

[2](#) Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.1.1.

[3](#) Matthew Henry, 38.

[4](#) Matthew Henry, 38.

[5](#) Matthew Henry, 38-39.