

Matthew 4:1-16 “Temptations: Their Lure and Their Cure”
Deuteronomy 6:16-19, 7:17-21, 8:1-9:5
Psalm 91

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Introduction: Militarism, Materialism, and Moralism

a. Israel’s Three Temptations in Deuteronomy (Dt. 6-9)

Three times in Deuteronomy 6-9,
the LORD warns Israel about something that they will be tempted to say in their hearts.

These are the three temptations that Israel will face:
the temptations of militarism, materialism, and moralism.

Each of these three temptations starts in the heart –
the core of who you are – the center of your thinking and knowing and loving.

And each of these three temptations is cured by remembering.

Let’s think about how this works in Deuteronomy:

First, in Dt 7:17, God says, “If you say in your heart, ‘These nations are greater than I’” –

This is the temptation to focus on political power and outward appearance.

Dennis Olson calls this ‘militarism’ –

you count your forces – you count your enemies forces –
and you say, we’re outnumbered – forget it!

Militarism is when you focus on outward numbers –
and you base decisions on careful calculations of probable outcomes.

Sounds good, right?

It’s how most businesses work!

But according to the calculations of probable outcomes,
Israel should not have entered the Promised Land.

The temptation of militarism is *not* that you trust in your own power.

The temptation of militarism is that you see the power of the nations,
and you waver – “I’m just too small!”

Perhaps it would be better to call this the temptation of “mock humility”!

The only cure for militarism is memory:

remember what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh (Dt 7:17-18).

The slaves of Egypt ran away –

the slaves of the mightiest empire in the world ran away –
in purely human terms, that was a bad calculation.

So when you think that you are too small and too insignificant,
remember your God!

Second, we go to the opposite side:

In chapter 8, verse 17, God says, “Beware lest you say in your heart,
‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’” (8:17)

This is the temptation to focus on material wealth – stuff and status!

That’s why it’s called ‘materialism’ –
you look at your stuff and your status –
and you say, I’ve done well for myself!

And the cure for materialism is likewise *memory*:

“You shall remember the LORD your God,
for it is he who gives you power to get wealth” (8:18)

When you think that you are hot stuff because you’ve got a lot of stuff –
remember that all that you have was given to you by your God –
even your ability to acquire and maintain stuff and status!

But there is a third danger.

Notice that the first two temptations come when you forget the LORD.

The third temptation comes precisely when you remember the LORD your God –
but in the wrong way!

Look at Deuteronomy 9:4 –

“Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you,
‘It is because of my righteousness
that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land...’”

This is the temptation of ‘moralism’ –
the idea that God owes me.

Memory also cures moralism.

Remember 9:6 –

“Know, therefore, that the LORD your God
is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness,
for you are a stubborn people.

Remember and do not forget
how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness.”

So, three times in Deuteronomy 6-9, Moses warns Israel
about things that they will be tempted to say in their hearts.

And three times he says to *remember* who God is –
and remember who you are.

Our Psalm of response is the Psalm that Satan quoted to Jesus – Psalm 91.

Satan understood very well how this song applied to Jesus.

I’m not so sure that he understood how well the song applied to himself!

As you sing the sixth stanza, you will see the passage that Satan quoted to Jesus.

As you sing the seventh stanza, you will see the passage that Jesus *undoubtedly* chuckled about when he heard the tempter quote this Psalm.

Sing Psalm 91

Read Matthew 4:1-17

When you think of “temptation” what do you think of?

Food?

Sex?

Money?

All those things (and more) can be temptations.

But at the heart of temptation is a *forgetting* of the Lord and his word.

The fundamental point of temptation is about worship and power.

Whose voice rules your life?

And not just “your life” – but your community – your people – your world!

I don’t think that Israel remembered Moses’ words all that well.

But someone else “remembered” the words that Moses had spoken,

and when he spotted Jesus in the wilderness –

precisely the same place where he had tripped up the fathers in the days of Moses, he came and used his old tricks against Jesus.

Satan remembers.

He knows God’s word very well.

Satan comes to Jesus in the wilderness and demonstrates the power of partial knowledge.

b. Jesus’ Three Temptations in Matthew (4:1-2)

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

We saw last time that the Spirit of God was poured out on Jesus at his baptism.

The Spirit equips Jesus for his Messianic ministry.

And now, the first thing that the Spirit does

is lead Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted.

Just like the Spirit had led Israel into the wilderness to be tempted...

The wilderness is a place of temptation and trial.

But that doesn’t mean that we should avoid the wilderness.

The wilderness is a dangerous place –

but sometimes the wilderness is precisely where the Spirit leads you.

Think of the Lord’s Prayer –

“and lead us not into temptation...”

The Spirit leads Jesus into temptation!

Jesus taught us to pray, “lead us not into temptation.”

He knew what he was talking about.

The Spirit had led him into temptation.

And it was not a pleasant experience!

That’s why Jesus adds, “but deliver us from evil” (or, perhaps, “from the evil one”).

Again, Jesus knew what he was talking about!

When we pray, “and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”

we are asking God either to preserve us from being tempted in the first place,
or to support and deliver us when we are tempted!

But I want to encourage you with this.

Because sometimes we give up in the face of temptation

thinking that God has abandoned us.

“Where were you God, when temptation came?”

“You didn’t deliver me from the temptation!”

He brought you here to see what was in your heart –

or more precisely, he brought you here so that *you might see* what was in your heart.

When he brought Israel into the wilderness in the days of Moses –

that didn’t work out so well.

When he brought the house of David into the wilderness in the days of Jeremiah –

that didn’t work out so well.

And so when the Spirit led the Son of David out into the wilderness again,

the Tempter must have been licking his chops!

“Ever since the Garden, I’ve owned them!

I’ve turned the Garden into a Wilderness –

and yet *He* keeps sending these pathetic ‘heirs of promise’ ‘sons of God’!

Ha! Here comes another one.”

The theologians have debated for millennia –

did Satan know who Jesus really was?

I don’t think it would have mattered whether he did or not!

Did Satan really believe that he could thwart the Almighty God?!!

As Mark Hanson likes to say, “Sin makes you stupid.”

Or, to say it another way, “It seemed like a good idea at the time!”

Stupid, yes –

but not ignorant!

Satan's problem is not a lack of knowledge.

It is a lack of love for God and neighbor!

It is interesting to see how well the tempter knows the scriptures –

and equally clear how the tempter misses the point, because he misses *love*.

1. Man Shall Not Live by Bread Alone – Curing Materialism (v3-4)

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

Satan understands that the Son of God is about bread.

After all, Satan knew all about redemptive history!

God had fed Israel with manna in the wilderness – bread from heaven.

Now, Jesus, the Son of God – the true Israel –

is in the wilderness.

For 40 days he has been fasting

(echoing the 40 years that Israel wandered in the desert –

the 40 days that Moses fasted on the mountain –

the 40 days that Elijah fasted on the mountain).

He is hungry.

So the tempter points out that the Son of God could just command these stones to become bread.

Plainly Satan understands (at least to some degree) who Jesus is.

This is the same temptation of materialism –

the temptation to say "my power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth"

(Deut. 8:17)

At the heart of materialism is *selfishness*.

It's all about *me*.

I'm hungry.

I want food.

Of course, it's not *just* about Jesus' personal hunger.

If you want to galvanize the Jews for a new Exodus –

a new return from Exile –

turning stones into bread would be a good start!

As we go through Jesus ministry,

we'll see how Jesus *multiplies* the loaves and fishes in order to feed the 5,000;

but compared to Moses, Jesus falls short!

Moses fed all Israel with bread from heaven (the manna) for 40 years.

Jesus feeds 5,000 people for one day, and 4,000 people for another day.

Satan challenges Jesus to *outdo* Moses.

Notice that Satan knows Bible content very well.

He understands the lure of *stuff* and *status*.

He understands how to acquire and control.

He simply does not understand *love*.

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."*

In other words, Jesus says that the tempter has misunderstood redemptive history.

The point of bread always was and always will be
the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us.

Israel ate manna in the wilderness – and they died.

The priests ate the holy bread in the temple – and they died.

Jesus is the living bread – the Word that came from the mouth of God.

I want you to notice something in each of Jesus' answers to the tempter:

each answer is certainly Jesus' own answer –

this is why Jesus himself will not succumb to this temptation.

But each answer is also supposed to be *our answer*.

Jesus is the *subject* of these answers – the one who speaks them –

but Jesus is also the *object* of these answers – the one of whom *we speak*.

Obviously we do not have the power to turn stones into bread!

But we are just foolish enough – just stupid enough –

to think that our might and our power have acquired this – "our wealth."

We prize our stuff and our status – and we are consumed by our own materialism.

Maybe in our day we need to say it this way:

"man shall not live by i-phones and microwaves

and thousands of other modern conveniences"

but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

The cure for materialism is to *remember* the LORD and his word.

As Jesus will say later in Matthew,

"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,

and all these things (your material needs) will be added to you."

2. You Shall Not Put the Lord Your God to the Test – Curing Moralism (v5-7)

The second temptation connects with Israel’s temptation to trust their own righteousness.

You might be tempted to say that Jesus *could* trust his own righteousness!

After all, Jesus *alone* of all Adam’s race was perfectly righteous –
like us in all ways – *except sin!*

So look at verses 5-7:

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and 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 will command his angels concerning you,
and
“On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.””

If you are who you say you are,
then you can do whatever you want!
You are the “righteous one” – so flaunt it!

You want to start a revolution?
You want to bring the kingdom of God?
Make a big splash!

And the devil even quotes Scripture – Psalm 91.
Psalm 91 is a Warrior Song –
stating how a thousand might fall at your side,
but it will not come near you.
Whether war, disease, or famine –
God will protect you and exalt you and establish your throne.

If you are the Son of God, then it’s all about you, Jesus!

Jesus reply flabbergasts me:

⁷ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

If I were Jesus, I would have said,
“You idiot!
Haven’t you read the next line of Psalm 91,
the one that says,
‘You will tread on the lion and the adder;
the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.’? (91:13)
I’m going to stomp you so hard...”

But Jesus does not say that
(But did he think it?! I mean, seriously, that’s too good to pass up!).

Instead, Jesus said,

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

Even Jesus does not trust in his own righteousness.

Even Jesus does not presume upon the Father.

In his holy conception and birth, the Son of God has identified with humanity.

In his adoption by Joseph, Jesus has become the Son of David.

In his baptism, Jesus has identified himself with Israel.

He remembers that *his people* are a stubborn people –
and he is called to enter exile and death for them.

And therefore Jesus also becomes the *object* of this text.

It’s easy for us to become self-righteous –

to become “moralists” who think that we have God’s favor
because we are better than “those people” over there.

Do not put Jesus to the test!

Jesus says, I will not put the Lord to the test.

I know that he is able to deliver me,
but I will not put him to the test;
rather, I will wait for his time.

Jesus will be revealed in the temple – but not this way.

He will be revealed in his humiliation and suffering.

He will be the sacrifice that cleanses us from our sins.

He will become a spectacle –

the derelict on the cross!

But he will patiently wait for the Lord and put his trust in him.

This temptation also comes to us every day.

It is easy to put God to the test!

–why am I still suffering?

–why hasn’t God dealt with my problem?!

But we also put him to the test when we say,

“This problem is too big.”

“My enemies are too strong.”

“Nothing will ever change!”

It is hard to wait for the Lord.

And we want an answer now!

If you want an answer now – you can always get one!
From the Devil...

3. You Shall Worship the Lord Your God – Curing Militarism (v8-10)

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 I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

You want it now, do you?!

In Luke, the order of the temptations moves from bread to authority to the temple –
concluding with the temptation to cast himself off of the pinnacle of the temple.
Luke’s gospel highlights the temple –
and Luke’s gospel begins and ends in the temple.

But Matthew’s order of the temptations concludes with the kingdoms of the world
and the question of authority.

Not surprisingly, Matthew’s gospel will conclude with the Great Commission,
where Jesus says “all authority is given to me”

In the first two temptations, the devil started by saying, “If you are the Son of God.”
Here, in the third temptation, the focus shifts.

Then again, think about the three temptations in the wilderness:
the temptation of materialism is to trust our own ability to get stuff;
the temptation of moralism is to trust our own righteousness –
both temptations are to think too highly of ourselves.
But the third temptation (actually the first in Deuteronomy)
is to think too highly of someone else.

Moses warned Israel not to think too much of the nations.
Now, the devil is tempting Jesus to think too much of the devil.

I’m calling it “militarism” for the sake of the “M” –
but the point is simply that you are thinking too highly of someone else.

“The nations are too strong for me”
(Jeremiah talks about this a lot!)

In light of the adoption theme in Matthew,
you could say that in essence, Satan is saying,
“I will be your father, and you will be my son!”

Jesus’ response is remarkable.
Jesus must endure these temptations according to the properties of his human nature.
And he must respond to them as the second Adam,

as the new Israel –
as the one who must succeed where humanity has repeatedly failed!

Notice first that Jesus acknowledges (implicitly) that Satan has the ability to make this offer.
When Satan says that he will give Jesus “all the kingdoms of the world and their glory,”
he is referring to the fact that Adam & Eve had bowed the knee to him.

They had listened to his voice and submitted to him,
and so the devil *did* have authority over the nations.

It is not rightful authority – it is usurped and corrupt authority!
But the usurper is still the *de facto* ruler of the nation.

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.”

Again, Satan knows the *content* of the scriptures –
but he does not “get” the heart of the scriptures.

But don’t shortchange the devil!
Every time that Israel has been here in the wilderness,
Israel has fallen into temptation.

Why is Jesus different?

Well, sure, he is God!
But Matthew makes clear to us that what is unique about Jesus
is that Jesus *worships God and serves God only*.

Jesus is the one who *actually does* what Deuteronomy says!

He *remembers* what God did to Pharaoh.
He *remembers* God’s faithfulness to all generations.
And so he worships the Lord alone.

And thus, Jesus becomes the *object* of verse 10 as well.
You and I should worship the Lord Jesus, our God, and him only shall we serve.

Because you and I now inhabit that wilderness where he was tempted.
And these same temptations come to you.
They may feel overwhelming.
You may at times be beaten down by them–
and you may think that there is no way out.

Our problem is that “we want bread, we want to force God’s hand to rescue us,

we want peace – and we want all this now.
But Jesus is our bread, he is our salvation, and he is our peace.” (Hauerwas, 55)

Brothers,
sisters,
take heart!

Because Jesus has overthrown the power of the devil!
It’s not just that he is able to “sympathize”
–hey, I know what you’re going through–hang in there!
Every high priest could do that!

Rather, Jesus brings *help*.

You will never face a temptation that Jesus has not defeated.
And his Spirit now rests upon *you*.
The same Spirit who empowered Jesus now empowers you.
The Spirit of the exalted Christ has been given to his church,
so that you might be able to resist the devil,
and cling to your faithful Savior.

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

Conclusion: The Dawning of the Light (4:12-17)

¹² *Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. ¹³ And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali,*

¹⁴ *so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:*

¹⁵ *“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—*

¹⁶ *the people dwelling in darkness*

have seen a great light,

and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,

on them a light has dawned.”

¹⁷ *From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

In other words,
the kingdom of David has dawned in Jesus.

The exile is over.

The King has come.

And therefore you must repent and reorient your whole around him!