

According to a radio report... a middle school (somewhere here in Oregon) faced a unique problem. ... A number of girls began to use lipstick and put it on in the bathroom. ... After they put on their lipstick... they pressed their lips to the mirrors leaving dozens of little lip prints.

Finally the principal decided something had to be done. She called the girls to the bathroom... and met them there with the custodian. She explained lip prints caused a major problem for the custodian... who had to clean the mirrors every day. ... To demonstrate how difficult it was... she had them watch and asked the custodian to clean one of the mirrors. ... He took out a long-handled brush... dipped it into the toilet... and scrubbed the mirror. ... Since then there have been no lip prints on the mirrors.

When tempted to sin... if we could only see the real filth we'd be kissing... we wouldn't be attracted to it ... would we...?

Our passage this morning in Matthew chapter four... among other things... attempts to get us to see the filth that we are tempted to kiss each and every day.

At every point... I am prone to sin. My mind is susceptible to wandering... and I am tempted to think unmentionable thoughts... when I watch inappropriate things on television... and allow my mind to dwell on it. ... My heart is bent toward pride... and I am tempted to compete with other pastors over who is a more qualified spiritual leader... and more successful. ... I am tempted to demand my personal rights... and offer little or no grace to others when they threaten *what I believe* that I am entitled to (such as cutting in front of me... when I was there first)... I am prone to

pretense and hypocrisy... tempted to lie to make myself look better... and to call people to do what I am not willing to do myself. ... I am prone to value appearance over authenticity... my wants over other people's needs... and I am prone to desire the glory that is due God alone.

I am keenly... if not frighteningly... aware that one wrong look... one inappropriate meeting... one rash decision... one fleeting moment could wreak spiritual havoc on my life... my family... and our church. I have the potential of bringing untold disgrace on my God.

My involvement in spiritual warfare is personal... and the same holds true for every follower of Christ. ... Look! Can we all just admit... that each and every one of us is in this same boat...? We face... and give-in to a lot of temptation. ... The battles may look different... as they play out in each of our lives... but (PLEASE)... let's not any of us be fooled. ... The war is real... and the evil one is persistently plotting to subtly entice us with sin... and ultimately to bring destruction upon our soul. So don't be caught unaware. Learn the lessons that Matthew 4... verses 1 through 11 will teach us today.

Now before we turn to our passage... I would like to do a few things to set it up... for a better understanding. One of those things is to present two other pictures... from Scripture... which are parallel to today's passage.

A new Man has come... (The Second Adam)... over whom Satan could gain no control. His name is Jesus... ... There are deliberate parallels between Jesus in the wilderness (that we are about to see in Matthew 4)... and Adam and Eve in the garden (if we were to go back and read Genesis

3)... (LISTEN!)... It's no coincidence that both Adam and Jesus... are initially tempted to eat food - apart from the Father's will. ... For Adam... it was fruit from a tree. For Jesus... it was stones becoming bread. ... And in both situations... the temptation begins by questioning God.

For Adam... the serpent questions God's word... asking... "*Did God really say...?*" (Gen 3:1). ... For Jesus... the serpent calls into question Christ's sonship... saying in effect... "*If you are really the Son of God, why are you hungry like this?*" Satan had both Adam and Jesus question God. "*Does God really care about you...? Why would He allow you to be in this condition. Why is God holding out on you...?*"

Jesus steps into the same story that Adam stepped into... but Jesus is able to stand... whereas Adam fell. ... Jesus is a new Man... unlike Adam... and... unlike all of us... who so often give-in to sin.

Now... here is the second picture from Scripture... where there is definite parallelism to today's passage. ... This one also helps us glean more from Matthew 4:1-11.

Jesus is not only the "new Man" (the second Adam... leader of a new race of humankind) ... but Jesus is also the **true Son**... There are some parallels between Jesus and Adam (Jesus in the wilderness and Adam in the Garden)... but there are even more parallels between Jesus' temptation... and the testing of God's people... (the Israelites)... before they entered into the promised land... in the Old Testament.

When God commanded Pharaoh to let His people go... God told Moses...

Exodus 4:22-23 (ESV)

Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.'"

Did you notice that God refers to Israel as His son...? ... This same reference for Israel ("My son") was also used in Matthew 2:15.. (we saw two weeks ago when we studied it)... where Matthew quoted from Hosea 11:1, saying, "*Out of Egypt I called My Son.*"

Both Israel and Jesus... are referred to as God's Son... and both were tested in the wilderness. ... God's son (Israel)... was tested for 40 years... while God's Son (Jesus)... was tested for 40 days.

It's fitting, then, that Jesus uses Scripture every time He wards off temptation, and the passages He uses are from Deuteronomy 8:3; 6:16; and 6:13—all passages related to Israel's wandering through the wilderness those 40 years.

One last parallel is worth pointing out... right before they were tested... God delivered the people of Israel... through the waters of the Red Sea... so that Paul is able to call this Israel's baptism (in 1 Cor 10:2). ... Then in the New Testament... right before Jesus' testing... we see His baptism in this same river (Jordan)... by John the Baptist.

These parallels concerning Jesus' sonship... are the key to understanding His temptations... in Matthew chapter 4. ... I would like for you to pay attention and notice... how the first two temptations begin with Satan saying, "*If You are the Son of God*" (in Matt 4:3, 6). ... These are a clear

reference back to Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3:17... where God said of Jesus, "*This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.*"

At the core... all temptation to sin... is an assault on sonship. ... Just as the Devil was trying to attack the relationship between the Father and the Son in the wilderness temptations... so the temptations you and I face today are really attacks on what it means to relate to God as Father.

The Israelites' sin in the wilderness began when they started saying in effect... "*Are we really the sons of God? We don't have bread or water! Is He really our Father?*" ... That's exactly how Satan attacked Jesus in Matthew 4... and it's where he'll attack you today...Believer! ... He did it in the garden of Eden... tempting Adam and Eve to see God not as their Father... but as their rival.

Every sin that we commit is identical to a rejection of God as our Father... as the One who knows what is best for us and is committed to providing it for us. ... How crucial it is... then... for us to see that Jesus is the Second Adam... and the true Son.

Before we turn to our passage in Matthew... we have looked at the parallels of Adam and Israel. This... I hope will help us as we study the temptation of Christ in the wilderness. ... But I would like to delay us just a bit further... before we get to the passage. You see... there are two questions that often arise... and I don't want these question to distract us from the lessons we can learn from the passage. So I am going to deal with them right now.

The first question is this: **Does God tempt us?**

Matthew 4:1 says that Jesus was led "by the Spirit" to be tempted by the Devil in the wilderness. ... But in what sense did the Spirit lead Jesus to be tempted? ... Did the Spirit of God tempt Jesus?

The clear answer from Scripture is, "No." God never tempts us in the sense of enticing us to evil.

James 1:13 (ESV)

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

The Greek that is used in the verse for **tempted** is (peirazō)... it can also mean "test"... which I believe is the meaning here. While God clearly never tempts anyone to do evil... He does use circumstances to test a person's character. ... Why...? Because God wants to learn something that He doesn't already know...? No! He wants us to know it. He is showing us... and the rest of the world... what He already has knowledge of. ...

Remember... your convictions are only strong if they hold up under pressure!

Only the Devil and demons tempt us to evil... but even their tempting... it is ultimately under the sovereign control of God. *Nothing* happens in the universe apart from the sovereignty of God. ... Now to be sure... when Satan tempts... he intends it for evil... but God uses these temptations to refine His children... and to teach them His faithfulness.

God tested Abraham and told him to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham learned that God will always provide. ... The apostle Paul was tested when God gave him a "thorn in the flesh... a messenger of Satan" to torment him (2 Cor 12:7). The purpose of the trial was so that Paul would know the strength

and sufficiency of Christ (2 Cor 12:9-10). Consider also Joseph in the Old Testament, who was sold into slavery and tempted in a number of ways. God used these trials to bring about good—for Joseph *and* for his brothers who sold him into slavery.

We can say definitively that God was not tempting Adam... Abraham... Joseph... Paul... or Jesus. The Spirit led Jesus into the harsh conditions of the wilderness to battle Satan... Adam (by the way) did this battle in a garden... and failed. ... Jesus was under the harsh conditions of a wasteland and pained with hunger after a 40 day fast. Satan had all the advantages... over Jesus. ... So... here was the test: God was delighted to show the world... that Satan at his strongest is no match for Jesus at His weakest.

Here is the second question... that I don't want to be a distraction from our gaining the lessons from the text: **Could Jesus have sinned?**

The answer to the second question this passage raises is no... and yes.

Pointing out four truths from Scripture may help explain the complex answer to this question. First... **Jesus is fully man.**

He was and is fully human, as human as you and me. Second... **Jesus was fully tempted.** The Bible says He was tempted as we are (in Heb 4:15)... that means... He was tempted with things that are common to man.

Now you may read these temptations in Matthew and think, "*I'm not tempted in these ways.*" ... If you're honest, these temptations may even seem quite trivial. ... However... these temptations Jesus faced are at the

core of every temptation that you and I face. There are no new temptations—just new ways of succumbing to old temptations.

But the thought of Jesus facing these same temptations (that we do) seems to contradict a verse that we just looked at in James. If Jesus is fully God... how is it that He could be tempted when James 1:13 clearly says God cannot be tempted.

James 1:13 (ESV)

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

Jesus' human nature and divine nature are different... yet unified... leading to some wonderful mysteries. ... These are mind-boggling realities... for which an illustration I read... may help.

Think of someone in this world that you intensely love. ... If you are a grandparent... it might be your precious little grandchild. If it is... picture them as an infant. Picture their face and their tiny little body. ... Maybe you would want to picture your spouse... with whom you are incredibly in love. ... Picture their face... and feel their embrace. ... If you are not married... maybe you can think about a pet dog... or cat... or horse... an animal that you absolutely cherish... look that adored animal in the eyes. ...
... .. Once you have a person or an animal come to mind... I am sorry to ask this... but I don't know of any other way to make the point... I want you to now ask yourself, "*Could I murder that person or animal?*" or "*Can I take it's life from them?*"

I hope that I just repulsed you so much that you immediately thought... "*Absolutely not!*" ... I hope such an idea was so revolting and hideous...

And in that response, what you were thinking was, "I don't have the *moral* capability of murdering them." ... But if you understood my question, "Could you take the life from this living being" in terms of *physically* performing an action... even though it's unfathomable to you... it would be *physically* possible.

Even so... Jesus... in His deity... as the light of the world in whom there is no darkness... could not have sinned. ... He is *morally* incapable of such an action. Yet at the same time... Jesus could have sinned in the sense that He was *physically* capable of eating bread or throwing Himself off a temple or bowing the knee to Satan. ... In this way... Jesus was fully tempted as we are (Heb 4:15).

Oh! That we would be just as morally repulsed... at our temptations... as we were in that stomach-turning test that I just put you through. ... May God give us the same kind of revulsion to the sin we are being tempted with.

Having looked at two parallel Biblical pictures... two difficult questions related to Jesus' temptations... and a repulsive experience... we now turn to today's passage... of Christ being tempted in the wilderness. When we look under the surface of each of these temptations to see their core... we will see that we are tempted in exactly the same ways. And most importantly... we will see how Jesus conquered each temptation on our behalf.

The first area of temptation is: **Self-Gratification**

Matthew 4:1-4

This statement by Satan was a challenge for Christ to prove His identity as God's Son... by working some great miracle. ... But Christ does not have to prove to Satan anything. ... Especially does He not have to prove to Satan anything on Satan's terms. We believe God on His terms not on our terms.

The Devil tempts Jesus to turn stones into bread as proof that He is the Son of God. He is sowing doubt by asking, "*If You are the Son of God, the beloved of God, then why are You out here in the wilderness starving? You desire food. Is Your Father not providing and caring for You? Satisfy Your desires now.*"

While he tries to get Jesus to question God... we see the Satanic philosophy that would give fleshly appetites precedence over spiritual requirements. ... But when we put our physical needs ahead of our spiritual needs, we sin. When we allow circumstances to dictate our actions, instead of following God's will, we sin.

At the heart of this temptation is the self-gratification... that every one of us craves... in the depths of our own hearts.

We are tempted to fulfill our wants apart from God's will. All of us have desires that God has built into us... desires that are good... needs in our bodies and cravings in our souls. ... But God has also created us to look to Him as a good Father... Who satisfies those desires. ... That was the point of the garden of Eden... wasn't it?

Satan suggested to Adam and Eve that God was withholding good from them... so they decided to fulfill their desire apart from God's will. That's when sin entered the world. ... It's the same story behind God's testing of

Israel in the wilderness. In Deuteronomy 8:2-3, the passage that Jesus quotes from during His temptation, we read the following:

Deuteronomy 8:2-3 (ESV)

And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

This was a testing of the heart to see if the Israelites would trust the goodness of God to fulfill their desires according to His word and the counsel of His will. ... This same kind of testing accompanies every temptation in our lives.

We have desires that are good and God-given... desires for food... water... sleep... sex... relationships... companionship... etc. ... This is the place where Satan works — at the level of our wants. ... You desire food... and he tempts you toward undisciplined overeating. ... You desire sleep... and he tempts you toward apathy and laziness. ... You desire sex... and he tempts you toward such sins as lust... pornography... adultery... and homosexuality. ... And at the core is a desire for self-gratification that says... *"God is not providing for me in the way I want, so I will seek my own gratification apart from Him."* Satan tempts you to fulfill God-given wants apart from God's will.

The Enemy is so deadly in the way he attacks our desires. Just because you are God's child does not mean that you will never want something that

doesn't accord with God's will. ... You will fight with some temptations for 40 days... or in some cases 40 years. ... You may even have to battle your entire life.

We learn from this common temptation that Christ faced... that the temptation is often to do a right thing in the wrong way (satisfying His hunger by turning stones into bread was the wrong way), to do the right thing at the wrong time (it was not time for Christ to work such miracles), and to do the right thing with the wrong motive (the motive of proving His identity to Satan was a wrong motive).

You can count on the presence of Satan in your life to tempt you. That is part of his work. Sooner or later you will meet up with him and face strong temptation. And his coming will be when you are vulnerable (such as, Christ had not eaten in forty days). ... So how do you win... day after day... year after year? You do what Jesus did.

When He was hungry... Jesus trusted the all-satisfying... all-sufficient goodness of the Father. Don't tell God when and how your desires should be fulfilled... trust God to fulfill your desires in His way according to His Word. ... Trust that God your Father is good... and realize that any attempt to satisfy your wants apart from His will... ultimately... leads not to delight... but to destruction. ... Oh! That we would look down the road... and be disgusted by the end-result! ... As soon as Adam and Eve had eaten the fruit... they realized what they had done... and everything—around them, within them, and between them—changed for the worse. What they thought would lead to delight... led to destruction.

Mark it down: The bread of demons always destroys. The will and Word of the Lord... on the other hand... always satisfy. ... So trust the goodness of the Father. Jesus did, and by the end of Matthew 4 Jesus' desire for food was supernaturally fulfilled.

The second area of temptation is: **Self-Protection**

Matthew 4:5-7

After looking at the temptation of self-gratification... we move next to the second temptation: self-protection. ... This temptation is probably the most difficult to understand... because we struggle to see what is so enticing about the possibility of Jesus jumping off a tower. ... But this was no normal tower... This was the top of the temple... the place that was intended to be a visible demonstration of God's presence and protection among His people.

Satan quotes from Psalm 91... a song about God's protection... and he tempts Jesus to prove that God will be faithful to Him as His Son: "*If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down.*" Once again... Jesus' reply helps us understand the core of the temptation here. He quotes from Deuteronomy 6:16... where Israel received the following command: "*Do not test the Lord your God as you tested Him at Massah.*"

The reference to Massah in Deuteronomy 6:16 takes us back to Exodus 17... where the people of God put God to the test by demanding that He provide them more water. ... They asked... "*Is the Lord among us or not?*" (Exod 17:7). ... Their questioning proved a lack of trust in God. They didn't trust His presence with them or His protection of them.

The same thing can often be said of us. Just as Israel was tempted in the Old Testament, and Jesus was tempted in the New Testament, we are tempted to question God's presence and manipulate God's promises.

Jesus was tempted to put God to the test by manipulating Psalm 91 into forcing the Father to prove His [Jesus'] sonship by miraculously delivering Him. This would be tantamount to asking God for proof of His presence and protection. But that kind of callous experimentation with God is a clear example of a lack of trust, and it shows up in all kinds of ways in our lives.

We are tempted to twist God's Word around our personal preferences. We are tempted to question His plans for us when they don't go the way we would like. We are tempted to doubt His love for us when something goes wrong. We are tempted to ask for signs that He is still with us even though He has shown His faithfulness to us over and over and over again. We are tempted to complain to Him about the circumstances of our lives, boldly thinking (if not saying) just like the Israelites did, "*God, are You with me or not?*" So how did Jesus react to such temptation?

Jesus rested in the shelter of the Father's unshakeable security. Jesus knew He had no reason to test the Father. It's no wonder, therefore, that Jesus' message to us repeatedly in the book of Matthew is, "*Don't worry*" (6:25, 31). In the Sermon on the Mount, which starts in the next chapter, Jesus points to the Father's care for the flowers of the field and the birds of the air as evidence that His children need not worry (6:26-30). If God cares for plants and animals, He will surely provide for His children.

I love spending time with my kids, and I would do anything to protect them and care for them. Yet, according to what Jesus says in Luke 11:13, I am an evil father. That is, even with my good intentions and the kindness I show to my kids, I am a sinner who fails repeatedly to do what is right.

Consider that God is a good Father, and *everything* He does in our lives is good. How much more, then, can we trust Him? Like Jesus, we can rest in the shelter of the Father's unshakeable security.

Now for the third and final temptation: **Self-Exaltation**

Matthew 4:8-11

Having looked at the temptations of self-gratification (4:3-4) and self-protection (4:5-6), consider now the third temptation: self-exaltation. In verses 8-9 Jesus is taken to a very high mountain, either a physical mountain or at the very least a very high vision, and He is shown all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.

You may be wondering why this would be such a great temptation if Jesus already knew these kingdoms would be His. But remember... Jesus also knows that the road ahead leading to such authority is filled with sorrow... suffering... and ultimately a violent death. ... He was tempted to try and seize God's reward right then... apart from the path of pain. "*You're a Son,*" the Devil said, "*so why be a Servant? You're a King, so why be crucified? Take them now; they're yours.*"

That's precisely what Satan whispers in our ears today. He points to all the things of this world — the successes... the accomplishments... the pleasures... and the possessions — and he says... "*Get them now.*"

He promised Adam and Eve that they would be like God if they ate the fruit, and they believed him. They ascribed worth to Satan instead of worth to God.

We are tempted to do the same thing that Adam and Eve did. We are tempted to assert ourselves in the world while we rob God of His worship. Instead of a simple... humble... difficult obedience to God in this world... in our pride we seek to attain what we want in the way we want to do it. ...This pride is at the root of all our rebellion. ...We all struggle with pride... wherein we bow the knee to the prince of this world and seek to dethrone the one true God who alone is worthy of all worship. Once again, we need to see how Jesus resisted this temptation.

Jesus refused to exchange the end-time exaltation by the Father for a right-now exaltation of a snake. ... Jesus... the beloved Son... knew that the supreme duty of everyone and everything is to worship God... and He knew that everyone who humbles himself before God... will be exalted (Matt 23:12).

Jesus chose to live a life of suffering obedience to the Father instead of sinful submission to Satan, and in the end, all authority in heaven and on earth was given to Him.

The temptations Matthew records for us in this chapter are directly relevant to the battles we face every day. Self-gratification, self-protection, and self-

exaltation are always trying to allure us. And we'll continue to face these battles until the day when finally and eternally Christ will be crowned as King.

God has given us His Spirit... the same Spirit who led Jesus not only *into* the wilderness... but also *through* the wilderness unscathed. If you are a follower of Christ... this same Spirit is alive in you! ... You cannot triumph over temptation... but Christ can. ... And Christ is in you, the hope of glory (Col 1:27).

We must consider the danger we are in as a part of this cosmic and very personal spiritual war. But we also need to see how empowered we are to resist the Devil... and when we do resist him... he will flee from us (Jas 4:7 says). Therefore, live in Him until one day He will reign over all as our Sovereign.

In the fall of 1999, for the first time in 47 years, the tuna were running only 30 miles off Cape Cod. And boy were they biting! All a person needed to catch one... was a sharp hook and some bait. And the rewards for doing so were substantial. Rumor was that Japanese buyers were paying \$50,000 for a nice bluefin.

That's why many would-be fishermen ignored Coast Guard warnings and headed out to sea in small boats. What these new fishermen didn't realize was the problem is not catching a tuna—the problem comes after they're caught. On September 23, the *Christi Anne*, a 19-foot boat, capsized while doing battle with a tuna. That same day the 27-foot boat *Basic Instinct*

suffered the same fate, while *Official Business*, a 28-footer, was swamped after it hooked onto a 600-pound tuna. The tuna pulled it underwater.

These fishermen underestimated the power of the fish they were trying to catch. That is what temptation does to us. It takes us by surprise. It looks great on the surface. Only after we hook into it do we discover its strength.

- 1) Be repulsed by the final outcome of any effort that is not in God's will !
- 2) Find satisfaction – knowing that God *is* good. Wise-up! He is not withholding good from you!
- 3) Rely on the same Spirit Who not only led Jesus to the wilderness – but through it - unscathed.