

# The Temptation of Christ

*Matthew*

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**Bible Text:** Matthew 4:1-11  
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As our students make their way to their life groups, just a reminder this next Sunday evening is our Palm Sunday musical celebration and our student choir will be joining our adult choir and orchestra on one of the pieces next Sunday night. And I also want to give you, I'm going to go ahead and kind of make a spoiler alert, Bruce. We also have the Korean choir singing as well. Anytime we mention them, then everybody comes out. So just to let you know, our adult choir and orchestra, our student choir, and the Korean choir, everybody is going to be singing next Sunday night.

Let's pray together.

*Heavenly Father, as we prepare to hear and digest and apply your word, God, may our simple prayer be the prayer that we heard sung that originated from the mouth of Isaiah, may we simply be available. And Lord, I pray for each and every one of us that it wouldn't take the death of King Uzziah in our life, it wouldn't take a heartache, it wouldn't take one of those low places but that we would simply just in the ebb and flow of life declare to you that we are available to any calling, any direction, and any change. May you be the lead and may we simply be following behind. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

Tonight, as we continue our study through the gospel of Matthew, we're going to be in chapter 4, verses 1 through 11, very famous section of scripture known as the temptation of Jesus Christ. Now every time we gather on Sunday evening, particularly through the gospel of Matthew, we are taking not only the gospel of Matthew and its contents but we're looking at the greater picture, the totality of the message of scripture, both the Old Testament, the New Testament all being extrapolated through this centrally located book of the Bible, this book of Matthew that translates or transitions us out of the Old into the New, from Israel to the church. Tonight, not only are we going to be in Matthew 4, but for those of you who like to put your eyes on the verses, we're also going to allude to three passages in the book of Revelation. Now for the sake of time tonight, we're not going to go through the totality of those because we want to get to chapter 5 of the book of Matthew, but tonight we're going to be in chapter 4, verses 1 through 11, a very famous event that we know as the temptation of Jesus Christ. We're going to spend not only some time reading it, we're going to look at it from an introductory perspective, and

then I want us to address each and every of the three temptations as presented by Satan possibly tonight through a lens that you may not have seen.

Beginning in verse 1 of Matthew 4, it says,

1 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. 2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. 3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. 4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. 5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, 6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. 7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. 8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; 9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. 10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. 11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

Very famous passage of scripture that to be quite forthright with you, typically we interpret it in light of 1 John 2:15 through 17 that warns us of the dangers of this world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, and rightfully so. You can read the temptation through the filter of those collective, shall we say, statements regarding the temptation of sin but tonight I want to begin with a necessary introduction because, remember, as we walk through the gospel of Matthew, Jesus Christ is being presented as the King of the Jews, eventually the King of kings and the Lord of lords, however, it is his Messiahship, it is his suffering, it is Calvary, it is Golgotha that must precede his glorious return.

When we deal with the primacy of Jesus' ministry, one of the great debates that we have and questions we ask is what's more important, Easter or Christmas, because if it weren't for Christmas we wouldn't have Easter, but I would argue if it weren't for Easter we would never celebrate Christmas. When we discuss the ministry and the life of Jesus Christ, obviously if it were not for his birth and life, we could never celebrate his death and his resurrection, but allow me to state for record, if it were not for his death and resurrection, nobody would ever remember or celebrate his birth. And the reason this is important is the totality of the ministry, not just one aspect of it and so I want to walk through kind of the protocol of how this temptation experience happens and then look at each of the specific temptations as they were laid out.

It begins in verse 1 by saying that the Spirit led him. This is going to be important in just a moment because this did not come by just some strange happenstance and such, that the Spirit of God actually led himself into the wilderness. Secondly, it says that he went into the wilderness. Now we typically interpret that from a Western viewpoint as thick trees and moss and scary noises, you understand that the word "wilderness" particularly in the Eastern world means desert, okay? When we talk about the wilderness, think about the Old Testament, think about the book of Numbers. When the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, they weren't wandering among the trees, much the opposite. But one of the things that we have to address when it comes to the wilderness is was it a place of punishment or was it a place of preparation? Well, it depends who you were. If you were the generation that did not believe, if you were the generation that said, "Oh, we don't believe Caleb, we believe those other 10 spies. They're too big. It's too vast. We can't do it. Let's go back to Egypt." Then according to scripture it was a place of punishment. They were not allowed to go into the Promised Land until the entire generation died out, but for the vast majority when 40 years had passed, the wilderness experience was actually a place of preparation, how do we prepare to inhabit. In fact, if you do a strict chronology within the book of Numbers, you'll discover for the last two years of the wilderness experience the Lord instructed the Israelites on how to live in the Promised Land. He gave them specific directions how to handle family matters, how to handle monetary matters, how to address military strategy. It was a time of preparation for those who were believers in what God was doing. When Jesus Christ is led of the Spirit of God into the wilderness, there is no person more willing, more capable, and more able than him, so when he goes for 40 days and 40 nights, this isn't because something bad has happened, this is because he is preparing himself for the next 3 ½ ministries that will change the world.

Then there's the fasting. As you look throughout scripture, there are only four men that were given record of that go 40 days and 40 nights in a very extreme fastful manner. Obviously we have Moses on Mount Sinai. We have the prophet Elijah. We have his understudy, the other prophet, Elisha. And we have Jesus Christ. That's it. Why go to all this length in such an introductory manner? Because I think we need to "visit or revisit" the temptation of Jesus Christ because when we hear that word "the temptation," we think the temptation to overtly sin. We think the temptation to do wrong. We think the temptation to do ill because in our lives, in our fallen hopefully redeemed state, that is what we know when we hear the word "temptation." But did you know, in my opinion and we're going to see this laid out in just a moment, I think the most subtle, the most deceptive, the most demonic temptation that ever comes out of the pit of hell is to do the right thing at the wrong time. Is that not a temptation? You see, we think of temptation from our perspective as to rebel against, or to do contrary to, or to resist what is right, but we can fall into the temptation of doing the right thing just at the wrong time.

So let's talk about the purpose of the wilderness experience, 40 days, 40 nights, focusing on the mission that is at hand, preparation for the next 3 ½ years where he will not only give of his body, he will shed of his blood, he will be mocked, he will be made fun of, he will be harassed, they will make fun of his lineage as well as every word that comes out of his mouth. I would stand before you tonight declaring I don't believe that when Satan

showed up he was trying to get him to "violate the precepts of God." I don't think he was trying to get him to "trip up and sin" as you and I know it. Multiple reasons for that, one of which is this, James 1:13, it says God tempts nobody to sin. Well, if the Spirit led him into the wilderness, then how do we justify James 1? In Hebrews 4:15 it said, he as the Messiah underwent every temptation known to man. Yes, there is the temptation to "do wrong" but I think most of us would agree there's also the temptation to do the right thing at the wrong time.

Then for formal theological purposes, there is what we call the law of impeccability, the ability to and/or not to sin. In 2 Corinthians 5:20-21 it says, "He," being Jesus, "who knew no sin became sin for us so that we might be declared his righteousness." He actually embraced and became and took the punishment of our sin on the cross so that we could experience righteousness with his taking on our sinfulness. So we know that even though tempted in a multitude of ways, sin was not a part of his decision-making nor was it the path that he took.

So what are these three temptations? I would propose tonight that every one of these temptations is actually the opportunity to do the right thing at the wrong time. I mean, after all, if you've been fasting 40 days and 40 nights, you're going to be hungry. It is not a sin to eat. Now it can be a sin how much you eat but it's not a sin to eat. And so therefore from the very first temptation, it is not a sinful act to place a piece of bread in one's mouth, particularly if they have not eaten in 40 days; it seems like a natural rightful act. But in the first four verses, there is the temptation to turn a stone or a rock into bread. This is where Revelation 12 comes into play. Again, for the sake of time, I'm going to allude to what is there. Feel free to turn if you would like but for the time constraints that we have tonight, we would spend a multiplicity of hours if we were to go verse by verse with all these passages.

In Revelation 12, we have one of those sections in the book of Revelation that we're kind of taking out of the chronology of time. There is this story that is told of a woman who gives birth. This child that is born, it says that Satan, or the serpent, desires to have him destroyed because he knows one day he will be the one who rules over him. Then there's this great war, there's this great battle in heaven. Whom we know as the serpent, the old dragon and the devil as described in Revelation 12, is cast out along with the stars above. When we get to the end of chapter 12, the woman who gave birth to the child, the one who the serpent was so upset with, the woman is running for her life and in the process of running for her life, the Bible says that for an extreme period of time, she goes into her wilderness and is fed supernaturally by God and protected by the one who's trying to hunt her down.

Why is this important to the story? Because Revelation 12 isn't just the story of a woman and a child and somebody who's really upset, it's actually a multi-thousand year discourse of what you and I would call spiritual warfare, and the decisions that we have to make is who are the people involved and what is taking place. Well, there is no question of who the child is. We know that the one that is born who will be a Redeemer, who is hated by whom we know as Satan, we know that that is Jesus the Messiah. That's the easy part.

The hard part comes into who is this woman? Who is it that gives birth? Who is it that not only gives birth to him but then is fleeing for her life in the wilderness? I think one of the great biblical errors over time is that people have claimed that this woman is either A) literally Mary, or B) the church. Well, it's kind of hard for it to be Mary so how is it that she would quote run for her life thousands of years later when there's no record that actually happened in the historical record? It can't be the church because last time I checked, Jesus birthed the church, the church didn't birth Jesus.

At the very beginning of chapter 12 it says that this woman, that the stars bow down before her. You remember the story in the book of Genesis of Joseph where he had the dream of his brothers bowing down before him, the animosity that that created? That is a picture of what we know as Israel, that seed of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and we know that Jesus Christ, yes, Mary was that earthly vessel but just as the gospel began, that he is the son of Abraham, the son of David, we know that he is the fulfillment of that prophecy, he is the one that had been spoken of by the prophets for thousands of years. We know that Satan despised, has tried and attempted to destroy him not only in his earthly existence but even his own body, the body of Christ. The Bible also speaks that there's coming a day, it's there in the book of Revelation, what we call the end times, where what we know as the people of God, the Jewish people raised to the preeminence again, and what we know as the "wilderness experience" will be repeated.

Now I know what I'm about to share with you really doesn't have anything to do with Matthew 4 but I want to give you one of those possible biblical aha moments. Have you ever wondered why we have Exodus and Deuteronomy? I mean, shouldn't one telling of the story be enough? Why do we tell the story a second time? And if you'll read Exodus and you'll read Deuteronomy, you'll notice there are very important subtle differences. You say, "What is that?" Because the exodus is the experience of the Israelites coming out of Egypt, Deuteronomy is actually a prophecy of the Israelites during a period Jesus called the Great Tribulation when they're running from the Antichrist. Isn't it interesting, it's the same story a second trip. Unlike the first one, it doesn't last 38 to 40 years, it actually lasts only about 3 ½.

Why is this so important? Because when the people of God in Revelation 12 are running from the enemy of God, what does he do? He does the same thing that he did in the book of Numbers, he supernaturally feeds them. You know, there are a lot of miracles that are written throughout the four gospels, do you find it interesting that the only miracle that is in all four gospels is the feeding of the 5,000? That's it. Why is that so important? It's important because that's how God took care of his people in the Old Testament. For an entire generation wandering in the wilderness, manna from heaven; even in one instance, meat came supernaturally provided for by God. And guess what? One day he will do it again. In fact, you've also got the feeding of the 4,000 and then what I would refer to as the precedence of Jesus when he referred to himself as the "bread of life," that he alone was of substance.

So is it possible that when Satan tempted him to turn a rock into bread, he wasn't tempting him to the sin of gluttony but there is biblical precedence that the Messiah one

day will supernaturally feed his people. Hold that thought and let's go to the second one beginning in verse 5. We have the temptation to "come off the pinnacle of the temple." Now this is somewhat of an odd thing, particularly if you've never actually been to the Holy Land and seen the location, but let me give you kind of a perspective here. The Temple Mount in Jerusalem, that sacred piece of property, it stands about 2,400 feet above sea level and in its original condition had a spire that went some 450 feet into the air. You say, "Why is that significant?" Because if you've ever visited over there, particularly in certain seasons, due to its location, its proximity to water and its height, it is an area that is very well-known to, shall we say, have low-level cloud influx. In fact, one of the reasons that the temple was built in the manner that it was, obviously instructed by God, is it was meant to picture a passageway into the heavens, that the sacrifices of humanity that go in before the Lord, that that incense would go into the throne room of God, well, if the building itself extended into the cloud cover, do you see the imagery that God was giving them.

What is the lie that Satan gives? Notice what it says in verse 6, "He said unto him, If thou be the Son of God." Do you really think Satan questioned his identity? No. And one of the illustrations I love to use, when the Bible uses the word "if," you do realize many times it means "since." Let me give you the example that takes place in my life on a regular basis. "If you're in the kitchen, bring me back a drink." Is my wife questioning my being in the kitchen? No, that is a way of saying, "Well, since you are there, could you take care of something while you're there?" When he asked, "If you're the Son of God," please hear me clearly, Satan was not questioning the identity of Jesus Christ. He knew who he was. He tried to kill him as a baby. There's no question about his identity. What he is saying is, "Since you are."

What does he do? He confuses the situation. He actually, if you don't know this, he quotes scripture. This famous scripture that he quotes about "cast yourself down and the angels shall take care of thee," that is a quotation from Psalm 92. Now why is that important? Because he left out four very critical words, "in all your ways." Isn't that just like Satan, gives us just enough scripture to give us half the picture but not the totality of it? So what is he doing with the second temptation? He comes to Jesus after resisting turning the rock into bread, and he says, "Okay, since you're the Son of God, why don't you go to the top of the temple in Jerusalem and throw yourself off the building because, after all, the scripture says that the angels will take care of you." Notice Jesus' response, "It is written again," verse 7, "thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Why is this important? Because if Jesus Christ were to cast himself off the "spire of the temple" on a typical day there in the Middle East, his coming off that spire, he would descend from the clouds to the earth.

Do you see the picture? Why? Because in Revelation 19, what is the imagery that we're given? It was spoken of in Acts 1, remember the angels at the ascension of Jesus Christ said, "In the same manner that he departed, he shall in likewise descend." The Bible says in Acts 1 that the heavens departed and he went up. In Revelation 19, the heavens are going to part and he's going to come down. He is going to descend out of the clouds. When Satan comes to him and tells him, "Hey, why don't you just jump off a tall building

known as the temple, why don't you land and knowing the angels will take care of you," I don't think this is "the temptation to be a thrill-seeker." What it is, is the temptation to do what he's going to do in Revelation 19 in Matthew 4.

Which leads to the third temptation. Beginning in verse 8 it says, "He taketh him up to an exceedingly high location." Now that's interesting because what we know as the Temple Mount would have been about as high as you could get in the area of Jerusalem, and I think unfortunately at times we limit ourselves to that which is available to ourselves. I want you to understand who we're dealing with here. We're dealing with Satan who, by the way, used to be Lucifer that according to Ezekiel 28 was the cherubim over the throne of God, and one of the things that we've said, it's somewhat colloquial but it's true, that in his fall and in his resistance to God, he no longer desired to be number 2, he would rather, as the great literary work said, he would rather rule in hell than serve in heaven. We're dealing with one of the, if not the most powerful creations of God and God in the flesh. Do you really think they were limited to the simple mountain ranges in the Middle East? No. Why? Because what does he show him? The kingdoms of the world. What is the mountain that he took him to? Again, we cannot be conclusive but I would daresay this was a supernatural journey. You know, one of the distinctions the Bible gives you may or may not have noticed in the past, is there's a place on the south side of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem that the Bible refers to as Mount Zion with a "Z." In fact, that's the actual place where Zechariah 14 says the Lord one day shall descend and touch place on the earth. Have you ever noticed in the Bible when it talks about Mount Sion with an "S," the mountain of God, which is actually pictured in what you and I would call the "throne room of God." I don't know exactly where this high exceeding place was but I do know this, that if you want to see the kingdoms of the world, you've got to go higher than the mountain peaks in the Asiatic area.

I believe it was a supernatural journey and what does he offer him? He offers him the kingdoms of the world. Now does this strike you as odd? Not odd that he would offer it but odd how Jesus responded? Now I want you to think about it just from a pragmatic viewpoint. Why did Jesus not look him "straight in the eye" and say, "You can't offer that, they're not yours to give." But he didn't, did he? No. In fact, one of the things that is so intriguing about this passage is in 2 Corinthians 4:4 it says that Satan is the "god of this world." Interesting, Jesus did not refute his ownership of the kingdoms, what he refuted was to do something in order to receive them.

Then we have the option, will he worship him or will he not? Interesting that the one who is tempting, Satan, is the one who refused to worship and he resisted that initial sin. In fact, in Isaiah 14:12-14 what we refer to as the fall of Satan, he made this statement, and by the way, in his statement in three verses five times the phrase "I will" is utilized. Just note that anytime we start using the phrase "I will, I will," we're probably not headed the right direction. Nonetheless he says, "I will place," listen to this, this is the words of Satan in his fall, "I will place my throne above his." In other words, "I desire not to serve at the pleasure of but to rule over all." He refused to worship. Now let me define worship for you because rightfully so we often make it a synonym of singing and music which is rightfully so, but worship, at least my definition, is our willful response to a self-

revealing God, to be at his will, to be at his mercy, to respond to his commands and not initiate our own. What does Satan offer him? He says, "You can have it all if I can be the one in charge of you."

And of course, we see the response of Jesus in verse 10, he says, "Get thee hence, Satan, for it is written thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him alone shalt thou serve." Which leads to the oversight, the big picture here. You do understand that Jesus Christ coming out of the clouds and one day ruling the kingdoms of the earth is not an option. It's going to happen. In fact, in Revelation 11:15 there is this famous scene where it says that the kingdoms of the earth have now become the kingdom of our Christ. There is coming a time where Jesus Christ will descend out of the clouds and he will rightfully set his throne and he shall rule over what we know as the earth.

This is important because in Revelation 1:5, it speaks about Jesus Christ, the first begotten of the dead, it says the Prince of the kings of the earth. Isn't that interesting that in Revelation 1 Jesus is referred to as the Prince, in Revelation 19 when he comes back he's referred to as the King. What is the definition of a prince? A king in waiting. You see, all three of these temptations, nothing he's "asking Jesus to do" is what you and I would call "wrong." Eating bread even if you're hungry, particularly is not wrong. Jumping off a tall building, it may not be wise but it's not wrong. Obviously worshipping Satan, yeah, we see that as wrong but notice how it's precipitated by the "kingdoms of the earth."

So in summation, what's really happening here? Jesus Christ was led of the Spirit in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights. As he initiates his ministry with the impeccable timing that he often has, Satan shows up, and in my own vernacular allow me to share with you what I believe happens. He says, "Let's make a deal. How about all those things that we know are going to happen at your Second Coming, why don't we just skip to it? Why don't we bypass this whole ministry thing? Why don't we bypass this whole servant and serving? Why don't we bypass washing their feet? Why don't we bypass the cross? Let's just get to the good stuff, I mean, after all, you're going to do it anyway, let's just go ahead and 'jump to it.'"

Let me ask you a rhetorical question: what if Jesus Christ had actually done what tempted to do that day in the wilderness? What if he had instituted what you and I know as the Second Coming coming out of the wilderness? Then you and I and every other human being from Adam and Eve to you and me would have a destiny in a place the Bible calls hell. What was Satan doing? Satan was tempting him to do the right thing at the wrong time. Nothing he tempted him to do is anything he won't do at some point in the future but there was something that was in the way, you and I. You see, humanity had sinned, humanity had rebelled, and our eternity was at stake. You see, his eternity was already settled. Satan's eternity has already been set but ours, our destiny, our eternity was all in the hands of one who willingly allowed himself to come, to seek and to save and to serve and to offer his body and shed his blood, to go through all that he went through, according to Hebrews 12:2, for the joy that was set before him.



You see, there was no question in the wilderness whether Jesus Christ one day would supernaturally take care of humanity, supernaturally descend out of the clouds, and supernaturally inherit the kingdoms of the earth, that was prophesied years ago, that was going to happen, here's what was at stake, was he willing to spend the next 3 ½ years suffering at the hands of the ones that he came to save? You see, the temptation wasn't so much to get Jesus to "do wrong" as it was to get Jesus to not go through with allowing us the opportunity to be forgiven and to be saved. You and I tonight need to be grateful that Jesus was more interested in what we needed than doing the right thing at the wrong time. The temptation wasn't so much about him as it was about us, and tonight we need to be eternally grateful that he said, "Get behind me, Satan. It is written."

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe tonight as we prepare for our time of response, maybe tonight you're one of those here in person, or maybe you're online, one of those individuals that never really looked at the gravity and the weight of what Jesus Christ did on your behalf, his willingness to look into the face of pain and agony and misery and mockery and say, "Yes, they are worth saving." Maybe tonight's the night that you call on the name of the Lord. Maybe tonight's the night where you confess your sin condition and you ask him to save you. Maybe you're already a believer, maybe you're already one of those who said, "I had that conversation with the Lord years ago." Maybe tonight as you look at what Jesus underwent, maybe you see your own life, the temptation to do the right thing at the wrong time, to do that which the Lord has said coming and have it fulfilled in this hour. Maybe tonight is one of those nights to render a decision that will change the scope of your eternity. Maybe tonight is one of those nights to render a decision that changes your today and your tomorrow. Whatever the decision, it is the Spirit of God using the word of God that today will make us decide what we do on behalf of God.

*Lord Jesus, tonight as we come to this invitation, thank you that in spite of where we've been, who we are, what we've thought and what we've said, that your love for us, that your mercy and your grace is beyond comprehension. God, thank you that your love for us was so great that you were willing, God, you were willing to go through the crucifixion, you were willing to go through the mockery because you loved us so much. Thank you, O God, that your love for us was that great. May we honor you tonight with the decision that you've called us to. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*