

Introduction

Last week we laid the foundation for understanding the significance of the temptations of Jesus. He is proclaimed the son of God and tested accordingly. He is tested in the same way Israel as a nation was tested in the wilderness in order to identify with them as God’s son. He is the good and faithful son who identifies with faithless Israel. This testing prepares Jesus to be our tried and proven, tempted but sinless substitute on the cross. Triumph over temptation infuses richness into the statement that “God made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

This morning we turn to Matthew 4 to look at the temptations themselves, the nature of the devil’s enticements, and the triumph of Christ.

[Read Text and Pray]

I. Temptation Number 1 – Doubt God (3-4)

A. The tempter came and said to [Jesus], “If you are the son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”

Jesus had been fasting for 40 days and forty nights. He was weak and famished. We drew attention last week to the fact that the nation of Israel was also tested by hunger in the wilderness. It was to see what was in their hearts. Exodus 16 shows us what was in their hearts. The children of Israel had come through the Red Sea rejoicing over God’s great deliverance. Three days later they were grumbling about the lack of good water. The Lord took care of that. Two and a half months after departing Egypt they began murmuring again. They said, “would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full.” They said to Moses, “you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” The Lord told Moses he was about to rain down bread from heaven to test the people whether they would walk in his law or not. They failed the test of faith but God’s faithfulness was clear.

So here is Jesus in the wilderness. He is hungry. The devil suggests if he is the Son of God that HE turn stones into bread, both demonstrating his omnipotence and dealing with his hunger. And this seems completely reasonable doesn't it? You are hungry. You not only want food, your body needs it. D. A. Carson notes that the devil does not usually come and say, "Here is a great pig pile of moral manure. Wallow in it! No, he presents the temptation as something that is at least beneficial." I have certainly experienced this in my life. When I have fallen to temptation, I have caved to the deception that it wasn't all that bad. That outburst of anger was legitimate because the circumstances.

This is the approach the devil took in the garden with Eve. How could this be wrong? God is holding something back from you. Eve ate believing good things were in store for her. And now Satan is coming to Jesus in this first temptation not to go find a prostitute or raid an encampment. Just turn some stones into some bread.

However, the question before Jesus was whether to listen to the devil and doubt the provision and love of God, as the Israelites had done. To step in and miraculously provide for himself would in essence be a complaint that God the Father was not properly meeting his needs. He would be jumping in to take matters into his own hands. So would Jesus follow the example of Israel the nation? Or would he rather experience hunger if necessary to demonstrate his complete contentedness with and confidence in God's provision? Would he exemplify that he came not to be served but to serve? Would he exhibit complete trust in the will and timing of God? Turning the stones to bread would have violated the plan of God that Jesus set aside his power and only use it when the Father willed. Turning the stones into bread would have meant listening to the devil instead of listening to the Father.

B. Jesus was abundantly clear in his reply to the devil. He answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

By his reply, Jesus declares that bread is not the only consideration here. Life depends upon being nourished. You don't eat; eventually you will die.

But life also depends upon God's words, every word that God speaks. You do not obey God and you will die. Jesus' reply makes clear that obeying the word of God and the commands of God actually trumps eating bread for the body. He is refusing to turn the stones into bread because the words of God will not allow him to. What God has said is more important to Jesus than being physically alive. It would be greater death to disobey the commands of God than to die of hunger. Here is the heart of the tragedy that took place in Eden. Adam and Eve wound up with food in their stomachs but they were no longer alive. Their hearts of disobedience resulted in far more than just physical death.

The test for Jesus came down to this. What was more important, addressing momentary physical yearning and discomfort or obeying God. His answer to the devil from the scriptures left no doubt. The nourishment of life and strength of soul for Jesus was obedience. It is a point he also brought to light in Samaria. Jesus' encounter there with the woman at the well took place when he was apart from his disciples. Perhaps they had gone for food, for when they came back, they were urging him to eat. Jesus said to them, "Oh I have food to eat that you do not know about." And they said, "Really, did somebody bring Jesus something to eat?" And Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."

That is what Jesus is telling the devil here in Matthew. Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 8, to say to Satan, "Obeying every single word of God is more fundamental to life than eating bread." Carson said it this way, "The word of God is so important that if there is ever any tension between what the word of God demands and the apparent demands of the immediate physical circumstances, the word of God has got to win hands down every time."

C. This temptation of Jesus is repeated over and over in our lives almost every day. We are driven for a quick fix for all our desires and all our discomforts and all our problems. And we tend to view life on a terribly superficial level where what matters most to us is getting what we want when we want it. What alarms us most are inconveniences and annoyances that interrupt our schedules and plans and dreams for living life in this world. If we become sick, we want to be well. If we have pain, we want it

eliminated. If we encounter challenging circumstances, we want to get past them. Let's put that to the test. About which of these do you exhibit greater care—missing daily time with God or with missing a meal? Are your inward sorrows mainly due to your shortfall in seeking God and obeying God? Or due to the conditions of your circumstances? This distinction is at the heart of the devil's first temptation and Jesus' answer. Sometimes obeying God, alright many times obeying God, requires the sacrifice of our fleshly appetites. These points are the proving ground of faith. Do we trust God? Do we really care for every word that comes from the mouth of God or do we just say we do?

D. I heard of a sad turn of events a number of years ago in a solid church over in England. A very successful and seemingly doctrinally strong young doctor and his beautiful family had returned to the UK after a stint of missionary service in north Africa. They became active in the church and the young man displayed strong gifting. He was bright and insightful and was seemingly having an impact in the life of the church and the pastor and other elders led in bringing him into leadership as an elder. But the young doctor fell into an adulterous affair. Upon discovery, he resigned his position as elder. The church fulfilled their duty to minister to him and his family. They confronted him biblically, but he would not repent. Finally, they excommunicated him. It was a painful and sad experience in the life of the church and particularly for the pastor who had led the effort to place him in leadership. A couple years later, a friend asked this pastor about the situation. He replied that many hours of looking back and considering led him to believe that until the affair, this young doctor had never actually faced a decision that went against his natural desires. He was never really tested until this nurse came into his life. At that point he was tested as to what was in his heart. And it became evident that his true allegiance was to his own fleshly desires and not to the word of God.

When you embrace Jesus' reply to the devil, "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God," then you will be found determined to do what honors that word despite whatever sacrifice you may have to make. You do not doubt God. You actually believe that God's word is more fundamental to life than food itself.

II. Temptation Number 2 - Test God (5-7)

A. In this temptation the devil takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple. It is probably a visionary thing. But that is not really the issue. The devil tempts Jesus saying, "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."

Satan says, well if you are going to appeal to the Bible I am too. The devil is suggesting that according to the scripture itself, if Jesus were to throw himself off the top of the temple, God would preserve and protect him by angelic intervention. His sonship and Messiahship would bear incredible marks of authenticity. And what's more, Jesus could see it as an authentication of the love the Father has just professed for him at his baptism. "Does not the Bible say God will bear you up by angels? If you are truly his son and he loves you, then he will not allow you to hurt yourself. Put that thing to the test and see. You will not use your power to help yourself. How about this, 'let your Father help you!' I mean here you are in the desert all hungry and such. It does not look like the father cares for you. It does not look like the father really loves you. Let's just see. You can prove his love and his word right here right now."

B. Now what the devil is doing here, people do all of the time. They cite scriptures out of context to support whatever they want to support. They come to the Bible with an agenda and abuse it in order to support their agenda. They appear to be compelling because they quote the Bible, but they wrest the text from its context and derive conclusions that fly in the face of the whole of the Bible. Just a few weeks ago we had our conference on homosexuality. In the session on what does the Bible say, we noted one individual in particular, Matthew Vines, who says he has a high view of the Bible, but he is challenging the idea that the Bible condemns all homosexual behavior as sin. As we looked at the Bible's teaching on God's design for sex and his clear characterization of homosexual behavior as abominable, we were able to see that the only way one can come away saying the Bible condones any kind of homosexual behavior is that one brings it into the Bible from the outside. You can look at the Bible through the lens of your sexuality. For that matter you can look at the Bible from any presupposition of yours. But what you better do if

you want to hear what God is saying is that you better look at your sexuality or your presupposition through the lens of the Bible. And we all better interpret Scripture in light of Scripture.

C. That is precisely how Jesus answers the devil here. Whatever the assurances of protection that come from the mouth of God, it also comes from his mouth that you are not to put him to the test.

Putting God to the test is to become his judge. It is to call God to answer for himself as though he is beholden to his creatures who have a right to question what he does. I cannot imagine a more brazen expression of arrogance than this. This is the kind of attitude Paul attacks in Romans 9. There he asks "who are you O man to answer back to God?" Now Jesus is more than man; he is God the Son. Yet as son he submits to the Father. He listens to the Father for what to say. He looks to the Father for what to do. For Jesus to put the Father to the test is to turn the tables on the Father. It is to say, "You answer to me."

To put God to the test does not demonstrate faith but the lack of faith. It says, "I cannot trust God unless I can manipulate him." That kind of God is not the great and mighty and sovereign creator but nothing more than a pagan idol. And under the scenario of a pagan god, when we fail, it actually is not our fault at all but God's fault. When we live as if God is beholden to us, we make ourselves the center of the universe. And when we fail and fall and get into trouble and experience the hardships of our sin, it is God's fault not ours. Adam demonstrated just this kind of reasoning when God confronted him in the garden of Eden. The Lord said to the man, "who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit of the tree and I ate." Adam was laying the blame in part on his wife but ultimately it was God who gave her to be with him.

MacArthur rightly declares our responsibility. He writes, "Our need is not to prove God's faithfulness but to demonstrate our own, by trusting Him both to determine and to supply our needs according to his own will." (95)

Should we take risks? You bettcha! We should risk it all! Anything and everything to obey his will! Those risks are on his terms not ours.

III. Temptation Number 3 – Deny God (8-10)

A. In the third temptation the devil promises Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if Jesus will simply fall down and worship him. As Messiah and as Son of God, this is what Jesus is slated for. In Psalm 2, the Lord who sits in the heavens sees the raging nations and the kings of the earth plotting together to defy the rule of God. But he speaks saying, "As for me I have installed my king on Zion, my holy hill." To that Son he says, "ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession." Whatever Satan may or may not know, he does know that Jesus is set to be the king of kings.

So Satan himself offers that for which Jesus is intended. And his way to receive the rule is easy. It is not clear that Satan understood the cross was the way to the throne, but his offer had to be easier. It would certainly bypass discomfoting wilderness situations like the one in which Jesus found himself just now. Just bow down to him. Break commandment number 1 and all the nations are his.

B. Better, sooner, easier, and cheaper. That's what Satan always sells. There are several things we need to remember. First, Satan cannot deliver what he promises. This was a great big lie that he was feeding Jesus. He did not make the world. He is not sovereign over the world. He has neither the resources nor the authority to give to anyone the kingdoms of this world. He is a liar. He always offers what he cannot deliver. He is the father of lies. All you have to do to be caught is to believe him. And then you lose your soul.

C. Jesus for the third time now replies with what comes from the mouth of God, his word. It is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve." Worship derives from an apprehension and acknowledgment of worth in the one we worship. Worship expresses awe and fidelity and submission. You serve the one you worship. And here is a fact. You worship and serve someone. That someone is whoever you bow to you. It is whomever or whatever wins your heart. It is who or what you

love above all other things. There is a clear distinction between the God who created all things and we whom he created. God does not exist for us. We exist for him. He created us for Himself. We exist by his will and for his glory. He is the potter. We are the clay. Jesus himself protects the worship of God, and so should we. And by the way, the worship of God and service of God are the fountain of over-flowing, ever-increasing joy. To serve God is to rejoice in him. In his hand there are pleasures evermore.

How ridiculous to buy what the devil is selling. Yet we do. Don't we? Everyday we hear his commercials. Some days we buy his lies, but we are never satisfied with his goods. Praise God that Jesus was not conned. Praise God not just that Jesus was smarter but that he is better. Son of God? You better believe it. Perfect lamb of God? Not one spot.

And in this way he inherits the kingdoms of this world. It is proclaimed in Revelation 11. When the seventh angel blew his trumpet, loud voices in heaven were saying: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." Such rule and reign is not cheap or easy. The sinless lamb delivered himself up to Calvary's cross to die. He made Him to be sin who knew no sin so that those who are in him by faith might become the righteousness of God.

Concluding Exhortations

A. Love the Word. Obey the Word. Delight in the word. If there ever was one who delighted in the word, who hid the word of God in his heart, it was Jesus. Every word that comes forth from the mouth of God is a word for life. Jesus models for us how to deal with temptation. We must reply to every temptation with the word of God. It is written. We need to pack our arsenal with scripture to fight the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life. We need the word of God to fight the temptations to anxiety and fear. We need the word of God implanted in our hearts to take down anger and filth and disrespect. We need the word of God to guide us in the worship of God. Scripture memory is not an option. It is a necessity for doing battle with the deceiver. And we need to know it well as a whole.

B. Use the word on offense and defense. That's what Jesus did. On defense, Jesus took up the word in faith. It was a shield with which he extinguished the flaming darts of the evil one. He also used the word offensively as the sword of the Spirit. He said, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written. And the devil left and angels began ministering to him.

C. Be assured of help from this one who triumphed. The angels came to his aid. He himself comes to the aid of those who trust in him. Hebrews 2:18 says, "For because he himself has suffered when being tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."