

## THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS: SUBMISSION

Let's turn to Matthew 4, and continue our study of the temptations faced by the Lord Jesus. Matthew 4:1-11 reads,

1 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. 3 And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4 But he answered, "It is written, " 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' " 5 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.' " 7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 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." 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.'" 11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him. (Matthew 4:1-11, ESV)

**Jesus endured forty days of fasting.** We've already talked about Jesus' fasting in the wilderness. I'll just remind you that Jesus was suffering from extreme starvation and all of the physical effects of it.

**The first temptation was to put physical needs ahead of spiritual needs.** Jesus successfully resisted that temptation by putting His entire weight on the written Word of God, declaring that God's Word – and therefore God's will and God Himself – matters more than any earthly concern we have.

I really hope that this isn't the case, but if anyone here rejects that idea – that God and His Word and His will matters more than anything on earth – then you are starting off with a tremendous handicap, not only as we look at the second temptation today, and the final one next week, but as we continue on through Matthew. In fact, the Sunday after I return from California is Palm Sunday, and Easter Sunday is the week after that. If you believe that earthly concerns and ideals and hopes and dreams matter more than God and His Word and will, then you can't rightly understand Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. I don't think anyone here is in that state, but just in case, and because we record these messages for others, let me urge that person to turn loose of what holds you to the earth, and to cling solely to Jesus Christ as the hope of eternity.

TRANSITION: Satan didn't give up after one temptation. He took another approach, this time sneakier than before.

**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.' " (Matthew 4:5-6, ESV)

## THE TEMPTATION

**To begin with, Satan changes the setting.** Jesus was out in the desert, and suddenly He is standing on the pinnacle of the temple. The word pinnacle just means the extreme end of something, so it could have been the top of the sanctuary building, 90 feet in the air, or the southeastern corner of the Temple Mount, which stood 450 feet above the Kidron Valley. Many scholars believe that this was a vision; others believe that Satan had the power in that moment to take Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple. Either way, this was probably confusing and disorienting.

As we saw last week, we are vulnerable when we are weak or suffering. We see here that we are vulnerable when we are flustered and confused. A sudden bad diagnosis will fluster us and make us unstable. Virtually the entire world has become shaky and uncertain because of the coronavirus. People are getting panicky and chaotic. That leaves them open to various sorts of temptation.

**And then we notice that that Satan quoted from the Scripture.** Misquoted, I should say. This is Psalm 91:11-12, and the devil left out the second line of verse 11.

The devil handled the Word like many people do today, quoting just a phrase, a fragment of the full text. By eliminating even part of the text, the meaning is changed, and it is no longer the Word of God. The theme of Psalm 91 is God's protection of His people as He brings judgment on the nations. His judgment will not bring harm to His people. The wicked face the terror of the night, the arrow that flies by day, the pestilence that stalks in darkness, the destruction that wastes at noonday, so that a thousand fall on one side, and ten thousand on the other side. But as Psalm 91:8-12 says,

**8** You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked. **9** Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place— the Most High, who is my refuge— **10** no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent. **11** For He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. **12** On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone. (Psalm 91:8-12, ESV)

By deleting the second phrase of Psalm 91:11, Satan turned it into an immediate promise of miraculous deliverance from any sort of harm at all, and tries to persuade Jesus to use that misquote as a means of making God prove His love for His Son.

Now, what is the actual temptation?

The very last verse of Matthew 3 says,

**17** and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17, ESV)

But would God fulfill His promises? How does Jesus really know if the Father is still happy with Him? That voice did speak from heaven, but then came a time of intense suffering. Is that how a good father treats his beloved son? How could God do that? Was there actually substance to the Father's love, or was it just words?

Satan tried to persuade Jesus to believe that the Father's statement of love could not be trusted, and to make God prove Himself before He went any further. Putting it another way, the temptation was for Jesus to put His own emotional state above the Word of God.

We've all questioned God's love for us, and His willingness to follow through on His promises. He has forgiven those believe in Jesus Christ. Do you believe? Do you always feel forgiven? No? That's common to us all. He has promised to save the lost, but we see so many lost people that He isn't saving. He has promised that Jesus will return for His church, but it's been 2,000 years – where is He? The same temptation comes to us to try to make God dance to our tune, rather than submitting ourselves to His revealed will.

## THE RESPONSE

**7** Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” (Matthew 4:7, ESV)

As with the first temptation, Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy, this time from Deuteronomy 6:16. Let's take a look at those verses.

Moses was speaking to the children of the Hebrews who had been delivered from slavery in Egypt. Their parents had died by this point, and they were ready to enter the promised land.

Moses says that when they go into the promised land,

**14** You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you—  
**15** for the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God—lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and He destroy you from off the face of the earth.  
**16** You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah.  
(Deuteronomy 6:14–16, ESV)

Alright, then – what happened at Massah? Exodus 17 tells us that just a couple of months after leaving Egypt ...

**1** All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. **2** Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” And Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? **Why do you test the Lord?**” **3** But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” **4** So Moses cried to the Lord, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” **5** And the Lord said to Moses, “Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. **6** Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. **7** And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because **they tested the Lord by saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?”** (Exodus 17:1–7, ESV)

Things weren't going the way that the Israelites wanted them to, and so they felt free to test the Lord by questioning His faithfulness and His character. They felt completely justified in thinking, “If God were really with us everything would be easy and simple, life would be wonderful, and we would have everything we want.” How wrong they were! There are people who still teach such things, and they are just as wrong.

Coming back to Jesus, He rejected the temptation, against putting His full weight and trust in the Scriptures. He refused to doubt the Father's love or character. He refused to make the Father prove Himself. The love and affirmation of God had been declared, and Jesus rested in that truth even as He suffered from extreme starvation in the wilderness, even as He hung dying on the cross. He lived in complete submission to the Father's will, in spite of His own suffering.

## BRINGING IT HOME

Let's bring this home.

**First and foremost, Jesus did this for us.** He didn't simply live a righteous, submitted life so that we could be forgiven by His perfect sacrifice, but so that we would be justified by the Father through faith in Christ. That means that each and every sinner who believes in Jesus for salvation receives the full credit for Jesus' righteousness, including His faithfulness in this temptation. He DIED in our place, taking our death upon Himself. And, He LIVED in our place, so that we would be declared righteous with His perfect righteousness. That righteousness is the grace-gift of God to all who believe in His Son.

**Second, let's be clear that the Father doesn't lead us into temptation.** It wasn't the Father who put Jesus up on that pinnacle. It isn't God who whispers in your ear, urging you to give in to your desires. Listen, if you find yourself on a pinnacle, with the devil urging you to make God prove His love for you, it wasn't the Father who put you up there. You climbed up there by yourself, following Satan's lead.

We have this promise:

**13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man [Temptations are never one of a kind; you've never faced on that no one ever faced before]. God is faithful [And that's our hope and comfort.], and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability [We all have different vulnerabilities and different amounts of strength to face certain temptations. God won't allow you to face something that only a much stronger Christian could endure.], but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape [There is always a way of escape; always. Oh, we tell ourselves that the temptation was just too strong, and we couldn't help it. But if we are in Christ, we can help it; we just choose not to.], that you may be able to endure it. [We can endure temptation until the Lord shows us the escape route because we know that an escape route is going to be given to us. That hope keeps us hanging on until the door of escape opens for us.] (1 Corinthians 10:13)**

**Finally, temptation is a constant enemy.** It never stops trying to get around our defenses. As I mentioned last week, when Jesus quoted Scripture in response to these temptations, He was giving us a pattern to follow. The best possible means of resisting temptation is to know the Word of God, trust it, and cling to it tightly. And when all is said and done, we have a Savior, a Redeemer, a Defender, and a Friend in Jesus Christ.

**10** He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. **11** For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him; **12** as far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us. **13** As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear Him. **14** For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. (Psalm 103:10–14, ESV)

So Paul writes in Romans,

**33** Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. **[Charges of sin come from God and God alone; He will not charge those whom He has justified, because He has declared them righteous.]** **34** Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. **[All judgment has been given into Jesus hands (John 5:22); He will not judge those for whom He died and was raised and for whom He is even now interceding.]** (Romans 8:33–34, ESV)

Trust in the Lord! Remain submitted to Him. Don't second-guess His purposes. Stay faithful to Him and His Word. The uncertainty of the times – whether it's coronavirus or any of the other countless troubles – is no match for the promise of God to keep us and bring us safely to Him.