

# The First Temptation of Christ: Lessons from the Wilderness

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*Matthew, a Preaching Series*

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**Bible Text:** Matthew 4:1-11; Deuteronomy 6

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Matthew 4, are you there? So the first temptation. That's as far as I want to go. I just want to get into the first temptation. Bill probably expects me to do all three but we're not going to be able to do that because we're going to go back and look at Deuteronomy tonight and get into this. So let's set the context so let's look at your Bibles for just a moment. Let me remind you that chapter 3 begins with the ministry of John the Baptist. I want to remind you then that chapter 3 also includes the baptism of Jesus Christ, so begin reading in verse 13 of chapter 3 of the book of Matthew. The word of God says, "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him," allow it, or, "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Jesus when he was baptized went immediately," King James says, "straightway out of the water: and, lo," or see, "the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting," or landing, "upon him: And see a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

"Then," made the transition, "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he," Jesus, "had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward hungry. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. 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. Then the devil takes him up into the holy city, and sets him on a pinnacle of the temple, And said, 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. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and shews him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then said Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaves him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him."

*Father in heaven, thank you for the word. Thank you for the faithful people here who are in town and chose to come out for a Wednesday night service. Bless their faithfulness in Jesus' name. Amen.*

So let's get started. So the first thing I wanted to show you was credit where credit is due. This guy, Craig Blomberg, wrote a great commentary on the book of Matthew and it was very helpful to me in preparing for this lesson. Now, why do I show this to you? Because some of you are teachers and I want to commend to you the tools that others use. You know, any time you teach a lesson and you go alone, what I mean by go alone, you're flying solo, you can't find anyone to support what you think, you might want to stop. You might want to stop. Do you know what I'm saying? If you can't find anyone else to substantiate what you think, you know, this is your interpretation and you're flying without a copilot, stop and regroup and go back and look because there are a lot of brilliant men and women who have been studying the word of God for a long time, haven't they? And they've written a lot of stuff and it's for our edification and so our help.

So we read in the text the event that precedes the testing and the event that precedes the testing is awesome. It's amazing. What would it have been like for Jesus to hear, "Well done, thou..." No, he didn't hear that, did he? No, he heard, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Do you think those were empty words to him or do you really think he actually appreciated them? What do you think, church? Talk to me. Small group, what do you think? Do you think that because he's the Son of God it was just kind of like empty? Yeah, yeah, or do you actually think it meant something? Do you think it was incredibly encouraging? Do you think it was real? Do you think it was just as real? Can you remember when you received a compliment and it was just over the top? Can you remember a time and that really meant something to you? Can you remember a time when someone said something to you and, man, it was just so encouraging? Anybody at all, can you remember that time? Do you think this was like that for Jesus? Do you think it was? I do too.

So what happens next? Go right to the wilderness. Right to the wilderness. I mean, this is a mountaintop experience for Jesus. Have you had mountaintop experiences? Have you had mountaintop experiences? Man, life is good. God's good. I'm good. This is awesome. It doesn't get much better than this. And you just feel like nothing can keep you from walking with the Lord and you're on the mountaintop and then Monday shows up? Have you been there? It's just like, wham!

Notice the orientation here. Notice the wording there. Again, ignore the chapter breaks, those are just helpful for us. "And this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Then was Jesus led." Then. Then. Right now. Going right to the wilderness. The Son of God is going to the wilderness. He was led to the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted of the devil. Now, grab a hold of that in your mind. Deal with that for just a minute. "Here, come with me." Okay, I'm coming. "Get in there." Okay, did I create the visual for you? "Get in there." Who's in there? "The devil. Get in there." He leads them to where the temptation is. He leads them to the testing point. This is not like, "Okay, I was sinning

and I deserve this and this is a repercussion. You reap what you sow." That's not what this is. This is part of God's divine plan to get Jesus ready for more.

"Come on over here." The Spirit did what? Led him. Do you see the text? "You need to go right over here. God's got a plan for you over here. This is where you need to be right over here." And who's over there? Satan. Satan is over there. Devil, Satan, what does it mean? What does the word mean, the devil, when you say the devil? Adversary, what else? The accuser. The slanderer. This is what the word literally means. "Devil" literally means "the accuser of the brethren." Okay, so you've got this entity that's out there accusing the brethren. Just accusing the brethren.

Someone go and find Jonathan, please? Because he will know how to fix it. Have you got it? Let me try it again. Beautiful.

So I want you to see what's going on here. We've got the Spirit leading Jesus to the devil. Now, if all of us tonight are willing to be honest and if we're able to actually think tonight, I know it's late and 90 degrees out today and everything, we'll have to admit that the sovereignty of God and Satan's free will is one of the most difficult things to grasp. That is to say, nothing happens outside of the will of the Lord and Satan goes around doing evil and this shows you, this episode in this text takes both of them and throws them into the same chapter. Here is the Spirit of God leading the Son of God to have a period of testing from Satan. So this clearly shows you that Satan operates within the bounds that God permits. You could think of it like this: here's your box. Right here, this is your box. I mean, you know what book of the Bible would you take someone to to best illustrate this? Where would you run to right away? Job. You've got to go to Job. Everyone, Job. You've got to go J-o-b. You've got to go right there, chapter 1 and you realize that although Satan is bringing things into your life, Brother B., it's not there because he's a free will agent running amuck doing what he wants and God's over here going, "Woo, I wish he'd slow down."

No, no, no, the Son of Man needs to be tempted right now and tested right now and you're going to be the agent that's going to do that. Craig Blomberg writes, "Matthew warns against two common errors, blaming God for temptation and creating the devil with power to act independently of God." Both, two errors, blaming God for things that are not God or giving the devil this huge amount of power that makes him on par with God. In the New Testament, God is always disassociated from evil that he is never directly responsible for attempting humans yet the devil is never portrayed as an enemy equal with but opposite to God. So never think of God and Satan in the same boxing ring and they're going at it. Never, ever think of it in those terms. It's never like that. James 1:13, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. He tempts them to sin, that's not to say testing now. Don't get confused. This is very difficult. A temptation to sin is different than testing that will test your faith. I'm going to bring a trial into your life to test your faith. And James opens up with this which is just mind-boggling, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers trials." Various trials. "Knowing that the trials of your faith produces patience." Patience is not a great word here for us. Patience gives you the

idea of like waiting in line at Walmart. Okay, that's not what we're talking about. We're talking about steadfast, enduring in the faith. That's what we're talking about. A relentless pursuit of God. This is, "I'm committed." This is, "You're not moving me out of my walk with the Lord. Okay, alright, cancer came in, I'm still here, Lord. Premature death of my spouse, not moving anywhere, Lord. Still in the fight." This is not like, "I'm at the credit union and the line is long and I can just sit here." That's not the patience that we're talking about here. This is, "I've got my face set. I'm here for the long haul." That's what's happening here.

So we said already that Satan is the slanderer; he's the accuser; he is the deceiver and now Jesus has to go to the wilderness and why? Why? The wilderness and why 40 days and why 40 nights? Tell me. Why 40? Who's already been to the wilderness? Who has already been to the wilderness? Who else beside Moses? All of Israel, in fact, Israel is called God's firstborn and they have already had to have 40 years in the wilderness. They have already had a period of testing and trying for 40 years in the wilderness and now the Son of God must also go to the wilderness.

So when he had fasted 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry and I asked myself, "Is this possible from a human perspective?" Well, this lady right here, Rita, and it's Chretien, was a Canadian woman that survived 48 days with a little bit of trail mix. 48 days. To the glory of God, she made it. Her husband was never found. They were taking a trip from British Columbia to Nevada following their GPS, got off the highway and continued to follow their GPS almost blindly down dirt roads until their front wheel drive vehicle completely bogged out. It looked like a Chevy Astro or a GM Safari or something like that. After three days, he got out to go look for help and they never found him. 45 days later, hunters found her nearly dead but she was still alive and today she's fully covered. Of course, you know that this man right here fasted and struggled all the time with no food. So it is realistic, it is possible for 40 days.

So he was hungry. What does this teach us? The Bible says that he was hungry. What do we learn from this? He was hungry. What do we learn from that very simple sentence? What theological truths can we derive from, "He was hungry"? He was a man, right. He was a man. He got dehydrated, headaches, everything. All man.

So we get to the first temptation. "If thou be the Son of God, command these stones to be made bread." Now, this is not a difficult idea. Moses is in the wilderness and takes a stone and turns it into what? Water. Just strikes it. Water comes rushing out. John the Baptist told the Israelites, "God doesn't need you to be a son of Abraham. He can turn these stones into sons of Abraham." Okay, so this is not difficult. God can do anything he wants with stones.

So, "If thou be the Son of God, command these stones to bread." What's the temptation? What is the temptation here? Is it just feed yourself? Is that all this is or is there more here to this? Look down at your Bible and what does it say? "If thou be the Son of God, command these stones and turn them into bread." So what is the temptation here? Questions who he is. Abuse his powers. To quit. Weak. To go beyond God's plans. So

take matters in your own hands. Pride. "I'm the Son of Man, of course I should be able to do this." The way Christ responds helps us to understand the temptation. His response is, "Man shall not live by bread alone but every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." So God's mouth communicates God's plan. God's mouth communicates God's plan. Is that a reasonable idea? That God, through words, communicates his plan? So God has a plan for your life. God has a way. God has objectives, goals, guidance.

"If thou be the Son of God, ignore that and do this." Ignore that and do this. Now, where is he quoting from? He's quoting from Deuteronomy so let's go back to Deuteronomy 1 and we're going to spend the rest of the time there and then we'll be done. Parent, don't worry a bit that nothing, none of the noise is bothering me one bit so just relax. Deuteronomy 1:1. We're going to get to 8 but I want to show you 1:1 first. I'm going to show you, first of all, what Deuteronomy is. Deuteronomy 1:1, "These be the words which Moses spake." Do you see it? Do you see it? "These be," Deuteronomy 1:1, "These be the words that," who spake? "Moses." These are Moses' words. These are Moses' words.

So let's stop for just a moment and remind ourselves what is Jesus doing when he quotes from Deuteronomy? What is he doing? That's right, Jesus is saying, "That's the word of God." When he quotes from that, that's the word of God. When he says, "Have you not read? Have you not heard? Have you not written? Don't you know what's there?" He is, in fact, validating the authenticity of the text. The historicity of Moses is validated by quoting that. I don't go around in my sermon saying, "Do you know what Batman said? Let's talk about Spiderman and his amazing powers." No, no, that in fact would send a very confusing message to the children because in quoting him along with George Washington, what are you doing? You are what? You're doing something. You're mitigating George Washington or you're elevating the other. You're doing one of the two. You are either pulling Washington's quote down and marginalizing it or you're elevating Batman into an historical figure that has legitimacy in what he teaches.

So when Jesus says, "Was it not written?" Go back here and look at this, he says, "This is God's word. You can trust it." Additionally, by the way, I want to remind you that there is great probability that he was quoting from the Septuagint. The Septuagint, what is the Septuagint again? A Wednesday night crowd should all know what the Septuagint is. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, of the Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible. The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Tanakh so when we, in fact, hear Christ quoting from the Hebrew Bible in the Septuagint, not only is he validating the original manuscript, he's validating the authenticity of the translation. So not only does God preserve his word in the original text, God preserves his word in the translation process as well.

So Deuteronomy 1:1 are the words of Moses. In fact, you could organize Deuteronomy into three sermons. Turn to chapter 5. Chapters 1 through 4 are sermon number 1. Look at chapter 5, verse 1, "And Moses called all Israel and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that you may learn them and keep them and do them." Now, if time would permit and you had the ability to focus, I would start reading at chapter 5 and continue reading until we got to 8 so that you

would hear everything that led up chapter 8 because chapter 8 is where we want to go, but it's one continuous discourse. It doesn't stop. It just goes on and on and on.

Now, let me remind you, young people, let me remind you where we're at. We've already been to Kadesh Barnea and at Kadesh Barnea, two spies said, "We can take the land," and ten said, "No way." Young people, tell me, who are the two spies that said we can take the land? Somebody, a young person. A young person. A young person, okay. You don't fit that criteria. Those are days gone by for you, Greg, okay? Who? Joshua is one and Caleb. Joshua and Caleb. Thank you, buddy. Most appropriate. Joshua and Caleb are, "We can take the land," and the rest said, "No way." What happens? Judgment falls and we get what? 40 years of judgment in the where? In the wilderness. 40 years have transpired. We're all set and ready to go to the wilderness and Moses has got Israel assembled and he's preaching to them. That's what we're reading. Does everybody understand it?

So we are literally days away from starting the trek to the Promised Land. This is, "Hey, all you army guys." This is the battalion brigade division commander assembling the troops together before the major deployment. You're down at Fort Bragg. The stadium was a place that we often met down on the floor, up on the stadium. Everyone is around there and you're going to hear the final words of the commander before you launch. That's what's happening right here. So let's read the context based on that.

"All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do," why? "That you may live, and multiply," and what are you going to do? You're going to "go in and possess," the Promised Land, "the land which the LORD swore unto," Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph, "your fathers." And this is what you need to do, you need to "remember all the ways which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness." Why? "To humble thee." Stop. Okay, I do not want to be humbled. Let's just be honest. Who wants trials to come into your life for the express purpose, Danny, of humbling you? ("No one.") Down there, got a little uppity.

Now think about that. Grab ahold of that for just a moment. The Lord is concerned that I may become too arrogant. "I will bring trials into your life to take you down a notch or two." Did you hear what I just said? Not God is minding his own business and whatever is happening down there is happening. No, no, God says, "You're my son and you're becoming far too arrogant. I think a trial will help humble you." Obviously God wants us to be humble people. God is not interested in a prideful, arrogant Christian. Think what you know about the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Think what you know about them and think what sin does God most attack in the form of Jesus Christ to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. What does he most attack? The pride of the Pharisees and Sadducees and the scribes and the religious leaders who are, quite frankly, very arrogant dudes. Very arrogant dudes.

So obviously humbling them is an important component and he continues, let's read it, "led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart." Now, is God not sure what's in our heart? Is that why he's

testing us? Is God not sure? Of course not. This is to validate. This is to authenticate. This is to test what's in your heart.

Let's keep reading, "he humbled thee, and allowed thee to hunger." God let the children of Israel go hungry. God moved them to a place where there were no Walmarts, no Food Lions, and they were going to get hungry. My son most needs his mom right now three times a day: breakfast, lunch and dinner. He's almost completely unable to do anything for himself when it comes to...he's 19 years old and he still says, "Mom, are you going to make my breakfast?" As long as she does it, he's good to go. This is not much different. He takes them to a point where they're hungry and in their state of hunger, they need God. They need God.

So he takes them there and he says, "he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD." If you were wondering why we were going to Deuteronomy, now you've got it. That's why, because that's exactly what Jesus said. Jesus quotes one verse but let's remind ourselves, he's quoting that verse to an audience that knows their Old Testament well so he doesn't need to read the entire chapter to them. They immediately make the connection. Immediately make the connection. They know exactly where he's going. He's reminding them that God's firstborn, Israel, was taken to the wilderness and was allowed to starve, to utterly starve, to be without food and water and to be at a point where the only hope for life is if God does something.

Now, once again, almost like we said Sunday night and Sunday morning, we can't grasp this. We have food on every corner. We have food everywhere. We have cabinets full of food and refrigerators and freezers full of food and McDonald's has got food and KFC has got food. We can't even imagine what it would be like to be in the middle of a wilderness and have nothing.

In verse 4, "Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years. Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth me. Therefore you and I must keep God's commandments. We must walk in his ways. We must remain in a reverential fear for who he is. For the LORD thy God brings thee into a good land." He's reminding them, here comes the Promised Land. Listen to these descriptions: it's a land of brooks of water, of fountains, depths and springs out of valleys and hills."

Some of you know that we do a little bit of landscaping and Tuesday I took a day off and took a vacation and we worked and we worked all day and it was pretty hot Tuesday, I don't know if you were out but it was pretty hot. We worked right next to a pool in which children were playing in the pool, okay? Now, that's like about miserable, okay? We are burning hot and you're in the pool splashing around cool as can be. Now, I bring this to your attention here because if you've been in the wilderness for 40 days and this land has got streams and it's got brooks and it's got lakes and it's waterfalls, do you see where I'm going with this? That's a glorious land because you've been in the wilderness, brother. You've been in dirt on top of dirt on top of dirt. Dry, musty dirt. You breathe it in and you

choke. That's the kind of dryness that we're talking about and what is he describing? He's describing brooks of water.

But how else does he describe them? "A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey and you're going to eat bread without," what? "Scarceness and thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass." Bear with me one more illustration. I think maybe a few of you have been to Ranger's school in this room and they about starve you there, okay, that's the closest I can come to this. You go like every 20 days and you get like a four hour window, an eight hour window to be released into the public and you go and buy your stuff and wash your clothes. Well, the entire time, all you do is plan about everywhere you're going to eat, okay? "Okay, first thing we're going to do is we're going to go to Ryan's and we're going to eat at Ryan's, and then from Ryan's we're going to go across the street to the Wendy's and we'll get frosties. Then we'll do our laundry and then while our laundry is..." And all you do is think where you're going to eat for eight straight hours, okay? And you literally gorge yourself. Remember, folks, the children of Israel have been in the wilderness for 40 years and they've eaten manna and quail. They are so ready to be in the Promised Land.

Verse 11, stay with me now. Stay with me, "Beware." Beware. This is what I'm afraid of. I'm your leader. I've got a concern. "Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: Lest when you have eaten and you're full, and you're in this goodly houses and you've got the car in the garage and everything's washed and waxed and the air conditioning is running and the grass has been cut and the freezer is stocked and the refrigerator's packed with Mountain Dew and the refrigerator and the freezers have got the best of everything, don't forget the God who blessed you. Don't do that." That's his warning, Danny. "Don't. I know who you are. You're so prone to forget. You get in those houses and you get into that land when your herds in verse 13, and your flocks are multiplying, when your 401k plan is multiplying, then thin heart is going to be lifted up and surely you're going to forget the LORD thy God which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

How much of what has happened in America is part of God's divine plan to cause God's people to get back on their knees? Most of you in this room are old enough to remember September 12, 2001. Oh, my goodness. "Is there a God in heaven? We need you. We need you. 3,000 people lost their lives in a single moment in a single city. We need you God." But like the children of Israel, we have forgotten. We have forgotten and Moses says, "Remember. Remember. Remember. Remember. Remember. Remember." Where does he take them to? "Remember, remember who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness. What was in that great and terrible wilderness? There were fiery serpents. There were scorpions. There was drought. There was no water. Who was it that brought thee forth water out of that rock? Who was it that fed thee in the wilderness with manna?"

Verse 17, we're going to finish the chapter. Stay with me. "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth." That is disastrous. That is utterly, Thomas, that is disastrous. The moment I forget God's grace, two arms

working well, a mind that's sharp, energy to go to work every day, 401k plan is prospering. Let me tear down my barns and build new ones to contain it. If you've got three cars in your house, give God the credit. Air conditioning, give God the credit. Flat screen televisions, give God some credit. Money in the bank, give God some credit. A good job, give God some credit. Give it to God. Remember the Lord that did this. Don't forget who did this. That's the admonishment.

Let me finish the chapter. "But thou shalt instead," verse 18, "remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that gives thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he swore unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and if you serve the other gods, and if you worship the other gods, I," Moses says, "I, Moses, testify against you this day that you will surely perish." You say, "You're awful fired up tonight." I don't know how you could read this text and not be fired up. I promise you, when Moses delivered this sermon, it wasn't some monologue. I promise you he gave it with some emphasis. When you say something like, "I swear unto you," because that's what he said. "I testify, I swear unto you," you're serious about it.

You go over here into this land because remember, he doesn't get to go in there, does he? He gets to see it but he ain't going in so this is his parting word. "I'm not going to be there anymore. God has already told me. You're going to look but you're not going in, so this is my final admonishment to you. I'm concerned that you're not going to remember. I'm concerned that you're going to forget and I testify," I'll say it like this, "I swear unto you in the name of the Lord God that if you go into that land and you start serving those idols and you start worshiping those other gods, he will destroy you. He can think of nothing else to do but communicate the strongest warning he can think of. These are the only words that he can do. Jim, this is all he has. He has words to communicate. He's a father on his dying bed talking to his son, "I'm not going to be there. I'm not going to be leading you in there so I say this to you, son." This is Moses talking to his people.

"And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall you perish; because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God." Think about that. God destroys Amalekites so that you can have a city. Think about that. They live in houses they didn't build, Jennifer. They walk into granite countertops that they didn't put in. There are gardens built, brother, that they didn't till. There are wells dug that they did not dig. That's difficult for us to grasp. I want you to think about that for a moment and then we'll pray. God ordains that sinners build houses that his chosen people will occupy and they only do it for such a time as necessary. When the iniquity of the people is full, then you get the land so they build cities, Don, sidewalks, roads, lights, parks, water purification centers, libraries, municipalities, so that the Israelites have some place to live. His chosen people and he says, "I know how you are, you're going to get in there and it's going to be good and you're going to forget God. Don't do that."

Let's pray.