

## **“Overcoming Temptation” (part 1)**

Matthew 4:1-11

Robert Browning was a famous English poet and playwright who lived in the early 19th century. In 1888, Browning wrote perhaps his most famous poem, “The Pied Piper of Hamelin,” which was based on an old German legend that goes back several centuries. As the story goes, the little German village of Hamelin found itself completely overrun by rats. Every home, every shop, and every street was full of rats. These rats, according to Browning, “Fought the dogs and killed the cats, and bit the babies in the cradles, and ate the cheeses out of the vats, and licked the soup from the cook’s own ladles!” One day, an odd-looking stranger appeared, promising to rid the town of its rat problem should the townspeople pay him a hefty sum. He was quickly hired, and pulling a small flute from his pocket, he began to play a shrill little tune. As he played, the rats came from every corner far and wide. With curiosity, they followed him out of the town and into the river where they were all drowned. The townspeople celebrated, but the mayor of Hamelin refused to pay the piper his sum. Without saying a word, the piper left the mayor, took out his flute, and began playing different tune. This time, the tune wasn’t shrill, but was soft and low. In an instant, all the children of Hamelin came out of their houses, out of the schools, and into the streets. Much to the horror of the townspeople, all the children followed the piper out of the city and into a nearby mountain that opened up, never to be seen again. As the story goes, all but one small and crippled boy disappeared with the piper. Unable to keep up with the rest, he managed to escape and told the townspeople what he had heard. Based on his description, the piper’s tune was all about a land where all things were beautiful, where the people were friendly, where the rivers were clear and cool, where the flowers were brighter. In this magical land, the dogs ran faster, the bees didn’t sting, horses flew like eagles, and no one ever got sick.

The lure of the piper’s tune was virtually irresistible, and with his sweet and subtle delusion, the piper led the crowd to its own destruction. Hence the phrase, “pay the piper.” It has become a reference to bearing the consequences of one’s own bad decisions.

The piper is still playing his tune to a deceived generation! In his tune, he promises satisfaction, but provides only destruction. In many ways, Satan is much like the piper, and he plays his enticing tune through the use of temptation.

As the enemy of all souls, Satan is in opposition of all that glorifies God. He seeks to ensnare, to entrap, and to prevent people from coming to a saving knowledge of the truth.

**John MacArthur** - *“The devil’s single purpose is to frustrate the plan of God and to usurp the place of God.”*

Satan opposes Christ and His people, and his tool of choice to trip us up in life is the use of temptation.

**Proverbs 22:1** - **“A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favor rather than silver and gold.”**

The enemy uses temptation like a battering ram, hammering at the fortress of our heart until he can finally create a breach. All he needs is a small crack, a narrow opening, and this is all it takes to topple a life of honor.

Through caving in to the temptation of a moment, many have thrown away their testimony that took them a lifetime to build. It takes much more time to build up than it does to tear down.

These verses in Matthew 4 record an epic battle of all battles that took place between God’s Son and the tempter. From the passage, we come to learn several lessons about Satan’s strategy and the way that temptation was and can be overcome.

Several lessons about temptation emerge from the text:

- The TRIAL of temptation is common
- The TIME of temptation is coming
- The TARGET of temptation is character
- The TRIUMPH over temptation is clear

**Charles Spurgeon** - *“Some temptations come to the industrious, but all temptations attack the idle.”*

If we are not on guard and well prepared for it when it comes, temptation will be much harder to overcome. Thus, we must know the tactics of our enemy as well as the strength and victory that Christ supplies.

**Lesson #1: The TRIAL of temptation is common (4:1)**

*“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”*

How do we define temptation? What is it, and where does it come from? If you are a believer, then you already know full well that there is a constant struggle that exists between the two

natures. As the result of living in a fallen environment, the Holy Spirit who lives within the believer is at constant war with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

**Warren Wiersbe** - *“A temptation is an opportunity to accomplish a good thing in a bad way, out of the will of God...It is when we want to satisfy these desires in ways outside God’s will that we get into trouble.”*

- Eating can lead to the temptation of gluttony
- Sleeping can lead to the temptation of laziness
- Sexual desire can lead to the temptation of immorality

Temptation is opportunity to satisfy a normal desire in a sinful way.

We constantly are bombarded by the world, the flesh, and the devil. The world is like a pool of gasoline. The flesh is a match stick. The devil is the one who comes along and strikes the match, offering the temptation for you to create the explosion.

**1 John 2:16 - “For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world.”**

The enemy comes along and tempts us in one of those areas:

- “The lust of the flesh”--refers to physical temptations
- “The lust of the eyes”--refers to materialistic temptations
- “The pride of life”--refers to self-advancing temptations

A careful look at the way the enemy tempted Jesus in this passage will reveal that he tempted Christ in each of these three areas. Any temptation that you will ever face as a believer can be narrowed down into one of these three categories.

**1 Corinthians 10:12-13 - “Therefore let him who things he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”**

Someone might ask, “Why am I tempted? Am I tempted because I am a sinner?” The answer is that we are tempted because we are human. Temptation is common to man.

**Oswald Chambers** - *“The word temptation has come to mean something bad for us today, but we tend to use the word in the wrong way. Temptation itself is not sin; it is something we are bound to face simply by virtue of being human. Not to be tempted would mean that we were already so shameful that we would be beneath contempt...Temptation is not something that we can escape; in fact it is essential to the well-rounded life of a person. Beware of thinking that you are tempted as no one else--what you go through is the common inheritance of the human race, not something that no one has ever before endured. God does not save us from temptations--He sustains us in the midst of them.”*

**Hebrews 2:18** - **“For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.”**

Christians are not impervious to temptation. They are subject to it. Because Jesus has identified with us, He is able to aid us in our struggle. What can we learn about this common trial of temptation that we all face?

### **1. It involves a common STRUGGLE (v. 1a)**

*“Then Jesus was led up...to be tempted...”*

Keep in mind that Jesus came for the purpose of saving us from our sin. In order for Him to do that, He had to come and identify Himself with us in order to be our sufficient Substitute. This is seen both in His baptism in chapter 3, and His temptation in chapter 4.

**Hebrews 4:15** - **“For we do not have a High Priest, who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”**

The sinless Son of God was subjected to common temptation just as you and I are, but He was without sin. He overcame the temptation rather than being overcome by it.

Scripture is replete with examples and warnings of how we are to be ready for temptation when it comes. Such examples include:

- Joseph facing temptation in the house of Potiphar (Gen. 39)
- David being tempted to number the people (1 Chron. 21:1)
- Solomon warning about sexual temptation (Prov. 5)
- Paul warning Timothy about greed (1 Tim. 6)

**1 Timothy 6:9-10 - “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”**

Jesus even instructs us to pray in such a way that we are aware of temptation’s reality:

**Matthew 6:13 - “And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”**

Temptation is a common struggle that is a constant struggle. It often seems to creep up when we least expect it.

You don’t have to go looking for it; it knows where to find you.

By way of context, you will notice Matthew tells us that it was after Jesus’ baptism that He was led into the wilderness to be tempted. In other words, it was on the heels of a monumental experience of obedience that He was led into battle.

Here’s a good thought: Yesterday’s victory does not make me immune to today’s defeat.

Temptation is a constant struggle that demands we be on guard. The enemy never takes a day off, and neither should we.

**1 Peter 5:8-9 - “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.”**

Such is a two-fold admonition:

- “Be sober”--means that I am to be AWAKE
- “Be vigilant”--means that I am to be AWARE

Many are often overcome by temptation because they are not awake or alert and not aware of the enemy’s strategy.

David Jeremiah offers five simple tips for overcoming temptation:

- **Fight**--do battle; temptation is not the time for passivity
- **Follow**--look to the example of Jesus
- **Flee**--do not remain in the presence of temptation

- **Fellowship**--isolation only sets you up; surround yourself with fellow believers
- **Feed**--the Word of God is our daily bread for equipping us

## 2. It serves a common PURPOSE (v. 1b)

*“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted...”*

I find it interesting that Matthew tells us that Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted. In other words, the plan of God would have it to be so. Just like His baptism in chapter 3, His temptation in chapter 4 was necessary for the fulfillment of all righteousness.

It was the Spirit of God that led Jesus to the place where He would face the strongest temptation and struggle at this point in His life.

The temptation was permitted in His life. That is, God the Father allowed God the Son to be put in the position where He would face temptation.

Nothing ever comes my way that has not first of all been filtered through the gracious hand of God. However, this is not an excuse to go looking for an opportunity to be tempted.

**Illustration** - *“Don’t be like the man who wrestled with an addiction to Krispy Kreme doughnuts who confessed that his weakness wasn’t helped by the fact that he drove past Krispi Kreme each morning on his way to work. One morning, deciding to resist the urge, he said to himself, ‘I won’t stop unless there’s a parking place open at the front door. If so, then I guess it is just providential.’ Lo and behold, he found that open parking place, but he only had to circle the block six times...”*

Don’t allow yourself to be put in a situation where you know you will be tempted! Yet, you need to realize now that there will come a time when you will be in a tempting situation.

God does not tempt us, but He does test us by allowing us to be placed in certain environments where we are vulnerable.

**James 1:12-14** - **“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’, for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.”**

One of the best illustrations of how God allows believers to be tried and tested is the life of Job. God allowed Job to be tempted, but was not involved in any way in the temptation.

The enemy was given permission to assault Job's life. Rather than caving in to the pressure, Job's response was one of worship.

**Job 1:21-22 - "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong."**

**Job 2:10 - "In all this Job did not sin with his lips."**

God tests our character, but does not tempt us to sin.

When Christ-followers find themselves in situations where they are being tempted, it is an opportunity for them to resist the temptation to sin, thereby bringing glory to God and strengthening their character.

In this way, such testing can be purposeful in our lives, provided we see it as an opportunity to resist sin and reflect God's glory.

### **3. It comes from a common ORIGIN (v. 1c)**

*"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."*

Trials come from God to help us be strengthened, but temptation comes from the enemy to cause us to stumble.

**"Wilderness"** - *literally means the wild places*

Jesus was away from His family. Jesus was away from any who would be His followers. He was in the wild places to do battle with the ancient serpent of Eden.

**Russell Moore** - *"Author Barbara Brown Taylor recounts going to a seminar where a presenter talked about taking student groups out into the wilderness to experience in hiking and rafting 'the untamed holiness of the wild.' Brown writes that a participant raised his hand and asked whether 'there are predators in those places who are above you on the food chain.' The wilderness guide said that there weren't, of course, because he wouldn't take his students to a place where they would be so jeopardized. 'I wouldn't either,' the audience member replied, 'but don't lull them into thinking that they have experienced the true wilderness. It's only the wilderness if there's something out there that can eat you.'"*

There is an evil one who lurks in the wild places of this world, one who is bent on our destruction.

**1 Peter 5:8 - “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”**

**“Devour”** - *to cause the complete and sudden destruction of someone or something*

Satan is the destroyer--he destroys lives, he destroys homes, he destroys churches--and he dangles the bait through temptation.

**Platt quoting Russell Moore** - *“For a long time, cattle workers would forcefully push and prod cows into the slaughterhouse. For good reason, the cows would resist, and the whole operation would be extremely difficult to carry out. That’s until one particular scientist came along and pointed out that the most efficient way to slaughter cows is to make them feel ‘contented and comfortable’ as they enter into the slaughterhouse. In other words, keep the scenery the same as it is in the most peaceful moments of the cow’s life. In this system the cows aren’t prodded off the truck but are led, in silence, onto a ramp. They go through a squeeze chute, a gentle pressure device that mimics a mother’s nuzzling touch. The cattle continue down the ramp onto a smoothly curving path. There are no sudden turns. The cows experience the sensation of going home, the same kind of way they’ve traveled so many times before. As they mosey along the path, they don’t even notice when their hooves are no longer touching the ground. A conveyor belt slowly lifts them gently upward, and then, in the twinkling of an eye, a blunt instrument levels a surgical strike right between their eyes. They’re transitioned from livestock to meat and they’re never aware enough to be alarmed by any of it.”*

That’s exactly the way the enemy works to ensnare and destroy your life. He wants to make you as comfortable as possible as he slowly destroys your life.

He knows that each of us are on the very cusp of wrecking our life through one simple decision that is outside of the will of God.

GOOD NEWS: Our enemy is defeated. The Son of God overcame the son of sin, and went all the way to the cross to pay the price of redemption, and rose again from the dead to prove He is the One who now holds the keys to death. He imparts His victory and life to those who turn from sin and trust Him in simple faith.