

“Overcoming Temptation” (part 2)

Matthew 4:1-11

In the Australian outback, there grows a little plant called the “sundew” plant. It has a slender stem and tiny, round leaves fringed with hairs that glisten with bright drops of liquid as delicate as fine dew. Woe to the insect, however, that dares to light upon it. Although its attractive clusters of red, white, and pink blossoms are harmless, the leaves are quite deadly. The shiny moisture on each leaf is extremely sticky and will imprison any insect that touches it. As the insect struggles to free itself, the vibration causes the leaves to close tightly around it. This innocent-looking plant is really a carnivorous plant feeds on its tiny victim.

In many ways, this is how the enemy of our soul lures and ensnares us through temptation.

John Piper - *“Sin gets its power by persuading me that I will be more happy if I follow it. The power of all temptation is the prospect that it will make me happier.”*

Satan’s lie often goes something like this: “You will be happier if you trust your own ideas about how to be happy instead of trusting God and His Word.” He then offers the vehicle of temptation through which he offers us false hope and false satisfaction. What appears to be satisfaction is in reality poison that leads us to our destruction.

The account of Satan’s tempting of Jesus in the wilderness was observed by no other human being, and it is only through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit through the gospel writers that we are made aware of it. This passage is a very powerful passage that shows us how victory is won over the attacks and assaults that the enemy launches in our direction.

From verse 1, I have already pointed out one lesson that we need to understand if we are to ever overcome temptation--the TRIAL of temptation is common. In other words, it is a common struggle and one that we are all familiar with.

1 Corinthians 10:13 - **“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.”**

1 Corinthians 10:13 (Message) - **“No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; He’ll never let you be pushed past your limit; He’ll always be there to help you come through it.”**

From this passage in Mathew's gospel, there are a couple of other lessons about temptation that we need to understand:

Lesson #2: The TIME of temptation is coming (4:2)

"And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry."

Temptation knows how to find us. You can be all by yourself or in a crowded room, and temptation will still be a problem. You can climb a mountain or descend to the bottom of the sea, and temptation will still know where to find you. That's because temptation is inescapable in this life. As long as the followers of Jesus are living in this world, we can rest assured that we will wrestle with temptation.

It is never an 'if' but is always a 'when.'

Russell Moore - *"You are being tempted right now, and so am I. Most of the time we don't even know it. And in every one of those moments we want either to overestimate or underestimate the power of that temptation."*

We often overestimate temptation by having an attitude of defeatism that says we are incapable of resisting. On the other hand, we underestimate temptation through an attitude of pride that assumes we are incapable of caving in.

When temptation comes, we should neither overestimate nor underestimate its power. Instead, we should have an exit strategy, and that only comes through understanding how the enemy works and relying upon the power of God's Spirit.

1. WHEN the temptation came (2:1a)

"Then Jesus was led..."

Jesus faced temptation after a season of monumental obedience in His life.

Verse 1 sort of serves as a transitional statement, linking what had previously happened with that which is about to happen.

v. 17 - "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Satan then moves to challenge this through tempting Jesus.

It is often in the midst of making spiritual strides that Satan tries to trip us up. When we experience great spiritual victory, it is fair to expect that an intense time of testing will soon follow.

1 Corinthians 10:12 - “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”

Lest we ever forget, we are sinful men and women who have the propensity to sin in the most grotesque sort of way.

F.B. Meyer - *“When we see a brother or sister in sin, there are two things we do not know: First, we do not know how hard he or she tried not to sin. And second, we do not know the power of the forces that assailed him or her. We also do not know what we would have done in the same circumstances.”*

Never underestimate your own sin and the subtlety of Satan.

Consider the example of King David in 2 Samuel 8-11. In chapters 8-10, we read of his great military victories and successes. In chapter 8, he crushed the Philistines. In chapter 9, he showed grace to Mephibosheth, grandson of Saul. In chapter 10, he conquered the Ammonites and the Syrians.

2 Samuel 11:1 - “It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.”

David was in the wrong place.

2 Samuel 11:2 - “Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king’s house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold.”

David was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

2 Samuel 11:3 - “So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, ‘Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?’”

The way of escape was still available for David, but it grew more narrow as the lust expanded in his proud heart.

2 Samuel 11:4 - “Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her.”

Notice the progression of sin in David's life:

- Lack of diligence
- Look of temptation
- Lust of sin
- Lack of integrity

It has well been said that sin will always take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.

Success does not make us invincible. In many ways, it only makes us a bigger target. When we experience success, we easily forget God.

Alexandr Solzhenitsyn was a Russian novelist and historian, as well as a vocal critic of Soviet totalitarianism. Born in Russia in 1918, Solzhenitsyn was brainwashed by a state education system which taught him that socialism was just and that religion was the enemy of the people. Like most of his peers, he became an atheist and joined the communist party.

Serving in the Soviet army on the Eastern Front during World War II he witnessed cold blooded murder and the raping of women and children as the Red Army took its "revenge" on the Germans. Disillusioned, he began criticizing the Soviet leader Josef Stalin and in February of 1945, he was imprisoned for doing so. Solzhenitsyn was taken to the Lubyanka prison in Moscow, where he was interrogated. On July 7, 1945, he was sentenced to an eight-year term in a Soviet labor camp. While in prison, he converted to Christianity and resolved to expose the horrors of the Soviet system. Throughout the 1960s Solzhenitsyn published three novels exposing the secularist tyranny of the Soviet Union and received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1970.

Alexandr Solzhenitsyn - *"When things are bad, we are not ashamed of our God. We are only ashamed of Him when things are going well."*

Solzhenitsyn wrote those words to explain just why it was in that concentration camp that he first learned to pray. He turned to prayer because he had no other hope. Before his arrest, when things were going well, he had seldom given God a thought.

Alexandr Solzhenitsyn - *"The battleline between good and evil runs through the heart of every man."*

The enemy of all souls knows this full well, and he lures us to take God as well as our own propensity toward sin for granted.

2. WHERE the temptation came (2:1b-2)

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.”

First, the enemy attacked in a place of personal WILDERNESS.

Matthew points out that Jesus was in the wilderness, or wild places, when the enemy came and attacked Him. In other words, Jesus was in an isolated place and was away from everybody else--no family, no friends, and no followers.

It is often in the wilderness and wasteland experiences of this life that the enemy seeks us out.

We may often find ourselves in a season of discouragement or fatigue, frustrated by the circumstances of life. It may stem from:

- Problems at work
- Problems at home
- Problems at random

Lurking in the shadows of the wasteland is our enemy who easily recognizes that we are in a place of vulnerability.

Second, the enemy attacked in a time of physical WEAKNESS.

v. 2 - “And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.”

As a result of fasting, Jesus was extremely hungry. He was in a place of physical weakness. It was upon this weakness that Satan offered his first temptation.

We should know our weaknesses and limitations, because we can rest assured that the enemy does.

Where we are weak, Christ is strong.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 - “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three

times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

There is strength in acknowledged and surrendered weakness.

Charles Spurgeon - *"The way to grow strong in Christ is to become weak in yourself. God pours no power into man's heart till man's power is all poured out. The Christian's life is one of daily dependence on the grace and strength of God."*

3. WHY the temptation came (2:3a)

"Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, 'If You are the Son of God...'"

Through temptation, Satan attempts to launch an all-out assault on Jesus' credibility and role as Messiah. If he could be successful in getting Jesus to cave in, then Jesus could be discredited and become disqualified as our Savior.

Let's all face it--we are in desperate need of a Savior.

- Maybe you've one again said hurtful things to your spouse or to your kids out of uncontrollable anger.
- Maybe you're secretly wrestling with the constant struggle to want the approval of others.
- Maybe you've deleted the history cache on your computer yet again this week, promising that you will never access those pornographic images again.
- Maybe you wrestle with the constant pull toward some substance like alcohol or prescription drugs.

Why does the enemy tempt us so?

Russell Moore - *"Temptation is so strong in our lives because it's not about us. Temptation is an assault by the demonic powers on the rival empire of the Messiah. That's why conversion doesn't diminish the power of temptation, as we often assume, but actually, counter-intuitively, ratchets it up."*

Satan does not want Jesus to get glory through our lives.

The time of temptation is coming, and it is not a matter of 'if' but is only a matter of 'when.'
Since this is true, the followers of Jesus must be prepared for it when it comes.

How we can be prepared:

- Through keeping a constant FOCUS on Jesus
- Through remaining FAITHFUL to prayer
- Through a daily FEEDING upon Scripture
- Through constant FELLOWSHIP with other believers
- Through intentional FAITHFULNESS to the mission

Times of temptation call for desperation, the kind of desperation that drives us to the only place where we can find refuge from the storm of temptation--the nail scarred hands of Jesus.

Have you failed in your plan of your storm-tossed life?

Place your hand in the nail-scarred hand;

Are you weary and worn from its toil and strife?

Place your hand in the nail-scarred hand.

Are you walking alone thro' the shadows dim?

Place your hand in the nail-scarred hand;

Christ will comfort your heart, put your trust in Him,

Place your hand in the nail-scarred hand.