

## **“Overcoming Temptation” (part 3)**

Matthew 4:1-11

In our study of the temptation narrative found in Matthew 4, I have already pointed out a couple of lessons:

- The TRIAL of temptation is common
- The TIME of temptation is coming

### **Lesson #3: The TARGET of temptation is character (4:3-11)**

Beginning in verse 3, the enemy launches his attack on Jesus and is aiming at His character. He approaches Jesus and tempts Him in three different areas.

The temptation came just as Jesus was preparing to begin His public ministry. Satan structured each temptation, crafting them in such a way to weaken and destroy Christ in His mission.

If you carefully notice, you will see that each temptation progressively gets worse in nature, beginning with fleshly desire and ending with Satanic worship.

Upon taking a closer look at this passage, we see that we are tempted in the same way.

**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 enemy comes along and tempts us in one of these areas:

- “The lust of the flesh”--refers to self-gratification
- “The lust of the eyes”--refers to self-promotion
- “The pride of life”--refers to self-exaltation

At the very core of his strategy, temptation is the way that Satan entices us to call into question God’s goodness. You’ll notice that the enemy tempts Jesus to question His Father’s goodness in three specific areas:

#### **1. Does God PROVIDE? (4:3-4)**

*“Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, ‘If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.’ But He answered and said, ‘It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”*

The enemy always tempts us in the area of our desires.

**James 1:14-16 - “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.”**

Keep in mind that Matthew has told us that Jesus had been fasting forty days and forty nights.

**v. 2 - “...afterward, He was hungry.”**

Satan comes and challenges Jesus at the point of what He wanted. Physically, Jesus was hungry and His body craved food. Thus, the enemy sought to exploit Jesus’ human and innate desire.

The enemy tempts Jesus to turn stones into bread. He prefaces the temptation by slyly saying, “If You are the Son of God,” hinting at the fact that no Son of God should be as hungry as Jesus was and surrounded by nothing but stones and barren wilderness.

It was a way of calling into question the Father’s provision on behalf of the Son.

This is where Eve was deceived. Satan came along and suggested that God was withholding something good from her, something that, in fact, would make her like God.

**Genesis 3:1-6 - “Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’ And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’ Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband, and he ate.”**

Of every tree in the garden, God had said she and Adam could eat. There was one tree, however, that God had forbidden them to eat from. Thus, Satan used Eve’s desires against her.

**C.S. Lewis** - *“Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition, when infinite joy is offered to us, like*

*an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”*

Whatever the desire for pleasure is--for food, for sex, for approval, for fun--whatever it is you crave at the moment, once it is redirected away from the way God intends for it to be fulfilled, it becomes a master over you.

The pull of our passions promises satisfaction. But unless they find resolution the way that God designed them according to His wisdom, they are forever unsatisfied.

**2 Peter 2:19 - “For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.”**

Ultimately, in their search for fulfillment and never finding it, your desires can gain mastery over you. How does this work? Think about it:

- There is no amount of FAME that can ever satisfy the heart of the one who craves it
- There is no amount of FORTUNE that can ever satisfy the greedy tendency of the one who covets it
- There is no amount of FEELING that ever satisfy the cravings of the one enslaved by his or her sexual passions

Knowing this, the enemy constantly tempts and solicits us in the area of our desires. Satan always works in conjunction with what you want and crave the most.

**Russell Moore** - *“As you move along toward temptation, the demonic powers want to work in concert with, not in opposition to, what it is that you want...The lure of desire never shows up with suddenness. That would scare you away. The desires have to be cultivated little by little, until you are ready to give in to them.”*

For instance:

- Esau never would have thrown his birthright away had his stomach been full
- David never would have committed adultery while basking in the victory over the Philistines
- The rich young ruler never would have walked away from Christ had he understood that money soon fades

Through temptation, the enemy feeds us the lie that God does not and cannot provide for our desires.

As Jesus' stomach is no doubt growling in that Judean wilderness, the enemy whispers, "If Your Father truly loves You, why then are You so hungry?"

He then tempts Jesus to satisfy His desires apart from His Father's provision-- "*Command that these stones become bread.*" The fiend from hell says, "Feed Your stomach, Jesus. Satisfy for Yourself what You really want."

He then directs Christ's attention to the stones that surrounded Him and uses suggestion and imagination. He enticingly says, "What You need is bread, Jesus. But all Your Father has given You is stones."

In truth, had Jesus used His power to turn stones into bread, it would have been a rejection of His Father's will and a lack of perfect trust in His Father's provision.

Notice how Jesus responds:

**v. 4 - "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."**

The enemy desperately wants us to believe that man DOES live by bread alone, and subsequently structure and pattern our life after that sort of belief.

Satan wants us to structure our life as if this life were all that really matters.

**C.S. Lewis** - "*If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world.*"

For those who know Jesus Christ and seek their satisfaction in a relationship with Him, there is a vast table prepared on the other side of death, a table with every sort of pleasure and satisfaction beyond our wildest imagination.

**Psalm 16:11 - "You will show me the path of life; in Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."**

Jesus knew that He would one day eat plenty of bread in His Father's kingdom. Until then, He was willing to fully rely on the Father's provision.

TRUTH: Don't ever mistake the devil's stones for the Father's bread! Jesus didn't, and this is where He secured victory for us.

Satan's stones always lead to death. They can never satisfy the desires within you. Where others before Him failed, and where we fail time and time again, Jesus Christ succeeded.

## **2. Will God PROTECT? (4:5-7)**

*"Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: He shall give His angels charge over you, and, In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.' Jesus said to him, 'It is written again, You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"*

When Satan was unsuccessful in tempting Jesus to give in to self-gratification, he turns to a second tactic. This time, he tempts Jesus in the area of self-promotion.

**"Pinnacle"** - *roof that extended out over Herod's portico where the drop to the valley floor was some 450 feet*

In the first temptation, a desire already existed. In the second, the enemy attempted to create a desire. In the first temptation, Satan tempted Jesus in the area of instant food and self-gratification. In the second temptation, he tempts Jesus in the area of instant fame and self-promotion. And to make this temptation even more persuasive, Satan quotes Scripture--Psalm 91:11-12.

For Jesus to have followed Satan's logic, such a miraculous intervention of the Father on His behalf would have been a sure fire way to convince everyone that He was the Messiah.

It would have been a sign that many were looking for.

The enemy whispers, "You're not really getting anywhere fast, Jesus. Here You are, 30 years old, and yet You have no audience. You have no large following and no fame. No one even knows who You are! But if You listen to me, I can make You famous. You can quickly become the topic of conversation!"

The enemy often tempts us with popularity. He tempts us to live for ourselves and promote ourselves.

The enemy was questioning God's protection of His Son. Again, if He were the Son of God, why would He not? Why be alone in the wilderness when He could instantly be ushered into the palace?

It was all an attempt to keep Jesus from going to the cross.

### 3. Is this God's PLAN? (4:8-11)

*“Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, ‘All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! For it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’ Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered Him.”*

The enemy tempts Jesus in the area of self-exaltation. He solicits Jesus to give him worship rather than the Father.

The devil shows Jesus all the kingdoms of this world--Egypt and its pyramids, Rome and its power, Athens and all of its prestige. He offers them to Jesus in exchange for His worship.

**John 18:36 - “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.”**

Again, it was all an attempt to thwart the overall plan of God and keep Jesus from going to the cross.

**John MacArthur** - *“Satan was offering the world to Jesus on his own corrupt terms, not God’s. That which the Father promised to the Son because of His righteous obedience, Satan offered to the Son in exchange for His unrighteous disobedience. God’s plan in testing the Son was to prove the Son’s worthiness to inherit and rule the world. Satan’s plan was to draw the Son away from that worthiness by enticing Him to grab the kingdom the Father promised to give Him. Instead of enduring the long, bitter, humiliating, and painful road to the cross--and the even longer wait in heaven for God’s time to be completed--Jesus could rule the world now!”*

But as they are now, the kingdoms of this world pale in comparison to God’s kingdom. They are corrupted by sin, corroded with rust, and crumbling to the ground.

Not only does the enemy tempt us to embrace for ourselves what does not satisfy, he also tempts us to grab for ourselves what does not last. And it is all an attempt for him to receive the worship that ought to be exclusive to God alone.

**Matthew 16:26 - “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”**

Jesus didn't need the devil's offer! The Father had already promised the Son that the kingdom would be His:

**Psalm 2:8 - "Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession."**

**Revelation 7:9-10 - "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"**

Because of His obedience, the kingdom belongs to Jesus, and because it belongs to Him, it belongs to us! There is nothing that the enemy can give that could even come close to what is already ours.

Why trade that which is eternal for that which is temporal?

#### **Lesson #4: The TRIUMPH over temptation is Christ (4:3-11)**

**Illustration** - *"As the Union Pacific Railroad was being constructed, an elaborate trestle bridge was built across a large canyon in the West. Wanting to test the bridge, the builder loaded a train with enough extra cars and equipment to double its normal payload. The train was then driven to the middle of the bridge, where it stayed an entire day. One worker asked, 'Are you trying to break this bridge?' 'No,' the builder replied, 'I'm trying to prove that the bridge won't break.'"*

In the same way, the temptations Jesus faced weren't designed to see if He would sin, but to prove that He couldn't. Our Savior is tested, tried, and triumphant.

Jesus successfully responded to the enemy through:

- RELIANCE upon God's Word
- REPETITION of God's Word
- REGULATION by God's Word

We rest in His accomplishment on our behalf.

**Romans 8:37 - "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."**