

The Temptation of Jesus

Matthew 4:1-11

When I began talking with Brad about preaching this passage, the first thing he said to me was, you could talk about the dangers of fasting... If you fast, the devil is going to come to you in the desert and try to get you to throw yourself off of a cliff. When I mentioned it to a couple of my friends, they asked if I would just be talking about teleportation because it seems like Jesus and the devil are just zooming around all over the place. So clearly... I got very little help from them...

Most of our favorite ancient stories have a king or chief or leader or someone who saves the day. And this king is set up almost as a glowing, super-human, overcoming savior who mightily saves his people from some sort of enemy at the gates. These kings, these great leaders, even after death are loved and remembered with pride and joy – what they did, the success that they won, gives life and confidence to their people. The victory that the king wins, becomes a part of the identity of the people, and the king lives on. The great victories that are won by the heroes are not just attributed to those heroes... The people who they lead, the people who they save, take pride in the actions of those heroes. And those heroes become immortalized in a special way. On the tomb of King Arthur (the guy with the knights and the round table) it reads, “Here lies Arthur, the once and future king.” We have a deep, deep love for heroes. Just last week, my favorite soccer team, Barcelona, won a soccer tournament, and I felt like I won the tournament! The people take on this identity. Think of King David defeating Goliath. Forever, after his reign, the kings are listed as sons of David. Not sons of Saul, the first king, but sons of David, the first great king. Jesus is the son of David. The kings who were great, the Bible tells us they followed after their father David, and if they fall away, the Bible says they did not follow David! We love kings! Our more recent stories, my favorite stories, the Lord of the Rings, are full of great heroes. In the Lord of the Rings what is going on? Everything is going wrong, the evil, the shadow is closing in, but when the King, when Aragorn arrives there is hope, and the tree in the city begins to bloom again. When the king is revealed, there is hope. But what does that king have to do? He has to win the battle. This aching for a savior, this burning in our hearts for someone to save us, this love for these stories of kings and heroes is written on our hearts because God has put it there. We desire, we need a savior. All of these stories, all of these shadows are just tiny pieces of Jesus and our need for His saving. That’s part of what we see in this passage – the King is coming. And what I want to really drive home today is this – Jesus is our champion.

So let’s look at this passage together –

I want to start in chapter 3 – the baptism of Jesus, let’s just read that. Now, let’s notice what Jesus says to John – This is necessary to fulfill all righteousness. That is important later on. Please notice that. So what is happening? The Spirit comes upon Jesus and leads Him straight into a time of intimacy and testing. The ball is rolling; the time is coming; the kingdom is

moving. Jesus comes to be tested, this new anointed One, Heaven's Prince, is going to be tested. But first, He fasts. For 40 days He eats nothing. Now, He is hungry. Matthew drops one of those captain obvious moments... but don't take it for granted. Remember that the first part of Matthew is communicating that Jesus is God. Jesus is God's son, and Jesus is God. This has been communicated. But now, Matthew says that God is hungry. Jesus is also a human. Jesus is a person, both of these observations are important. Jesus is a man and Jesus is God. In verse two Jesus is man, now let's keep reading.

Last week, Stephen talked very wisely about the importance of reading this like the original hearers. Reading this story like the folks would have listened first. Remember that they were trying to make sure that Jesus was real. Persecution made them ask. Persecution made them wonder. Is Jesus really the Messiah? Is Jesus really our champion? SO with those things in mind as context, let's look at the temptations in order.

The first temptation: If you are the son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread. Friends, have you ever looked at something when you were hungry and thought, 'man, I'd love to be able to eat that.' I have. Maybe you haven't and now I sound crazy, but I definitely have. I remember when I would go hiking as a kid, and I wouldn't be prepared at all, so I would get super hungry, and I would just look around at all of the trees and plants and wish that I could eat them... I would suggest that God is fully capable of accomplishing this miracle, but realize what the devil said to Jesus. He said command these stones. Could you command stones? No. Only God can. This temptation is unique for Jesus. He is being asked to do something that only God can do. But Jesus' response is scripture. He quotes from Deuteronomy 8. He says, "It is written, man will not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

This verse in context, says that God brought the Israelites into the wilderness to test them and to humble them. Part of their transition from being slaves to being God's people was this trial in the wilderness. We know that the Israelites failed their tests over and over again. Jesus understood that part of His trial was through this hunger, testing, and temptation in the wilderness. He saw that there was a purpose in the testing. It was not mindless, it was not endless either. But if we rush our circumstances, if we rush the trial, we may miss out on the Promised Land that God has for us at the end. Unlike the Israelites, Jesus truly relied on and trusted and submitted to the Father in His time of testing. God had a plan, and He stuck to it. He submitted to it. He was who the Israelites were supposed to be. Like in the baptism last week, He is fulfilling all righteousness.

Also, this is an attack on His identity, not just His self-control and hunger. Look at what the devil says, "If you are the son of God..." You know what he's saying, we've heard it 1,000 times. The devil says, "PROVE IT". How many times have you heard the devil say this to you...? He comes to you in your doubts, in your questions, in your spiritual hunger, and he says... prove to me that you're real. Prove to me that God cares about you. Our response can be

this: “My faith does not rely only on the physical. It relies on the promises and faithfulness of a God that has spoken. He has called and chosen me, and I don’t need to prove anything to you.” The devil had a good strategy. Tempt a hungry guy with food after 40 days of starving. Jesus had a better return to parry this attack. He says, I don’t need your food to be satisfied. I trust that the Father will provide every one of my needs.

He won’t give in to this first temptation. He will not question God, and He will not rush through the trial by making it come to an end. So, no, to the first temptation. No Satan, I will not give up on God and my mission to curb my hunger. No. And from the stands, we cheer on Jesus our champion. So Jesus’ divinity and humanity are tempted here, but He overcomes.

The Second Temptation: Then the devil took Him to the holy city and 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 will command his angels concerning you, and on their hands they will bear you up lest you strike your foot against a stone.” Notice what he says again, “If you are the Son of God...” again an attack and an asking for Jesus to prove His identity. He’s asking Him again to prove that He is indeed the son of God. But he goes a step further here. Remember that Jesus has just said that He doesn’t live by bread alone, but on the promises of God, so the devil brings Him a promise of God! He doesn’t tempt Him with bread, he tempts Him with those words of God that Jesus already referenced. He brings Him Psalm 91. The Devil quotes scripture, but he is taking these verses from Psalms out of context. What the Psalmist is not saying is, “Do crazy, stupid, irrational things and see if God protects you.” That is certainly not what the psalmist is saying. He is not saying, walk out into the woods with a blindfold on and see if God keeps you from running into a tree. But essentially, that’s what the devil is telling Jesus to do. Force God’s hand. Make Him save you. Make Him show the people who you truly are. Put God in a corner. But no one. Jesus says, no one puts God in a corner. You shall not put the Lord your God to the test. So no, Devil, I will not make a name for myself by turning God’s power into a carnival trick. No, I will not. I will submit to the Father’s will.

Jesus Christ is the famous one. He is the one who’s praise and glory will never end, but it will not come like this, it will not come this way. He is our champion, and He won’t take any shortcuts, and from the stands we cheer on our champion.

The Third Temptation: Then the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory and he said to Him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

I don’t know what mountain this means... It seems to be not a physical mountain... Luke says, ‘the devil took him up.’ I’m not sure if you or I could see what Jesus saw... our brains probably could not take in what He saw. What the devil showed Him was the glory of all of the kingdoms of the world... When I think about this... I don’t know what it was like... but when I think about this, I think of this ride at Disney Land... I think it’s called ‘Soaring over California.

During this ride, you watch a screen as your seat moves and you feel wind rushing past you and you watch as you fly over Los Angeles, Napa Valley, the Golden Gate Bridge, the red woods, all over California and you see the beauty and the glory of California. Now, I don't know what this was like for Jesus, but that was the closest thing I could think of to what He might have experienced. He saw everything. The beauty of the world, and the devil offered it to Him without suffering. He offered Him the throne and the power and the kingdom without suffering for it. Without paying the price that Jesus was going to have to pay. He showed Him the kings and the kingdoms, the rulers and the powers, maybe they looked into the future. I don't know. But what I do know is that Jesus didn't need the devil. Is Jesus the heir of all things? Is Jesus the king of the universe? Is every person going to bow their knees and worship Him in the end? Yes. But what must come first? Suffering. Jesus must pay the price; He must die to buy back His children who have sold themselves into slavery to this devil. And Satan offers to Jesus, without suffering, the reign of the whole world. See the devil knows why Jesus is coming. He knows why He is here, and he will do anything to keep Jesus from accomplishing His goal. The Devil will try his hardest to keep Jesus from suffering and dying on that cross. Because he knows that is the end for him. Later, in Matthew 16, Jesus tells His disciples that He is going to have to die. Peter's response is – far be it from you Lord, this shall never happen to you. But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan. You are a hindrance to me.” The devil is trying to keep Jesus off of that cross. Jesus felt this tug, this internal murmur, but He would not listen. He was tempted, but He would not submit to the easy way. So His response to the devil is this, “Be gone, Satan. For it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve” Jesus' submission produces power. Jesus' humbling produces the worship. Jesus' love produces the reigning – and all of it to the glory of God the father. Because He submitted. Because He wouldn't cave to the devils tempting.

Jesus' response shows His complete commitment to God's plan. He is going to see this through to the end. He is going to suffer and die and purchase back the people of God. He is not going to take the easy road. He is not going to skip the steps. He is going to suffer and He is going to die, so that we don't have to. He is going to pay the price we couldn't pay, He is going to pay the debt we couldn't pay, and He is going to live the life we couldn't live, so that He can die the death we cannot die. And the worship will come. The kingdoms of the world will go where they belong – right under His feet. But not this way. Not through giving up on God's plan, but by seeing it through. So, no. No Satan, I will not bow to you. And also, Satan, why don't you get out of here. Why don't you just leave? And the Devil left Him. And from the stands, we cheer on our champion.

Jesus conquers the devil. He faces His toughest test yet, and He wins. He is our champion.

So what are we going to do?

First, I want to talk directly about the tempter. Friends the devil is not like the guy in the cartoons. The Bible gives us very few details about the appearance of the devil. We have

surmised for ourselves, and settled upon, for ourselves, a picture of the devil that is this red guy, with horns, a pitchfork, and a boiling pot... We think of him as coming to us with horrible temptations, dark things that we would never actually choose to do. When we think of him, he is not crafty; he is evil and unattractive, so we keep him far from us that way. But, I want to say, and I want to be careful saying this: It does not seem to me that he is like that. The devil certainly has evil for us, he certainly wants our harm, and he has come to steal and to kill, and to destroy. He is the enemy of your soul, he has been a liar from the start, he is the father of lies, he loves to ruin and kill, but I think he does it in ways that we often do not see coming. He comes in ways that are deceptive and attractive. He is going to lie to us about cutting corners, as we see with Jesus. He is going to lie to us about how to get ahead and succeed, as we see with Jesus. He is going to lie to us about love and acceptance, as we see with Jesus. The devil lies to us through our pride, through our ego, through anything that he can get his hands on. He asks us to trade what we want most for what we want most right now. Remember that he tempts Eve with her own identity – something she already has – he says, you will be like God. Eve already had as much God as she could handle! He said, have more! With Jesus, he tries to give a hungry guy some food, he tries to get Him to seize authority, and he tries to give Him His kingdom. But, friends. Jesus is the inventor of food, the most famous person in history, and the king of the entire universe. What does He need from the devil? NOTHING. I want to say the same thing to you, to my own heart: you need nothing from the devil. Everything that you are supposed to be, everything that you are becoming, everything that your heart has ever desired, is here, in the presence of God, forever and ever. If we will look the devil right in the face and tell him that we don't need a single thing from his hand, he has no power. We need nothing from that evil snake. Everything we need, everything we are, is found in the presence of our father God. And Jesus knew it.

Identity is always one of the questions and Jesus gives us a gospel response. Are you a child of God? Yes. Yes you are. Do you work to achieve that title? No, no you do not. You do not need to prove your child status. You were saved by grace, you are brought into the family by grace, and now you do not need to prove a single thing. Jesus was the son of God, the promised heir of the entire universe, the King of the world, and He had absolutely nothing to prove to the devil in the wilderness, so He gave up no ground; He trusted the Father. Now, friends, I want to take a moment and speak to those who may not have given their lives to Christ. The invitation is open. The door is open; He is calling. He has accomplished this work; He has overcome your enemy; He loves you and He wants to give this new identity to you. He can save you. He can be your champion too. I would invite you to open your heart; open your life to this King.

The second thing I would say is this, we must know the Word. Jesus' response to the devil was scripture every time. But the Bible is not just a response to temptation it is armor against it. It is armor against it. When we permeate our lives with the promises of God, temptation can't break through. Every time the devil comes at you with temptation, you can respond with a promise from God. Do you need to be bitter and angry and hurt because of what someone has done to

you? No, because you remember that God has promised to be with you always – never forsaking you. Do you need to lie and steal in order to gain notoriety and approval? No, because you know that you already have God’s attention – Jesus says that He knows the most intimate details of your life, you don’t need anyone else’s approval. Do you need to pursue money and possessions to find happiness? No, because you know that only true satisfaction comes from Christ. If we know the word, if we know these promises of God, what He has done for us, and what He is still doing for us, we can say no to these temptations just like Jesus did. We must know the Word of God. “Your word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against you. Also, I want to remind you of what Hebrews says about our champion. Because He has seen this temptation, because He has experienced this, He understands what you experience; He feels what you feel; His heart breaks for you.

But what I think the most important application of this passage is, is a commitment to looking at Christ *first* as our substitution. First as our champion. Looking at Him first as the one who takes our place. He is first our fighting savior, He is first the one who overcomes for us, He is first the one who fought the devil in the wilderness and overcame. Second, He is our example. Second, we follow. Second, we put forth whatever effort we have. But first, first, we just look. We just look at Jesus. He won the battle we couldn’t win, He paid the price we couldn’t pay, He proved He was worthy through His life, and overcoming this temptation is one of the key ways that Jesus is saying to us, “I can take it.” Before we can give anything to Jesus, we must receive from Jesus. Acts 17 tells us that God is not served by human hands as if He needed anything. Jesus does not need. We need. We must receive Christ’s righteousness before we can do anything of worth at all. Our righteousness is filthy rags. Christ’s righteousness is a robe, a crown, and a ring.

So often we want to say to Jesus, “Let me try. Let me prove it!” To that He says, “My child, I already won, the work is done.” We look at our sin, and we say to Him, “Let me fix this. You don’t need to see this, when I wrap this up, I’ll come and be with you.” To that He says, “My child, I already know. You can’t hide, but you don’t need to. I know you and I love you.” So often we are concerned with bringing something with us when we approach Christ, but one of the main things that I see in the temptation of Jesus is Him showing us that we have something to receive from Him instead of the other way around. “He became sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become his righteousness.” What Jesus did is given to us; what we have done has been put on Jesus. Remember Galatians 2:20: I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Like all of those champions and kings I brought up at the beginning, Jesus’ victory is imputed to us. His righteousness is imputed into us. When those kings won the war, the nation won the war. When Jesus beat the devil in the wilderness, righteousness that would one day be ours, was fulfilled. Jesus is our champion.

All through the rest of Matthew we will see this – and I would remind you of this as we see the rest of the ministry of Jesus – we are first to look to Jesus as our substitution and second as our example.

"THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS"

Matthew 4:1-11

Main Idea: Jesus is our champion.

The First Temptation (3-4)

Bread or Promises (4)

The Second Temptation (5-7)

Out of context promises (6)

Don't try to back God into a corner (7)

The Third Temptation (8-10)

Jesus needed nothing from Satan (9)

Jesus submitted to the father (10)

Family Life Groups

Sermon Discussion Questions

The Temptation of Jesus

Matthew 4:1-11

Main Idea: Jesus is our champion.

- 1) What are some areas of particular weakness that the enemy targets in your life and tries to gain a foothold?
- 2) When you are dealing with temptation, do you think of it as a spiritual attack, a physical urge, or some combination of both?
- 3) Can you think of a particular time that you have overcome temptation? What steps did you take?
- 4) What promises of God can you latch onto this week when temptation comes your way?