

The Temptations of Jesus

<i>Text</i>	Matthew 4:1-11
<i>Reading</i>	Deuteronomy 8; Exodus 17:1-7; Matthew 3:13-4:17
<i>Theme</i>	Jesus resists the temptation to disobey God and turn from the task God had given him.
<i>Purpose</i>	To show how Jesus resisted temptation and obeyed God so that he might save us his people.

It is not uncommon for us to go from a very good experience to a very difficult one, from feeling high to feeling low, to receiving positive encouragement from a friend and then later that day being severely criticised by someone else.

You could feel this change after having had you have a wonderful holiday and then going back to all sorts of problems at work, or having had a great time at the Family Camp and then going back to the normal routines at home.

This passage we have read describes the great experience Jesus had of being baptised by John in the Jordan River, and anointed by the Holy Spirit and commended by his Father. This was the beginning of his ministry, like an ordination to his office or a commissioning to his task.

But immediately after that wonderful moment the Holy Spirit led him out into the desert for a time of temptation and testing. The Greek word used here for tempted can be translated as tempted or tested. Both are true in this situation.

God the Father used this as a test of obedience for his Son - Jesus had to prove that he would be faithful to his task and that he would obey his Father's will and law. This was because Jesus came into the world as the second Adam. The first Adam was tempted and failed; now the second Adam would be tested and he needed to succeed. So God tested Jesus.

But Satan tempted Jesus. Satan knew all the prophecies of the Old Testament about the coming of the Messiah who would crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:14). He had been waiting for the birth of Jesus and, through King Herod, had tried to kill Jesus soon after he was born, but God had sent Joseph, Mary and Jesus into Egypt to be safe there (cross-reference Revelation 12:4).

With Jesus about to begin his ministry Satan came to try to draw him away from his task. Just as he had tempted Adam and Eve here he tried to tempt Jesus to disobey God the Father.

So this was a crucial moment in the history of God's plan of salvation; this was the first clash of swords between the prince of darkness and the prince of Light, between Satan and Jesus.

Satan was and is a very powerful angel. He was not afraid to engage the Son of God himself. We need to remember this for ourselves; never under-estimate the Devil, never dismiss him lightly because he is cunning and powerful, devious and tricky.

Jesus was in the desert for 40 days, which recalls the 40 days Moses spent on Mount Sinai, and the 40 years Israel spent in the wilderness, and the 40 days Elijah spent running from Jezebel. This pictures a time of testing and of trial. Mark's gospel tells us that Jesus was tempted by Satan throughout the forty days (Mark 1:12-13), but all that came to a climax at the end of that time with these three temptations described by Matthew.

1. THE FIRST TEMPTATION (verse 3-4)

a. The Temptation: "If you are the Son of God, then tell these stones to become bread."

As with the temptation of Adam and Eve this one concerned food. It reminds us that there are many temptations and sins associated with food and drink: greed, gluttony, a lack of self-control, over-eating and drunkenness.

Both Satan and Jesus knew that God had fed the people of Israel with manna in the desert, and had fed the prophet Elijah with bread and meat brought by ravens when he was hiding in the Kerith Ravine.

What Satan suggested seemed perfectly reasonable; "You are the Son of God and you are hungry; turn these stones here, which look like little loaves anyway, into real bread!"

Satan recalled the words of the Father at Jesus' baptism; "This is my Son"; "Since you are God's Son you can easily feed yourself - no problem for you!"

But this would have been wrong. Jesus had come into the world as the Son of God but he had also become a son of man; he had become fully human, made like us in every way; he had to be like us in every respect.

That meant that he could not use his power to his own advantage. He could work miracles to feed others – which he did – 4,000 one time and 5,000 another – but he could not work miracles to please himself or for his own comfort or well-being. He had to trust in God to look after all his needs.

Jesus would face this temptation again.

In the Garden of Gethsemane Judas came with a large crowd armed with swords and clubs to arrest him. Peter wanted to defend Jesus with his sword but Jesus told him to put it away. He knew he could call on twelve legions of angels to help him – 72,000 angels! – but he chose not to (26:53-54).

When he was on the cross the religious leaders mocked him; “If you are the Christ come down from the cross - save yourself”. He could have done that, easily, but he chose not to.

So right at the beginning of his ministry Jesus set a pattern he would follow through on: he refused to use his power for his own advantage because he had come to save others, not himself.

b. His answer shows this: verse 4 – “It is written: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

This is a quote from Deuteronomy 8:3 where Moses urged the people of Israel to trust in God to provide for all their needs. God provided them with their daily food, with manna, but he also provided them with everything else they needed. They had to realise that they were dependant “on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” They had to trust in God and rely on him.

Jesus himself taught the people this in the Sermon on the Mount, the first of the five teaching sections in this gospel: “Do not worry, saying, ‘what shall we eat?’ or ‘what shall we drink?’ ...for... your heavenly Father knows that you need them” (Matthew 6:31f).

Jesus knew that he had to do this too; he had to live his life and conduct his ministry depending on God. He had to trust in God, believing that God would provide for all his needs, physically and spiritually. His Father would look after him. Jesus had to believe this and practice this right at the beginning of his ministry and all through it.

2. Satan came to Jesus with **A SECOND TEMPTATION.**

a. The Temptation: Satan took him to the temple in Jerusalem which was the symbol of God’s presence and a reminder of God’s protection over his people. The setting was descriptive of God’s protective power for his people.

Herod the Great (37-4BC) had completely rebuilt the temple and this reconstruction work was continued by his descendants. There were a couple of high points on the temple, one of which was on the south east corner that looked down into the Kidron Valley below; the other was the pinnacle of the temple which was 15 stories high.

Satan stood with Jesus at that great height and said (verse 6), “If you are the son of God throw yourself down. For it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone’.”

This is very cunning. Satan says; “You trust in God to provide for your needs and look after you. But do you *really* trust him? Prove that now by throwing yourself down.”

This too was something that Jesus would have to face later on in his ministry. Again and again, especially towards the end, he would have to trust in God his Father and rely on him. Maybe he should prove, right at the beginning, that he *could and would* rely on his Father.

b. But Jesus refused to do this and again quotes the Scriptures from another passage in Deuteronomy (6:13) - "Do not put the Lord your God to the test" - where Moses spoke to the people of Israel. They had been complaining about the lack of water and demanded that God provide it! Moses warned them against testing the Lord. Instead they ought to trust him believing that he would provide for their needs.

Jesus wanted to trust in God and to do that all through his ministry as he went about doing his Father's will. Psalm 91 gives us a promise that God will look after us but Jesus knew that you cannot read a verse in the Scriptures on its own; every statement in the Bible must be read in the context of that passage, that psalm, that book, and in the context of the entire Bible.

The Scriptures also tell us that we must *walk in God's ways*, a little phrase in those verses that Satan left out of his quotation! (Psalm 91:11b) God wants us to go about doing his will and obeying his commands and seeking to serve him and he promises to provide for us and look after us as we do that. But he does not want us to test his kindness or to presume on his protection, as the people of Israel did when they demanded water.

God wants us to live wise, careful and responsible lives in obedience to his commands and to avoid unnecessary situations of danger. One writer says, "We cannot claim miracles when we court danger" (Farrar). To jump off the temple would have been a foolish action that would test God rather than trust him.

By refusing to do this Jesus again deliberately identified himself with us as humans. He had come into this world as a man to save his people and he needed to be a man, with all the limitations and restrictions this involved. He could not work miracles just to feed himself and he couldn't jump off great heights thinking the angels would catch him!

Here Jesus was obedient where Adam was disobedient. Adam did not trust in the goodness of God and reached above and beyond himself, but Jesus is content with his position as a man and is willing to be obedient to God's will.

3. THE THIRD TEMPTATION (v 8-10)

a. The Temptation: Satan then took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world. Luke adds, "in an instant"; it was like a vision, a panorama of the world and its empires and kingdoms. "All this I will give to you", Satan said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

Here Satan, in his pride and conceit, over-reached himself. Certainly he has great power; Paul described him as "the ruler of the kingdom of the air" and the apostle John tells us that "the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (Ephesians 2:2; 1 John 5:19).

But the kingdoms of the world and their splendour are not Satan's to give; he does not have that authority or that power.

Rather, "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1). "The Lord" there includes Jesus Christ, "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities" (Colossians 1:16). All this belonged to Jesus anyway!

So why did Satan say this? What was he suggesting?

Satan here offered Jesus a shortcut to fulfilling his task. The Father had promised that the nations would be his inheritance and the ends of the earth his possession. (Psalm 2). After his suffering and death Jesus would be exalted to the right hand of God and given all rule and authority and power.

Satan offers this to Jesus *now*, without having to go the way of the cross; he could avoid the suffering and the pain and the rejection that faced him; he could get the crown and avoid the cross.

"All you have to do", said Satan, "is bow down and worship me." This is a variation of the "ends justifies the means" argument; "You will achieve your goal but you can do that by a different method; but that's okay because you'll get the same result!" Satan offers Jesus a compromise solution: worship *me* this once and then everyone can worship *you*.

A similar temptation would be repeated later on when Satan, through Peter, tried to dissuade Jesus from his suffering and dying (Matthew 16:22). And Jesus struggled with this again in the Garden of Gethsemane when he asked if this cup could be taken from him.

b. But Jesus rejected this temptation

He refused any compromise, or shortcut and any disobedience to the will of his Father.

And he did not debate the matter of authority, whether this was really in Satan's power or not (which it wasn't!). He simply went back to the Scriptures and to the law, "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only", quoting again from the book of Deuteronomy (6:13). To worship Satan would be idolatry, a breaking of the first and second commandments.

Jesus was the second Adam; he stood the test and he won the victory. He stood the test as the representative of a new humanity, of all who would believe in him. Because he overcame we are given salvation; we are given eternal life in the Lord Jesus.

Verse 11: "Then the devil left him and angels came and attended him." He had refused to test God in the hope that the angels might catch him, but here the angels came and ministered to him.

He refused to bow down to Satan even with the promise of all the kingdoms of the world and instead chose to follow the path of suffering and death. After this he went to Galilee and announced that “the kingdom of heaven is near” (verse 17).

And after his death and resurrection he assured his disciples; “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” It was given to him by his Father because he was obedient to death, even death on a cross.

For his is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever.

Amen