

Jesus Defeats The Devil

Matthew 4:1-11

Key Verse: 4:10

“Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”””

Just after Jesus’ baptism by John, Jesus was led into the devil’s temptation. It was a test of Jesus’ faith and faithfulness to God. We all face temptations daily in our lives—temptations to sin against God in our actions, as well as in our thoughts, our desires and our words. How does the devil tempt us? How can we win over the devil’s temptations? Let’s learn from today’s passage.

At Jesus’ baptism, the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus like a dove and God the Father spoke, **“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”** It was a declaration to the world regarding Jesus’ identity. Thus far, Matthew has introduced Jesus as the promised Messiah, our Savior from sin, Immanuel—God with us, the King of the Jews, the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, and the Son of God. Still, up to this point, Jesus had not yet done anything except receive baptism by John. The only words Jesus has spoken thus far in the gospel are: **“Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.”** So what would Jesus’ mission be and how would he fulfill it? We learn from this passage more about Jesus, his mission, and how he would carry it out.

Look at verse 1. **“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”** Jesus was a human being, like us. At the same time, Jesus was anointed by the Spirit of God for his messianic mission. The Spirit of God guided Jesus. Jesus lived by the Spirit. Jesus listened to and obeyed the Holy Spirit. The Spirit first led Jesus into the wilderness. The wilderness is not a good place for a vacation. No one goes to the wilderness to get some good R & R (rest and relaxation). Jesus was on a mission from God. The wilderness is a place of desolation. Jesus went there, alone. Why? The Bible tells us why. It was to be tempted by the devil.

The word ‘tempted’ can also mean ‘tested.’ We usually think of being tempted as a very bad thing. However, to be tested can be a very good thing, since it often makes us stronger and wiser. If we pass the test, that is. James 1:12 says, **“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.”**

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Jesus was led to be tempted by the devil. Who is the devil? The Bible first introduces the devil in Genesis 3 as a crafty tempter and deceiver. Jesus called the devil ‘a liar,’ ‘the father of lies,’ and, ‘a murderer from the beginning.’ (Jn 8:44) He is also called ‘Satan,’ which means adversary, slanderer, and accuser. Revelation 12:7-9 describes the devil as a rebel kicked out of heaven, who leads the whole world astray, and who has a group of fallen angels on his side. He is the enemy of God and our enemy too. 1Peter 5:8 says, **“Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.”**

Then why did Jesus have to face the devil’s temptation at the start of his earthly mission? We can answer this question with a brief review of the Old Testament. In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve faced the devil as a serpent. The devil tempted them to disobey God’s command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Since that time, all human beings have failed to be perfectly faithful to God. This included God’s chosen people Israel. They fell into idolatry and disobedience over and over again until they were conquered and exiled. Not only Israel but the whole world has been under the power of sin and temptation. All have sinned. All, until Jesus came. At the start of Jesus’ ministry, he faced the devil one on one in the wilderness. Three specific temptations that he faced are recorded. Jesus teaches us three things through his victory.

First, we live not on bread alone, but on every word from God (3-4). Look at verses 2-3. **“After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”** Why did Jesus fast for 40 days and 40 nights? Have you ever fasted that long? I fasted once for 3 days. That was hard enough. Actually, when Moses went up Mt. Sinai to get God’s commands for Israel, he fasted for 40 days and nights. Fasting is a form of spiritual discipline. Though it weakens the body, it can strengthen the spirit. Fasting, praying and giving to the needy are spiritual disciplines that God rewards when they are done secretly before God. However, there is a danger that doing these things can make one spiritually proud, when they are done for people to see (Mt 6:1-18).

Jesus fasted for 40 days and was hungry. Actually, he was more like starving! At this time the devil came to Jesus and tempted him, **“If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”** As we know, God declared Jesus already to be His Son at his baptism. Was the devil tempting Jesus to doubt his identity or to prove it? In this remote place Jesus would only be proving it to himself. But Jesus knew who he was. How about us? Sometimes we may wonder:

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“Am I really a child of God? Does God love me or care about me? Why does God allow suffering? Is God really there?” When the Israelites came out of Egypt, they faced trials in the wilderness. They had no water. They had no meat. So they grumbled, **“Is the Lord among us, or not?”** (Ex 17:7)

Jesus had a definite need, not just a desire, but an extreme need. Without food, a man will die. We all have a few real needs, as well as many desires. The devil tempted Jesus to use his power to satisfy his need for bread and to do it immediately, right away. He made it sound like bread was the most important thing, the most urgent matter. Actually life is more important than food and the body is more important than clothes (Mt 6:25).

Still we need food to live. This is like saying we need money to survive. That’s what we are conditioned to believe. For example, bread is a nickname for money. But look at children. They have no money but they survive, because their parents provide for them. God is our heavenly Father. He feeds the birds. He clothes the flowers. Will he not much more feed and clothe us? He will, when we **‘seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.’** (Mt 6:33) So to Jesus, it’s really a matter of trust and priority in God. If we reject his word, it means our priorities are mixed up. It means we don’t trust God. Then the devil is keeping us in defeat.

Jesus trusted God. Look at verse 4. Jesus answered, **“It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”** Jesus said, **“It is written…”** Where was it written? In the Bible. Jesus absolutely believed the Bible. He didn’t quote the latest psychology or movie to defeat the devil’s temptation. He stood confidently on the word of God. If Jesus quoted the Bible and absolutely believed it, so should we.

Jesus said, **“It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone…”** Jesus did not say that man does not need bread. He said, **“Man shall not live on bread alone.”** Bread alone is not enough to live on. Rather, man lives on every word that comes from the mouth of God. We tend to think that we are self-sufficient, self-empowered. One may think, “I’m sort of like a machine that will simply break down or run out of battery some day. Until then, I’ve just got to enjoy my life as much as I can!” But I cannot extend my life or keep my heart pumping as long as I want to. Do you tell your heart to beat? No, your heart beats because God says, “Beat.” Why are you alive? You are alive because God said and still says, “Live.” God’s word keeps us alive. God’s word is living and active. For, **“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.”** (1 Peter 1:24-

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25). Every breath we take, every second we live-is God's mercy and grace to us, even to those who don't praise him.

Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 in his reply. The Israelites were tested by God in the wilderness. God gave them manna from heaven and tested whether they would obey God's directions in collecting it. For 40 years in the wilderness God provided for them. In this way, God taught them that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

Karl Marx thought that religion is like a drug, just to make people feel good. He proposed that man doesn't need God; he just needs enough food. With enough food for everyone, man can create a world utopia, peace on earth. But in reality, his theory practiced in communist nations yielded the most depressed, oppressed nations on earth. His theory failed since he did not accept, **"Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."**

Daniel and his three friends knew this truth. On a vegetables only diet, they looked healthier and better nourished than others who ate royal food. And they received from God wisdom and understanding ten times better than all the king's magicians and enchanters (Dan 1:15-20). Psalm 1 was penned by a godly man who delighted in God's word like a gourmet meal. He understood that the one who delights in God's law and meditates on it will prosper in whatever he does.

The devil tempts us to think that our worldly needs are the most important things to fulfill. We know this is not true. There are many people with plenty of worldly things who are still miserable since they do not believe, **"Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."** What is your most urgent need? The devil wants you to think that it is food, or money, or marriage. Many students study hard in the hopes of getting a high-paying job. They think they have no time to pray or worship or study the Bible. Still, they make time to party. Others put their careers ahead of God and ahead of quality time with their families. They do so because they believe that bread or money is the most important thing in their lives. It is the devil's lie. We need more than bread. We need the word of God. We need a Father-child relationship with God. This is what we need most.

Second, don't test God, trust God (5-7). Look at verses 5-6. Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. **"If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He**

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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.”

In 1956 French adventurer Leo Valentin attempted to fly using bird-like wings, jumping from an airplane. He died when his backup parachute failed. He was 37. Not many people are foolish enough to try to fly off a building. Then why did the devil tempt Jesus in this way? Surely with Jesus standing on top of the temple he drew a great crowd. If Jesus jumped and miraculously survived then many people would believe in him. This could be Satan's attempt to kill Jesus or to have Jesus divert himself from God's mission and plan for him.

The sneaky thing here is that the devil quoted the Bible, from Psalm 91:11-12. The devil is not afraid to quote God's word. He is not like a vampire who shies away from a cross or a Bible. The devil knows the Bible and can quote it. The problem is that the devil takes it out of context to misuse it for his own purposes. For example, in context, Psalm 91 says that no harm will befall the one who makes the Lord his dwelling and refuge. This does not mean however, that God's faithful people can never encounter harm, for Jesus did. It also does not give us permission to throw ourselves into harm's way to prove God's word to be true. Cults often misuse the Bible to justify strange doctrines or sinful behavior. **The Bible warns that the devil masquerades as an angel of light and his servants as servants of righteousness (2Co 11:14-15).**

Are you confused yet? Perhaps you should be, because the devil is smarter and stronger than you are. If you depend on your own strength and understanding, you will fail against the devil. The only way to defeat the devil is to have greater wisdom and greater strength on your side. In other words, we need the wisdom of God and the power of God. Jesus is the wisdom of God and the power of God (1Co 1:24-25). Jesus is the only one who defeated the devil. Jesus is the only one stronger and wiser than the devil. If and only if Jesus is in us can we overcome the devil (1Jn 4:4; 5:5:4-5). Hebrews 2:18 says of Jesus, **“Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”** Jesus is our help and salvation.

How did Jesus reply to this temptation? Look at verse 7. Jesus answered him, **“It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”** Again, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy, 6:16, which says, **“Do not test the Lord your God as you did at Massah.”** As mentioned already, the Israelites had no water in the wilderness and grumbled against God and quarreled with Moses. It was testing God, whether he would prove that he was really with them.

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It is not for us to test God or to tell God what to do. It is not for us to make our own agenda or convenient plan and then justify it with Bible verses. It is not for us to put the Lord our God to the test. God has the right to test us. Of course, it is good for us to pray: **“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”** We are not to test God, but to trust God. We are to believe his word not just in our heads but in our hearts.

Third, worship the Lord your God and serve him only (8-10). It seems strange that the devil would tempt Jesus to bow down and worship him. After all, there are very few Satan worshipers today. Let’s think about what this means. Look at verses 8-9. Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. **“All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”**

It could be that the devil was tempting Jesus with power to rule and dominate people. That’s indeed a temptation. Or it could be a temptation to get glittering, glamorous things of the world: all the nice things that money can buy, or fame or a great following. But Jesus wasn’t the political type, looking to win an election, or the fashionable type, looking for a new chariot. Then why would this even be a temptation for Jesus? As we know, God’s purpose for Jesus was to reign over the world as King of kings to bring all people into God’s kingdom by following Him. The temptation then was how he would fulfill this mission. The compromise the devil offered then, was not to thwart God’s plan, but to fulfill it in another way-the devil’s way, on the devil’s terms.

According to the devil, if Jesus just bowed down and worshiped the devil, then the devil would give him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. I’m not so sure the devil could do that, although there is definitely a lot of satanic, corrupt power and wealth available on earth. Of course to worship the devil would mean to fall into idolatry, or idol worship, a sin the Bible repeatedly condemns. Jesus had a strong response to this offer. Look at verse 10. Jesus said to him, **“Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”**

Sometimes we have to stop debating or talking with the devil and say, **“Away from me, Satan!”** When the devil is tempting us to compromise our faith and worship created things, we must resist him. We remember Joseph who fled from the boss’ wife, an adulterous woman who repeatedly tried to seduce him. We are to worship the Lord our God, and serve him only, not the devil, and not our

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sinful inclinations. Only the Lord our God is worthy of our worship and wholehearted service.

Apostle Peter's message to Christians is to be self-controlled and alert against the devil, to resist him, standing firm in the faith along with our fellow Christians throughout the world who are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. Peter adds, **“And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.”** (1Pe 5:10-11)

Apostle Paul writes that in our spiritual struggle against the devil, we are to put on the full armor of God: the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, feet fitted with gospel readiness, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. We are to pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests; to be alert and to always keep on praying for all the believers (Eph 6:10-18).

Jesus rebuked the devil, **“Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”** This was all the devil could take for the time being. So he left Jesus, and angels came and attended Jesus. Jesus would face further temptations. But he defeated the devil all the way to the cross. Jesus was **“tempted in every way, just as we are-yet was without sin”** (Heb 4:15). Jesus is the only victor over the devil in human history.

We are weak and foolish in our natural selves. The devil tempts us to think that our worldly needs and desires are most urgent. We are tempted to misuse God's word, to seek worldly power and glory, to worship idols, and to follow a way different from God's way and plan. We don't have a chance by our own strength or wisdom to defeat the devil. Then how can we win?

Is it enough to be able to quote the Bible? No, for even the devil can do that. It's good to know the Bible. But it's more important to humbly obey it. So many Christians today, myself included, can quote many verses of the Bible. And that's good. But that's not enough to defeat the devil. The devil can have a Bible study. But the devil does not humbly pray, trust God, love God or obey God. This means that we must not only have the word of God in our heads, but more importantly in our hearts. The devil does not submit humbly and joyfully to Jesus' lordship. So the victory is given to those who love God, trust God, humbly pray and obey God's will. The victory is for those who are led by the Holy Spirit of God, who love and

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obey Jesus Christ. May Jesus reign in each of our hearts and lives and give us the victory in Him over sin and temptations. May we trust God and worship and serve him only and wholeheartedly.