

The Gospel of Matthew

Title: The Temptation

Text: Matthew 4:1-11

INTRODUCTION: Since the fall in the Garden of Eden, temptation has been a constant, unrelenting part of human life. Men have tried to avoid it by confining themselves to solitary places, and from physical comforts in an effort to avoid temptation. But no one has ever found such a place. A fifth century Christian wrote *"Fly from all occasions of temptation, and if still tempted, fly further still. If there is no escape possible, then have done with running away and show a bold face and take a two edged sword of the Spirit. Some temptations must be taken by the throat as David killed the lion; others must be stifled as David hugged the bear to death. Some you had better keep to yourselves and not give air. Shut them up as a scorpion in a bottle. Scorpions in such confinement die soon, but if allowed out for a crawl and then put back into the bottle and corked down, they will live a long while and give you trouble. Keep the cork on your temptations, and they will die themselves."*

Jesus faced the full force of Satan's wrath, deception, yet remained untouched and uncontaminated. We are shown here in our text the way to escape and remain faithful to God. Side by side we are shown the way of danger and the way of escape. The way that leads to defeat and death and the way that leads to life and victory, in short the way of Satan and of God.¹ We also have a pattern by Matthew to demonstrate victory of sin and temptation. We can have victory over Satan's deception and wiles.

POINT #1 - THE PREPARATION. God is not surprised at Satan's temptations. This took place after the baptism of Jesus, the anointing of God, the well pleased statement of God and Mark makes a very less detailed account of Matthew but we see the immediate fact that occurred after His baptism, Mark 1:12-13 *"Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. ¹³ And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him."*² Let's remind ourselves of 1 Corinthians 10:12 *"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall."* Let us be careful however, often after we have succeeded at something, we are tempted to think it's our own power and self will. When we are most exhilarated with success, that's when we are most likely to failure and pride.

¹ The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 1-7, pp. 85

² NKJV

The Gospel of Matthew

Elijah who had tremendous victory over the prophets of Baal, rain sent to drought stricken Judah, but less than a day later he asked the Lord to take his life because of the threats of Jezebel.

1A - The most common name for Satan is the Devil. The word means "*accuser or slanderer*". He is also the ruler of the world, the prince and power of the air, the god of this world, the serpent of old and the deceiver of the world. Many Christians do not believe in a personal devil. The devil is not like God, he cannot be in more than one place at one time per say. But he has minions and demons doing his work. It was Martin Luther that once said the devil seems so real he threw an ink well at him. Satan was cast out of heaven by the Lord and Satan's full fury has been turned against God and His work.

- The devil's single purpose is to frustrate the plan of God
- He attacks Christ and all who belong to Him
- He pursues every effort to keep others from coming to Christ

1B - Temptations did not catch God by surprise. The Greek word is a morally neutral word which mean *to test*. Whether the testing is for good or evil depends on the one giving the test. When the tempting is for one to do evil we get the english translation *tempt*. For example in Genesis 22:1 God tested Abraham, but not with evil, but good. Many early english translations used the word *tempt* which in today's culture we would naturally think negatively upon.

Temptations are a means of growing our faith and trust in God. Yet, even God uses satan's own evil ways and attempts for our good. Satan intends for disobedience and sin, God intends for obedience and holiness. Cf. James 1:2-4, 13-14

- Joseph was sold into slavery, false accusations, imprisonments and forgotten about. But God used all of this for good, Genesis 50:20 "**But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good...**"³.

1C - The preparation for any temptation. Jesus spend 40 days and night communing with the Father, no water or drink. Even in His perfect humanity, Jesus needed time for thought and prayer, as we all do. To say that Jesus was hungry after this time is an understatement. But time in prayer, fasting, and in God's word is essential to being prepared for battle. Paul spent three years in an Arabian desert with the Lord. Galatians 1:15-18 "**But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was**

³ NKJV

The Gospel of Matthew

pleased ¹⁶ to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. ¹⁸ Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days."

- Satan attacks most fiercely in times of weakness and unpreparedness
- Temptations that have been anticipated, guarded against and prayed about have little power over us, Mark 4:38 "Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation."

Experts say that if you are traveling in tiger country, you will not be attacked if you see the tiger before it sees you. Tiger attacks are from behind to surprise their victims.

POINT #2 - The Temptation Itself. The tempter, as one of the ways he is known, we aren't told in what form he came. But the confrontation was direct and personal.

2A - Self serving temptation. Satan's first approach to Jesus was the same approach that was used to Eve. It was to cast doubt upon God's word. The statement "If you are the Son of God" questions everything God said. Satan was hoping to persuade Jesus to demonstrate His power to verify it was real.⁴ Satan wanted Jesus to disobey God and His will. Let's remember Genesis 3:1 "Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, Indeed, has God said, You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?" We must remember the word's of God. When we doubt God's word and His promises, we find ourselves sinning and being disobedient to Him. Jesus was mocked on the cross "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matthew 27:40).

2B - Satan went after His weakness, hunger. Don't go to the grocery store hungry! The temptation of turning stones into bread wasn't just to satisfy His hunger, it was to doubt God's plan. The Son of God shouldn't be treated this way! The object of this temptation was for Jesus to fulfill His legitimate physical needs by a miraculous power, thus, disobeying God. In essence, our temptations are often geared towards disobeying God's commands, and are a direct result of the devil and his minions.

2C - Jesus' response and purpose. Jesus came to do the Father's will. Period. Satan tried to shatter the absolute trust and submission Jesus had. He tried to fracture the nature of God.

⁴ The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 1-7, pp. 90

The Gospel of Matthew

The response is one we must do as well, "It is written". Psalms 119:11 "Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee." Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 declaring we are better off to obey God and depend on God, waiting on His provision, than to grab short, temporal satisfaction.

God's people are never justified in complaining and worrying about their needs. If we live by faith in Him, and obedience to His word, we will never lack anything. Philippians 4:19 "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Matthew 6:8a "for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." It is not food, Jesus says, that's the most important part of life. It's the sustaining power of God that is. He provides food. He provides shelter. He provides a means and a way that seems impossible for the world. Cf. James 4:14-15