

## Lessons From The Temptations of Christ

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### Matthew 4:1-11

Read vv. 1-2 before the introductory narrative

Temptation and assaults by the devil are experienced by the people of God every day. As long as we live on this earth, we will be susceptible to this curse. Every day our old nature proves to us that it is essentially unchanged because we witness it lusting after the carnal things continuously. We notice that within our flesh dwelleth no good thing, and too often that which we would not do we discover that we do anyway. More than that, we too often find that the right things which we would do, we do not do. This is the way of the flesh and we are hindered in our forward spiritual progress by it. The rebellion of our flesh is helped along by Satan's unrelenting attack against us. He knows what humans are tempted by, and he has mastered the art of tempting them.

Because our Lord knew that temptations from the devil would be many and frequent, He wanted us to have an account of His confrontation with the master of temptations. I believe in this encounter, He had presented to him every class of temptation that comes to humans. Although we only see three attempts by the devil to persuade the Lord, I believe that those three contain every type of temptation that humans can know. I want us to examine them and see what we may learn from our Lord's flawless handling of them all. I won't pretend in this study to cover every nuance of every temptation the devil comes to people with, but I do hope to cover every temptation type or class. And as we think about Christ's confrontation of every kind of temptation here we can more clearly understand the statement in scripture in Heb 4:15: "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was **in all points tempted like as we are**, yet without sin."

As we go through this study, may the Holy Spirit help us to learn about temptation and how we should confront it ourselves to the glory of the Lord.

### I. Temptations Related to the Body and Its Needs or Wants

❖ **Mat 4:1-4** Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted

of the devil. 2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. 3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. 4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

- Needs and wants of the body are powerful drives, and the mind is inextricably connected with bodily requirements. It is the mind that tells us we are hungry, thirsty, etc. by interpreting the demand of the body for something to sustain itself. Those bodily needs, wants or drives interpret through the mind, and things like hunger, thirst, a need or want to be warm, a need or want to be cool, a need or want to be generally comfortable can send the mind ricocheting off in all directions with all kinds of imaginings. The worst part of this danger of our mind becoming a loose cannon is that when it happens we are in a mental and emotional place to become dupes to the devil's temptation.
- Let's take the example before us and look at the potential temptations in it. We'll use human responses to such an experience like Jesus is going through here with 40 days without food that he has just endured:
  - "I don't think I'm going to make it if I don't get some food" (fear of death or physical failure)
  - I want to show you something about this portal to temptation (fear of death or physical failure) that the bible reveals to us. I'm going to introduce this in the context it is given to us in scripture; that is, where the bible explains the role of Christ in freeing us from bondage: Heb. 2:14-15 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; 15 And deliver them **who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.**
    - What I want us to see is just how powerful fear of death, and even physical damage that can lead to death, can be. So, this fear is a huge potential for us to yield to temptation.
    - But the real danger of it for us relates to our over-inflation of it in the back of our minds, when no real life-threatening danger exists.
  - So, what kind of temptations rise up in the human mind from coming to this kind of place where hunger, or imagining hunger, can lead people to?
    - Stealing food

- Armed robbery to get food
- Now, some other possible temptations we might yield to in a supposed crisis like this-things we might be tempted to imagine and play out:
  - “Nobody should have to go hungry this long” (playing the “poor me I am entitled” card)
  - “There’s no reason I should be forbidden to have this; it is one of the necessities of life” (playing the “it is approved for me to have it” card)
  - “Why should I deny myself this? I am a citizen of God’s Kingdom! (This one is actually hinted at by the devil’s statement; it is an instance of playing the “I am privileged” card)
- ❖ Let’s look at how Christ countered this:
  - First, it was not forbidden for Him to turn those stones into bread. Second, He was 40 days and 40 nights without eating, and getting food at this point would not only be sensible, but justifiable on the surface of things. So, what was the big deal? Why was this a temptation that would lead to sin?
    - It was an invitation to satisfy the flesh (He was not going into a coma, nor was His body failing as a result of the fasting)
    - In this case it would have been a direct contradiction to what was sustaining Him in the first place (communion with God was obviously sustaining Him)
    - It was a temptation to abuse His station or position as the Son of God (the whole deal here was orchestrated in order for Him to go through being tempted of the devil)
    - Last, but not at all least, the suggestion came from the devil, and as our Savior clearly understood; in the same way we should be spiritually savvy enough to understand, the very fact that the suggestion came from the devil made it inherently evil.
      - Folks, if we know the devil has suggested something, know that it is wicked, even if it seems to be right.
    - So how did He counter it? He used the facts of God against both Satan’s suggestion and obviously against His own body’s crying need.
      - “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”
  - The spiritual principle about necessities will help here: (**Mat. 6:25**)  
Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

- ❖ How does this experience with the devil and Christ's statement translate to us in our times of temptation by the devil?
  - We should suspect an attack by the devil if bodily needs...whether imagined or real, cause us to think about satisfying them in a way that is obviously separate from trust in our God. Examples:
    - Using dishonest techniques or practices to supply ourselves with necessities or comforts (we've got a lot of people in America that are gaming the government out of millions of our tax dollars. Christians should never be involved in gaming the system; use the couple living in TN and drawing welfare out of Illinois as an example)
    - Letting our basic human needs or drives turn us toward solutions that are human-made or desperation-driven. Examples: (when I think of this one, I think of the movie plot where the young unwed mother leaves her infant on the doorstep of some rich woman's house and walks away into the night with tears in her eyes; to her this was a solution...but it was hatched in her own brain without consulting God.
    - A biblical parallel: Hagar leaves Ishmael under a bush to die instead of consulting God about survival [**Gen.21:15-16** - we ought to also take note that in this instance of Hagar resorting to human solutions, it was Ishmael that God heard in this distressful situation; another proof that Hagar did not consult with the Lord even after she sat down and began to weep])
    - The desperation of Tamar (Gen. 38) the widow of Er, Judah's oldest son; how she disguised herself as a harlot and sold herself to Judah and bore him a son, because she was desperate to be given a husband by Judah and he ignored her for many years (after promising her his other son).

## II. Temptations About Sinning Against Divine Preservation

- ❖ **Mat. 4:5-7** Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, 6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. 7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.
  - There is almost a standing temptation among the people of God to play it loose with our conduct because of the fact of "once saved, always saved." This is a truth that is well established in scripture, but I think in this biblical account, Christ has something to teach us about the pitfall of being loose

because of divine keeping.

- The first thing we should notice about this kind of temptation is that it suggests taking unnecessary risks, (according to the statement of Jesus here, taking unnecessary risks is to tempt God)
- Second, such a temptation implies that everything and anything we do has a guarantee of protection from God attached to it. This includes imagining that we have a guarantee of God's protection even when we knowingly and willfully disobey Him.
  - Let's be clear, eternal protection against eternal ruin is guaranteed by the very nature of God's power toward us in security of the believer. But let's not get the idea that His protection extends to protecting us from very negative outcomes when we willfully sin against His precepts.
- Third, this kind of temptation can include mis-application of scripture
  - Suspect that sudden wild ideas about doing something like that suggested here is truly a temptation from the devil
  - Such wild ideas about taking risks do not have any spiritual purpose in them
  - When you look at the thing suggested by the temptation, you will not be able to see a result that would glorify God
  - Be aware that it is possible to mis-appropriate the promises of God

### **III. Temptations Related to Possessions, Power and Pride**

- ❖ **Mat. 4:8-10** Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; 9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. 10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.
- ❖ First, this represents the bare temptation to reach for possessions, or power, or to give way to a lifestyle built on human pride.
- ❖ These goals become a temptation when they are what motivates the life of a person. Let's look at each one of these:
- ❖ **POSSESSIONS**
  - The obsession with getting material possessions may be the single most deadly temptation of the human race.
  - This great temptation was the very thing that the Lord called the rich farmer to account for in **Luke 12:18-21**.
  - We should note the nature of the offense that a person can fall into is that of

- having great possession and then not being rich toward God (v.21)
- This wealth can usually be represented by money. Scripture reminds us that the temptation to love money leads to bad consequences:
    - **1Tim. 6:10** For the **love of money** is the root of all evil: which while some **coveted after**, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.
    - Note that it is the love of money that is the big mistake, and scripture assumes that if there is love of the kind described here, then coveting after it will be certain.
  - Second, as with the temptations related to turning stones into bread, this is a temptation about relying on someone besides God to get possessions
    - This is a far more widespread temptation than humans comprehend. As:
      - Attempting to get gain by using man-made processes which leave God out of the picture. Gambling is a man-devised process for using the theories of probability to get gain. Problem is, probability becomes a god to those who become obsessed with this practice to gain money and possessions
      - Attempting to get gain by dishonest unethical practices
        - ◆ Con artists are the best examples of this; but they are not the only ones who use dishonesty, lying, or unethical practices to get gain
  - ❖ **POWER** - This seems to be second only to the obsession for wealth, but for some people the lust after power is at the top of the list. What shape does this temptation take?
    - Attempting to get to a place of power or authority by using deception and techniques which are carnal. Examples:
      - There are a lot of clubs and organizations today that are set up to help people interact with their communities and be able to benefit people. Some of these fraternal lodges, clubs, orders etc. are governed by rules and practices that only reward those who promote humanism...that is ideas and projects which glorify man.
      - Resolving to get to a place of power regardless of what must be done
    - Some of the greatest atrocities done to society and people in general have been acted out by men who become obsessed by the temptation to gain power
    - Some of the biggest lies, and greatest deceptions in history have been perpetrated by men and groups trying to rise to positions of power
    - The greatest threat to the immortal souls of people who become obsessed with gaining power is that they almost always believe it is their destiny, and

that they have the answers to mankind's need; and that answer lies within the ideology that drives them

- When we look at the philosophy and beliefs of every character in history who was famous for causing war, disaster, and upheaval, we find that they all showed signs of being megalomaniacs (people obsessed with the importance of their own agenda).

❖ **PRIDE** - There is a seed of depravity in every human being that I would call "the big me." It is the human tendency to want to gain recognition from others, even from the whole world. It is a temptation that is a powerful driving force. It has ruined many people down through history. The presence of pride as part of our nature is the perfect point for the devil to intrude into our lives with temptation to feed the weakness. How does the temptation present itself?

- In the model temptation of Jesus in our text, it presents itself like this: the devil says, "All these things I will give thee...." The one being tempted is, at this point, supposed to begin thinking how much power, possessions and PRESTIGE getting all these things would bring. From there, lust for pride is fed, and if a person yields to the temptation, the route to satisfying pride is taken.

- (1John 2:16) "...the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."

❖ **TEMPTATION TO ABANDON GOD** ("...if thou wilt fall down and worship me.")

- This was the great aim of the devil in pointing to all that wealth, power, and feeding of pride which would come from owning the world.
- What he offered suggests to us that making wealth, power and feeding pride to be the number one priority leads inevitably to abandoning any idea of making God part of one's life. I think we have seen this happen in some people's lives.
- The nature of the devil's language also teaches us that **his temptations may often come as promises that we will benefit hugely from doing his bidding** (Be aware that he may never come to a common human and asked to be worshiped in order for them to gain something. What really happens is people are tempted to believe that laying aside every spiritual principle will allow them to be unchained to get and have everything their carnal heart could desire).
- This kind of temptation only becomes forceful when we forget what our

inheritance is in the first place: **Rom. 8:17** “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ...”

- **1Peter 1:3-4** “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 To an **inheritance incorruptible**, and undefiled, and **that fadeth not away**, reserved in heaven for you....”

**III. Overcoming without succumbing: Mat. 4:11** “Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.”

- ❖ Note that this event could only be recorded in the way it was because Jesus resisted the devil and never yielded on any point.
  - This agrees with the biblical instruction from **James (4:1)**: “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”
  - If we waffle on our resolve to not yield to temptation, the devil will keep a presence nearby to tempt us more