

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:  
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## Matthew 4:1-11      “Overcoming Temptation”

Intro. Last Sunday I preached about the baptism of Jesus Christ. One prominent point of my message was the fact that at His baptism, it was shown that Jesus would save His people by suffering and dying. At one point in my message I also pointed out that for Him to die for our sins, He must be spotless and without sin. We know this from the Old Testament, where sacrifices had to be spotless in order to be acceptable by God. So at the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus is required to face the strongest temptations the devil could bring against Him. We can see this from v.1, where we see that the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness. The language of Mk. 1:12 is even stronger, “Immediately the Spirit drove Him [*ekballo*] into the wilderness.” Why did the Holy Spirit insist that Jesus go into the wilderness? It was for the express purpose of being tested by the devil.

As the Union Pacific Railroad was being constructed, an elaborate trestle bridge was built across a large canyon in the West. Wanting to test the bridge, the builder loaded a train with enough extra cars and equipment to double its normal payload. The train was then driven to the middle of the bridge, where it stayed an entire day. One worker asked, “Are you trying to break this bridge?” “No,” the builder replied, “I’m trying to prove that the bridge won’t break.” In the same way, the temptations Jesus faced weren’t designed by God to see if Christ would sin, but to prove that He wouldn’t.<sup>1</sup>

Now this morning I have a two-fold purpose for the message. I believe Matthew’s main purpose for this account was to affirm yet again that Jesus Christ is the sinless Son of God, the promised Messianic King. But I believe this text of Scripture also has a practical application. Jesus exposed Satan and his tactics, and He defeated Satan. Because of His victory, we can have victory over the tempter. So this morning I want you also to learn how to overcome temptation in your own life. All too often temptations come our way, and we are defeated by them. The devil gets the victory over our lives. Did you yield to temptation last night? How about this morning? Well God wants you to be able to share in the victory of Christ over temptation. So be sure to listen carefully this morning, and I will share with you some ways you can have victory over temptation.

Now beginning in v.3 Satan assails the Son of God with 3 powerful temptations. Let’s examine each of these temptations together. In vv.3-4 we see:

### I. CHRIST WAS VICTORIOUS OVER THE TEMPTATION OF PASSIONATE DESIRE

Let me give you a little background to this temptation. Now Jesus fasted and prayed for 40 days and nights. He no doubt was preparing Himself spiritually for the ministry He was about to begin. Now with that background, I want to share with you a few principles that I gleaned from the first temptation:

A. Temptation May Come through Satan – Many people today do not believe that there is a devil. But in v.1 he is called “the devil.” Then we read in v.3, “Now when the tempter came to

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<sup>1</sup> Today in the Word, 3-14-91.

Him....” Here, the devil is called “the tempter.” That is one of the names of the devil, for that is one of his main works (cf. 1 Thess. 3:5). Now it is clear that Matthew believed in the existence of a personal devil. It is clear that the temptation came from the outside, and not from within.<sup>2</sup> The Bible teaches that the devil is a real person. 1 Pet. 5:8 says that the devil is like a roaring lion that walks about, seeking whom he may devour. Though Satan is like a roaring lion, he would not have appeared in that form to Jesus. And you can be rest assured that he did not appear as a red monster with horns, a forked tail, and with a pitchfork in his hand! 2 Cor. 11:13 says that the devil can transform himself “into an angel of light.” He is the master deceiver and he does not want to reveal his true form or his true intent.

So we need to watch, and be on our guard (1 Pet. 5:8). Satan or his demons are always looking for opportunities to tempt us.

The devil’s main purpose was to overthrow the Messiah at the outset. He knew that Jesus had come to bring salvation, and he knew that if he could get Jesus to sin, that would ruin the whole plan of salvation.

B. Temptation Comes When the Opportunity Is Present – Satan waited until the conditions were right before he began his onslaught of temptation. Notice in v.1 it says that Jesus was “led up... into the wilderness....” The Judean wilderness stretches between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. It is an area of yellow sand, crumbling limestone, and contorted strata. It glows and shimmers with heat like some vast furnace. The conditions of the wilderness made the deprivation of hunger and thirst even greater. Christ also faced loneliness and isolation. So after spending 40 days in such a place, it is something of an understatement when Matthew says that Jesus “hungered.” He was famished. It is said that during a prolonged fast, the feeling of hunger goes away after three or four days, only to return with renewed force. Hunger is the God-given desire to meet our natural need for food. And this sudden onslaught of recurring hunger became the opportunity for the first temptation.

And when you are hungry, the opportunity is certainly present for temptation. For example, you may be tempted to satisfy your needs in ways that God has prohibited. Yes we need food, but we do not meet the need for food by stealing. Yes we need food, but we should not abuse God’s provision with gluttony. So we need to watch out. There are certain times when we are more prone to temptation. Satan may tempt you at a time of bodily weakness. He may tempt you in a time of spiritual weakness. After you have missed church for several weeks, or after you have gone several days without praying and reading your Bible, you will be vulnerable to the temptations of Satan. By the way, another prime temptation is when you seem to be strong and self-confident (1 Cor. 10:12).

C. Temptation Is Tailored to the Individual – Satan’s basis for temptation was unique to Jesus because Jesus was a unique person. Notice in v.3 that Satan said to Jesus, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” Only recently at the baptism of Jesus, God the Father had confirmed that Jesus was the Son of God. So Satan uses that as the springboard of this temptation. It must have been in the spirit of derision that the tempter uttered the words, “Since you are God’s Son, make use of your majestic power, and no longer be tortured by hunger. Son of God, hungry? How ridiculous! And if you are a Son, then God is supposed to be your Father. He must not care about you. You have to take matters into your own hands!” He was tempting Christ to act independently of the Holy Spirit who had led Him into the wilderness. He was seeking to destroy

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<sup>2</sup> Barclay attempts to show that the temptations were inward and that there was no personal devil.

the Son's confidence in his Father's will and power to sustain him. Satan is always trying to get people to doubt the love and care of God.

So Satan tempted Him to use His power to produce instant food. That is something we are quite used to today. Put food in a microwave for a minute or two, and you have a hot meal. Or pull into the closest fast food place, and you can get a meal pretty quickly. And in the case of Jesus, He could turn desert stones into bread. After all, John had said that God could turn stones into sons of Abraham, and if Jesus is God's Son, then surely He could turn stones into bread, a lesser miracle. Later He would demonstrate that He could change water into wine, and multiply a few loaves and fishes and feed thousands. Oh, He had the power. And why not use it? The desire for food was innocent but strong, the need was imperative, and he had the power to secure instant relief. With the objections apparently nil, the bait is skillfully wound over the barbed hook.

How will Jesus respond? Will He yield to the suggestion, turn the stones into bread, and then quickly devour them? Well in v.4 we see another principle:

D. Temptation Can Be Resisted by Scripture – We are going to see that Jesus appealed to Scripture in all 3 temptations. That is the weapon Satan fears more than anything else in this world. And all His quotations that day were from Deuteronomy 6 and 8. Could it be that the Lord's meditation that morning had been in this portion of God's Word?

Now the primary application is that we also should learn the Word of God, and use Scripture to resist temptation. The devil hates Scripture and attacks it, because he is like a punctured balloon before Truth. So you need to know and memorize the Word of God. Psa. 119:11 says, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You!" Jesus was not deceived by the devil's temptation because He knew the Word of God.

Now in this case, Jesus quotes from Dt. 8:3, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." The key is the word "alone." Always remember that ultimately your life is not sustained by bread but by God. In the context it shows how the Lord had fed the Israelites in the wilderness with manna, unknown to them, that he might teach them "that not by bread alone does man live, but by everything proceeding out of the mouth of the Lord does man live." The "word" here refers to the word of His power. It is His word of effective command. Cf. Gen. 1:3. God provided manna by speaking it into existence.

So Jesus is here giving an expression of childlike confidence in the Father's care. Certainly the One who, when there was no bread, had provided manna, would not fail His Beloved Son in this hour of trial. As a Son Jesus was obeying the Father by being in the wilderness, and as a Father, God will provide the food He needed. Jesus would trust in the provision of God just the same way we have to trust in the provision of God. God had provided food for His prophet Elijah (I Kings 19:5-7). Jesus later promised that if we seek first "the kingdom of God and His righteousness," all "these things" - whatsoever the need may be - will be added unto us (Mt. 6:33). So He will wait for the Father's provision.

So Satan could not use the lust of the flesh to cause Christ to sin. Christ has won round 1. Now Satan tries his next temptation, and in vv.5-7 we see:

## II. CHRIST WAS VICTORIOUS OVER THE TEMPTATION OF PRESUMPTION

Satan took Jesus to the temple complex, not just the sanctuary of the temple itself. Now I had always visualized Jesus up on the edge of the roof of the temple building. But actually, it was a different location. You see, when Herod expanded the temple courts, he had to build a retaining

wall to do so, because the temple was near the edge of one of the hills of Jerusalem. The retaining wall was back filled to enlarge the temple courts. Well the retaining wall at the southeast corner of the Temple complex was probably at least 50 feet high. And then at the base of the retaining wall there was a steep grade of several hundred more feet down to the Kidron Valley below. It is still very much like that even today. So picture Jesus at the edge of such a high wall, looking down into the rocky valley below. And now consider with me:

A. The Essence of the Temptation - From that high point, Satan proceeded to tempt Jesus. He said to Him in v.6, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" This may have been a follow-up to the response of Jesus to the first temptation. Satan was saying something like: "So, you trust your Father? Well let's see how much you trust God. If you will not work a miracle for yourself, then let God work one for you. And since you seem to know Scripture, let me give you one," and he proceeded to quote from Psalm 91:11-12, which he alleges will give Him promise of safety. However, Satan misquoted Scripture. He left out the words, "in all your ways." He left those words out, for in so doing, it becomes easier to interpret the passage as if it were a promise of the Lord to protect the righteous no matter what he does. God does not promise this.

So what was the temptation here? Satan was urging the Lord to be presumptuous, not trusting. Furthermore, he was tempting Christ to prove the reality of God's love and care. We are often tempted to demand a visible proof of God's presence and care. For example, someone may say, "God, if you don't heal me, I won't believe in you." That is not faith, but putting God to the test. I really don't believe this was an appeal to be sensational. I believe that very few people, if any, would have even seen Him jump.

B. The Goal of Satan in the Temptation - The devil knew that the Seed of the woman would bruise his head. God told him so in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:15). Satan was hoping that he would leap and God would not honor Jesus' distrust, and the Messiah would fall upon the rocks below and die. That would end God's plan of salvation.

C. Jesus' Response - The Lord knew His Bible better than to be taken in by Satan's garbled version of a much-loved Messianic Psalm. So in v.7 Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'" It would appear that such an act would be the highest act of faith. But it is not. There were 2 problems with such "faith":

1. If you have to have a miracle in order to believe what God has already said, then you lack true faith. True faith does not put God to the test. Jesus quotes Dt. 6:16 which says, "You shall not tempt the LORD your God as you tempted Him in Massah." That incident is found in Ex. 17:1-7. There they complained against Moses and God because there was no water. They demanded water and said, "Is the LORD among us or not?" If He is, then prove it by giving us water." Instead of waiting on God's provision, they put Him to the test. Putting God to the test is when you insist that God do something to prove Himself to you. True faith does not demand signs from heaven or miracles, but simply believes the Word of God.

Now the second thing that was wrong with Satan's temptation was the fact that it was contrary to the following principle:

2. Faith Is Based on the Word of God - Now if God had commanded Jesus to cast Himself down, to do it would have been right. As He had not, to do it was not faith, but self-will.

The Scripture Satan quoted did not support that idea of God's protection even in cases such as this, but in "all your ways."

Suppose you drive 90 miles per hour up the Boulevard, running through every red light, and you say, "I have faith that God will protect me." And then you crash and kill yourself and others. Someone may say you died in faith, but I would say you died putting God to the test. Such faith is not true faith because it was *contrary* to the Word of God, which says we are to obey the laws of the government. Do not do foolish things and demand that God deliver you from the result of foolish actions. Sometimes in His mercy & grace He will, but you can't expect it or demand it. After all, the Bible says, "You reap what you sow."

The lessons for us from the second temptation are weighty. Faith may be perverted. Daily life all around us affords abundant illustrations of false confidence. We tempt God when we put ourselves into circumstances that force Him to work miracles on our behalf. The diabetic who refuses to take insulin and argues, "Jesus will take care of me," may be tempting the Lord. God's rescuing power is not something to be experimented with; it is something to be quietly trusted in every day life. The moment a man begins to tempt God, to prove trust; he proves that he does not trust. Perfect trust is submissive to God's will. We can claim God's protection only if we are in the center of God's will.

So round 2 is over. Jesus has won another victory over Satan & his temptation. Now the devil drops his mask and, having failed miserably in the first two attempts to conquer his enemy, stakes everything in one final, desperate attempt to achieve his purpose. And in this final temptation we will see that:

### III. CHRIST WAS VICTORIOUS OVER THE TEMPTATION OF POWER

Everyone likes to have power. Satan would also offer Him position and prestige. Once again, let's consider:

A. The Essence of the Temptation – In v.8 we see that Satan begins this temptation by showing Christ all the kingdoms of the world. For Satan to show Christ all the kingdoms of the world would have required a miracle, even from a high mountain. Furthermore, Luke adds that he did this "in a moment." Jesus saw the proud glory of imperial Rome. He was saying, "All of it can be Yours—not just Rome, but beyond the Euphrates." Satan boasted that he has control over the kingdoms of the world. That was partly true, but it was a great lie also. There is indication that he has temporary control now, but he could not grant permanent control. Remember, dear friend, that every thing the devil can offer you is only temporary. It will not bring any lasting satisfaction.

Now Satan's offer was tempting in at least 2 respects:

1. Satan Appealed to Personal Ambition - How appealing it would be to many of us to be king of the world.

2. Satan Appealed to Instant Gratification - Satan knew that according to Psa. 2, the Son is promised a kingdom. "Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance..." (v.8). Conceding the fact that Jesus is Messiah and that He will one day set up a Kingdom on earth, the devil offered Jesus a shortcut to His kingdom. For Jesus that kingdom would be received only after a 3 1/2 year ministry and after suffering and dying on a cross. Satan tempts Him to accept a kingdom *now*. All He would have to do is bow down and worship Satan just once (aorist tense). All he wanted was just one brief bend of the knee. Then He could enjoy all the glory and power now, and without enduring any suffering.

Oh, how Satan effectively uses that kind of temptation today. Satan is always offering instant gratification. The Bible admits there is temporary pleasure in sin. Too many are like Esau, who traded the surpassing, future value of his birthright for the temporary pleasure and satisfaction of a mess of pottage. Youth seem vulnerable to this temptation. For example, Satan will say, "Why wait until marriage to experience the pleasure of sexual intimacy. I will give it to you now. Why wait until you are 21 to experience the high of alcohol. I will give it to you now." And many young people fall for such temptations of Satan!

But we need to follow the example of Christ. He maintained loyalty to God, and endured the cross and suffering, for He knew that beyond the cross, was a crown of glory. Heb. 12:2 says of Jesus, "who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Child of God, God's way may be the path of delayed gratification and even suffering, but it is the path of greater blessing ultimately, both in this life, and in the life to come.

B. The Goal of Satan in the Temptation – Satan said in v.9, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." Satan has always had a problem of wanting to take the place of God. He wants people to worship and honor *him*. Here is a desperate attempt to receive such honor.

C. Jesus' Response – In v.10 Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" Jesus' reply was simply, "God forbids it," and he quoted Scripture to prove that God forbids that we worship anyone but Him. Ex. 20:3 gives one of the 10 Commandments: "You shall have no other gods before Me." Christ put God and obedience to God above everything. Your life will be a lot less complicated if you will just trust God enough to say that His way is best, and live in obedience to Him.

D. The Supremacy of Christ – The final round of the conflict is over. Jesus was victorious over the most powerful temptations Satan could throw at Him. And because Jesus resisted all of the temptations of Satan, He could issue the command, "Be gone, Satan." And v.11 shows the result of Christ's supremacy over him. Matthew says, "Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him." And the good news is that 1 John 4:4 indicates we can have that same supremacy. John says, "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." James 4:7 says, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." If you are a Christian, Satan has no authority over you. You can't say, "The devil made me do it." 1 Cor. 10:13 says, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." Also, 2 Peter 2:9 says, "the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations...." There is never a necessity for the believer to sin. When you are tempted, remember that.

And notice that after the conflict came glad refreshment. When the angels came, they probably brought bodily nourishment. Perhaps they cooked Him some heavenly hash, and for dessert he had angel's food cake! Christian friend, say "No" to temptation, and the Lord will reward you with joy and peace, a clear conscience, your needs met, and ultimately, a heavenly reward. The Lord's way is always the best way.

Conclusion – The battle is over. Christ won the victory. He was now ready to begin His ministry. He has proven perfect obedience. Now He has the right to call on others to obey God. Let us give Him our obedience and loyalty as Lord of our lives. And the Gospel writer has added yet more evidence that Jesus is the Son of God. And as the sinless, spotless Lamb of God, He will offer up Himself as a sacrifice for sin. If you have not yet believed in Jesus as your Savior, why not do so today? Don't let the devil continue his victory over your life. Repent of your sins, and trust in Christ instead.

Most here today are Christians. Now let me review for you how you can have victory over temptation: 1) Know the Word of God. Eph. 6:12 says, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." Eph. 6:17 says the Word of God is "the sword of the Spirit." 2) Trust in the power of God available to you to enable you to overcome that temptation. 3) Grow in love with Jesus more and more. Delight in His love. Ps. 34:8 says, "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!" Ps. 84:11b says, "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." The more you love Jesus, the less appeal the temptations of the world will have.

John Burroughs, the naturalist, says that when a hawk is attacked by crows or kingbirds, he does not make a counterattack, but soars higher and higher in ever widening circles until his tormentors leave him alone.<sup>3</sup> I thank the Lord that the Lord has brought me along so that many things the devil has to offer are not even appealing to me any longer.

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: Matthew* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975); Charles R. Erdman, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Westminster, 1966); Oliver B. Greene, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Vol. 1, (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1971); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol 6* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House); G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1929); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); John Philips, *Exploring The Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999); Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, reprint, Christian Publishing Co.; James S. Stewart, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, no date), 39-45; Jerry Vines, *Great Events in the Life of Christ* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1979); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal: Matthew* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1980). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: #6525* (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1979).