

Temptations 11-16-03

Matthew 4:1-11

¹Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.
²After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."
⁴Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" ⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶"If you are the Son of God," he said, "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.'" ⁷Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹"All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" ¹¹Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. (NIV)

In the American Christian Church we have a great misconception of the way in which God works in our lives. So many of us think that when we come to Christ He blesses us so much with the things of the world that we are never to be sick, never to go without, and never to be put out. We have fallen for an old Pharisaical idea that says the richer you are, the more blessed by God you are. If God blesses your life, you should be trouble free. But when we line that up with the experiences of the people in Scripture, especially the life of our Savior, we find out it just isn't true.

Jesus had just begun His ministry. In the last chapter He had that amazing beginning of being baptized by John with heaven opening and the Spirit descending like a dove upon Him. The audible voice of God declared "This is my son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased". Wow! He should have gone from there straight to the throne of David and reigned forever! That is how we would have written the script. But no, the Spirit leads Him out into the wilderness. Oh then it must be for another mountain top experience. Let's read that first verse again. ¹*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert--- to be tempted by the devil.* No, the Spirit led Him there to be tempted. Hmmm? You mean to tell me that sometimes the Spirit will lead us into a place of testing? Yes, to strengthen your resolve and help you focus on your mission, He will. Tests and trials expose the lack of genuine faith in unbelievers and strengthen resolve and endurance in believers.

When you set out to fully surrender to God, to hear His call on your life, and obey the Spirit, don't expect it to be a walk in the park. Every man and woman of God, who set about to fully obey what God would have him or her to do, faced opposition. The enemy of your soul isn't going to harass you much if you are not actively opposing Him. But when you yield your life to the Holy Spirit, you've become a threat to his kingdom. You've become an enemy that has the potential to lead his captives to freedom in Christ. That's when he gets serious about trying to sidetrack you.

Verse 2 says *After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.* Interesting thing about fasting, after the first three days you aren't really hungry anymore. Oh, you want food, but it's more psychological than physical hunger. But when your body has used up all your reserve, consumed all the unnecessary cells, it begins to feed on the good and even necessary cells. Then you start to feel hunger pains again. This is where Jesus was when the enemy attacked. Our enemy is clever and his timing is impeccable. He knows to hit us where and when we are weakest.

³*The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."* One thing about Satan, he uses the same tactics over and over. What did he do in the Garden? "Eve, has God said...?" He tried to get Eve to doubt what God had said. Here he is with the Second Adam, Jesus, trying to get Him to doubt what God just said at the baptism, "You are My Son!" Satan begins, "If you are the Son of God...". His tactic is to get you to doubt the Word and heart of God.

Sons and daughters of God, he is doing the same thing today. How many of you have heard, "You aren't really saved"? Come on, let's see the hands. Isn't that amazing. He's using the same tactics on us. God's word says that as many as believe on Jesus are given the power to become sons of God. (John 1:12) He is still trying to get us to doubt the word of God. Do you see that? Grab hold of the truth declared in the Word and stick it in his face and tell him, "I don't care what you think, God can't lie! You can, and in fact, you are the father of lies." (John 8:44)

Now, what was Satan up to? Well, Jesus was hungry. Why not take a short cut and turn a stone into a loaf of bread. After 40 days, you'd be so hungry you'd be hallucinating that the stones were loaves of bread. He says, "Use your miraculous power for yourself; you've earned it." Later on Jesus will declare that He only does what He sees the Father doing. (John 5:19) Satan was trying to get Him to do His own thing. There would be absolutely nothing wrong with the desire for food, but the power of God is to be directed by God, not Satan and not self. If your body is on the throne of your life, physical fulfillment reigns. That is quick road to destruction.

I think there may be one more temptation beyond just using God's power to satisfy self. Jesus saw the need around Him. Though the people were generally well off, there were plenty in need, widows and orphans that went hungry. When tempted, our mind often thinks of reasons to justify doing what we want. If Jesus turned the stones of the wilderness daily into fresh loaves of bread, He could meet all the needs around Him. Why not start now by making one for Himself?

Do you see what is happening? Man is so good at this one. I'll do a great cause for humanity and in the process become great. It's not God's direction or God's plan, but we justify it by saying it will be good for so many. How could that be wrong? It's wrong because it's all about your glory! It is to refuse God's way because you've got a better one, which just so happens to make you look good. God's way is so unseen, so self-effacing, but aren't we clever? Clever at deceiving ourselves! Sin is sin, even when it "helps" people. There would come a time when Jesus will feed the

Commented [notes1]: ¹²Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- John 1:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ⁴⁴You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. John 8:44 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ¹⁹Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. John 5:19 (NIV)

multitudes, but it will be God's timing together with Jesus' compassion, not Satan's timing for selfish reasons. Meeting their physical needs would not satisfy spiritual hunger. Jesus' real goal was to become the bread that truly satisfies. (John 6:51)

Look how Jesus deals with it. ⁴*Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"* He is saying, "Satan, you've forgotten that it's all about God. I use His power at His command. I live by His Word, not yours. He isn't saying to change rocks into bread, you are."

The Son of God responded in a way that you and I can deal with temptation. Toni Evans has a great sermon on this that I'm sure some of you have heard. Jesus didn't reveal His glory and blow Satan away. He didn't transport Himself out of Satan's presence to the pantry at Peter's home. He didn't do anything that you or I couldn't do, because He is our perfect example. Instead of doing something only God can do, He did something any Spirit indwelt person can do; He quoted the Word. You see, one of the Holy Spirit's jobs is to remind us of what Jesus has said. (John 14:26) The Spirit will bring a verse to your mind that exactly fits the situation. In this case, He reminded Jesus of Deuteronomy 8:3. We are to live by the Word of God, and God wasn't saying to start Rocky's Wilderness Bread shop.

The question that we must ask ourselves then is this, what do we live on? Are we living on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God? Or are we living on our own ways, on bread alone. Is your life about your next meal, just existing, or are you living for the glory of God, living on His every word?

Since Satan was put in his place by the word of God, he thought he'd try to use the word to tempt Jesus. ⁵*Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.* ⁶*"If you are the Son of God," he said, "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.'"* Archeology has revealed where this must have been. Some 450 feet high, everyone on that side of Jerusalem would see the spectacle. The priest blew the trumpet there when the morning sacrifice was offered. Not only would this resolve the issue that Jesus is the Son, but everyone watching would be awe struck. Why take the long arduous road of training disciples and healing the sick? Do the spectacular, right now, and get off to a powerful start.

⁷*Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"* The word of God can be quoted for self-seeking reasons. What a warning to us to properly handle the word of God. Again, this temptation was not God's timing or God's way. The temptation is a short cut. The crowds will wave Palm Branches and shout Hosanna in God's timing. Every knee will bow in God's time. Jesus is not out for recognition, tempting as it is, but pleasing the Father. (John 8:29) After years of silently growing and preparing, why not show everyone that You are the One? Last week I spoke on the anticipation that led up to this beginning. Satan is using that to tempt Jesus to rush things. Human nature longs for others to see us as special and recognize our calling. We should be satisfied to know that we are special in the eyes of God. Jesus dealt with this temptation in the Pharisees when He told them not to

Commented [notes4]: ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."
John 6:51 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: ²⁶But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.
John 14:26 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: ²⁹The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him."
John 8:29 (NIV)

appear to be fasting, to give in secret, and to pray in secret. (Matthew 6:3-6) True spirituality does not seek recognition from man, but from God alone. The desire to be seen and respected by men is pride. It was the infectious sin of the Pharisees, but Jesus would not touch it. He humbled Himself and became obedient, even to the death of the cross. (Philippians 2:8) He was determined to obey God alone, not personal desire, and certainly not the suggestions of Satan.

The passage Jesus' quoted again perfectly fit the situation. It was an application from the Spirit of God. The Jews demanded a sign to prove God was among them by providing water for them in the desert. God was testing the people's trust, and they turned around and gave the test to God, demanding physical proof. (See Exodus 17) Satan is using the same tactic; make God prove Himself on your terms!

⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹"All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." The third temptation is a powerful one that has ruined many. The splendor of the kingdoms of the world is a powerful attraction. To Jesus, it must have had a whole different appeal. If the nations were in His control, He could establish righteous laws, stop injustice, and care for the needy. Isn't this what He had eventually come to do, rule the nations? Once again, it is not God's time and God's way. But couldn't Jesus just take them now and skip the cross? Not if you were to be made right with God and fit to live in His Kingdom, He couldn't.

From Satan's temptation, we can see that the world was under his authority, but he doesn't want the world. He wants worship. He fell from his lofty position in heaven because he desired worship. To give him worship is to join his rebellion against God. You can't take an unholy path to create a holy outcome. Disobedience is sin and sin results in death. Satan's path is always promising, but he never delivers what you are imagining. Why would he? He has none of the attributes of God.

Is he promising you something right now? A better relationship? A better income? Some kind of satisfaction? He is the deceiver. He baits us with promises and delivers death. Jesus didn't fall for it. Here is how He dealt with it, and the example that we should follow. ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

Satan means adversary. He is opposed to God, and because God loves you, he is your adversary too. Because you can bring worship to God, he opposes you. Resist him. He can't do one good thing for you that doesn't have evil consequences. James said, "*Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*" James 4:7 (NIV) Jesus was submitted to His Father's will and way. As He resisted the devil, he had to flee.

Not long after this took place, Jesus sat down with a Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob and explained that worship of God had to take place in spirit and in truth. It is something that comes from the spirit, the inner depths of man, where we commune with God. You only have that spiritual communion when your spirit has been born from above. And worship has to be in truth. Satan doesn't care about

Commented [notes7]: ³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁵And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. Matthew 6:3-6 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! Philippians 2:8 (NIV)

man's spirit; he just wants submission. He doesn't care about truth; He is the father of lies. When Jesus quoted that passage, "*Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only*", His words cut right through everything Satan was after. Worship belongs to God alone. Service, also, belongs to God alone. We readily acknowledge the first, but flounder when it comes to service. Whatever you do should be service to the Lord. Don't do things because man or your flesh asks you to. Do them as unto the Lord for His glory. I have the hardest time conveying this to High School students. Do your work unto the Lord. We do a sloppy job because we do things for our self and don't really care what it turns out like.

I've heard it said that the UN lists the religion of the United States as materialism. I haven't been able to confirm that is true, but it would be appropriate. What we spend the most of our time doing is what we truly worship. If you do your work as unto the Lord, if your motivation is to please Him and advance the Kingdom of God, you are a worshipper of God. If you are living for material gain and financial security then your religion is materialism. Who or what do you serve? (Matthew 6:24)

You can serve self. That is ultimately emptiness. You can serve Satan for the things He promises but delivers in a twisted and destructive way. Or you can serve God. "*Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.*" The results of worshipping and serving God are continual spiritual growth and heavenly reward beyond your wildest dreams. It's the only choice that makes sense now and in eternity.

We face this same tests that Jesus faced. Who will you worship? Who will you serve? You can't really separate worship and serving. Satan neglected to mention that, but the Scripture Jesus hit him with showed that Jesus understood the connection. Worship Satan by bowing to his tests, taking his shortcuts, doing things his way, and you will end up in his service.

This story is about Satan trying to derail the mission and life goal of God's children. It is about him trying to steal our purpose from us. Jesus must have relayed this experience to His disciples, for He was alone during that time of testing. He relayed the experience to help them and us. He relayed it because Satan uses the same methods on us. He tempts us with short cuts, promising a desirable outcome and an easier course. He tempts us to focus on our own need and justify going our own way. He tempts us with fame and power and authority over the splendor of the world. All those are temporal, false promises that result in emptiness and ultimately death. "*Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.*"

See times of testing for what they really are, a battle over the effectiveness of your life from an eternal perspective. If you desire to be used of God to further His kingdom, to hear God's "well done good and faithful servant", then answer Satan with God's word. Live submitted to God's will and way. Draw near to God, and resist the enemy of your soul until he flees. "*Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.*"

Commented [notes9]: ²⁴"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. Matthew 6:24 (NIV)