

JESUS" TEMPTATION

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By Pastor Stan

Matthew 4:1-11

PASTOR STAN WEESE

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-- There's a story about a man who was shopping with his wife in a mall, and the wife stopped at a kiosk in the mall's concourse to look at some item. The husband was standing beside her when a good-looking, shapely young woman walked by in a short, form-fitting dress. The woman caught the man's eye (it was probably the handbag that she was carrying). Anyhow, as she strolled by, his eyes and head followed her. Without even looking up from the item that she was examining, the man's wife asked, "Was it worth the trouble you're in?"

Most of us can relate to the saying, "I can resist just about anything - except temptation."

-- In today's passage in Matthew Jesus faces some high-stakes temptations that are presented by Satan himself. How Jesus responds will have enormous implications, not only for Jesus but also for all of us.

Matthew 4

-- As we come to Matthew 4, Jesus has just been baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. That baptism served as an inauguration of Jesus' earthly ministry. Heaven's full stamp of approval was placed on Jesus at His baptism. As Jesus came up out of the Jordan River, the heavens ripped open, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove, and the Father spoke from Heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

-- The next thing we would expect would be for Jesus to get going with His mission as the Messiah - proclaiming the arrival of God's Kingdom, preaching about God's love, and confirming that message with miraculous signs. But what actually happens next is almost the exact opposite.

Read Matthew 4:1-2

I. The Setting (vv. 1-2)

-- These first two verses give us important information about the setting for today's story.

A. The Place

-- The place where Jesus will be tempted is in the "wilderness," probably referring to the same barren and desolate Judean desert where John carried out his preaching ministry.

In biblical times the desert was often thought of as Satan's turf - a place inhabited by demons and dominated by evil forces. Unlike Adam, who was tempted in Eden's perfect environment, Jesus would be tempted in a harsh and hostile environment, where He was alone, without food or shelter.

B. The Characters

-- There are just two characters in this temptation encounter - the tempted and the tempter.

1. The Tempted: Jesus

-- Jesus, of course, is the one who is being tempted. As we saw last week in the account of Jesus' baptism, Jesus is God the Son, the eternal Second Person of the Trinity, who took on Himself our human form and came into this world as Jesus of Nazareth, who was fully God and fully man. Jesus' baptism also affirmed that He was the Messiah, the anointed one, the one chosen and sent by the Father to provide for salvation.

2. The Tempter: The Devil

-- The Bible makes it clear that the devil is not an imaginary or mythical being, not just a symbol for evil. The devil is a real being who really exists. The word "devil" is actually a descriptive title meaning "slanderer," one who speaks evil against others and intends them harm. He entices us to sin, and then when we fall, he says, "How can you say you're a Christian and do something like that?"

The proper name given to him in the Bible is "Satan," meaning "adversary." He is the enemy of God and the enemy of humanity, who are created in God's image. The Bible indicates that Satan is a fallen angel, that he was created good but somehow turned to oppose God and led a group of rebel angels (also known as demons). Satan is a powerful, evil spiritual being, but he is far from being god. Indeed, there

is no sense in which Satan even comes close to rivaling God. Satan is a dangerous but limited foe; he functions only within the bounds set and allowed by God

C. The Encounter

-- Look again at why the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness: "to be tempted by the devil"

1. Two Aspects

a. The word "tempted" actually has 2 aspects; the same word is sometimes translated "tempt" and sometimes translated "test," depending on the context.

To "tempt" someone is to entice them to sin. To "test" someone is to do something that will reveal and potentially strengthen that person's character. The Bible clearly teaches that God never tempts anyone, but God often tests people.

b. Actually, the same event can be both a temptation and a test. That's what we see here in this episode in Jesus' life. We find both the working of the Spirit and the activity of the devil present in this event. The Spirit leads Jesus into the desert, to the place of temptation, but God isn't the one who does the tempting. Satan is the one who does the tempting.

This encounter is both a temptation and a test. Satan uses it as a temptation, intending for Jesus to fail and to disobey the Father. But God the Father uses this same encounter as a test, intending to demonstrate Jesus' genuine character and to strengthen Jesus as He begins His ministry. The same Spirit who leads Jesus into the desert to be tempted by Satan has already anointed Jesus with the power necessary to withstand those temptations.

2. Two Questions / Two Answers

a. The Questions

-- There are two closely connected questions that always come up when we talk about Jesus' being tempted:

(1) Could Jesus really have sinned?

(2) Were the temptations real (especially if He couldn't have sinned)?

b. The Answers

We dealt with these questions in greater depth earlier this year in the series on Jesus' humanity, but let me just give the short answer today.

(1) Concerning the question if Jesus could have sinned, the answer is "No." Jesus was fully God, and God cannot sin.

(2) Concerning the question if the temptations were real, the answer is "Yes." There are several reasons why this is the case:

-- Jesus was also fully human and, therefore, possessed a nature that could be tempted.

-- Jesus had voluntarily chosen not to access His divine powers to resist temptations; He used only the resources that are available to all humans.

-- The one who fully and completely resists every temptation all the way without ever sinning is the only one who truly knows the full fury of temptation, and the only one who has ever done that was Jesus.

D. The Connection Between the Temptations & Jesus' Baptism

-- In order to understand the temptations that Satan uses to attack Jesus we need to remember why Jesus was baptized. Jesus' baptism was not a sign that He was confessing sin because He never sinned. Rather, Jesus' baptism was a sign that He was submitting Himself fully to the Father's will. Satan's intention is to make an assault on that commitment and to break Jesus' submission. Each temptation is made intending to lead Jesus to distrust the Father's providence and step outside the Father's will.

II. The Temptations (vv. 3-11)

A. The First Temptation (vv. 3-4)

1. The Temptation (3)

-- When Satan says, "If you are the Son of God," Satan is not expressing any doubt about that; Satan knows who Jesus is. These words aren't spoken in doubt but as a lead-in to the temptation, which is an effort to manipulate Jesus into doing what He had decided not to do - use His divine powers for personal purposes.

-- The devil starts the temptations at an obvious place - Jesus' hunger. Jesus hasn't eaten for 40 days, and His desire for food is almost overwhelming. So Satan tempts Jesus to turn some desert stones into loaves of bread. Satan is urging Jesus to quit trusting the Father for His needs and, instead, to use His power in an independent, self-willed way.

-- In effect, Satan is saying, "Listen, Jesus, you're God's Son and look at what He's done to you - led you out here without anything to eat for 40 days. Look at yourself - you're skin and bones - you're starving. Is that any way for a Father to treat a son? The Son of God should be able to eat something.

Go ahead, turn the stones into bread - you deserve it."

2. Jesus' Response (4)

-- Jesus responds to each temptation by quoting Scripture. The Psalmist declared:

Psalm 119:11 Thy Word I have hid in my heart that I might not sin against

Thee.

Jesus had done the same thing.

-- Each time here Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy, where Moses recounts Israel's testing and failures in the 40 years of wilderness wanderings. This first quote is from Deuteronomy 8:3, which is in a passage where God tells Israel that He allowed them to be tested with hunger in the wilderness to reveal what was in their heart and to teach them that they could trust Him to provide for them, which He did by giving them daily manna.

-- He does the same with us. He allows us to be tested that we might learn that He is the God who will never leave or forsake us, that He is the God who can make a way where there is no way, that He is the God who can provide bread, even in the middle of the desert.

B. The Second Temptation (vv. 5-7)

1. The Temptation (5-6)

-- The Temple sat on a hill overlooking the Kidron Valley. From the top of the Temple to the bottom of the Valley was a drop of 450 feet. So the devil took Jesus there and said, "OK, so you want to trust the Father to take care of you. Well, let's see just how much you really trust Him. Go ahead, jump! After all, God promised in Psalm 91 that his angels would be your bodyguards. So show us how much trust you really have - JUMP!"

-- The temptation here is to approach faith not as trust and submission to God but as manipulation of Him. For Jesus to jump deliberately and unnecessarily would mean that He was making a self-willed demand for the Father to act in Jesus' behalf.

2. Jesus' Response (7)

-- Jesus sees through this and again quotes from the book of Deuteronomy 6:16.

v. 7

-- This verse refers to an incident in the wilderness when Israel had nothing to drink. But instead of coming before God in prayer and intercession depending and trusting Him to provide, they came with grumbling and demands that God prove His presence with them by providing water for them.

The point that Jesus is making here is that faith means trusting God, not testing Him. Faith means submitting to Him, not making self-willed attempts to manipulate Him to act on our behalf.

C. The Third Temptation (vv. 8-10)

1. The Temptation (8-9)

-- "OK," Satan says, "Let's quit playing games. We both know why you're here. You want this - the world you created - the people you made in your image. They're rebels against you and are serving me, and you want them back. OK, I'll give them to you. The whole world - it's yours. I give it back to you. All you have to do is get down right here and worship me."

2. Jesus' Response (10)

-- This is a stunning and breath-taking arrogance. Yet from the standpoint of Jesus' humanity this may have been the strongest temptation. Jesus could have the world back without enduring the suffering of the cross - something that He would pray to avoid in the Garden of Gethsemane.

But Jesus knows that even if you gain the whole world and lose your soul it's a bad deal. Without even a second's hesitation Jesus replies.

v. 10

-- Again, this is a quote from Deuteronomy, this time Deuteronomy 6, a chapter that is about what Jesus would later call the first and greatest commandment, what the Jews consider to be the central affirmation of their faith, the Shema.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

There are no shortcuts for those who love the Father. There are no shortcuts for those who would follow the Son. We have to take up our cross - and nail all of our lives - our time, or money, our possessions, our relationships, our plans - nail it all to His cross. Yield it all to His lordship.

CONCLUSION

In the 17th century John Milton wrote two epic poems that people have been reading for over 300 years now. The first was Paradise Lost, in which Milton tells about man's fall into sin. The sequel was Paradise Regained, in which Milton tells about God's reclaiming man from sin. You might think that Paradise Regained would be about Jesus' Crucifixion and Resurrection, but actually it's about Jesus' Temptation in the wilderness - because, just as the D-Day invasion of Normandy led to the defeat of Nazi Germany, Jesus'

triumph over Satan in the wilderness was a prelude to the fatal blow that would be delivered at the Cross and the empty tomb.