

Jesus Overcomes Temptations
Matthew 4 1-11

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It could be chocolate, your phone, an ad for a sale, car or vacation. It could come in an email, or text or post or a look. It could come through someone's suggestions, or questions, or comments, or appeal. It might come through your eyes or your ears or what you smell or taste or touch. It can come from our own thoughts or experiences or dreams. It looks appealing, harmless, inviting. It often comes through something that looks good & beneficial and enjoyable. Yet, it has the potential to hurt us or someone else. It can lead to hospitalization, break ups, divorce or financial difficulty. If accepted it will cause some harm, a distance in our relationship with God. What is it?

Temptation.

A temptation is an invitation to act on, participate in or go ahead with something wrong. Temptations appeal to our natural desires and invite us to satisfy them outside of God ordained parameters. So we can have a natural desire to eat. Food temptations invite us to eat in a way that will damage us or have negative consequences on our bodies. We have a natural desire for relationships. Relationship temptations invite us to fulfill this desire in ways outside of God's good boundaries for us. We all have a desire to live meaningful lives. Temptations invite us to pursue meaning at the expense of others or through an overly aggressive approach.

All of us face temptations. Would you stop for a moment and ask God to bring to mind the 1 or 2 biggest temptations you're facing in life right now? Lust, worry, despair, greed, laziness, cheating, gossip. Temptations are part of the human condition. But how can we overcome them?

We can discover the tactics & find the power to overcome them by observing Jesus' life. Jesus Himself will face severe temptations and overcome them. The Bible tells us He was tempted in every way we are yet was without sin. We get to examine one time Jesus was tempted today in Matthew. Remember last week we saw the exaltation of Jesus at His baptism? The heavens opened; the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove; the Father broke the 400 year prophetic silence declaring "this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Now it's time for the next step in Jesus' ministry where He will face the devil himself and overcome him. We will consider the thrust of the devil's temptations and how they might show up in our lives today. We will see how Jesus overcame them. Then we will discover both the pattern and power to overcome the temptations we face.

Matthew 4:1-11 ESV

[1] Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. [2] And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. [3] And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." [4] But he answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

[5] Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple [6] and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you,' and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" [7] Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

[8] Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. [9] And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." [10] Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"

[11] Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

Jesus moves from His baptism into the wilderness. This desert played a large part in Jewish history. Their forefather Jacob brought his family down through the wilderness to Egypt to escape a famine. Then Moses led Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness. There on Mount Sinai, in the desert, the Lord gave the 10 commandments and the rest of His law. Then God brought them to the entrance of the Promised Land. But they failed to trust the Lord and His ability to help them conquer it. So He forced them to turn around and wander for 40 years in the wilderness until the faithless generation all died. Israel had faced great tests and temptations in the desert as a nation. They for the most part failed.

Now the One Matthew presents as their ultimate deliverer goes into the wilderness to face temptation. This was no day excursion that Jesus thought would be neat to do on His baptismal trip. The Spirit who descended upon Jesus at His baptism, now leads Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

But before this encounter, Jesus prepares for their meeting. He fasts 40 days & 40 nights perhaps reminding us of 40 years in the wilderness. This both weakens and strengthens him. He was physically weakened.

But Jesus uses this time to gain spiritual strength for his encounter with the devil. He is at the limit of human bodily endurance for a fast. He is at his weakest physically but strong spiritually. And now the tempter arrives.

"If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." He tempts Jesus where He was most vulnerable at this moment – in the area of hunger. Talk about an inviting proposition. What would be so bad if Jesus made some bread for Himself? No one would know. And He was hungry. He already had successfully fasted. And

we will see Him transform 5 loaves of bread and 2 fishes into enough lunch for 5000. So Jesus had the power to act on this invitation. It would satisfy what appeared to be his greatest need at the moment.

But the temptation invites Jesus to question God's provision and timing. It really strikes at the core of His relationship with His Father. It invites thoughts like "you don't have to wait for your Father's provision because He might not come through for you and your hungry NOW."

So we could summarize the temptation like this. Use your divine power to satisfy a personal need. It is apparently not the Father's will for Jesus to eat bread now. Jesus came to live a truly human life that went through the normal means of acquiring food. Though he will miraculously provide food for others, he never used this power to selfishly provide for His own needs or give Himself some advantage. Jesus instead waits for God to act for him. He will use His power only at His Father's bidding. He trusts that His Father will give Him bread at the appropriate time. .

So Jesus resists this temptation by quoting Deuteronomy – It is written – **"Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."** Or to put it another way "I ultimately depend on my Father's Word to sustain me. He will speak & provide when it is time." This quotes Moses who reviewed a shameful part of Israel's history. When God led the multitude out into the desert, He had to feed them. So God provided for them through manna, a bread that came from heaven and was on the ground every morning like dew. Through this experience, God taught them that life ultimately depends on Him and not bread. God sustains life and can provide for His people even when they don't have the provisions themselves. So Jesus demonstrates here how Israel should have responded in the wilderness when they were short of food. Take God at His Word. He will care for you, even when you face scarcity. If it is God's will for you to be in a desert, you need to trust Him when He says He will take care of you.

Now none of us will be tempted by an invitation to turn stones into loaves of bread. We can't do that. But this temptation comes to us in a similar form. **Use what you have to satisfy a desire in a way contrary to God's will or timing.** What do we have that we could use this way? Some have good looks or bodies; some have money or smarts or positions or power. All of us have tongues that can be used to glorify God or pass on gossip. If you think about that which tempts you most, you likely have some means or ability to say yes to those temptations.

Say you have a need/desire for someone to love you romantically. You want to get into a relationship. It looks like there is a possibility with this one person. But maybe that possibility goes outside of God's will or timing. Maybe

you're in a relationship and that other person pressures or invites you to include sex in that relationship outside of marriage. You think that if you don't do it, you will lose that person. That's all you can see. So you're considering whether or not to say yes.

Or you might believe that God has placed you in a desert where there are no possibilities for you when it comes to relationships. You might believe that SVBC is a desert for you in the area of finding someone to marry. Yet if God can provide food in the desert for a multitude of people, he can provide you with a spouse where and when it's right for you maybe even here.

Maybe you are in competition for a job or position or a scholarship – you think that the only way this could happen is if you cheat on the test or lie on the application. But God says I will provide whatever you need.

Will God provide when you are unemployed? He provided for an unemployed multitude in the desert.

Will God provide in the midst of difficult problems? God provided Abraham and Sarah a son when they were childless at 100 and 90.

Jesus remained faithful to His Father through this temptation to use His power for personal gain. When we face temptations like this, we need to remember our relationship with the Father and trust His ability to provide.

The tempter does not give up. Matthew identifies him as the devil in verse 5. He takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple – a very high place. Then he invites Jesus to do something much more dramatic and public – “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down.” Now that's a crazy request. So the devil tries to justify it by quoting Scripture and using Jesus' tactic “For it is written – ‘He will command his angels concerning you – on their hands they will bear you up lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” So why don't you jump off the temple roof Jesus and just before you hit the stone pavement below, God will send His angels to catch you. **He wants Jesus to test His Father for His faithfulness.**

That would be a pretty spectacular stunt. Think about the impact it would have on the crowds and Jesus' claim to be Messiah. Imagine how you could market this – “Man jumps off temple roof and is caught by angels.” That would sell and gain a pretty large following. The devil quotes Scripture – Psalm 91 in fact. But he quotes it in a misleading way to fit his purpose.

If Jesus accepted this invitation, he would be testing whether his Father was trustworthy. He would manufacture a situation demanding that God prove Himself. He would presume that He can dictate to His Father what must happen to keep His trust. Notice again, this temptation attacks the relationship between Father and Son.

Jesus resists the test by again quoting from Deuteronomy. This time he quotes Deuteronomy 6:16 – **“You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.”** Moses reminds Israel of another difficult episode in Israel’s history. They were in the desert and running out of water. Things looked desperate. But instead of turning to the Lord in prayer and faith, they complained and started talking about turning back to Egypt. Despite witnessing all the plagues and the incredible deliverance through the Passover, they questioned “is God with us or not?” God enabled Moses to strike a rock and water poured out. But Moses discerned the faithlessness of the people. So he called the place Massah because they tested the Lord and His faithfulness. Jesus will not imitate His countrymen. He chooses to continue to trust in the Father and His timetable for the unveiling of His ministry. He will test His Father.

How does this temptation show up in our lives today? I think it’s something like this. **Believe that testing God’s faithfulness is a normal practice in the Christian life.** We can say things like “God, if this situation works out, then I will believe in you. If you get me out of this trouble, then I will go back to church. If you do this or show me a sign, then I will trust you. We think that laying out a fleece before God like Gideon did in the Old Testament is a good thing. God must prove Himself for us to trust Him.

Sometimes God condescends to our low level of trust. In the case of the fleece, God had a work to do through Gideon so He allowed Gideon’s test. But if our faith depends on God delivering a sign or producing what we want when we want, we have to ask ourselves if we actually trust in God or a genie.

Testing God is actually an act of disobedience and a lack of trust in Him. Remember we learned in Job. God is worthy of our worship and obedience regardless of whether we get anything out of it. Remember at the end of the book of Job when he prayed for his friends? There was nothing in it for him. He was promised no reward and no relief. He was simply obedient to God because God is worthy of being obeyed. You and I need to continue to obey God and cultivate that trust in Him that is not dependent on everything working out or getting some reward. If we don’t know God enough to trust Him this way, we must invest more in going deeper with Him through His word and prayer.

The devil makes one last attempt in this encounter. He takes Jesus to a high mountain somewhere and shows him the kingdoms of the world in all their glory. We don't know if this was in some sort of vision or an actual place. But as they gaze upon the kingdoms and their power, the devil offers them to Jesus for an apparently simple act. "All these I will give to you, if you will fall down and worship me." Here is another skillful and enticing temptation. Jesus did come to reign over the kingdoms of the world. Jesus would call people from every nation to come into the kingdom of heaven. Here it was laid out all before Him without a cross to go through. Here was a shortcut to glory. Satan tempts Jesus to **go against God's way by giving your worship to someone other than Him.**

This temptation had particular appeal to the disciples. They wanted power without suffering. Peter fell to this temptation when he realized Jesus would go to the cross. He was convinced Jesus' path to glory must bypass the shame of the cross. What did Jesus say to Peter that day? Get behind me Satan.

Jesus resists Satan's offer of the glorious world kingdoms for a kingdom with greater glory. Jesus' mission involved a cross and so would the mission of the disciples and His followers. So Jesus not only resists but commands Satan. **"Be gone – for it is written – you shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."** And this also comes from Deuteronomy where Moses reminds the Israelites of another shameful episode in their history. When Moses was up on Mount Sinai for 40 days and nights, they got restless. They wanted a god they could see. So they made a golden calf and worshipped it as Yahweh, the Lord. But they were to worship the Lord alone – not some idol they made in their own image.

This is our temptation. We face the temptation to go against God's way by giving our worship to someone else. Sometimes that someone is us. Sin desires to cast off God's will and have our own way so that we set ourselves up to be God. Notice again, this temptation attacks the core of Jesus' relationship with His Father. "Turn away from your Father and His commands and worship me". But Jesus obeys His Father and commands Satan to depart.

So Jesus proves Himself faithful to His Father. He passes the tests Israel failed. Israel despised the bread and the one who provided it thinking they could go back to Egypt to find life. Jesus recognized that man lives by the Word of God. Israel tested the Lord at Massah. Jesus refused to test the Lord by throwing Himself off of the temple. Israel worshipped the golden calf. Jesus refused to worship Satan.

The account closes with a wonderful testimony of God's provision. Angels come and minister to Jesus. All of heaven and the spiritual world must have watched this battle. Instead of angels coming to catch Jesus at the end of a publicity stunt, they minister to Jesus at the end of a great victory over Satan. If Jesus had said yes to any of these temptations, there would be no salvation; no church and no reconciliation with God. We would not be gathered together here. We would be lost. But Jesus won that day as a human in the face of the most intense temptation anyone has ever faced. This is the good news from this passage. It also has very practical implications for our lives today.

Jesus' pattern of obedience to and trust in His Father shows us the way to overcome temptation. .

It can be summarized in one statement that has 4 parts. **Resist the devil in the power of the Spirit through the guidance of the Word to accomplish the will of God. Here is the pattern & power to overcome.**

(1) Resist the devil. Have you decided in your heart and mind that you are going to resist the devil as a Christ follower? Or are you going to dabble in whatever comes along and deceive yourself into thinking he's not that much of a threat. A decision to resist the devil is a key part of the Christian walk. Listen to what Jesus' family and disciple have to say about this.

James 4:7. "Submit yourselves, then, to God. **Resist the devil**, and he will flee from you" 1 Peter 5:8–9. "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. **Resist him**, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings." Resist – fight, struggle against, repel, oppose, withstand, refuse. Resistance is not futile. It is essential. When temptation arrives, the beginning of the victory comes in saying "No!" We have been called to put on the full armor of God and to take our stand against the devil's schemes (Eph. 6:10–18).

(2) In the power of the Spirit of God. We cannot resist the devil in our own strength; our power must come from the Holy Spirit. Jesus was guided and empowered by the Spirit in his temptations. He was never alone in his struggle, even at the most difficult moments. The Spirit was there as his guide and his resource for power. Don't believe the devil's lie that God has abandoned you. Don't believe that you can handle temptation in your own strength. Turn to the Spirit and other Christians for help. I saw an example of the necessity for help in my own life this week. I have a favorite winter jacket. The zipper puller broke. For weeks I have been using a paperclip to pull my zipper up & down. This week I decided I am going to fix the zipper myself. I went to Fabricland to get some zipper replacements for under 5\$. I looked

forward to my coming zipper victory. So I tried to put on these new zippers. Here is the result of my attempts. Zipper carnage! I was determined to resist the zipper malfunction. But I needed help – so I went to a tailor who fixed it for me. Now I enjoy zipper victory. We can determine to resist the devil in temptation. But we need the help of the Holy Spirit and other Christians. Resist the devil by the power of the Spirit.

(3) *Through the guidance of the Word of God.* If temptation invites us to go contrary to God’s will for us, then knowing that will is what keeps us on track. How did Jesus resist every one of Satan’s temptations? He used God’s Word. The Bible has been given to show us the truth of life in contrast to the lie of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Compare the Word of Jesus to the words of the world, and we will understand both how to confront lies and how to follow the Father’s will (cf. John 8:31–32).

(4) *To accomplish the will of God the Father.* By knowing God’s Word we will be able to discern his will for us. This is especially important when we face some gray area of temptation. We must ask “is this what God wants for me. Can I do this and truly love God and delight in Him while I’m doing it?” Delighting in God, or loving God, may be the most important guideline for all of the decisions of our lives, big and small. If we truly love God, we will not do anything contrary to his Word and will for us.

So we’ve seen Satan’s attempts and Jesus’ resistance. We’ve seen that Jesus’ pattern of obedience to and trust in His Father shows us the way to resist the devil. Now what do we need to talk to God our Father about in light of all that He’s revealed today.

If you don’t know Christ, you are on your own when it comes to resisting the devil’s temptations. You don’t have the Holy Spirit’s power in you. You need Christ for forgiveness and for the power to overcome the temptations in your life. Will you trust Him with your life by receiving Him into your life when we pray in a moment?

Christian, have you been resisting the devil or giving in? Do you need to confess this to Lord and maybe to others? Then ask the Holy Spirit for the power to actively resist those temptations when they come.

All Christians, we must continually follow Jesus’ pattern to overcome temptation more and more. Resolve to resist the devil. Tap into the Spirit’s power. Continue to know God through time in His Word. Continue to test what you’re thinking about doing through the filter of will this enable me to delight in and honor God? Will you come to God

your Father now, to talk with Him about He has revealed to you today? Everyone faces temptations, but we don't have to give into them.