

Temptation

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 February 2024

Preacher: Ray Sweet

- [0 : 0 0] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. As always, you can check us out at FCCGreensburg.com or you can go to the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.
- But hey, we are all about getting into the Word of God, but most importantly, letting the Word of God get into us. Transform these hearts more and more into the image of Christ every single day.
- So welcome to a brand new series. We're starting today from the Gospel of Matthew. If you'd like to follow along, you can go ahead and grab your Bibles. Go to Matthew chapter 4. It's about two-thirds the way or so through your Bible.
- But let's play a game to get started in this series where my clear bias is going to show here. And you could choose to approve by giving a thumbs up or even cheering if you want.
- Or you could disagree with me by giving a thumbs down or booing. And you could do that from home, in your car, wherever you are, okay? So got it? Thumbs up, Ray? We agree. Thumbs down. You got this one wrong, Pastor.
- [1 : 0 5] Okay, let's start here. And I'll start with a big controversy here in Greensburg. El Reparo is greater than any other Mexican restaurant in Greensburg.
- Okay, I bet you we got a lot of thumbs up there. Maybe a few thumbs down. Okay, some people's food palate needs some work. But let's stay on this food topic here. Sushi is yucky.
- Big thumbs up for me. There's a lot of things greater than sushi, in my opinion. Can't do that seaweed taste. Here's another one for you football fans. Rooting for the Colts is greater than rooting for any other NFL team.
- A lot of thumbs should be up in this area. I know we got a lot of Bengals fans, Steelers fans, maybe some Ravens fans, some Bears, Browns, maybe in this area as well.
- How about this one? Switching gears a little bit. Shiplap is overrated. Probably some thumbs down there. People love their shiplap, right?
- [2 : 0 5] And so you're saying, no, no, it's not. Nothing else is greater than shiplap. Okay, here's the next one. The Hallmark Channel saves money on screenwriters using almost the same script in every movie.
- Now, whether you agree with me or not there, that is absolutely true. Okay, last one. When it comes to basketball, the Purdue Boilermakers are greater than those has-been Indiana Hoosiers.
- Man, I just love to start my messages off by picking a fight, okay? But on a serious note, over the next couple of months, I'm excited to talk about those words greater than.
- I remember at elementary school, you had these math problems where they would say 100 is greater or less than 50. And you would have to choose which side is the bigger number, the greater than.

And my teachers always taught me to remember them with the visual of an alligator. And when it has its mouth wide open, it's eating the larger number of fish. But I want to challenge you in this series to realize that every day you have a choice to make.

[3 : 12] To let Jesus be greater than or less than whatever it is you're facing. Whether we're talking about sickness or health struggles. Maybe your past that's holding you back.

Other limitations you feel that you have. Fear over all kinds of things. Maybe it's religion or death, even temptation. You know, in this Easter series, we're going to discover a God who is greater than anything this world can throw your way.

And it's my prayer that as we walk through certain passages in Matthew, that you'll not only come to that head knowledge that He is greater than dot, dot, dot.

Go ahead and fill in your blank. But that each of us will walk intimately with Him, living for His glory. Walking in His freedom that only He gives. So today, we're going to look at a story that I know a lot of you have probably heard all your life.

The story of Jesus, right after His baptism, being led into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. So to continue to set this stage for you a little bit, this is early on in Jesus' ministry.

[4 : 21] And in that baptism I just mentioned, you have John the Baptist baptizing Jesus in the Jordan River, where His heavenly Father's voice audibly says, This is my Son, whom I love.

With Him, I am well pleased. And if that's the coronation of the King, then His kingship, His lordship, is about to be put to the test. Now, before we jump into this passage all about temptation, there's some stuff that I think we need to understand right off the top.

So make no mistake about it. You and I both are in a spiritual battle right now. Right now. And trust me, it won't end while you're still breathing. Ephesians 6.12, the Apostle Paul, through the Holy Spirit, says, For our struggle is not against flesh and blood.

We like to fight with people, right? But our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against authorities, against the powers of this dark world. And listen to this. And against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

So if you and I, if this veil could be moved from our eyes, and we could see the spiritual realm and what is really happening, the battle for our hearts all around us, I'm convinced we'd either freak out, faint, or do both.

[5 : 38] I am talking about the battle between light and dark. The war between two conflicting kingdoms with opposite agendas. The kingdom of Satan that is evil.

And the kingdom of God that is holy and good. And it started in Genesis chapter 3, didn't it? Where God had told Adam and Eve that they could have all the amazing food in the Garden of Eden, except they couldn't eat from one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And onto the scene slithers the deceiver, the father of lies. And Satan says, did God really say? And he tempted Eve with empty lies and manipulation.

She took the fruit. She gave it to her poor defenseless husband. I'm just kidding there. He was just as guilty. But they ate it.

Sin came into the world. And there's been this cosmic battle for the heart of men and women and even children ever since. But make no bones about it.

[6 : 41] Satan wants to destroy you. The devil wants to keep you from discovering salvation in Christ. But if he can't do that, he'll do his best to tempt you with shiny things so that you fall into his traps, so that you are ineffective in shining the light of Jesus into Satan's darkness.

And listen, there are a lot of Christians. And each of us can fall into this trap if we're not careful. A lot of believers who are defeated and depleted and not walking in the power of the Holy Spirit living inside of us.

And today, that's what we're going to talk about. And how you respond to temptation will determine your spiritual maturity. The late Charles Stanley said it like this.

He said, The awful, never-ending process of combating temptation is God's means of maturing us and conforming us to the image of Christ.

So let's get a few things, kind of get to a few things in our minds right now that are common for people like us to be tempted by. We're tempted to grab for as much power as possible.

[7 : 50] We're tempted to run after material things, thinking that somehow that house, that car, those clothes, whatever, will fill me up. We're tempted to define our worth by a relationship.

Even do that relationship outside of God's perfect parameters, which usually never ends well. We're tempted to be a victim in every situation. We're tempted to ignore God's word and with pride oozing, saying, I did it my way, right?

We're tempted to steal, cheat, and lie. Even those little white lies to get what we want. We're tempted to lust after those made in the image of God. We're tempted to gossip, slander, and use profane and abusive language to hurt others, to squelch our own insecurities.

We're tempted to be lazy when God made us for a purpose. We're tempted to hoard our gifts and make church all about who's serving me instead of picking up my towel to wash feet.

We're tempted to hold grudges and not forgive when we've been washed clean, standing spotless before the King of Kings. Listen, we could keep going for the rest of this message because there are millions of creative ways that Satan tempts us to not walk in the freedom and the power that's found in Jesus Christ.

[9 : 07] But today, let's look at the example of the only one who walked this earth, dealt with constant temptation even more than we have, and yet he never sinned, not even once.

That would be our Messiah, Jesus, who has died in our place, conquered the grave by rising from the dead, and he offers life everlasting to you and me.

The one who created us in our mother's womb. That's who we're talking about. Who knows us better than we know ourselves, and who wants to daily walk in a relationship with his creation.

So, here's Jesus in the wilderness. It's no accident that this story parallels the Israelites when they wandered in the wilderness, and when Satan came with temptation, so many Israelites gave into it by grumbling, by choosing to worship idols, even by rebelling against the Lord and his leader Moses.

But here we see the Savior also in the wilderness as Satan comes to tempt him. You know, I was once taught an acronym for when we can be the most vulnerable to temptation, and it goes like this.

[10 : 16] HALT. H-A-L-T. When you're hungry, alone, lonely, or tired. Let me say it again. When you're hungry, alone, lonely, or tired, you better believe that Satan is going to attack, and here he does this with Jesus as well.

So, if you're a note taker, don't forget, if you have the YouVersion Bible app on your phone, it's free. It's only free because a church does it as a ministry.

But if you have the YouVersion Bible app, Y-O-U version Bible app, you can go ahead and go to the menu, go to events, go to First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana, and you'll see the outline that way.

But let's talk first about this temptation of self-gratification. Self-gratification. You should have your Bibles open with me here to Matthew 4, and let's start in verse 1.

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry. Probably the biggest understatement of the year, right?

[11 : 23] Of course he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread. Jesus answered, It is written, Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

You know, I think the longest I've fasted, at least on purpose, I've had a couple medical things that I did not enjoy, but the longest I've fasted on purpose is 36 hours. And I'm telling you, I was ready for some food.

I was hangry as all get-out, okay? Depleted. Depleted. I could imagine a 40-day fast. Now, I have heard of believers doing it. Of course, they have plenty of water, even things like juices and vitamins and nutrients to make sure their body has what it needs.

But Satan always comes attacking when we're the most vulnerable. And you'll notice that he plays off Jesus' baptism, where the Father has just declared him as the Son of God.

And he basically says, Son of God, huh? Man, if that's true, then why would God let you, the Son of God, be hungry like this? And the answer is simple. It's because Jesus is drawing near to the Father by rejecting those physical needs.

[12 : 32] He is seeking the heart of God, realizing that God is his true sustenance. But is there anything wrong with food? Absolutely not, okay?

Especially since Culver's just came to town. But what the deceiver is trying to get Jesus to do here was outside of God's will. And doesn't Satan do the same thing with us?

Child of God, huh? That's who you claim to be? Then why are you walking through this? Why would God let you feel this way? Why would God allow that to happen in your life?

And when the reality is that we do live in a fallen world. And while I'm not trying to make light of anyone's hurt whatsoever, listen, there's free will. And the heartbreaking side of that is that people often hurt people.

And Jesus understood this because later in his ministry, in John 16, 33, he says, In this world you will have trouble, but take heart because I have overcome the world.

[13 : 33] Jesus says, I am your answer. I am your hope. During it all, you live in a fallen world where there's going to be sickness. There's going to be bad decisions by others. But take heart because I am with you.

I want to be your hope. See, Jesus knew this. And we can know that our Father will meet every need we have as we seek his heart. See, in Matthew 16, actually Matthew 6, 33, Jesus taught us, But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.

And then all these things, talking about the needs that you have, will be given to you as well. So what are some of those natural desires? Things like food, water, sleep, sexual intimacy.

All things created by God wired into you that are good. Listen to this, that are good when kept in his will, when done his way according to his word.

See, food is fine. But when we get out of control and we get unhealthy, we can harm the temple and it can become an idol. And listen, I personally battle food as an idol every day.

[14 : 39] I've had seasons where I've defeated it and I've done well. And then I've had seasons where I've crashed hard. I am tempted to run to food before I run to the Lord. Sleep is necessary to function at your best, helping your body to heal and recharge.

And yet when we overdo it, that laziness doesn't honor God at all. And on the other end, when we refuse to rest and recharge, that's not honoring either. Also, sexual intimacy was created by God.

It's a beautiful thing. But look at our culture. We have perverted it in so many ways for self-gratification. And when we go outside of God's perfect design, according to his word, what God says should happen, how sex should happen, we do the very thing Satan was trying to get Jesus to do.

We choose self-gratification. We choose my way over God's plan that always leads to life. When Satan's way, when my way always leads to death and destruction and chaos.

So the answer is what Jesus understood. My heavenly father is good. He will meet every need and I will trust him. And I'll tell you guys, because I am just as human as you are, even though giving into the flesh promises to satisfy those longings.

[15 : 57] Just think about the times you've given into things. It's because it promises to satisfy, right? But instead it leaves us empty and longing for something more that only a savior can give.

Now here's the second temptation. We're calling it testing God. Pick back up with me, if you would, in Matthew 5-7 as we look at this testing of God.

It says this, So Satan takes Jesus up to the highest point of the temple.

The Jewish historian Josephus reported that to be about a 450-foot drop down to the valley, which means no one is surviving that fall without God intervening.

Tradition even tells us that James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, honestly, guys like Peter and Paul would have reported probably to him, he would have been killed for his faith by being thrown down from the same portico.

[17 : 12] That's what tradition teaches us. So yes, Satan once again is saying, Son of God, huh? Then throw yourself off the highest point of the temple. And possibly because Jesus quoted scripture after the first temptation, now Satan tries to get clever by doing the same.

The bad part is he takes it out of context. This scripture is talking about trusting God, not testing him outside of his perfect will. Now, did you know that doing radical things like this were pretty common among those who came before Jesus?

A lot of people don't realize that there were a lot of people who came and claimed to be the Messiah, the long-awaited Savior of the world. A lot of people wanted that attention.

And there's a man, and I may not pronounce his name right, but his name I think is Thutis or Thetis. He led a group from the temple to the Jordan River, this is before Jesus came, promising to split the Jordan River in two.

And when he failed, everyone stopped listening to him as they should have. And there were others who did similar things and failed. And yet Satan knows that Jesus is the Son of God.

[18 : 21] He's the real deal. And he tries to get Jesus to operate outside the Father's perfect timing, to ruin God's perfect plan. Because listen, what Satan tried to make happen outside of the will of the Father will happen someday.

In fact, in Philippians 2, 9-11, it says, Therefore God exalted him, Jesus, to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

So let's be careful not to give in to this temptation to test God, to accept a counterfeit when the real deal is coming. This instant gratification can be a major struggle when you are walking with God.

We see this a lot in American Christianity where it becomes this selfish, it's all about God blessing me type of religion. God, what can you do for me?

Where Christianity has been manipulated into something it was never intended to be. And so God, if you're real, then you'll let me win that \$890 million Powerball jackpot.

[19 : 34] Of course, that would show that you're real, right? And it's this God, you're this cosmic genie that is supposed to serve me. God, if you're real, then you'll heal my loved one.

And I get the reason to ask that. And yet God's will may not always be ours. And we could keep going. Instead, he says, do not put the Lord your God to the test.

Is there anything wrong to pray for someone? Absolutely not. And God can heal. But do not put the Lord your God to the test. Trust his perfect will and care over your life. Here's the third temptation.

We're calling this self-exaltation. Self-exaltation. So look at Matthew 4, 8 through 10. It says, You know, the interesting thing about that question is you could answer yes or no, right?

The answer is yes and no. You could make the argument that he's the God of this world that a lot of people serve, right? That he's the God of this world. And so a lot of people, he has control over a lot of this world.

[20 : 54] So in some ways, yes, at least for now. In so many other ways, it's like, no, we have a God who is so much greater, a true God. But what Satan is doing here is he's offering to bypass Jesus' painful path to exaltation.

He deserves to be exalted over all. He is that long-awaited Messiah. And yet God's perfect will was that he would walk that painful path, giving his life on the cross to be that substitute for us, to pay our sin debt.

But Satan tried to offer Jesus a shortcut. And he does that for us a lot too. And yet Jesus chose to do it God's way. And how often does Satan come tempting us to put ourselves on this pedestal, to exalt ourselves?

And I'll tell you, we live in a very me-centered world. And even church sometimes. Very me-centered church. It's been shoved down our throats by our culture. And it's easy to find yourself as an idol.

It's all about my plans. It's all about my pleasures, my possessions. And ultimately, that's my pride. That's my pride in full swing. It's this pursuit of success so I can be exalted over them, whoever they are.

[22 : 08] Getting others to ascribe me value and worth. Look at me. Look at my title. Look at my corner office. It's the pursuit that he who has the most toys wins. And yet in reality, we can be surrounded by luxury, by money, by extravagant things.

And we can be miserable. Just look at Hollywood. The people we're told are the pinnacle of success and beauty. And yet when they have been a little more vulnerable in recent decades and they open up, it's an ugly thing.

It's the same song and dance over and over. The things of this world will never satisfy the God-shaped hole that Blaise Pascal talked about.

That God-shaped hole that every one of us has in our heart. But Jesus is greater than. He is greater than all these temptations and all these worldly things.

And the answer to every temptation that you and I will face is found in Scripture. Now, I purposely skip talking much about this, Jesus' responses back to Satan until now.

[23 : 12] Because I want to make this strong point. We can defeat temptation by knowing and obeying God's Word. It doesn't have to be as complicated as we sometimes make it to be.

And if you look at a passage like 1 Corinthians 10.13, it even says, No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. What's that mean? It means that we deal with the same stuff.

Satan loves to isolate you, make you think you're the only one dealing with whatever this is. And yet we're all dealing with very similar stuff. And then he says, And God is faithful.

He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. That's not in your strength. That's when you are in Christ. He says, But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

Now, look at what Jesus, in extremely vulnerable moments, did on all three occasions where Satan tempts him. He says right back to him, It is written, Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

[24 : 14] It is also written, Do not put the Lord your God to the test. For it is written, Worship the Lord your God and serve him only. Let me ask you this. Where is it written? Listen, in the God-breathed words that we call the Bible.

And listen, if Jesus, the Son of God, needed the Word of God to combat Satan's lies, then we absolutely do as well. And yet so many of us, and this isn't me pointing fingers, because if I did, I'd have three more pointing right back at me.

But so many of us ignore the Word of God, and we wonder why we fall so hard every time Satan comes tempting. Listen to this incredible passage from Psalm 19, starting in verse 7.

The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous.

[25 : 23] They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold. They are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. By them your servant is warned, and keeping them there is great reward.

So how do we defeat Satan's attempts to destroy us? Because that's what he seeks to do with temptation, that always leads to sin, and then sin leads to death on this earth, and death forever in eternity.

By knowing the word of God. That's the answer. By knowing the word of God. Having it stored up in your heart, and then obeying the truth. Allowing the Holy Spirit to bring that to your mind.

Trusting him, and obeying the truth that shall set you free. Let me end with a couple different scenarios where I dealt with temptation in my life. The first one, I'm going to take you all the way back to me being in 8th grade, okay?

Also, pre-Jesus days for me. I didn't grow up in the church. Knew nothing about God or the Bible. So I've told you before that I was blessed to grow up, though, even though I didn't grow up in church, I did grow up in a loving and hardworking family.

[26 : 32] However, a lot of things that other kids had, I didn't get, because we just didn't have the money for it. For example, I've always loved sports. When other kids had their favorite jerseys, which was a really big deal, kind of in the 90s, it just wasn't something my family could afford to get.

So one day, I'm on the bus, and I'm going home after school, and a kid who was often in trouble pulled out several jerseys. I think he had, like, ripped open a locker in the locker room and stole some jerseys.

And he had one that apparently didn't appeal to him for whatever reason. I think it was a Penny Hardaway jersey, if my memory serves me right, a magic jersey. And he offered that jersey to me.

Now, listen, I was raised in a very moral family. I knew it was wrong. I had been taught never to steal. And yet, this was a shortcut. And this is what Satan does.

He gave me a shortcut. I didn't have to spend my own money. I didn't have to beg my mom and dad in here, no, right? Or maybe not even get it at all. And yet, this shortcut that would cost me anything was too appealing in the moment.

[27 : 40] And I gave in. About a day later, I get called to the office after he got caught. And to make a longer story short, I got suspended from school. I gave in to temptation that went against my oral, my moral upbringing.

And it was heartbreaking. And it was disappointing for my parents who taught me so much more. And I learned such a valuable lesson from that. But just the other day, I was being tempted. And it makes all the difference that I now have the Holy Spirit living inside of me.

And in this temptation, I just called back up the Word of God that was in my heart. And I said, Satan, it is written. And I quoted Scripture. And what a joy it was.

Now, I don't always win these battles. And I fail more than I'd like to admit. But what a joy it was in that moment to overcome that temptation and worship Jesus instead of my own flesh.

So let me leave you with this. No matter what temptation you are battling with today, no matter what you are facing, no matter what Satan is throwing your way to destroy you, to keep you from being the child of God that you are called to be, to make the impact for the kingdom that you are called to make, no matter what temptation you are battling today, know that Jesus is greater than as you walk in His purpose and His power.

[29 : 03] Let's pray. Father, thank you so much for just these words that you have spoken over us today, these words of life. We just give you permission to stir our hearts, to make us more like Jesus.

And we pray this in His precious name. God's people said, amen and amen. Hey, I want to give you this quick invitation. If you have questions about your faith, if you'd like to talk about surrendering your life to the Lordship of Christ, reach out to us, First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana.

My name is Ray Sweet. You can call us at 812-663-8488 or ray at fccgreensburg.com. You can email me. Hey, God bless you.

We hope you have a great week.