

God's Son stays true to God

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[0 : 00] So, we'll be reading today from Matthew chapter 4, just starting with verse 1, going through to verse 11. Matthew 4.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And then the tempter came and said to him, If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.

But he answered, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, 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 the stone.

Jesus said to him, Again it is written, You shall not put the Lord your God to the test. Again the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

And he said to him, All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me. 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.

[1 : 25] Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him. Well, I'm not sure about you, but I've never had an experience that even comes close to what we read in Matthew 4.

I've done World Vision's 40-hour famine a few times. Not always succeeding. And I don't think the temptation to sneak some popcorn in the movie theatre was the devil sitting beside me.

I've never been led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to undergo testing, unless you count planned hiking trips that I then get lost in the dark, or a friend forgets to bring his hiking pack which had lots of the food in it.

So maybe that was the spirit sending me to be tested. I don't think it was. I've never been offered all the glory of the world. I don't think winning second division in amateur church's soccer league is that glorious.

That's about as glorious as I've got so far. So if you're like me, you might be thinking this morning, what on earth does this have to do with my life? Why is this relevant?

[2 : 40] It's just so far removed from our everyday experience. Well, let me ask, are there destructive patterns in your life that you would love to get the victory over?

Are there destructive patterns in your life that you would love to get the victory over? There are in mine. This passage gives us a glimpse of how you can get that freedom from what wreaks havoc inside us and in our life.

And let me say from the outset, the answer might be a bit different to what we expect. Now, if you're new to Christianity and you're not sure about this devil character, can I just encourage you not to focus on that for the moment, but get to know the Jesus character first.

Decide first what you think of him. So I think there's two obvious lessons we can draw from this battle between Jesus and darkness.

Now, first, I think we get a glimpse into how Satan can tempt people to do evil, what strategies he uses. So he appeals to our sense of entitlement, suggesting that life is found purely in our earthly needs.

[4 : 05] Or he can pretend to be an angel of light, bringing to mind scripture even, provoking us to prove God's love to keep us safe.

Or he can outright just try and entice us with what the world can offer. So we do get a glimpse of how Satan works here. I think the other obvious lesson is that we get an example of how to fight.

Jesus trumps the lies with the truth, what God says in his word. So although there's these two obvious lessons, valuable lessons, about the spiritual dimension to the choices we make in life, there is a serious flaw to making this passage immediately about us, as if it's a manual for how we fight temptation.

They're good lessons, but it's not about us directly. Matthew wants us to see something crucially important about Jesus.

For us to see it, we need to pause and consider humanity's just sorry track record. So from Adam, the first son of God, even in a state of total contentment, total peace and blessing, total, like we have not experienced that.

[5 : 31] He was in that state. He chose to try and rule his own life, replacing the glory as the son of God with the glory he could get for himself.

That's incredible that he chose that. And we've felt the destructive consequences ever since. And then God called into being another son, another special relationship, a nation this time, the nation of Israel, the Jewish people.

Out of all the nations, these people would be God's special possession. Out of all the earth, this is his special possession, to live with God under his good laws.

And they were called to an incredible calling, to be a witness to the nations, to be a light so that people would come under the good rule of God and have life. But then this nation, this son, fails as well.

And we see it clearly in the wilderness experience after they leave Egypt. So when Jesus quotes scripture, it's all from the wilderness period of Israel.

[6 : 46] So we're going to see that as we go through it soon. And then there's every human being since, created by God. We've all tried to find life apart from God.

Like sometimes in my life, I can plainly see the evil before me in the choice. And I know exactly what God says will give me life. And I willingly choose to believe the lie.

I'm not sure if that represents you as well. The devil has an impressive record. He is undefeated. No, son.

No daughter has remained loyal to God the Father. Not one. This is one mighty foe. This unusual passage is relevant because the history of the world, the history of Israel, my history, our history, is that we've chosen evil, forfeiting the life God offers.

If we're going to have any freedom, if we're going to have life, we need a champion to fight on our behalf. We need someone outside of the problem. We need someone who's stronger than this foe.

[8 : 07] We need a son who remains loyal to God the Father all the way to represent us. That's why we really need to hear this passage.

So we heard at his baptism the Father calling him to be the servant of the world, lowering himself, identifying with sinners in order to become the king, in order to be the name above all names, in order to become the connection point between God and mankind.

So we've heard it. We've heard his calling. Does this man have the character to fulfill the calling?

Does he have the goods? Does he have the qualifications to do it? We might imagine that because Jesus is the eternal son of God that he didn't really feel the pressure of temptation like we do, but I think that's opposite from the truth.

He felt the pressure more than us because we cave in after a time, or sometimes at least. He felt it the entire way, even to the point of shedding his blood.

[9 : 27] So does he have what it takes to fulfill the mission, to stay loyal to God? Let's take a closer look at the verses. So let's please open God's word with me.

So verses 1 and 2. Notice that it's the Holy Spirit who leads Jesus into this situation. This is a God-orchestrated trial.

That does not mean that God tempts anyone. James is clear on this. God never pressures someone to do what is evil. The word tempt in Matthew's Gospel and the vast cases of the New Testament is about testing.

So the devil's intention is to persuade to do wrong, but God's intention is to show and to grow someone's trust. So will I trust God to provide for my material needs?

When I've got plenty of need, plenty, you can't really see it. Will I trust God to provide? It's only when I'm in need, when I'm tested, that's when my faith is either shown and grown or not.

[10:38] So that's God's intention. He wants it to show our faith and to grow it. The devil wants us to actually do wrong. And calling this event the temptation, so the little subheading in our Bibles that isn't in the original Bible, it's a bit, it gives us the wrong impression.

It's not like this is the only time Jesus felt pressure to compromise. His entire ministry is under severe pressure and it only intensifies. This is just a special testing before he begins, begins his work.

It's kind of like Israel in the wilderness. So I think the phrase in the wilderness, the setting of this and the number 40, it reminds us of Israel after they've come out of Egypt to be God's people, before they enter the promised land, before they undertake their mission in that sense.

They're tested. Will they trust God? They've seen his power. Will they trust him going forward? So Jesus at his baptism has been declared to be in special relationship with God, to start his mission to be saviour of the world and there's this testing before he begins.

Is he up for it? So let's see what he's got. What has he got? Let's look at each of these. Scene 1, verse 3.

[12:09] Jesus fasted 40 days and that is an understatement. He was hungry. If you are the son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.

Seems reasonable. When we were discussing this passage at elders meeting over Zoom, there I was eating dinner while we were reading these verses.

I didn't feel guilty, but it was kind of ironic. I didn't wait until after the meeting, but here I was eating while Jesus fasted 40 days. Jesus wasn't being asked to question his identity.

The if here isn't, are you the son of God or not? It's not about that. It's since you're the son of God, since you have authority over all things, you need food in this moment. That is true.

You need food. You're entitled to it. You need to live. It's quite reasonable, isn't it? We do need bread, unless you're gluten free.

[13:21] Jesus needed bread. And he clearly had the power to do it. It wasn't testing his power. He fed 5,000 people and then 4,000 people with just a little lunchbox later on.

He's clearly got the power. So what's going on? I'm going to give a small example from my own life. You may not relate to it, but here goes. I love coffee.

I live on coffee. I don't just love coffee. I live on coffee. It is usually the first thing, sorry Emma, that I think of when I wake up in the morning. I need it to get through the day.

And one day a while back, it hit me that if I was running late for my day's activities, I would make coffee and skip God's word. In effect, I'm believing I need coffee to live more than I need God's word.

What about ancient Israel? How'd they do? When they were hungry in the wilderness, the Lord sent them manna, a type of bread each day, and they survived off it for 40 years.

[14:34] So that's where this quote that Jesus says comes from. Deuteronomy 8.3. God explains what this giving of manna was all about. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

What does this mean? It's right for us to trust and thank God for being the source of our food. He is the source.

It's right for us to trust him and thank him for it. This isn't a lesson about depending on God rather than on ourselves, although that is a good lesson, a simpler lesson, which we often struggle with, don't we?

What this is about is for us to see that the command of God that sends the bread to us also offers us much, much more.

God's words give us promises to rely on. It gives us guidance for how best to live. God's word teaches us the truth and purpose of who we are and why we're here.

[15:37] God's word gives us identity. It gives us meaning, guidance, hope, and most of all, communion with God. You can have all the bread you want, but you can't really live without these things.

You can't be fully human without these things. So how did ancient Israel do at this lesson? Even with full stomachs, not fasting, but full stomachs, they whinged.

They're promised a land flowing with milk and honey, and they're grumbling. They'd rather go back to Egypt where they had onions. They'd rather be in slavery with onions.

Stuff having the identity of being God's treasured possession, and the purpose of being a light to the world for God, would rather have onions. And here's Jesus.

He must have been bone weary from 40 days of fasting, completely entitled to a small bite to eat, where he says, my life is more than food.

[16:58] I will learn this lesson from my father. What my father has said about who I am, my purpose, my mission, that feeds my soul. Scene two, verse five.

The tempter takes Jesus to Jerusalem, to the rooftop of the temple. Now, if this literally happened, or whether it's a vision, like for Ezekiel, the prophet Ezekiel, either way, I think Jesus' heart, his choice is revealed.

So I don't think it matters too much. And here's the devil quoting God's promises in Psalm 91 about his protection of the righteous person. 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 the stone.

He's not even questioning Jesus' righteousness. He's assuming that. He's urging Jesus to get rid of any doubts he has of God's backing of him, of God's love for him.

Will the Father protect him? He promises he will in Psalm 91. Perhaps knowing Jesus' intention to go to the cross, he's making Jesus think, will your Father deliver you?

[18:24] Make sure of it now. Remove any doubts. Let me illustrate this with a positive example.

A much-loved lecturer at SMBC passed away last month after battling lung cancer. And in one of his last prayer video updates, his trust was just incredible.

His honesty about the situation was incredible. His trust was incredible as well. Like he describes just the tears and just feeling miserable, and he's a doer, and so being stuck in bed was just agony. And he described it as out-of-control pain. But then he's saying, but God's teaching me that he's with me.

Like sometimes I pray, and he takes the pain away immediately. And then he's quick to say, often that doesn't happen, but sometimes he does, to remind me he's with me. He's teaching me that I will share in his glory.

[19:38] It was just such an encouraging video. Did he cry out for deliverance? Yes. Nothing wrong with that. Absolutely. But did he demand that God heal him to know that God loved him?

No. He knew he was loved because of the promises in God's word, and he kept going to the end based on those. I just hope I'm like that.

Jesus counters the lie with the truth of this situation. Deuteronomy 6.16. You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.

The context is of Israel camping at Massa, and they had no water, and so they argued with Moses. Why did you bring us up out of Egypt? To kill us?

And our children and our livestock of thirst? Is the Lord among us or not? Prove it. Give us water. Remember who's saying this?

[20:42] The people who saw all the plagues in Egypt passing through the water. Is the Lord among us or not? They saw and heard God's voice directly at Mount Sinai.

The issue wasn't crying out for help. They could have waited. They could have asked. They were complaining. They were saying, prove it. Demonstrate your love. Prove yourself, God. They started to doubt God's intentions, his good intentions.

Did he bring us out here to kill us? But this true son of God knew that he was about to embark on a very difficult path.

He's going to be rejected and flogged and murdered. Would the father deliver him from all his trials of his mission? He didn't demand proof. He knew God's backing because of what God had said at his baptism.

What he'd said in his word, You are my son in whom I delight. With you I am well pleased. He trusted God's word to be for him. Last one, scene 3, verse 8.

[22:07] The devil drops his disguise as an angel of light and he just offers Jesus all he's got. He shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. All these I will give you if you will fall down and worship me.

Now, I was discussing this with my brother-in-law a couple months ago and I said I just couldn't imagine how the offer of all the glory of the world was even enticing.

Like compared to the eternal kingdom that Jesus knew that was coming, like why would he even be tempted by that? It's like the plastic trophy you get from winning the church's soccer league. Like why is he even tempted by that? And my brother-in-law had a brilliant reply. You have the same promises.

Yeah, I do. Through Christ. And yet the flimsy imitation of the world I still find enticing.

[23 : 13] The comforts and the stuff of this world. I can have it. All I need to do is watch my spending really closely when I give to gospel work and to the poor.

That's all I need to do. To feel like I belong in society. I can have that. All I need to do is leave God at home.

Don't bring him up in conversations. Just leave him at home. I can have the status and the power in this world if I just befriend the right people, avoid others, outdo my competition, only serve people if I get an advantage from it.

All I have to do is dabble in the world's ways. Just put God a bit off centre. That's all I've got to do. Jesus confronts the lie with the truth.

Again, with Israel's experience. Deuteronomy 6.13 You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve. The context here is forgetting God due to affluence.

[24 : 27] Who would have thought affluence would be dangerous? God warns Israel, when you enter the promised land and you receive houses and vineyards and plenty of food and wine, when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of slavery.

You shall not go after the gods of the peoples who are around you. The gifts of creation are from the hand of God.

They are to be enjoyed. But there's a danger that we can forget the Lord. What did Israel do?

Rather than rejoicing in their special status as God's people and their calling to be a light to the nations, we see it with David's son Solomon. My goodness.

That would have been an amazing day to live in. The prosperity under Solomon would have been incredible. It's described as each household living in peace, in safety, full bellies.

[25 : 38] They had the joy of fellowship, worshipping together at the temple. And the temple was just, oh, that would have been impressive. That gold and the timber. But Solomon, even Solomon, later in his life, instead of influencing the nations, is seduced by the world.

And compromise creeps in, even in that generation. They start setting up other idols to worship.

And within a generation, the next son, they set up a golden bull.

Or two. They set up two golden bulls. They forgot the Lord. They thought the ways of the world is the way of glory.

Jesus isn't just offered here equal glory, like just being one among many of the nations, like Israel were trying to be. He was offered it all. He could have it all.

And the problem here isn't about having it all. He came to have it all. He came to conquer. He came to get the whole world, every heart, all his people.

[27 : 01] I think he's being offered here a way to get it without the pain. You don't have to go down God's way, God's painful way, that leads to the cross. You can have it now. Without the pain.

Just put God to one side. Be gone, Satan. He reveals the tempter's true nature in this name.

Satan means enemy. You are the enemy of God. You are the enemy of God's good purposes, of salvation. You are the enemy of God's people. Get out.

Go away. You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve. And with that, this initial time of testing is brought to an end.

Jesus has learnt his lessons well, and he receives the food. He receives the health, or probably food, that he refused to demand. He then receives it.

[28 : 03] In the Father's good timing. There is no one like this man. There is no one like him. Not reducing life to what we eat and drink and wear, but looking to God's truth and promises to nourish his soul.

Not demanding safety as proof of God's love, but resting in God's declared love for him, no matter what happens. Not taking the easy road of the world's glory, but choosing the path of suffering, trusting that the kingdom of heaven is glory worth dying for.

There is no one else like this man. This son stays true to God all the way. We don't get the victory over evil by fighting harder, by getting better weapons, by more willpower, by more discipline.

Here's how we get the victory. Jesus says it in John 8, Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever, but the son remains forever.

So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed. You need a champion to fight on your behalf.

[29 : 22] God has sent his champion to fight, his only son, who stays true to God. So the question for us is, will we tuck in behind our champion?

Will you give your allegiance to him, him only, and let his victory become your victory? Will you pray with me?

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we praise you that you are different, you are light, you are love, you are faithful to your father.

We thank you for that. Please help each one of us to rest in your righteousness. Thank you that you share that with us at great cost to yourself.

Lord, please help each one of us to tuck in behind you. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[30 : 36] Amen.