

## (5) The one to follow

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[ 0 : 00 ] As Simon says, we're going to be reading from Matthew's Gospel and chapter 4, verses 1 to 25, and that can be found on page 975 in the Bibles on your chairs.

So Matthew chapter 4, beginning at verse 1. Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And 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 a 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.

[ 1 : 33 ] 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.

Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him. Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew from Galilee, and leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled.

The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.

From that time, Jesus began to preach, saying, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. While walking by the sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.

And he said to them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. Immediately, they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them.

[ 3 : 18 ] Immediately, they left the boat and their father and followed him. And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them.

And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis and from Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan. Amen. Thanks very much, Fiona, for reading to us.

Do please keep your Bibles open there on page 975 as we look together at Matthew 4. Let me pray for us before we do that.

We thank you, Father God, that you are a speaking God. We thank you that as your word is read and taught, we hear your voice. We ask, therefore, that you would please give us ears to hear this morning.

[ 4 : 39 ] Please give us eyes of faith to see and receive the Lord Jesus. Speak to us now, we ask, by your Holy Spirit in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, with all the films that are shown on TV over Christmas at the cinema, I wonder if you've noticed the explosion of superhero films being made.

They've come out recently. Now, we've had Superman since the 70s, but over the last few years, Hollywood has been in overdrive bringing superhero after superhero to the big screen. Whether it's Superman returning, Spider-Man 1, 2, 3, Batman, X-Men, just to name a few I recognise. At the Spider-Man films, they've made over 2 billion dollars at making them some of the highest earning films of all time.

It seems we can't get enough of watching these superheroes saving the world. And it's not just at the cinema, on TV, the latest hit show is a show called Heroes, which, as you can guess from the name, is again, about superheroes saving humanity from impending doom.

Comic books about superheroes are becoming mainstream. Some of your kids are probably dressing up in their Superman costumes. And you might be thinking, whether you're into these things or not, well, why this fascination in society with superheroes?

[6:06] Why do people love them so much? Well, in his book, Superman on the Couch, yep, they write books about these things, Danny Fingeroth suggests the world loves superhero stories because superheroes uphold the principles we want to see working in the world.

Good over evil, peace over war, justice over corruption, and so superheroes and the films, their stories, well, they make us feel safe and secure in an uncertain world.

They give substance to the hope that exists in all cultures, pretty much, over all times, that a Superman, a Batman, some great figure will come, will appear, and put the world to rights to save the day and to bring the bad guys to account.

And so they suggest we love it when we see this happening on the big screen. We rejoice at the mighty superhero triumphing over evil powers, saving the day, and we imagine what a world would be like if we really had this superhero watching over us, protecting us, making the world a better place.

Unfortunately, you come out of the cinema and you're brought back to the real world. There's the homeless man asking you for money on the way back home, switch on TV, the murder of 300 Kenyans this week in church, sadness perhaps of a relative's funeral you attended just recently.

[7:38] It's why, as Christians, we need to remember the wonderful truth that we've been seeing in the opening chapters of Matthew's Gospel, that in the person of Jesus Christ, we do have a saviour, God's saviour, a real superhero, if you like, who will put the world to rights.

Now, the Bible doesn't call Jesus a superhero. The Bible calls Jesus the Christ, God's king, an all-powerful king, who, yes, he will make us feel safe and certain in an insecure world, but, more importantly, infinitely more importantly, he will make us safe and secure before God.

His name is Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. Now, in chapter 3, John the Baptist announced this king's arrival. Now, in chapter 4, we see our all-powerful king in action. And it's an awesome picture when you heard the reading read out. Did you see him? Powerful over the devil, powerful over death, powerful in people's lives.

If you turn to the service sheet, the back of the service sheet, actually, you won't see the points there, but I shall give them to you now. There's some space there to make notes. People find it helpful to make notes, jot down what they were like, and go over it with the Lord in their quiet times.

[9:02] Let me give you the points now. First, we're going to see Jesus is God's all-powerful king over the devil. Secondly, we're going to see Jesus is God's all-powerful king over death.

Thirdly, Jesus is God's all-powerful king, so repent and follow him. First then, Jesus is God's all-powerful king over the devil.

Because in verses 1 to 11, Jesus is tempted by the devil, the arch-enemy of God. But unlike the arch-enemies in superhero movies, the devil is no match for Jesus Christ.

We'll see, the devil is powerless before God's king. In verse 1, we see Jesus being led up by the spirit of God so that the devil can tempt him.

Jesus has been fasting for 40 days and 40 nights. Well, I'm not sure about you, but I'm pretty hungry in the morning if I haven't had my two Weetabix. Imagine Jesus here, 40 days, 40 nights, no food.

[10:11] And knowing this, the devil tries to exploit it. Verse 3, And the tempter came and said to him, If you are the son of God, command these stones to become loaths of bread.

Come on, says the devil, you're hungry, you've not eaten for 40 days. Since you're the powerful son of God, why not make some bread for yourself? God did it for the Israelites, why not do it for yourself?

But Jesus knows better than to doubt God, to doubt his provision, to take matters into his own hands, so he replies with a quote from Deuteronomy, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

This quote recalls Israel's own testing in the wilderness when God miraculously provided bread for them from heaven. Jesus has learnt from Israel's past mistakes.

He knows that God will provide for him too. Jesus trusts God. He trusts God to provide him with everything that he needs. And so the devil, well he can't tempt Jesus to take matters into his own hands.

[ 11 : 28 ] The devil is powerless against him. So much so that even when Jesus is at his greatest need hanging on the cross, dying for mine and your sins, bearing God's wrath, he won't give in to the devil's temptations and take matters into his own hands.

When the passers-by mock him, if you're the son of God, come down from the cross. No, Jesus won't give in because his trust is firmly in God's care and provision.

We see the same thing in the second temptation. So the devil takes Jesus up to Jerusalem onto the holy temple and says, verse 6, well if you're 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.

So you trust God, do you? Trust him to with all your caring for you, providing for you, well let's see about that, let's put that to the test. Why don't you throw yourself off this building?

After all, Psalm 91, God's own word, says he'll protect you. He won't allow your feet to touch the ground. But Jesus knows his Bible better than the devil.

[ 12 : 49 ] The psalm that the devil quotes from, yes it is about God's protection of his people, but Jesus knows it's never right to test God as the devil is suggesting here. Indeed, Deuteronomy again, chapter 6 says, explicitly opposes it.

Do not put the Lord your God to the test. And again, we see the devil powerless before Jesus. As the gospel story unfolds, even as the world rejects Jesus, even as his own people plot to have him killed, even as he's betrayed by one of his closest friends and forsaken by God, he will not give in to sin.

He will trust God to the end. And we see it again in the third and final temptation. Seems the devil's getting desperate here, perhaps frustrated by the first two failures.

He stakes everything on this final roll of the dice. So we read verse 8. 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. You don't need to die, says Jesus.

[ 14 : 07 ] Sorry, says the devil to Jesus. You don't need to suffer an agonising death. Worship me and all the kingdoms of the world will be yours right now. You are God's king after all.

You deserve all these kingdoms. Worship me and I'll give it all to you right this second. No more suffering, no cross, no crown of thorns. It will all go away.

Just bow your knee before me just for a moment and it's all yours. But by now, Jesus has had enough. Be gone, Satan, he says authoritatively.

For it is written, you shall worship the Lord, your God, and him only shall you serve. Jesus knows the path before him.

There will be no shortcut to glory. The path to glory is worship of God alone. So Jesus commands the devil to leave and he leaves. He's powerless before him, even submits to Jesus' command here at the end.

[ 15 : 08 ] Now I hope you find these are great verses for us as Christians to read as we see our king in action.

Powerful enough to face up to the devil and win. Powerful enough to resist temptation and sin. Someone who will not be deflected from the path set before him, even though that path will lead to his death.

Chief priests try to deflect him, come down from the cross, oh yeah, then we'll believe in you. Even his close friend Peter try to deflect him and we know how he replies, get behind me, Satan.

Jesus will not be deflected from his God-given mission and we know how the story ends. The darkness covering the land as Jesus dies on the cross. Bearing God's anger at our sin, dying the death you and I deserved and it's only because of Jesus' power over the devil that he could do this,

that we could be forgiven, that we could be safe with Jesus for eternity.

Praise God then for Jesus. Praise God for our all-powerful king, the one who is all-powerful over the devil. That nothing the devil throws at him will prevent him from going to the cross, rescuing you and I from the coming judgment.

[16:31] Remember what we saw last week in chapter 3? There were strong words, weren't there, last week, the wrath to come, the unquenchable fire of hell. That would have been the destiny of all of us if it weren't for Jesus Christ.

If Jesus had failed against the devil here in chapter 4, Jesus had given in to sin, if he'd wavered from God's will, it would have all been over. God's salvation plan destroyed, you and I spending an eternity in hell, but he didn't.

Jesus is all-powerful over the devil. And if we'd been there in the wilderness, would we have been able to withstand the devil's temptation? Of course not, no way.

But doesn't this make you all the more thankful and awestruck with Jesus? Because he's not weak like you and I. He is not weak like God's people, Israel, who failed in their wilderness testing.

Jesus is strong, he's powerful over the devil, powerful enough to resist temptation, powerful enough to overcome the devil. Even superheroes have their flaws and weaknesses.

[17:37] Put some crimp tonight before Superman, he crumbles, doesn't he? Not Jesus. No weaknesses, no flaws, perfect through and through, God's all-powerful king over the devil.

Secondly, and more briefly, Jesus is God's all-powerful king over death. Because in verses 12 to 16, Jesus moves to Galilee and Matthew equates this movement with a fulfillment, a glorious fulfillment, back from Isaiah about death being destroyed.

So look with me at verse 12. Now when he had heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. And leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled.

The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light.

And for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned. Isaiah had promised that God's king would come to save his people.

[19:00] It would be like the dawn of a new day, like light shining in the darkness. And Matthew is saying, look, that day is here. The light is Jesus Christ. The region is Galilee of the Gentiles.

That's an international region of all people. And the darkness spoken of is the darkness of the shadow of death. The people of Isaiah's time, they were living in darkness.

Lost in the darkness of sin, exiled to the darkness of loneliness and despair without God. It was as if death hung over them like a shadow. The darkness of God's judgment about to fall.

They needed a saviour. They were crying out for God to come. There's a poignant scene in the latest Superman film.

Yep, there are poignant moments in these movies where Superman, he turns to Lois Lane, the reporter, and says, look, Lois, I know you wrote that the world doesn't need a saviour, but every day I hear thousands of voices crying out for one.

[20:05] This is true for the world of Isaiah's time. It's just as true for the world we live in today. People then, people now, are lost in the darkness of sin. The shadow of death hangs over them.

They need a saviour. And gloriously we have one. This is what Matthew's saying in these verses. Here is the light shining in the darkness. God's king has come.

Powerful over death. Powerful enough to remove the shadow of death that hangs over us. To give us life, eternal life. So that we no longer need to fear death, no longer need to fear God's judgment. Jesus went to his death as the saviour of sins. Three days later, he rose from the grave, defeating death.

And now as the victorious, risen king, he offers life to all who will follow him. And one day promises to come back to take us to his kingdom. And if you want a picture of what living in this kingdom is like, just glance across to verses 23 to 25.

[21:13] Jesus goes through Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, healing every disease and every affliction among the people. The sick are healed, diseases are cured, pains are removed, epileptics are made well, paralytics walk again.

It's a picture of what heaven will be like. Kingdom of heaven, it's a glorious kingdom. No sickness, no diseases, no more pain, no more suffering.

