

Jesus' Temptation

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[0 : 00] Our Father, we pray that your word will bear rich fruit in our lives, for Jesus' sake. Amen. A man was adrift in the sea. His boat had sunk. He was in a lifeboat, being swamped by the waves.

His life was in danger. And he prayed to God that God would rescue him. And he knew that God would, for he trusted God and believed that God would answer his prayer.

A sailing boat came past. The sailor called out, here we'll come and rescue you, come on board.

No, he said, I've prayed and God will answer my prayer to rescue me.

And the sailing boat continued to sail past. And a fishing boat came. And the fisherman called out, we'll come and rescue you. We'll take you on board and take you back to port. No, he said, I've prayed and God will rescue me. He will answer my prayer.

So the fisherman went on fishing. And an ocean liner came past and the same thing happened. The people called out, we'll come and rescue you. We'll throw down ropes.

[1 : 12] But he refused and he said, I've prayed to God and God will answer my prayer. And God will save me. The man drowned. And he went up to heaven.

When he got in heaven, he went to the complaints office. God, I prayed that you would answer my, that you would save me. And I believe that you would answer my prayer.

Why didn't you? And God replied, What do you think the sailing boat was? And the fishing boat?

And the ocean liner? Jesus was led up into the wilderness.

He'd just been baptised. Crowds had been down at the River Jordan. And now led by the Spirit, he goes up into the wilderness. We're told it's up in verse 1 and it is. If you go from the River Jordan up towards Jerusalem, it's a steep climb.

The River Jordan is well below sea level. And Jerusalem is well above sea level. And Jesus is led up into the wilderness. It's an area that is very desolate.

[2 : 17] Hardly any trees at all. A few Bedouin tribes eke out an existence there. A few scrawny looking sheep or goats. That's about all there is.

And Jesus is led up there. And he fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. And afterwards he was famished. Well, I guess you'd be hungry after 40 days as well.

Jesus, it seems, deliberately fasted for those 40 days. And yet, even if he didn't fast, he would have been hungry after 40 days in the wilderness. There's very little to eat at all.

And no doubt after 40 days, he would have done anything for a lamb roast. He'd probably even have accepted a Big Mac. Or a McDavid's. But there's no McDavid's or McDonald's between Jerusalem and the Jordan River.

The devil offers a solution to his hunger. He says, If you're the Son of God, as indeed you are, the devil's not doubting this.

[3 : 14] It's just been declared, remember, at Jesus' baptism. Just three verses beforehand. The last verse of chapter 3. The voice from heaven said, This is my Son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased. The devil knows that he's the Son of God.

So if you're the Son of God, as you are indeed, then command these stones to become loaves of bread. Jesus can do it. The devil knows Jesus can do it.

Jesus is the Son of God after all, and he has that power to change stones into bread. And why not? Isn't this the answer to the prayer of Jesus' hunger? What makes Jesus different to the man in the boat?

Maybe the devil's offer or solution is God's way out of the trouble that Jesus is in. He can do it. After all, what good is supernatural power if you don't use it?

Later on, Jesus feeds 5,000 with a few loaves and fish. There's no problem in turning stones into loaves of bread. Why? In the previous chapter, as we saw last week, he said, God can turn stones

into children of Abraham.

[4 : 18] That's nothing. Turning them into bread is probably a bit easier. Well, of course, the devil's not really being helpful here. It's not that he's offering Jesus some little solution to a dilemma.

It's a challenge or really a temptation, as is commonly said. If you are the Son of God, yes, he is the Son of God, and the devil knows it. The voice from heaven declared it.

Okay then, if you're the Son of God, turn these stones into bread. Come on, show that you're the Son of God. Display some miraculous power. That's what the Son of God would do. So come on, show us a miracle.

Demonstrate that you're the Son. Because if Jesus were not able to change stones into bread, it's no temptation at all. If I said to you, come on, turn the trees out there into loaves of bread, that's not a temptation if you can't do it.

It's a temptation to Jesus precisely because he can do it. But he chooses not to. So what's wrong with the devil's challenge? What's wrong with Jesus using the power, the God-given power that he has, to change stones into bread?

[5 : 30] Jesus' response is to quote the Bible. He's obviously a good evangelical Christian. Plucks out a Bible verse, a memory verse from his Sunday school days or something like that. One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Now what's wrong with bread? Jesus fed 5,000 with some bread later on. He probably ate bread most days of his life, apart from these 40.

So what's wrong with bread? The verse he quoted says that one does not live by bread alone. But it's not saying that bread is bad. It's just that you don't live only on bread.

bread. The key to Jesus' decline of the devil's temptation is that he doesn't have to prove that he is the Son of God to anyone.

The voice from heaven declared that he was the Son at the end of the preceding chapter. The Spirit came down like a dove on him to show the same thing. Jesus doesn't have to walk around producing miracles in order to show that he is the Son of God.

[6 : 38] It's God who led him into the wilderness and it's not the devil tempting him so much as God testing him. The initiative came from God.

Verse 1 said that Jesus was led up into the wilderness by the Spirit. It's not the devil's doing, it's God's doing and it's God who's testing him. Yes, he uses the devil as a means for testing, to offer him some temptations perhaps.

But it's God's initiative and God is testing Jesus. And if Jesus changes stones into bread, he's cheating the test or he's evading the difficulty.

For God has led him to be tested to be fasting for 40 days and nights, to decline from using his power to feed himself, to nourish himself. And so if he changes stones into bread or into anything else for that matter, he's cheating the test.

When I was at university, I did basically a maths type degree initially and many of us had programmable calculators and we were told that we were not allowed to use them in our exams for that would be cheating, an unfair advantage.

[7 : 52] I suppose some of us thought that that was a bit unfair, that we weren't allowed to use it. But in retrospect, you can see the logic. The idea is to test your ability to solve equations and problems and so on.

And calculators are sort of a cheat's way of a shortcut's way through the difficulty. You can press a couple of buttons and outcomes and answer and you don't need to think anymore. Well, in some ways, changing stones into bread for Jesus would be like that.

It would be a cheat's way of getting through the test that God has subjected him to. And the test is about Jesus, does he qualify as God's son?

The voice from heaven declared it. Now the issue is, is Jesus really going to be the son of God? And that's behind the reason for Jesus choosing that particular verse.

If we have searched hard enough, we could probably find verses in the Old Testament that actually encourage us to think about changing stones into bread. If you're very ingenious, you can find Bible verses that tell you to do almost anything.

[8 : 56] I think the idea of finding God's guidance by opening the Bible at random and plucking out a verse is quite folly myself because so often we take them out of context. And usually when you open the Bible at random, you end up in Psalms anyway.

Jesus, you see, not only quotes a verse, but he understands it in its context. It's a verse from Deuteronomy. Obviously for Jesus, Deuteronomy was an important book of the Bible. What a good thing. And the book of Deuteronomy is addressed to Israel at the end of 40 years in their wilderness. Jesus is at the end of 40 days in the wilderness and it seems to be a direct parallel with Israel being at the end of 40 years in the wilderness. When Israel was called by God to leave Egypt, God described Israel to Moses as my beloved son. Israel, the son of God, the children of God, failed God in the wilderness. The passage in Deuteronomy 8, indeed the whole chapter of Deuteronomy 8, explains that. That God has led Israel in the wilderness for 40 years in order to test you, to humble you, to know what is in your heart.

[10:07] And the lesson that Israel was meant to have learned in the wilderness was that one does not live by bread alone, but by everything that comes out of the mouth of God. Israel failed that test.

It demanded bread. It disobeyed. And those who left Egypt and went initially into the wilderness died in the wilderness.

It was left to their children to enter the promised land. Israel failed. It complained. It grumbled. And in contrast, Jesus didn't. Israel demanded bread and Jesus denied himself bread.

Israel disobeyed. Jesus obeyed. Israel died in the wilderness and Jesus lives. See, the point that's being demonstrated here is about Jesus. Fundamentally, this passage is about Jesus, not about how we resist temptation.

It's about Jesus being the obedient Son of God. And where Israel failed, Jesus succeeds. He's saying that He, in a sense, is the true Israel, the real Son of God, the one who does the Father's will.

[11:13] Unlike Israel in the past and unlike any other person of God, Jesus is the perfect one, the one who perfectly obeys the Father in heaven. And yes, He's tested by God, disciplined by God, to test His obedience, to strengthen Him and so on.

And I guess there's a warning here for us in this passage so far. God does test His children and He seeks to refine them and strengthen them. And temptation is a muscle, a spiritual muscle building exercise.

So long as we resist the temptation, that is. Too often, sadly, we Christians look for a quick fix to our problems. We get ill so we pray for healing. We pray for an end to the stress or troubles of our life. We pray that God will take away the trials and tribulations that we face, the difficulties that we face. But sometimes those very difficulties and trials and tribulations, illness or unemployment or whatever, are sometimes God's tests for us to train us, refine us, to strengthen us as Christians, to keep on trusting in an almighty and loving God.

more often, I think, our first question when we're faced with trouble ought to be something like, God, what lesson am I to learn here?

[12:35] Not take it away, not heal me, not give me a job, but firstly, God, what lesson am I to learn here? But there's also great encouragement in this passage.

There's an encouragement because Jesus resists temptations not by using something that exclusively belongs to himself, a sort of special Messiah's handbook, if you like, but rather he uses the book for all of God's people, what we call the Old Testament, what for Jesus was his Bible. And he goes to verses in the Old Testament that aren't about the Messiah only, but are about the people of God as a whole. He's going to places in the Bible that apply to us as well as to him. Now the importance of that is to show that the resources Jesus uses to resist temptation are resources that are applicable for us as well. It's not a special Messiah's handbook that we can't go to, but it's God's book for all of us.

And that should be a great encouragement to us, that when we're facing trial or testing or tribulation or temptation, we can go to the same resources as Jesus did and find in there the same help and strength to resist that trial and temptation.

[13:55] Part of the armour of God is the word of God as Paul says in Ephesians 6. But the other encouragement as well is to remember that when we face trials and tribulations and stress, we can pray to Jesus and know that he knows what it's like.

He's been tempted. He's been tested. He's faced trials and tribulations. He knows what it's like for us to face the temptations of this world, the troubles of this world.

So we can pray and we can know that he understands and sympathises with us. As the writer to the Hebrews said later in the New Testament, Jesus has been tested and tempted in every way as we are yet without sin.

Nothing wrong with temptation. It's the sin. The sin is the yielding to temptation. temptation. Jesus has faced temptations like we do but unlike us he hasn't yielded and he's remained without sin. The devil learns from his first mistake. So when he comes up with his second test to Jesus or temptation, he himself quotes the Bible. He's worked out Jesus' method.

[15:03] So the devil took him to the holy city to Jerusalem. He placed him on the pinnacle of the temple probably the very corner of the temple mount overlooking the Kidron Valley very high and steep above the rugged valley of the Kidron.

And there he said to him, if you are the son of God as indeed you are as he's already mentioned, throw yourself down for it's written and he quotes from Psalm 91 Come on Jesus, if you throw yourself down from the pinnacle you'll show that you trust God.

You're on about trusting God in the wilderness, that's why you've not turned stones into bread. Well here we are, demonstrate your trust, throw yourself down and God has promised here in Psalm 91 that he will rescue you, he'll save you so that you won't even stub your toe on a rock when you fall. Surely God will protect you, he's promised that he will. Some Christians live like this, they think that God will rescue them from whatever jeopardy they throw their lives into.

Someone I know who's a Christian minister, who enjoys talking to people who aren't Christians, will often pick up hitchhikers when he's driving in the country, he's not a very good driver and he gets so engaged in conversation that he drives along and he's turning to his passenger saying, talking about Christian things and he says rather flippantly, if God wants me to get to the end of my journey he'll make me get there, I'll just talk to the person next to me.

[16:39] Well I don't think Psalm 91 really applies to that sort of foolhardy driving and Jesus recognises that as well. God's promise in Psalm 91 is not to pluck people out of self-inflicted crisis, not to rescue fools from their jeopardy or recklessness, forgiveness, but rather that God will protect and preserve those Christians who are faithfully trusting him and who stumble along the way of obedience and faith.

God is promised to help those who need his help as they seek to live obedient lives. He doesn't promise to rescue people who do stupid things and Jesus understands that.

There's no need for Jesus to jump from the pinnacle of the temple to show that he trusts God. He trusts God and he knows that God would protect him as indeed he does. And so he replies, again it's written he says, do not put the Lord your God to the test.

Another quote, another quote from Deuteronomy, this time from chapter 6 and that section of Deuteronomy as you may remember back to last September if your memories are good enough, is all about Israel's failure in the wilderness, the times that God has led them through the wilderness. Do not put the Lord your God to the test. Israel did. Israel tested God in the wilderness. They wanted water to come out of a rock and God provided it but he rebuked them afterwards.

[18:05] Do not put the Lord your God to the test. Jesus is saying Israel failed in the wilderness but I succeed. I keep on as a faithful obedient son of God. I do what Israel failed to do.

Do not put the Lord your God to the test. Don't manipulate him. Don't force his hand. In fact we cannot force God's hand. We cannot manipulate him. And yet so often we want some sort of demonstration of God in order to convince us.

But always it comes from a statement of unbelief. Have you ever met people who aren't Christians who say I'll become a Christian if some miracles performed. You know God do this. There was a Peter Cook and Dudley Moore sketch I remember where they said one of them was sick and he says I pray to God that he'll heal me.

And just so that I know it's God I'll pray that it happens by midday Tuesday. Of course you get to midday Tuesday and you're better but you still don't know whether it's God or not. Well that was the sketch of Peter Cook and Dudley Moore.

But it's true isn't it that people sometimes put God to the test but invariably they never respond with faith. We can't put God to the test but we can trust him. And to demand of God that he does this or that or the other is not coming from a statement of faith and trust.

[19:19] Rather we should be saying to God that his will be done and we will trust him whatever the situation and circumstance. God can't be bribed. He can't be manipulated. His hand can't be forced.

The devil tries a third time. Becomes a bit more blatant and a bit more obvious this time. This time the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.

Not their problems notice just their splendor. We don't know what mountain that could be. To show all the mountains of the world it probably doesn't matter. Whether it's a vision or a real mountain however it happened doesn't actually matter.

But Jesus sees and surveys all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. And then comes the temptation. All these I will give you.

If only you will fall down and worship me. it's a fairly blatant power play by the devil. But the reason why this is a real temptation is that all the kingdoms of the world belong to Jesus anyway.

[20 : 30] That's why it's a temptation. If they weren't his there's no temptation. But they are. And the temptation here being offered by the devil is to claim them now.

To claim kingship of all the nations of the world now. At the beginning of Jesus' ministry. To claim an immediate possession of what is after all Jesus' prerogative anyway.

The trick of course is that it would involve the worship of Satan, the devil. Jesus responds again with a quote, again from Deuteronomy, again from Deuteronomy 6, worship the Lord, your God, God, and serve only him.

The emphasis is on God. Him only you must serve. Yes, authority over nations does belong to Jesus, but what cost to claim it now?

Jesus later told his disciples, what does it profit a man to gain the whole world but to forfeit his soul? And Jesus would have done exactly that if he'd accepted the offer of the devil.

[21 : 43] To gain the whole world, the kingdoms of the world, and all their splendor which after all is rightly Jesus anyway, but in worshipping the devil he would forfeit his soul. You see there's a very important principle here for us.

The principle is that the end does not justify the means. The end for Jesus was that he is the ruler of the world, that all the kingdoms of the world belong to him.

And that's right, and that is good. But the end does not justify the means of bowing down and worshipping the devil. That principle is one that we break, I'm sure, many times.

Many times we do things because we think the outcome is right, therefore it doesn't matter how we go about meeting the outcome. And so we lie because we don't want our friends to know the truth or we want to protect our friends.

lying is never right and can never be justified by the end justifying the means. Sometimes people might steal in order to provide for their family who are in need.

[22 : 50] But that might be a good end because we're called to be responsible for our families. But the means of stealing is never justified by the end. It should be a warning to us to think about our own behaviour.

things that we do and excuse because we say the end makes it all right. It never makes it all right. God wants us to obey him at every point.

The means must be right as well as the end. Matthew's gospel ends with Jesus' words to his disciples well known I'm sure by almost everyone.

all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Notice that it's heaven and earth. It's more than Satan offered. He said all the kingdoms of the earth are yours but at the end of the gospel Jesus said all authority in heaven and on earth is mine.

And the reason that Jesus can claim that at the end of the gospel is because he died on a cross and he rose from the dead. the means to the end for Jesus involved the way of the cross.

[24 : 03] Death. Death for the world. No wonder Satan's offer is a temptation to him. No wonder Jesus must have been enticed by the offer of having the authority of the world without the cross, without the pain, without the rejection, without having to bear the sins of the world in himself when he died.

All of it, Satan says, can be yours without the cross. But of course Jesus recognises that that cost would be too high for he would forfeit his own soul.

And it's still one of Satan's tricks to God's people, promising too much too soon. To promise Jesus all authority now is too much too soon.

Because Jesus could only have all authority through the cross, through an obedient life that culminated when he died on the cross and rose from the dead. And yet Satan still plays the same

tricks on God's people, too much, too soon.

Hey, you can have all the health and healing, you don't have to be sick, all the prosperity you need, joy and perfect fulfillment in this life, satisfaction in everything you do. That sounds very Christian, but it's too much too soon.

[25 : 20] Because all of those are good things, and things that are ultimately promised by God, that belong to the realm of heaven, not necessarily now. Too much, too soon.

And yet so often Christians are ensnared by that temptation and that trick of the devil. So much Christian preaching or teaching or books, sometimes at the very charismatic end, promises too much, too soon.

Because the way of meeting the promises of God is through living in this world, a life of obedient and faithful trust as Jesus did. Certainly not to die on the cross as he did, but nonetheless to live a life of trials and tribulations.

For God never promises that he'll take us out of the trials and stresses of this life and give us a life of abundance and health and wealth now. That's heaven's prerogative. Don't fall into the trap of thinking God promises us too much too soon.

Because sadly there are many who do. I've met already in the last few months ex-paritioners of this parish who it seems to me have drifted from the worship of God into the worship of other things because they've wanted a life of joy, fun, pleasure, excitement, holidays, rest, sport, family, wealth, prosperity, and so they've given up on God.

[26 : 43] And sadly therefore they're no longer worshipping God. As Jesus said, worship the Lord your God and serve only him. And the promises of God of heaven are far greater than anything in which we can find satisfaction now in this world.

Be patient, persevere. The way of faithful obedience is the right way and the rewards of heaven make that worthwhile. Don't seek too much too soon, but seek what God promises and you'll find that it's even more than this world will ever promise.

sometimes Christians are fearful of Satan and think that he has too much power. But it's clear that Satan's power is very limited.

God led Jesus into the wilderness to be tested and the devil is God's means for doing that. And after the third offer of temptation, Jesus said in verse 10 to Satan, away with you, Satan.

And the next verse says, then the devil left him. Even there in the wilderness after 40 days of fasting, Jesus speaks and Satan flees.

[28 : 02] His power is very limited. His temptations were real and Jesus would have been really tempted by them. But Jesus speaks and Satan flees.

And what do we find at the end after he's gone? Suddenly angels came and waited on him. Exactly as Psalm 91 which the devil quoted promised.

That God would look after and protect with his angels those who faithfully obey him and trust him. Jesus didn't need to throw himself off a pinnacle to demonstrate that.

But by faithful obedience God's promise is fulfilled. God is faithful and does what he says. This passage shows us that Jesus shows what it means to be the Son of God.

Not to go around with flashy shows of power but rather with faithful obedience to a heavenly Father. In the midst of trials and temptations and difficulties not to be taken out of them but rather to obey through them.

[29 : 08] And Jesus passes the test by obeying the Father. we like Israel fail. None of us perfectly passes the test.

None of us qualifies to be called children of God, sons or daughters of God. But remember that great promise of God. As John says, behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us that we should be called children of God.

Not because we earn it or qualify for it, for we don't. But it's ours as a gift through Jesus' death which forgives us. Because we're forgiven by Jesus' death, God adopts us into his family and calls us his children.

And that is an enormous privilege because we don't earn it and can't earn it. But Jesus did it for us. Amen.

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