

Out of Egypt

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[0 : 00] Well, if you would like to take the Bible in front of you and turn to page 804, Matthew chapter 4. And as you do that, I just want to say thank you to those of you who know my mother and have been praying for her.

Her life in this world is nearly at an end. And I know she longs to go and be with the Lord Jesus after a life of richly serving him.

And I will likely head back to Australia this week. It has been a very strange and wonderful personal privilege for me studying this passage, Matthew 4, while this has been going on.

Looking at the temptations of Jesus has been a great surprise to me. What's been so nourishing and strengthening to me is to gradually see that this passage is not about how I deal with temptation and difficulty.

Nor about how you deal with temptation and difficulty, but about how Jesus does it. And about how he suffered in temptation to be made for us a perfect saviour and substitute.

[1 : 14] And I know many of you here are facing all kinds of difficulties. There is such a relief in this passage as we put Jesus at the centre and move ourselves out of the centre and see that everything Jesus does here is for us.

So last week we were in the baptism, chapter 3. And this follows immediately after the baptism. And I just remind you, this is the first thing Jesus did in his public ministry was to go and get baptised at the end of chapter 3.

And the key is that he was baptised not for himself, he was baptised for us. He had no sin to repent of, he had no sin to be washed from, he deliberately went and got baptised.

Since he has come to save his people from their sins to be God with us, what he does is he deliberately humbles himself and goes down, down, down, identifying with us as sinners.

He's baptised as a sinner even though he has no sin, you see. This is Jesus. He moves down out of heaven to be born of a baby. He moves down into the river to die.

[2 : 28] He goes down, down, down, finally to death on a cross. And he goes into the baptism so as to be one of us so that he can die on the cross. And you've just got to see the love and kindness of Jesus in this baptism.

That he enters into baptism to give away his glory and his power and his purity for you and for me. He steps into the water, you know, as a sort of another step towards the suffering humiliation that leads to the cross. Because at the heart of the Christian faith is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who steps down in humility deliberately to serve our needs at the expense of his own.

He enters into the deepest place so that he can be our replacement so that we don't have to go there. And at the end of the baptism, the Father speaks and the Spirit descends.

And what is the first thing that the Holy Spirit sends Jesus out to do in chapter 4, verse 1? It's to battle with Satan. And here we've got to remember this.

[3 : 40] Jesus doesn't go into the wilderness and do battle against Satan for his own sake. He does it for us. He does it so that he might become our perfect saviour and substitute. So you can see this radical change of mood.

You've got this really happy thing happening in the baptism where God the Father declares Jesus publicly to be the Son of God. And then chapter 4, verse 1, and we're introduced to these three characters. Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

The same Spirit who conceived Jesus in the womb, who came on Jesus at the baptism, now thrusts Jesus out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, from the warm affection of the Father to a warlike attack from the devil from hell.

Now, how can these things be in the same phrase? And you might know this, that Christians have worked overtime to smooth out this very difficult contrast and to remove all the difficulty of these temptations.

And the more we work to smooth this out, the more we remove what's really important. So, some Christians have said, and you might be one of those who is tempted by this, that Jesus could not sin.

[4 : 57] Because he's the Son of God, it was impossible for him to sin. So this passage is just an illustration of how we should deal with temptation, which I find utterly depressing because I've never dealt with temptation like Jesus does.

Some of us, I think, are more inclined to think that this is myth. It's mythological language. We have trouble with the idea that the devil or Satan can be a personal being. We're more comfortable with the idea that there is this impersonal force behind terrorism and genocide and racism.

And it makes this incident into a little fiction, a little lie. And it also doesn't explain, verse 1, and it doesn't explain why Jesus and the Gospel writers seem to believe that Satan is very real, very personal, and very evil.

But I want to suggest, closer to home, almost all of us irresistibly feel the pull to read this devotionally. That is, to put myself at the centre of the story, so that Jesus becomes an example to us.

So we follow him into the wilderness to face our temptations, and we try to do what he did when he was tempted. And we note that Jesus dealt with every temptation by quoting scripture, so the application would be we need to learn more memory verses.

[6 : 15] I'm for it. I'm not against it. Don't get me wrong. But we should copy Jesus' example. We should even copy his example and fast once a year for 40 days and 40 nights.

Don't do it. And there's some truth in this. And we can learn something from Jesus' tactics and from devil's tactics. But if that is our focus, we miss the main thing.

We're holding the wrong end of the stick. We're making the passage relevant to us in exactly the wrong way. What we've got to see is this is the beginning of our salvation. This is a unique encounter between Jesus and the devil in his ministry to redeem us from the power of the devil.

And this is an encounter which is crucial in the history of my redemption and of your redemption because unlike me and unlike you and unlike Israel in the Old Testament, Jesus suffers to the bottom of every temptation so that he can become the kind of rescuer that we need from sin.

And he faces the subtlety and the viciousness of Satan in our place as our saviour. So the message from this passage is not, here you are, do this with temptation, go out and try harder.

[7 : 30] The message is, you can't do this with temptation. I'm doing it on your behalf. I'm suffering to deliver you from the power of the devil.

So we're going to spend a few minutes on each one of the three temptations by far the longest on the first one. And I just, I want to, I want to try and encourage you, just move yourself out of the centre of your thinking for a few minutes and look at what's happening.

I know it's hard. Really, I mean this. It's very hard to do this. Just move yourself out of the centre. Look at what, look at what's happening to Jesus. Look at what he's doing and then what it means for us.

Okay. So the three temptations, the first one is to serve yourself. Verse three, the tempter came to Jesus. This is number one. So how do we move ourselves out of the centre?

Well, it's easy, isn't it, with this one? This is not my temptation. I've never been tempted to make stones into loaves of bread. It's way beyond my ability, though I will tell you I have the opposite ability.

[8 : 46] Every loaf I've made turns out like a stone. And what's so wrong with this temptation? It's not the crime of the century. I mean, Jesus hasn't jumped into a van and killed ten people.

There are two clues as to how we should understand what's going on. In each of the times that Jesus is tempted, he answers with a quote from scriptures.

They all come from one story in the Old Testament between Deuteronomy, what Moses is telling it, Deuteronomy 6 to 8, where Moses draws lessons from how God fed his people in the wilderness.

The second clue is verse two, where we read, Jesus was fasting 40 days and 40 nights and was hungry. Lovely understatement. He was hungry. Why?

Why is he fasting? It's not because he's careless, you know, just forgot, didn't think ahead. It's because this is from God. Because God, the Holy Spirit, has driven him into the wilderness for this battle and every detail of the battle has been ordained and chosen by God.

[9 : 50] It's no accident that he's fasting. He's fasting 40 days and 40 nights. Not to give us an example. Don't do it. Talk to your doctor.

He is reliving the 40 years of Israel in the wilderness where God tested them through hunger and fed them with manna and they failed.

So keep your hand. We're going to have two cross-references. Keep your hand in chapter 4 of Matthew and flick back to near the beginning of the Bible, Deuteronomy chapter 8. Just two verses. Deuteronomy 8, page 152. I'm going to start at verse 2 and read verses 2 and 3. Deuteronomy 8, verse 2.

Moses says, And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these 40 years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.

[10 : 57] And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

For 40 years, God led his people out of Egypt into a wilderness where there was no food, no food, no meat, no wheat, no carbohydrates, no paleo diet, nothing.

And he supernaturally supplied them from heaven with manna. Each morning they'd wake up and there would be this bread-like stuff on the surface of the earth that was nutritious, straight from God. And God does this to test his people, to see if they will trust him, if they will obey him. He wants them to connect their physical life with the spiritual reality that it's God who supplies bread, as he does for us.

I know there are a couple other things in between for us. But to not be so focused on bread that they lose sight of the power of God and the love of God who supplies us all our needs. And it's in this story, for the first time in the Bible, that God calls Israel, my son.

[12 : 12] So, we come back to Matthew 4. What's the first, what's the last verse in chapter 3? Jesus comes up out of the water. And what does God the Father say? This is my son.

And immediately he's led out into the wilderness to be tested. It's the same word as tempted.

Tested in the wilderness. He fasts 40 days and 40 nights. It is the perfect son of God.

He's reliving, reenacting, redoing the wilderness. And that is exactly Satan's starting point. He says, if you're the son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.

There's no doubt in this sentence. Satan, neither Satan nor Jesus, doubt that Jesus is the son of God. It's just been said by God the Father. Satan just wants Jesus to think about it a bit differently, to use his power a little bit differently.

Since you're the son of God, turn these stones to bread. He says, you're hungry. Surely, surely you, the son of God, don't need to be so hungry.

[13 : 13] You don't need to suffer like this. I mean, wouldn't it be easy just to turn around and take a couple of these rocks and make them into sourdough with sesame on top? And Jesus says, verse 4, It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

What's wrong with Jesus turning rocks into bread to feed himself? What Satan wants to do is he wants to take Jesus and just put him a little bit off track from saving us.

So by the time it comes to the cross, Jesus won't be able to go through with it. You remember these words of Satan come back on the cross through the lips of the clergy.

If you're the son of God, save yourself. If you're the son of God, come down from the cross. You don't have to suffer. You've sacrificed so much. It's your turn now. You deserve a little something for yourself.

What Satan wants to do is he wants to reverse this downward, humbling spiral that Jesus is on. His humility coming to serve us, to look after himself for just a moment.

[14 : 19] Because Satan hates the idea of Jesus delivering anyone from his power. I don't know if you've thought about this. Satan hates grace. He hates kindness. And the whole idea of giving your power away, it just terrifies Satan.

It terrifies Satan when we do it. Nothing makes him more sick and scared than when Jesus opens up the flow of grace to us by giving his life away.

And he wants to do everything to stop that flow of grace from Christ to us, to stop Jesus fulfilling all righteousness. This temptation is way more than just about physical desire. Satan wants Jesus to forget that he's doing this for us, for just a moment.

He wants Jesus to give up on denying himself and suffering for us, to stop serving us, and he uses power to serve himself for just a moment. But as we saw the other week, Jesus always uses his power for others.

So keep your hand in Matthew 4, second cross-reference. Let's go over to Hebrews chapter 2. This is closer to the back of the Bible. Let's go over to Hebrews 4.

[15:29] Let's go over to Hebrews 4. Let's go over to Hebrews 4. Page 1002. Let me read the last two verses of chapter 2 in Hebrews.

Fantastic verses. Therefore, Jesus had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, so as to make propitiation, to offer a sacrifice, as we use in the communion, for the sins of the people.

For because he himself suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Notice that, please. It's not just that Jesus was tempted that we draw our strength from. It's the fact that he suffered when he was tempted.

It's the suffering of his temptation that means that he is able to help us. It is feeling, it's his suffering of feeling the strength of the satanic onslaught to its very depth.

[16:44] Some people say it was easy for Jesus to resist sin. You know, he was the son of God. He wasn't weak. He was strong. He doesn't know what it is to be weak. It's the opposite that's true.

And I heard a great illustration from an English preacher. He used the illustration of a tug of war.

You know, you get a rope and you tie a white thing in the center and you get teams at either end.

And most of the times I've done this on Christian camps, you get a bunch of teams and you get one team that's really serious about this and they dig their heels in. And every team on the other end breaks around laughing and gives up before anything too difficult happens.

But the team that digs their heels in feels the strain and feels the strain and feels the strain and then they win without giving in. Just so in temptation, you and I are like the teams that give in quickly.

I give in to temptation so early, so easily, but the perfect son of God feels the strain and the struggle and the suffering right to its very end without giving in.

[17:53] That's the suffering of temptation that he feels. So that the fact that Jesus does not turn these stones into bread is not just a private win of victory over his tummy.

He's doing it for us. He's feeling it to the end to become the kind of savior who can give us actual help when we are tempted. Isn't that great?

And his help for us is in proportion to how much he suffered in the temptation. Bless you. So that's temptation number one.

Serve yourself. Now, two briefer looks. The second temptation is to presume on God. And 5 and 6, verses 5 and 6 back in Matthew. What's very worrying about this second temptation is that Satan seems to know and to be able to quote the Bible very clearly and accurately.

Ever thought about that? Verses 5 and 6. Okay, says Satan. So you live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. What about Psalm 91?

[18:55] Why not prove that God can be trusted in a way that's absolutely clear? I'm going to take you to the top of the temple. Let's see a real leap of faith.

And you can presume that God will come through for you. You won't be harmed because he has promised it literally in Psalm 91, verse 11 and verse 12.

So Satan quotes the Bible and reads the Bible, but he applies it wrongly. He misapplies the Bible.

He takes what's a promise of beautiful care and changes it into an invitation for arrogance.

He tempts Jesus to act as though God is the one who needs to prove himself to me now. I need to act in a way to see if God's going to come through for me. He gets Jesus to think that God is there to serve him, to degrade God's word into some kind of tawdry insurance policy for some dreamed up scheme.

I say this advisedly. In one sense, I think Satan doesn't mind how much of the Bible you know as a Christian, because where he really gets to work is how we apply the Bible to ourselves.

[20 : 08] And you know, we keep putting ourselves at the center of things and living as though God is at the periphery. We're so thirsty for application.

I confess some days I race through a couple of verses until I get to something that feels good or I can instantly see it's relevant and I take it and chew on that.

Worse days I find a paragraph in some commentator and don't even read the text and I engage with that. But I'll tell you what, after 20 minutes or so, it doesn't work anymore.

It's like eating Turkish delight. And it doesn't challenge me or sustain me or correct me or transform me. And if I spend seven days doing that, by the end of the week, I'm showing symptoms of spiritual diabetes.

We do this all the time. Judge not that you may not be judged. I hear Christians say this all the time as though this is the current Canadian understanding.

[21 : 12] I can't say anything's right or wrong. Anyone's opinions are wrong. Put it back in its context, it's about taking the log out of my eyes so that I can take a speck out of someone else's.

Or be still and know that I am God. You see this on mugs, Christian mugs. There's no such thing as Christian mugs. You see this on mugs. You know what I mean. Calendars.

As a sort of a, you know, God, the God of the spa. Be gentle, be still, take a deep breath.

Everything's going to be all right. But look at it in its context. In Psalm 46, the nations are raging against God.

And this is the strongest possible reprimand. He says, stop, be still. I'm going to exalt myself. We bolt on applications to the text.

We read ourselves into the text. We go to the Bible for a few devotional thoughts. We force God into our way of thinking. And we miss out what God is really saying. We make the Bible into a kind of a spiritual smorgasbord where I pick and choose what I feel is.

[22 : 13] Oh, it looks tasty to me. And the one thing about all misapplication is that it puts me at the center and God on the edge as a kind of a performing seal. Jesus won't be thrown.

In verse 7, he goes back to scripture again. He just shows how wide of the mark Satan's application is. Verse 7, he says, you shall not put the Lord your God to the test. Again, it's a quote from Deuteronomy.

God had rescued his people from Egypt. He had miraculously given them water. He'd miraculously given them manna from heaven. And now they're a bit short of water again.

And what did they do? Did they say, Lord, we trust you. We're seeking you for this. No. No. They called their rector a bad leader. Sorry. They turned on Moses.

And they started complaining. And they said this. They said, is the Lord among us or not? God, show up. C.S. Lewis has a wonderful series of essays under the title God in the Dock.

[23 : 18] And he says this. The ancient man approached God or the gods as the accused person approaches his judge. He says the modern man, the roles are reversed.

He is the judge. God is in the dock. He is quite a kindly judge. If God should have a reasonable defense for being the God who permits war, poverty and disease, he's ready to listen to it.

The trial may even end in God's acquittal. But the important thing is that man is on the bench and God is in the dock. This is the temptation, the second temptation. It's to presume on God.

It's to take his kindness and mercy for granted, his word for granted. It's to put God on the dock and say, you come through now. And Jesus knows that he's the one under testing.

God is not under testing. And the third temptation, very briefly, of course, is idolatry. And it's to avoid the cross. And it's kind of interesting to see how Jesus keeps resisting Satan and now the gloves come off.

[24 : 23] I mean, this is really what Satan wanted in the first place, isn't it? The third temptation, Satan comes to Jesus and offers him all authority on earth. He shows him all the kingdoms of the earth and their splendor.

And he says, look, I am completely willing to give them to you. You don't have to die. You can just go on living as the sort of supreme ruler, messiah.

I don't know. You choose the title of all nations with unqualified power. And you'll completely avoid all that nastiness of the cross. There's only one small thing I'm asking in return. That you fall down and worship me.

And here Satan drops his pretense. There's no, since you're the son of God at the beginning. This is what he wants. He wants to change places with God. He wants to be God.

He wants Jesus to worship him as God. And he thinks that the best way to do this is to take the thing that's most difficult for Jesus, becoming sin for us on the cross, and to offer him the crown without that cross.

[25 : 20] But if you think about it for just a moment, imagine Jesus submitted to this temptation. What kind of kingdom would it be? It would be a kingdom based on the worship of the accuser and the deceiver.

It would be a kingdom of lies and deception where the powerful get away with everything, where righteousness would be a complete impossibility eternally. No grace, no kindness, no compassion, only power.

And it's interesting, isn't it? We looked at this at Easter. At the end of the gospel, after Jesus has died and risen again, Jesus says to his disciples that God has given to him all authority in heaven and on earth.

And I think what that means is that it was never Satan's to give in the first place. It would never have come about. If Jesus had bowed and worshipped Satan, he would have received nothing.

And Jesus' reply is wonderful. He says to him, go away. You should try that. I try. Worship the Lord your God and serve him alone.

[26 : 31] And that just shows what kind of saviour he is. I think this is the really great takeaway for us this morning. In pain and in pleasure, in difficulty and when things are going well, it's not about trying harder and harder and harder to resist temptation.

It's about Jesus. It's all about Jesus and what a perfect saviour he is and going to him. Christian life is not about becoming self-reformed by our effort.

It's being transformed by the help that he is able to give us because he is the humble, victorious, perfect, tested Jesus.

Baptised for us. Tempted for us. Died for us. Raised for us. And he went through each of these and now offers himself to us to give us help and grace in our time of need.

Help when we're being tempted. The help isn't in trying harder, even though it's good to do that. The help is in Jesus. He is in heaven. He has all authority.

[27 : 41] And he has all tenderness as well. He's experienced the suffering and weakness for us. He is able to help those who are being tempted, says Hebrews 2.

And everyone who belongs to Jesus knows what it is to go to him in prayer every day, every hour, more and more. Because he's more willing and he's more able to help us than we are even to ask. So go to him. Or as the Hebrews writer says, Amen.