

Temptation to Doubt

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Date: 20 March 2010

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening all. If you'd like to keep your Bibles open there at Matthew 4, I'm going to pray that my voice holds out. Father, as we look at your word, I pray that you would just pour your spirit out upon us, Father, that we might see Christ and trust in who he is and what he's achieved for us on the cross.

Lord, as we struggle to be your disciples, as we doubt on those matters that your word is trustworthy and true, moment by moment I pray, Father, that you would hold us, that we might stand firm, that we might know that Christ is there.

And so, Lord, also pray that my voice would hold out to the end of this sermon. Amen. Some years ago, Nat and I were shopping at Macquarie Centre.

We picked up a couple of items. Why is that cheery? I've heard that cheery a couple of times. Oh, you live there? What, in the shops? We're shopping at Macquarie Centre. We picked up a few items.

I took them to the counter to purchase them. And, you know, as you do, you have a ballpark figure in your head as to, you know, roughly what this is going to cost. And so I went there and went to the counter, got the credit card slip, out it came, started to sign away.

[1 : 25] And I noticed that it was probably \$20 or \$30 less than what I'd anticipated. And I finished paying for the stuff, got my bag, got my docket, and I'm walking to the door.

And I'm looking at the docket, looking at the bag, looking at the docket, looking at the bag. And then I realised that they hadn't charged me for one item. They had taken the security tag thing off it, but they hadn't charged me for it.

And so, what do you do? You know, I'm almost at the door. The door's opened, and I think to myself, it's their mistake.

Myers has got a lot more money than I've got. They've got a lot more things than I've got. Look at their shop. And they wouldn't miss it. I mean, it's hardly dishonest, is it, when, you know, it was their mistake.

It's not like I picked it off the shelf and put on an extra pair of undies and walked out with it or something like that. And so, the question was in my mind, rolling over there, do I walk out with this or do I not?

[2 : 36] As I approached the door with this free item in my hand, it was at that point that my conscience kicked in, who, for clarity, will be known as Natalie from here on in.

And she spoke very loudly with the suggestion that it would be equivalent to shoplifting if I was to walk out with it.

And isn't shoplifting stealing and isn't stealing a sin? So, the first lesson is don't go shopping with your conscience. But that was it in that moment.

What do I do? We went back to the counter and I paid for it. The young lady at the counter was amazed at such honesty. She was just taken aback.

She said, I want to walk out with it. I said, yeah, but I'm a Christian and I don't do that sort of thing, so let me tell you about Jesus. And I felt so guilty now, I felt hypocritical.

[3 : 40] In a moment like that, it seems like God is so far away. It seems like he wouldn't know what it is to be me there.

It's so hard to be a Christian. It's so hard to obey God's word in that moment. Sometimes it feels like God is so remote right here, right now, in that moment.

God is up there. I'm down here. And all I have to go on is a promise. All I have to go on is the word of God. What would God know about temptation?

What would he know what it is to live with just a word? Well, of course, he does know. We know that. The word of promise to Jesus was, you are my son.

At his baptism, you are my son. And so as we come into Matthew chapter 4, the question would be, will Jesus resist every temptation to doubt that promise, that word from his father?

[4 : 50] The background of these verses is a larger section of Deuteronomy, but specifically we can hone in on Deuteronomy 8. Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 8 in his first reply to Satan.

But it says this in verses 1 to 5. He says, And so the context here is that God has taken, he has led Israel out into the wilderness for 40 years to test them to see whether or not in their heart that they would be obedient to God.

And of course, what we know is that they failed comprehensively. They tempted God at Meribah and Massah. They were idolatrous in the golden calf. They grabbed at the manna when God said to them, don't store up any more than a day.

They grabbed at it and stored it up and they ignored the word of God. And so the picture of us here is God leads Jesus out into the wilderness for testing.

The question is, will Jesus fail? Will he fail like Israel has done, like all the other people of God? Will Jesus fail? Now, Jesus has been declared the new person of God.

[6 : 28] That's what happens when the Holy Spirit descended upon him as the form of a dove. The dove was a symbol of the people of God in the Old Testament. And Jesus declared by God to be the true Israelite.

And now he is out in the desert. And will he fail? And so what we have here is in Matthew 4, we have a fight between the two arch enemies, if you like.

Two big arch enemies. And what is at stake here is not sort of prize money in a big fancy world title belt, but the eternal destination of all people. The scene is Satan and Jesus are pitted against one another.

They are there in the ring and we are in the stadium watching it all happen. We're there to cheer Jesus. And that is what ultimately this passage is about.

It is more than just providing an example for us as to how to deal with temptation. Because these temptations are uniquely directed towards Jesus as the Son of God.

[7 : 36] And so the fight begins round one. The bell goes. They jump off of their corners, off their little stools. Satan comes bounding across and goes whack!

And hits Jesus right where he is weak. Verse 3. The tempter came to him and said, If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread. You see, that was a blow that was aimed at knocking Jesus out.

You see, it says there, After 40 days and 40 nights without food, Jesus is hungry. And you kind of get that, don't you?

I mean, you understand that bit? He's hungry. What we probably don't understand is that after 40 days and 40 nights, you actually go through a hunger stage in the early stages.

And then you go through a point in your fasting where you don't feel anything. And then right at the end, just before, while your life is hanging on the balance, you get hungry again.

[8 : 43] In other words, Jesus has to eat now. And Satan comes to him described as the tempter. What does he do? He tempts him right at the point of his need.

Satan is saying, Use your power, Jesus, to satisfy your hunger. And that temptation would be so strong. I mean, he could do it, couldn't he? Just turn some rocks into bread.

And what would be the problem with that in the end? I mean, what would it matter if Jesus turned a few bits of rock into some bread, or just one big rock into a lump of bread? What would it matter? After all, if you've ever seen photos of Palestine or ever been there, there's a whole lot of rocks around. It's not like they'd miss a few. And it's not going to, you know, sort of disturb the balance of the ecology or something like that.

So what's going on here? What is the nature of this temptation? Verse 3, have a look at it. If you are the Son of God. What is Satan playing at here?

[9 : 44] Of course he's the Son of God. We know him to be the Son of God, don't we? I mean, in Jesus' baptism, it says there in Matthew 3, verse 17, this is my Son.

God had declared it. This is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased. And so Satan is tempting Jesus. You know, if you really are the Son of God, why are you hungry?

How can you be a child of God when you've got these issues? How can you trust the Word of God, who says that He will supply your needs when you are hungry? How can you trust that?

Let me say that whatever temptation it is that you face, and we all face temptations if we take God and His Word seriously, whatever your temptation is, the bottom line of the temptation, it all comes down to this.

Do I trust God's Word? It's a temptation to doubt God's Word. It's a temptation to doubt that what He has said is right and proper and good is, in fact, right and proper and good.

[10:57] That's what happened in the Garden of Eden. It's a temptation to doubt God's Word there. Satan says, in chapter 3 of Genesis, did God really say that you shouldn't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

You get the sense of it? Did God really say that? And Eve, who wasn't there when God said it to Adam, I don't know. Maybe.

Maybe not. Maybe I got it wrong. Maybe Adam got it wrong. Go back to Adam. What did he say? I don't know. I'm not really sure. Well, let's eat of the tree anyway. It's a temptation to doubt God's Word, to doubt whether or not He has my best interest at heart.

And so what is happening here is a direct attack on Jesus' faith. It is an attempt to get him to lose his trust in God, to follow his own interests rather than that of God's Word.

The sense of it is that if you feel like God has abandoned you, if you feel like that He's not looking out for you and not looking after you, then you should just do it yourself.

[12:09] Look after yourself. Provide yourself with food if it appears that God isn't going to do it. Satan is very cunning. And perhaps you've heard a similar kind of thing yourself.

If you're a Christian, how come your life has so many difficulties? I thought you were a Christian. Christians don't do that sort of thing, do they? Can't be a very good one. Surely a God who cares for you would give you something better than this.

Wouldn't he? Satan has used that sort of tactic to floor Christian after Christian after Christian. Because sometimes the negative voices of this world and the evil tempter are just a whole lot louder than the indwelling Spirit and the Word of God.

Satan was saying to Jesus, prove that you are the Son of God. Prove it. And sometimes just clinging to God's promise in His Word in the midst of my immediate temptation and trial and testing just doesn't seem so strong.

[13:20] It seems so flimsy. Satan tempts us to look for anything more than the assurance of the Word of God that we are indeed His.

And so, how do you answer such temptation to doubt God's Word? Jesus does it brilliantly in verse 4, quoting from Deuteronomy, it is written.

You see that again and again and again. It is written. It is written. And He quotes Scripture, man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

He answers this temptation to doubt God's Word with the Word of God. Now, we've got to be careful here not to be too quick to spiritualize this verse.

Our souls are not fed by tip-top, but by the Word of God. That's how we can do it. So, you know, the toast I had for breakfast, that doesn't feed my soul, but the Word of God feeds my soul.

[14:20] The bread feeds my body. Kind of stuff. So, we just spiritualize this verse. Jesus is here quoting Deuteronomy 8, and that is not the sense of it in Deuteronomy 8. You see, when there was no bread, when God led the Israelites out in the wilderness and there was no bread, God exceptionally provided for the Israelites by giving them this thing called manna, which basically means, what is it?

What is this stuff? And it's kind of like bread. And so, the point was, from every generation from that point on, was to know the truth that their very life is not confined by the eating of toast, but depends upon the commands and the pleasures of God.

God's authority reaches over all of creation, and though we feed on bread in the morning time, it would be wrong for us to attribute the life and the nourishment that I currently have from that slice of tip-top toast.

But, my life and my nourishment comes from the hidden blessing of the God who breathes life into that bread so that by it, I might be nourished and live.

God's behind it. That's why we pray, give us today our daily bread. God's behind it. Not just in the providing of it, but in the life that comes with it.

[15:53] Jesus is being tempted to doubt God's word, and he replies with, God's word is constant, and God's word is life. And it is to be trusted, and it is to be relied upon.

Anyone who does not rely upon the word of God for life and for nourishment can expect to be floored by Satan in the first round. And so, we, the spectators, are there watching the bout going on. First round is over. Our salvation is at stake on this, on Jesus winning, and Jesus goes to his corner, as does Satan, having won the first round, and so we, the crowd, go hip, hip.

Excellent. Round two. Satan comes bounding out again from his little stool in the corner, and he goes whack, and he hits Jesus right where he is strong this time. Verse five.

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. If you are the son of God, he said, throw down, throw yourself down, for it is written, you will command his, he will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

[17:07] You see, previously Jesus had used God's word to knock Satan down, and now Satan does this really cunning little tact and wheels around and uses the word of God in order to try and floor Jesus this time.

He is so cunning. I think that Satan does some of his best work when he uses the word of God against Christians. That's some of his best work. He hates the word of God.

Make no mistake about it. Satan knows the Bible better than anyone in this room, but he doesn't love it, he doesn't believe it, and he certainly won't obey it. He hates it, and he will use it for our ruin. It is so important for us to know the Bible. Satan calls on Jesus to show the reliability of God's word. Hey, Jesus, if you are the son of God, the Bible says that you can jump off here, and if the Bible's true and reliable, you won't be hurt.

The word of God is true. If he can be trusted, you ain't going to be damaged. Do the big bungee jump without the cord. You'll be fine. Then we will know whether this God can be taken at his word.

[18:19] You see, what's going on here is a testing of God. And Jesus wheels around in verse 7. It is also written, do not put the Lord your God to the test. You see, it's right.

Satan was right. It was true. He quoted from Psalm 91. Absolutely. But Jesus also knows that to put God to the test, to say to God, prove that you are worthy and true, shows distrust for God and his word.

So there's a difference between faith and testing. Faith comes from the perspective of me actually believing in God that he is reliable. Testing is saying, you prove yourself to me.

Two different things. Faith is where God has promised something and even though that I'm not sure it's right, even though I'm not sure it's going to be good for me, he's promised it and his character says he's right and it's good and I should pursue it.

Testing has said, I will pursue that when you prove it's going to work out all right for me. you prove yourself first. So when I try and force God's hand to prove himself and Jesus floors Satan again, end of round two, we the crowd are there watching this happen.

[19:38] We're excited because our salvation is at stake and we say hip hip. Hooray! Fantastic. I'm not sure everyone's saying hooray there but I know your intention.

Round three. Bell goes, Satan comes out, bit of blood coming from his nose this time. But he bounds across and whacks Jesus right where he loves. Verse eight, have a look at this. Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.

All this I will give you, he said, if you will bow down and worship me. Notice he doesn't come out and say this time, if you are the son of God.

He knows who he's dealing with here. This is some temptation that Jesus is facing in this last one. Other parts of the Bible tells us that God so loved the world that he gave his only son and now this only son who loves the world is being offered the world.

You see, now Satan is tempting Jesus with what he actually loves, with what the Father has promised him and with what he has come to achieve and to get together for the Father.

[20:54] And all Jesus has to do at this moment is bow down to Satan and he will get it. It'll be yours. He's offering Jesus the easy option, the no suffering version.

And Jesus tells him to clear off. And we see in verse 11 that he does. And he doesn't reappear again in Matthew's gospel until chapter 16.

Chapter 16, Jesus says, who do you say I am? Peter says, you're the Christ. And straight after a declaration of who Jesus is, Jesus says, guys, to his main men, the disciples, guys, we're heading up to Jerusalem and I'm going to suffer and I'm going to die.

And Peter, God bless him, does him footy mouth disease again. He puts his arm around Jesus, pulls him to one side and said, no, no, Jesus, you're not going to die. You're not going to die. And Peter, sorry, Jesus turns to his best mate and calls him by the name of his worst enemy. Get behind me, Satan, for you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.

[22 : 16] You will not deter me from the mission the Father has given me. He will not be deterred. He won't take the easy option.

Glory is on the other side of the cross. He doesn't take the easy option. He won't accept Satan's plan. If he did, it would mean the loss of everyone, not just his own life, but for all people, everyone who is gathered in this stand for all of eternity, all people from all time and eternity, who are standing there watching the battle go on, we would all be lost if Jesus took the easy plan and finished the fight at the end of round three.

Jesus would have abandoned his trust in his Father who would one day give him all the nations of the earth and the heavens. And so Jesus is there with this massive temptation and he's there with a choice.

Choose the way of Satan. Do what he asks. Believe the lies that all the troubles will be over or no. Declare war. And at this point, we don't cry, hip, hip, hooray. We're in the state as we go, hit him again, Jesus.

[23 : 47] Hit him again, Jesus. Knock him down, Jesus, because our future depends on you declaring war on him and winning this battle. And so Jesus, hit him again in verse 10, away from me, Satan, for it is written, worship the Lord your God and serve him only.

War is what Jesus chooses. And it's a war that will be fought round after round after round throughout his life until the final round, round 15, Matthew 27.

Above his head, they placed the written charge against him. This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.

Two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on his left.

And those who passed by hurled insults at him and shaking their heads, saying, you who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days. Save yourself.

And then we hear the familiar words, come down from the cross if you are the Son of God. What a temptation to give up right at that last moment.

[25 : 16] What a temptation it would have been for Jesus to prove that he's the Son of God by saving himself from the cross, getting down, calling upon the legions of angels and stepping on of it.

Especially when just moments before he cried on the cross, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And Satan takes the opportunity to wheel around for the last temptation.

Jesus, take the easy option. He's abandoned you again. take the easy option. Come down from the cross and save yourself.

Prove that you're the Son of God by saving yourself from the horror of that cross. And we're in the grandstands and we're saying, Jesus, don't!

Don't, Jesus! Don't save yourself! Put up with the taunts, Jesus! Take the pain, Jesus! Stay there!

You are the Son of God! Don't believe the lies!

[26 : 20] Because if you come down, then we die! And Jesus breathed his last.

When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified and they exclaimed, surely he was the Son of God.

The good news is, three days later, he rose again. The end of Matthew 28, Jesus is given what Satan had offered him in chapter 4, but the easy option.

All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. it's mine. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them everything that I have commanded you.

And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. Everything has been given to Jesus. He is supreme, he has all the authority and he calls me to recognize his authority, to submit to his authority, to believe that he is trustworthy and true, that the word of God is secure and right and honorable and not to believe the lies of Satan.

[27 : 55] All authority has been given to Jesus. Matthew chapter 4, Jesus' last call to Satan, his last bow, he says in round 3, worship the Lord your God and serve him only.

And in Matthew 28 verse 17, that is exactly what happens when the disciples come face to face with the risen Jesus. It says, when they saw him, they worshipped him.

But some doubted. They worshipped him, but some doubted. as we live to worship Jesus, we will struggle with the temptation to doubt who he is, what he's achieved for us, the reliability and the effectiveness of his word, in our frailty, in our failure, in the face of temptation that we will be there moment by moment when I'm standing in my eyes and the door is there in front of me, do I trust the word of God that says it is wrong and I've got a better plan for you.

You believe my word that stealing is wrong. Give it back. And where is Jesus in that moment?

Surely I'm with you always to the very end of the age. I think as his disciples, I think we need to be like the father of the demon possessed boy in Mark chapter 9.

[29 : 34] Amazing words. Jesus says, do you believe, do you believe that I can heal this son? Do you believe it? And he says, I do believe. Help me overcome my unbelief. It's like I do worship, God God isn't remote.

God isn't remote. He isn't absent from my struggles to obey him, to take refuge in him, that he is the son of God and what he's promised me as his child is right and true.

He says, surely I'm with you always to the very end of the age. he's very much present as I struggle to be his disciple. He hasn't abandoned me to go it alone and through the fires and the temptations and the testings as a disciple of Jesus, even when I feel like I'm in the wilderness and when doubt is at its strongest, Jesus' promise is sure.

I am with you always to the very end of the age. Amen.