

Temptation: Getting Started

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Preacher: Mr David Ferguson

[0 : 00] chapter 4 verse 1 we read then Jesus was led up by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Those of you who are able to join us for the fellowship after the Sunday service a couple of weeks ago might remember me saying that I've recently taken up running an attempt to get my fitness back to improve my fitness so if you see me lurching around the castle grounds red-faced and struggling to breathe that's what's happening. It's not something that comes naturally to me and I don't actually enjoy running at all. I enjoy the effects of running but I don't like the process and sometimes I am really tempted to give up.

Have you ever been tempted? Tempted to give up? Tempted to take the easy route? The shortcut? Now there are three three main times on a run that I find myself most tempted to stop.

One of those times is right at the beginning before I've really started. One is in the middle of the run when I hit hills or obstacles and the third one is right near the end when the finishing line is in sight but I am to put it in technical running terms burst. Over the next three midweek meetings I hope God willing to look at three times when Jesus faced temptation. Once at the beginning of his ministry, once when there were obstacles midway and finally towards the end as he approached the finish.

And tonight I want to start this this kind of mini series by looking at Jesus's temptations right at the beginning which we read about there in Matthew's gospel.

Because sometimes for me the biggest temptation to stop running comes before I really started.

This morning was a prime example. I didn't have to open the curtains to be able to tell that the weather out there was horrible and that I would be much warmer if I just stayed in bed.

[2 : 44] Some days I might have made it out and I might have completed my five minute warm-up walk but when the little voice in my headphones tell me it's time to start running I think no I just don't feel it. I'm tired. My legs are sore. Everything still hurts from the last run and the thought of what lies ahead of me is just about too much and all I really want to do is just swing around and walk home.

Well this account that we read of in Matthew's gospel here it occurs right at the start of Jesus's earthly ministry straight after his baptism and here we see the devil doing his best or perhaps we should say his worst to try to persuade Jesus to give up on the plan. I want to look at three different headings tonight. I want to look first at the temptations the devil puts in his way then I want to look at how Jesus responds and then I want to just briefly look at what that reveals to us about Jesus.

So the temptations the response and the revelation the temptations we see here that the devil throws three specific temptations at Jesus and each of them tells us a little something about how the tempter likes to work and first he tempts Jesus by striking through physical weakness.

We see it in verse 2. We read that Jesus was hungry so it's perhaps unsurprising that the devil might choose this angle of attack but the devil doesn't just offer Jesus bread.

Look at what he says in verse 3. He says if you are the son of God command these stones to become loaves of bread. See the devil is subtle.

[4 : 52] He doesn't just know our weaknesses he knows how to turn our strengths against us as well. Now if he was to ask you or me to turn stones into bread that wouldn't be much of a temptation would it?

Because we can't. But Jesus could. What the devil was doing here was he was tempting Jesus to use his rightful powers in the wrong way.

Because Jesus could transform things from one substance to another and he could miraculously provide sustenance. These were miracles which he would later do as part of his ministry.

But what the devil is doing here is he is tempting Jesus to take matters into his own hands to put his need for physical sustenance in the wilderness before his trust in his heavenly father.

Jesus' road was going to be hard. It was going to be demanding. It was going to involve sacrifice and trusting the father. And the devil sought here to persuade him to step off that road to use his powers to make things easier for himself.

[6 : 21] How often do we fall victim to that temptation? To let our immediate our temporal our worldly needs take first place.

To take matters into our own hands because we don't trust God enough and we are doubting his provision. Because that's what the devil was up to here.

It is not that there is anything wrong with bread. But the devil will often begin his attacks by trying to shake our trust in God as our provider.

Now when that angle fails he switches it around and he moves on to trying to use Jesus' trust in the father against him.

What it says in verse 6 hear this 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.

[7 : 27] Now imagine just for a moment if Jesus had done that what an incredible sight that would have been as angels bore him down to the ground.

He would have been fulfilling a prophecy. He would have been proving who he was. No need to run the hard path that was laid out in front of him.

But the temptation here is to put God to the test to force his hand because with this temptation the devil sought to get Jesus to presume on God's goodness for his own purposes.

Don't we all do that from time to time? Don't we demand that God prove himself to our satisfaction? Demand that he deliver on his promises in a manner of our choosing? There's a thin line between stepping out in faith and metaphorically speaking stepping off a building.

[8 : 43] Between trusting that God can catch us and insisting that he do it. It is right to have absolute trust in our Father.

But the devil will often try to talk us into overstepping that and presuming on him. But here that too fails.

The devil has one more trick up his sleeve. Look at verses 8 and 9. The devil takes Jesus to a high place and he puts the whole world out on display.

All of this he says all of this the power and the glory I can give it to you right now. All you have to do is just bow down worship me.

The devil was offering Jesus the ultimate shortcut. Forget the road ahead. Skip straight to the prize. All the pain all the suffering all the rejection that lay ahead could be sidestepped.

[10 : 00] He said all you have to do is worship me. And he doesn't say worship me forever.

He's not asking for a lifelong commitment. He doesn't even say worship me exclusively. He just says just this once just just now bow down before me.

what an easy and appealing trap that is isn't it? To think that we can carry on serving God but share just a little bit of our loyalty with something else.

But the devil knows that that is not true. Because if you or I let anything else take first place in our hearts even for a moment looking for a shortcut to satisfaction then we are turning our backs on God.

So if these are the temptations how does Jesus respond? well he doesn't get into a dialogue or a discussion.

[11 : 27] He doesn't rely on carefully prepared arguments or appeals to reason and philosophy or to sheer strength of will.

He goes directly to the word of God. All of Jesus' rebuttals are quotations from the Old Testament. because God's word is powerful. But and this is really important.

It is the word that is powerful not the words. Let me try and explain what I mean by that.

We can't hope to drive off the devil and to stave off temptation by just reciting passages of scripture as if they were a magic spell. We can't rely on the Bible as a kind of protective talisman.

[12 : 32] And I am saying this with all reverence. Just because someone is quoting scripture doesn't always mean they're right.

Even if it's you. do you need evidence of this? Look again at verse 6. He will command his angels concerning you and on their hands they will bear you up lest you strike your foot against a stone. That is a quote from scripture. scripture. But who is quoting it? Satan.

The devil is perfectly willing to try to use scripture to his own ends. Scripture, the word of God, properly used, properly understood, properly handled, is a powerful, powerful weapon against temptation.

But misapplied, misunderstood, or misused, it can be terrible and destructive, doing more damage than we can imagine.

[13:47] The word of God must be used in context, in the way that God intended it. You might remember that I said God's word is a sword.

And the thing about swords is you need to know what you are doing with them. You need to know how to use them. And if you don't, if you just pick one up and start waving it around, then someone is going to get hurt.

Possibly you. God's word is not a toy, and it is not something to be toyed with. We need to know it, we need to study it, we need to familiarize ourselves with it, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to open it up to us, to bring it alive to us, and to change us with it.

Because there are a lot of people today who think that just quoting the Bible is a guaranteed argument winner. God's God's word, God's word, so that you can wield it well when you need it.

So was that the reason this account was preserved in our Bibles?

[15:15] so that we could learn how to resist temptation the Jesus way? Well, yes, and no.

In some ways we should look to Jesus as our example, but it was not to be an example that Jesus came. There is so much more to this than that.

And the reason that we have this account preserved in God's word for us is because of what it reveals, which brings us to our third and our final heading, the revelation.

Because this passage goes far, far beyond giving us an example to imitate. This passage reveals to us who Jesus is.

So how does it do that? Well, one of the clues is in the passages of Scripture which Jesus used.

Because, you see, these temptations are not new.

[16:29] This account may come at the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry near the start of the Gospels, but it is not the start of the story. We need to remember that Jesus' life on earth is part of a bigger story, the story of the whole Bible.

And each of Jesus' response to the tempter comes from the same section of Scripture in Deuteronomy, where the Israelites had reached the end of their wanderings and they are about to start a new chapter.

and each of the temptations that Jesus faced in the wilderness at the start of his ministry shouts back to the temptations that the Israelites faced at the beginning of their wilderness journey.

Let's take a quick look at them. Look at verse 4. The words Jesus cites here are from Deuteronomy chapter 8 verse 3, where Moses reminds the Israelites how they had grumbled in the desert and failed to rely on God for sustenance, how they were no sooner free from Egypt than they wanted to return to their slavery there where their bellies had been full rather than putting their trust in the God who had just freed them.

When they were hungry in the wilderness, they lost their trust in God. consider verse 7, where Jesus said we should not put God to the test.

[18:02] Here he's quoting Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 16, which in turn refers back to the Israelites testing God at Massa in Exodus 17.7, where they demanded proof of his power.

And then finally, look at what it says in verse 10. You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve. That's another quote from Deuteronomy, this time chapter 6 verse 13.

Again, the Israelites failed this test at Sinai when they built a gold calf and thought that they could bow down before it and still follow the Lord. And so in the wilderness of Judea, we see Jesus facing essentially the same test that the Israelites had faced in their wilderness.

But where they failed, he triumphed. but you know, we can take it even further back than that.

We're looking at beginnings, right? At starting off. Well, the Bible has a whole book about beginnings, Genesis. Genesis. And that's where we meet the tempter for the first time in Genesis chapter 3.

[19:27] He shows Eve and through her Adam that the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is good for food and pleasing to the eye in verse 6.

He appealed to their temporal appetites. He causes them to doubt God and put him to the test. In verse 1, he says, did God really say?

In verse 4, you shall not surely die? And he leads them to reaching for the ultimate shortcut, trusting the devil over God and seeking to make gods of themselves right at the beginning before they had even got started.

started. Our first parents gave in to the temptation and that took them from the garden to the wilderness.

These temptations are literally the oldest trick in the book. But what does that mean?

[20 : 39] Well, the fact that Jesus faces the same underlying temptation temptations and succeeds where the Israelites failed and where Adam and Eve failed, that tells us something important.

This passage doesn't just present Jesus as our example to follow. It shows him as the true Israel, the new Adam.

God calls the nation of Israel his first born son several times. Israel and Israel repeatedly failed to resist the tempter's lure.

As God knew they would. Adam is described in the genealogies of Jesus as the son of God, but he failed to stand up to this temptation.

temptation. So in being tempted, Jesus shows his humanity. The difference is that in defeating temptation, we see his divinity.

[21 : 41] in verse three, the tempter says to Jesus, if you are truly the son of God.

Think about what Jesus doesn't do here. Jesus does not refer back to his recent baptism, which you would find in Matthew chapter three, the preceding chapter. He doesn't speak about the voice from heaven, which affirmed him as God's beloved son.

No, he says man shall not live by bread alone. Jesus, God incarnate, identifies himself with mankind.

Just as Israel, who were intended to be a boon and a blessing to all nations, failed in the wilderness, wilderness, so in this wilderness, God's only begotten son triumphs and shows himself to be the fulfillment of that promised blessing.

Just as Adam and Eve, the first of the human race, fell and lost the garden where God dwelt with them and they ushered in death for all people, so Jesus as the first fruits from the dead, opened up the way so that we can return to God's presence and know eternal life through trusting in him.

[23 : 23] And all who trust in him share in that triumph over sin because that's our real refuge from the effects of temptation. Jesus, who John's gospel describes as the word made flesh.

so when temptation comes and it will, don't give up before you even get started. Don't try to stand on your own strength or wisdom, flee and take refuge in the word, in the living word, in Jesus.

And if you haven't put your trust in him yet, if you haven't started that journey, if you haven't set out on that race, will you do so tonight?

Will you take refuge in him? Will you share in his victory over temptation? We can't do it on our own.

We can only do it through the power of God's word manifest in Jesus. will you do that?

[24 : 45] Going to close singing to God's praise again. Amen. Amen.