

Tempted!

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[0 : 00] Perhaps before we come to God's Word this morning, we could bow our heads for a few moments in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, we come now to consider your Word together, and we want to come to it with a mind that is fertile. We want your Spirit to feed us and to move amongst us.

We want your Word to speak to us powerfully. And we're so aware that when it comes to listening to the gospel, that there are a thousand voices in our head drawing our minds away from what you are saying to us.

We pray that those voices will be stilled and that we will only have ears for the one voice, the voice of the Son of God, the Holy Spirit as He reasons with us.

And as you say to us, come now, let us reason together, says the Lord, though your sins were as scarlet, they shall be as wool. We pray that you will give us faith to receive your Word with knowing that we are sinners and knowing that Jesus is the way and the truth and the life.

[1 : 11] We pray, Lord, for ourselves, but we also pray for wherever your Word is preached all over the world today. We ask for the gospel. We've just been singing those great words about the sower going out and sowing his seed in tears and yet the reaper reaping a great harvest.

And we ask, Lord, that this will indeed happen even today in many parts of the world. And so, Lord, give us, we pray, still minds, and we pray that you will give us listening ears.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to turn now to Matthew's Gospel and chapter 4. The beginning tells us of the temptation of Jesus.

We've just read it. We'll take up the reading once again by reading the beginning. Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting 40 days and 40 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.

[2 : 25] And so on. I want to begin today by emphasizing the place of this event in the life and in the ministry of Jesus.

And the reason I want to do that is because for some people, this was simply a hazard that Jesus unfortunately had to go through. It was something that by which the devil sought to trip him up as he began his ministry.

I don't believe that. It's quite clear from the Gospels that this event was something that Jesus had to go through in the plan of God in his ministry.

And that's why the details are given to us, or at least as much detail as we can take in or as is good for us. So I want to ask the question this morning, why was it that Jesus absolutely have to go through this period of temptation which lasted, as we read, 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness?

We read several things about this. First of all, that he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness immediately after he was baptized. That's no coincidence.

[3 : 43] All of this took place in the plan and in the purpose of God. We must never forget that. So it was quite deliberate that he was immediately taken or led into the desert, into the wilderness.

We read also that he was being tempted by the devil for 40 days and 40 nights. This was a major confrontation between the Son of God, who had come into the world to save us from our sins, the Messiah, and the archenemy, Satan, Lucifer, Beelzebub, whatever you want to call him.

The Bible calls him all of these names. The serpent at the very beginning. We read about him in Genesis chapter 3. Who deceived the woman and the man and drew them away from God's

command.

This was a major confrontation between the Son of God and the same being. Mark's gospel also tells us something really interesting.

It doesn't go into the detail which Luke and Matthew go into, but it tells us that he was with the wild animals. Now, nothing in the gospels is given us without purpose.

[4 : 58] There was a particular reason why Mark tells us that he was in the wilderness with the wild, though somehow or other, the wild animals featured in this place and in this incident.

And I would suggest to you today that it all goes back to the place where Adam was and the animals in the Garden of Eden and how at that time they were not wild.

Adam named them. He was surrounded by them. He was their companion in a way. There was no such thing as fear of a lion or a jaguar or whatever.

There was no fear at all because they were all still and they were wild. But now they are wild. They are our enemy in many senses. But it also goes on to explain to us three specific points, three specific suggestions that the devil made to Jesus in which the suggestion was placed in his mind to take another course of action than the one he had come to fulfill.

So that's what we know about this incident, this event in the life of Jesus.

[6 : 21] But it is, as I say, it was a major confrontation. And I want us to not jump, first of all, to the ways in which Jesus answered to the devil, help us when we are tempted.

I'm not saying, of course, that that's not a way to read this. And it's, of course, we want to draw as much practical help as we can out of what Jesus says. And the devil does choose and select areas in our lives where we are weak, just as he did to the Savior.

But that's not the first thing that we see in this passage. We see that this took place in the plan of God at the very beginning of his ministry. He had to go through this before he uttered a single word in preaching or in teaching or in doing miracles in the towns and cities of Galilee.

Now, why was that? What was happening in the wilderness at that time? Well, I believe that the answer lies with going all the way back to the chapter that we read, to the world that God had created at the very beginning of time, a world that was perfect and flawless and sinless and beautiful.

It was a world in which there was only perfect happiness. We cannot imagine that kind of world because even our happiest moments are always stained and flawed by various different things that spoil it.

[7 : 45] It's only a matter of time. We do not know what Adam and Eve felt and experienced in a perfect world. But that was the world that God created. Satan's strategy was, and of course you can go through all the questions of why did God allow it to happen and all the rest of it, but Satan's strategy was to spoil what God had created by suggesting to Eve that she take a different course than the one that God had commanded her and Adam to take.

And that was that they must not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, or else then the day you eat thereof, says God, you will die. That's exactly what happened.

So the first man, when he was given the command by God not to eat of the fruit, he disobeyed that command, and the fall and sin and the ruin and the misery and all the carnage that the world still experiences to this day, it flooded into that world, into that perfect world, and the perfect world became an imperfect world, a world that was full of darkness and fear and misery and sickness and death itself.

It was that world that Jesus came into in order to reverse the fall. And here we have a demonstration of the way in which Jesus, by his coming into the world, was going to reverse what Satan had done with our compliance.

And he was going to come not to the garden because the garden was no more. The world was no longer a perfect place. Instead, he came into the result of the fall, into the wilderness.

[9 : 37] There was no wilderness in the beginning. God did not create the world with a wilderness in it. He created the world fertile and blossoming and lovely and blooming.

But now there is dryness and nothing and sand and heat and death. And the animals are wild. And if anything depicts the world in its lostness, it was the wilderness.

The result, the fruit, if you like, it's not a very good word to use because there was no fruit in the wilderness. The result of the fall and all of our foolishness in listening to the wrong voices.

And there he met with exactly the same enemy that Eve and Adam met with. And the enemy tried exactly the same tactic, the same strategy upon the Son of God. He always does the same thing. With the same objective to destroy and to spoil what God is doing. It's always his strategy to do that.

[10:50] If you're a follower today, if you follow and love the Lord Jesus, then you obey him. Jesus says, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. But why is it so difficult to keep God's word and to put it into practice in our lives?

Because there are voices. There are suggestions. Day after day, we get drawn this way and drawn that way. And more often than not, or at least very often, we listen to those voices.

And we go the wrong way and we discover how miserable we are by listening to the wrong voices instead of listening to the right voices. But here is Jesus. And he too hears the voice of the evil one. And he's suggesting to him. And his suggestion is aimed at one thing and one thing alone. And that is to get Jesus to change course. Just a little bit.

Just slightly. If he can only alter his mind just slightly, then Satan has one. Every temptation, all three temptations are aimed at exactly the same thing.

[11:58] To persuade Jesus to take a different course of action from the one he had set his heart upon, which was to come into the world to die on the cross for sinners.

But for the Son of God and the Son of Man, that was no easy course of action. That was going to involve the pain and the agony and the shame and the suffering of Calvary.

Not only Calvary, but life on earth as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Never forget, Jesus' suffering did not just begin in the garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus' suffering began the moment he was born. He had already experienced the suffering of life in this world. He knew the sorrows of what it meant to be a human being living in a fallen world.

And yet he knew that it was only going to get worse. Much worse. As he bore our sin. And as he went towards the cross.

[13:05] In order to die the cursed death of the cross. So Satan, we're told, placed three proposals in front of Jesus.

The first proposal was when Satan came and he said, After 40 days of not eating. If you are the Son of God, he said, Command those stones to become loaves of bread.

But he answered, Jesus answered, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Now some of us might be surprised at that temptation. Some of us might be surprised that it was a temptation at all. After all, if Jesus was hungry, and if he was the Son of God, having all power at his fingertips, then what was wrong with him simply satisfying his hunger by commanding those stones to become bread?

Well, let's go into it in a little bit more detail. Spend just a few moments thinking about it together and ask ourselves, Well, what was wrong with that suggestion? Let's remember, first of all, the reason that Jesus had come into the world.

[14:27] And what had happened, what it meant for the Son of God to lay aside his heavenly glory and his power in order to humble himself and to make himself of no reputation.

And that meant that he had to come into this world born of a woman, born in a manger in the stable in Bethlehem, and that he had nothing at his disposal.

He was born in poverty. His earthly father and his mother were poor, humble people. He knew what it was like to be poor, to be amongst those who struggled for a living.

And that was the plan and the purpose of God. But it was also God's plan that the Son must suffer. That it was through suffering as the Son of Man that he would redeem you and I from our sins.

And that meant him having to forego what he could have done by his own power. He did that out of obedience to God who commanded him to live the kind of life that he lived, where he had to set aside the use of his own power for his own satisfaction.

[15:51] There were times that Jesus used his power for the good of others. He changed water into wine. He came to his disciples walking on the water. He fed the 5,000. For him, it was no problem to bring loaves of bread out of thin air.

He could have done it. He was the one and that's the point. This is the point that Satan is so cleverly coming to him with. You're supposed to be the Son of God. Just shortly before, Jesus had been baptized.

When Jesus was baptized, the Spirit came down. The heavens opened and a voice said, this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.

And Satan is coming to him 40 days after and he's saying, my beloved Son, why are you here? If you are the Son of God, you have got everything at your disposal.

You are next to the Father himself. You are the one through whom the universe was created. You are all powerful and you're alone in the middle of nowhere and you're starving and you've got nothing.

[17:02] What are you doing here? And it was at that moment that there was a crossroads. There always is a crossroads when we're tempted to do something.

And at a crossroads, you can go one way or the other. Jesus had all the power of God at his disposal. He could have just thought the thought and the stones would have become bread. And he could have satisfied his hunger in a few moments' time. But he had come into the world to set aside his own interests. He had come to obey the Father in heaven who sent him to come into the world as our sin bearer.

And it was only if he obeyed God that he would be successful in paying the price for our sin. If he had listened to the devil, the whole thing would have been ruined.

You have come to nothing. By the way, I'm not suggesting for a moment that Jesus could have sinned. I don't believe he could have. We'll set that question aside for another time.

[18:08] Jesus, remember, was in his person. He was the son of God. He was God himself. So it was impossible for him. Nevertheless, it was still a real temptation because he had a human nature.

And you know, that applies to ourselves as well that there are often times in our lives when things happen to us as the Lord's people and we just can't make head or tail of them.

You often think to yourself, why in the world is the Lord allowing this to happen to me? Why am I? This would have been a real temptation to Jesus.

Jesus, the Lord of glory, eternal in the heavens, no beginning, no end. And there he is alone. And he's starving.

He would love in his human nature to just, to eat. And he won't because he is obeying the voice of God. He's there for a reason.

[19:13] And for him, obedience to God is the very first, the very, very first priority. Even when, in a human sense, we can't make head or tail of why we are where we are at this moment in time, it doesn't make any sense.

Just as from the outside, it didn't appear to make sense as to why Jesus was in the desert, alone and hungry at that time.

It doesn't appear to us to make sense. But it was all in the plan and the purpose of God by which Jesus was being tested. You see, wherever there's real faith, it will be tested.

That applies to you and to me. That if our faith lies in the Lord Jesus today, it will be tested. Make no mistake. And the testing comes with those questions where we ask, why is it?

How can I put two and two together? The God who is supposed to, the God who is supposed to be looking after me and upholding me and protecting me. We pray that every day that God will protect us and uphold us and guide us.

[20:28] And then we find ourselves in the very last place that we ever expected to find us.

Yesterday, the congregation will know that some years ago, I used to go to Thailand to visit the Katholi Karein Baptist Church, college and school.

And I went there for several years. I don't seem to have the time to go there anymore. I was, I just can't fit it into my schedule. But these were blessed times. I used to go there and teach the students, 300 students every year would go through that place.

It's the biggest Bible school in the whole of Thailand and it was in a refugee camp. Who knows what God did in preparing young people for all kinds of service. That Bible school yesterday was burned to the ground.

It wasn't deliberate. It was an accident. Thankfully, nobody was killed. But I'm asking, what sense does this make?

You pray that God will bless the work of the Bible school. Just like we pray that God will bless his work all over the world, wherever we have an interest in the gospel.

[21:42] And we pray it for the right reasons. We want God's kingdom to grow and for people to be saved and to be built up and to be taught the Bible. And then something like this happens.

You think, that just doesn't make sense. And so at that moment, the devil comes in and says, well, there you go. I told you that from the very outset. Just a piece of nonsense, the Christian faith. You pray for protection. You pray for this and that and the next thing. Coincidentally, sometimes you get it. Sometimes you don't. It's all a matter of statistics. You're talking nonsense.

You believe in all this stuff. But it just doesn't work, does it? Yes, it does. Whatever it looks like on the outside, God has a bigger plan.

And even when we cannot see that plan, you have to simply believe in it. And that's what Jesus said. Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. [22 : 48] You have to believe. You can't see the bigger picture, but it's there. It's in the hand of God. And you have to simply believe his word.

And that's what takes us on to the second temptation where the devil took Jesus up to the pinnacle of the temple. The two things are related, by the way. They're very, very connected.

He took them out to the pinnacle of the temple and he said, look, your Bible says this, he will command his angels concerning you and on their hands they will bear you up lest you strike your foot against a stone.

Okay. If you believe it, test it. Try it. Let's see how true the Bible is. You've got nothing to fear because you believe it.

Then you think it's going to happen. You believe it's going to happen. So go for it. Let me see the truth of the Bible. Test it. Surely, surely to you, you must want to test it.

[23 : 51] And you know, again, once again, Jesus had only just heard the voice of God saying, you are my beloved son. And yet, how can God love his own son and leave him to hunger for 40 days in the wilderness?

What kind of love is this? Does God really love me? Many of us ask often. Sometimes when we don't see the immediate evidence of it.

And we would love to test God. We would love, we ask God, show me some kind of evidence of your love when we feel God is very distant from us.

How do we react to those times when the devil comes in and says, does God really love you? I can understand why he would love so-and-so or so-and-so because they are exemplary Christians.

But you are not, look at what you've done. How do you know that God loves you? And you would love to know it right away, wouldn't you? And it's at times like that you have to go to the Bible and you have to say, I love, God loves me because he says he loves me.

[25 : 14] And faith is when you believe that without having to test it. Faith is when you take hold of God's word and you, without seeing it in front of your eyes, but you believe it nonetheless.

Not only do you believe it, but it is the central energizing force in your life because it comes from the word of God. Jesus said, you shall not put the Lord your God to the test.

The third temptation, as we all know, where the devil took Jesus up to a high mountain. He showed him all the kingdoms of the world and he said, all of these I will give you. I don't know how he did that.

It's not important for us to know how the devil showed him because you can't see all the kingdoms of the world from any mountain in the world, so there must have been some kind of way in which the devil was able to display all the nations and the kingdoms and the peoples of the world and he said to Jesus, I'll give it all to you.

All these I will give to you if you will fall down and worship me. You might ask, well, what right did Satan have to offer something that wasn't his?

[26 : 42] Be careful. There's a sense in which it was his. The apostle Paul calls him the ruler of the kingdom of the air. There is a sense in which Satan does rule, not ultimately, but he does insofar as he controls and influences the minds and hearts and wills of the entire world.

This is a world that has gone wrong and continues to willingly go wrong because we listen to the wrong voices. But here is the devil saying to Jesus, you can have it all.

All you have to do is to recognize my authority and you'll have it all. Now, you might be asking, well, of course Jesus is not going to, he's never going to succumb to that because you can't possibly have the Son of God worshipping the devil.

That is absurd. So that was an easy one, you might say. That's dead easy. That's clear. That's a no-brainer. But be careful once again because the temptation lay in the suggestion that Jesus did not need to go to the cross, that there was another alternative, an easier, more successful, more

affluent alternative to the way of the cross.

And it's often like that with us as well, isn't it? Where we're persuaded very often that the way of ease and success, the way of, the way in which we live the easy life rather than the life that God has given us to it.

[28 : 41] Jesus said, if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily. If you are a Christian today, then your life is one of taking up your cross daily and following Jesus, and that is not an easy life to live.

And there are times when you say to yourself, well, I don't know how long I'm going to live in this world. If I live to the average age of say 80, that doesn't guarantee us anything. That's how many years have I got.

Am I really going to continue to live my life in self-denial, putting God first and all the difficulty that that involves, where all my friends, my non-Christian friends, are having a ball and they don't seem to be suffering for it.

They seem to be making the most of this world. They're successful, they're happy, they're blissful, everything seems to be going so easy for them, but me, I'm following Jesus and nothing seems to be going well for me.

Maybe there's another way, maybe it would be as well to just take another path. for Jesus. There was a temptation in the other path.

[30 : 03] That's why he said in the Garden of Gethsemane, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, if it be possible. Nevertheless, he said, not my will, but yours be done.

we must never think that it was straightforward for Jesus to simply amble along to the cross. For Jesus, the cross was a nightmare.

It was nothing but intense, absolute, ultimate suffering. we must never, never, ever forget what it took in the mind and in the heart of Jesus to become forsaken by God the Father in order for our sins to be paid for.

And he tells us that our lives, not in the same sense, only he could suffer on the cross for our sins, but nevertheless, the life of the Christian is one of self-denial.

It can only be that way. That's God's command. And today, if you're not a Christian and you're expecting me to try and paint a rosy picture of what the Christian life is, there is no rosy picture.

[31 : 26] The only way that I can present the Christian life to you is this, that it's the only way to live. It is the way in which you know that God is your Lord, that you're at peace with God and when you have that peace with God, you don't want anything else and you certainly don't want to turn back.

And so, the Lord Jesus stood his ground and he confronted the same enemy as suggested to Eve successfully that she disobeyed God, but this time, where Adam and Eve failed, Jesus succeeded and he did so on our behalf.

Never forget that Jesus was our representative, so when he went to the desert, we went to the desert, and when he stood his ground against the evil one, we were in him.

We can say that the devil today is a defeated foe, and that we belong not to the first Adam, but we belong to the last Adam, the Adam that came in order to secure the victory over the evil one in the wilderness and ultimately on the cross.

When he said, it is finished, he came to destroy the work of the devil, and he did. When he rose again, he rose triumphant over the grave, and that was the moment when the devil's work became just simply a matter of time.

[33 : 08] The day will come when ultimately Satan will be exterminated, cast out of this world altogether. Meanwhile, you and I have to battle on to keep on responding to his voice, and to keep on refusing to do whatever he wants us to do, to keep on fixing our eyes upon the prize of the calling of God, the ultimate destination to which God has called all of his people, his glory, his kingdom, his love, his forgiveness, and one day it will all be worth it.

It's worth it already, but one day it will be all perfectly clear. you have to hang on and carry on and battle on until that day looking to Jesus.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we pray now that you will bless our time together. We thank you for the victory that Jesus won over the evil one, not only in his life, but in his death and in his resurrection, and we have that promise of victory today, that when we confront the evil one and when he tries to use every possible resource against us, we know that we can be victorious in the

Jesus who is united to us.

Lord, we pray that you will bless each one of us now, bless this day to us, bless the rest of this day to us. We pray to make the most of it by living it in your worship and in obedience to you.

In Jesus' name, Amen.