

The Failed Temptation and the Fall Reversed

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[0 : 0 0] Now, for those of you who perhaps weren't with us on Friday or last night, let me just! explain very briefly that we're going through a theme that's called In the Garden. On Friday! night, I introduced that theme by reading Genesis chapter 2 and by exploring some of the areas of interest that arise out of the creation of humanity, i.e. Adam and Eve.

And we looked at some of the features of that chapter, which are the features of our identity as human beings. Last night, we spoke about how the perfect equilibrium that existed between God and Adam and Eve was ruined by the fall. We looked at the process in which Eve and Adam fell by disobeying God, by rejecting the command, the prohibition that he had given to them, and we saw some of the consequences of that. We didn't have time to look at how God evicted them from the garden and how he set the cherubim with a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life. But we looked at how God had promised that in difficulty there would be the work that man would try to do. There would be the difficulty in childbearing. There would be the loss of that perfect balance in the relationship between husband and wife. And of course, that applies to all different relationships in the world in which the balance that would have been there was upset by the fall. And then we looked, of course, lastly, at how God promised the serpent that he would one day be destroyed. And that is what I want to follow up on today. Because here in this chapter, there is a confrontation between the Son of God, who was made man, who came into the world in our nature as one of us, and who confronted the same serpent at the very beginning of his ministry.

This was only the very beginning of several confrontations that there were with the evil one, the serpent, as he made his way and as he prepared for the cross. And it's in that context that I think we ought to understand Matthew chapter 4, the temptation. I'm sure you've often heard sermons on it. I've preached on it a number of times. And I've often taken the line that you'll hear from many preachers. I'm not saying it's a bad line. I'm not saying it's a bad interpretation. But you've often heard people saying, well, here is the way that the devil tempted Jesus. And here is how Jesus resisted that temptation. This is how we are to resist temptation. You've heard that before. I've preached it before. What I want to suggest to you this morning is that although that's true, it's not the point of the passage. The primary point of the passage is to recognize Jesus re-enacting the Garden of Eden.

And there are certain continuities about this re-enactment as well as certain discontinuities in it. And that's what I want to explore with you this morning. But particularly in relation to Jesus' preparation for the cross. Because we always remember that the ministry of Jesus and the death of Jesus are inextricably related. The ministry of Jesus, or rather the life of Jesus, we don't know much about his young days, but we do know a lot about his ministry, his parables, his miracles, his conversations, his teaching. All of that was in preparation for the cross. So was the temptation. And I believe it is impossible to understand the temptation fully without seeing it in relation to the cross. Which of course relates to the reason why we're here today to remember Jesus' death on the cross. So I hope you'll see this passage as it is connected with Jesus. And I hope that comes out as we look at it together.

Here is the second Adam. He is placed into this world. He's at the beginning of his ministry, the baptism of Jesus marked the beginning of his public ministry. And the first thing that happens is that he's led out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Now it would be someone who is pretty inastute, who would not recognize how that matches the very first events in Genesis chapter 2 and chapter 3. Except this time, instead of a garden where there are trees and an abundance of fruit and provision for him, there is nothing. And that nothingness is the consequence of the fall. Here is what Adam has done. Here's what humanity has done. They've changed the world from being a garden in which there is plenty and perfection into a world in which there is misery and aloneness and isolation and hunger. And of course, all the sin and the misery. Remember what the catechism said. The catechism says this, the fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery. That kind of just sums it up, doesn't it? It brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery. And we all recognize that. So did Jesus. That's what he was confronted with. And now he is going to be, at the very beginning of his ministry, he's going to be confronted with the same serpent that confronted Eve in the garden. I'm not sure how much the serpent knew either about what it meant for Jesus to be the son. I know he uses the language of, if you are the son of God.

[6 : 32] I'm not sure how much he knew. I'm not sure how much he knew. Again, I'll leave that with you. The devil doesn't know everything. He's not omniscient. He doesn't know everything. So it's just a question that intrigues me. Neither am I sure of whether he knew exactly the way that God was going to secure our... His purpose was to destroy Jesus. But little did he know that in trying to destroy Jesus, he was actually carrying out the plan of God for our salvation. When Jesus died on the cross, it appeared that Satan had the complete victory. That was his design. And yet we read, Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians, we impart a secret wisdom from God, which God decreed before the ages of our glory.

Here's what it says. None of the rulers of this age understood it. Rulers of this age? Satan, the serpent. If they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. So that's my proof for saying, I'm not quite sure how much the devil understood what God was actually doing in the death of Jesus.

Jesus. Otherwise, he would have had a different plan. That's what Paul says. Not my words, but Paul. And that's, of course, because our redemption necessitated death. Without death, without the shedding of blood, God says there is no forgiveness. It's his ultimate purpose in securing our forgiveness was the death of his son, that ultimate sacrifice for our salvation. So with these things in mind, let's just explore the three temptations that we read about in Matthew chapter 4. And let's try and understand what the devil is doing, not just in what he says, but in what lies behind what he says. Remember what we saw that, how subtle he was in the conversation with Eve. Remember how I said to you yesterday that at no time does Satan ever say to Eve, I want you to eat that fruit. But what he does is he creates the conditions, opens up the possibility of another alternative. And while in this case, he is most definitely telling

Jesus what to do. He's also behind the scenes, he's opening up other possibilities for Jesus. And I want us to see that how as we go along. The first of these temptations, as you know, was the temptation to command these stones to turn into bread. And I think we can understand the tactic here, where he comes and he says, if you're the son of God, how is this possible? You are the son of God, whatever that means.

You're the son of God. And yet you've been 40 days without eating. You're starving. You're in the wilderness. You're alone. You're the creator of the universe. You've come from heaven. How is this possible for someone in your position to not be able to eat? It's incongruous. It doesn't make sense.

[9 : 57] It just defies all logic. You can see his point, can't you? And there's something in us that says, well, why didn't Jesus just command the stones to become bread? It's something maybe he should have thought of beforehand himself. I mean, why did he have to allow himself to descend into such a level of poverty and starvation, where he didn't eat for 40 days? But there was a reason for Jesus fasting.

I'm not quite sure if I understand fasting. You find it all the way through the Bible. You find it in our history books. Fasting was a feature of even this island at one point in time, particularly roundabout communion times. An interesting subject, isn't it? I'm not quite sure how it connects. But one thing I do know is that it's connected with prayer. It's very, very clear in the Bible that fasting has no merit in itself. It's not some kind of way of earning God's favor. But it seems to be some way of clearing away every other distraction so that I can focus my mind entirely on God. And I believe that's the only way of making sense of it here in this passage. So this was at the very beginning of his ministry.

Jesus was sent out into the wilderness, specifically to be tempted by the devil, and he needs the company of God the Father. Well, of course, he would have the company of God the Father anyway. But there are times, aren't there? There's a passage in, I think it's Mark chapter 2, where he gets up early in the morning, goes up a mountain to pray. There are specific times where he needs that communion with the Father that he perhaps doesn't have the same time for when he's doing other things.

There are specific times of prayer in the life of Jesus, specific times when he's. And Jesus, this is one of those times at the very beginning of his ministry, where for him, fasting was absolutely essential in the fulfillment of the ministry that Jesus gave him to do, which of course would culminate in his death. We're not told what transpired between Jesus and the Father and how this period fitted into his overall mission. But it did fit. It had to happen. And he needed this intense communion with the Father in order to confront the devil. That's maybe a lesson for us as well, that perhaps the reason we are so easily tempted is because we need to work on our communion with the Father. Maybe it's because we don't have enough time for prayer. I'm talking to myself, by the way. Maybe it's because we don't have enough time for prayer that we're so easily tempted. And Jesus' example is opposite here in terms of our temptation. But there's another thing I want us to think about this morning, and that is this was one of those moments when the horror of his death was becoming more and more clear to him. There's a verse in Hebrews. I want to spend a few moments on it. Verse in Hebrews, chapter 5, verse 7. And here's what it says. In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death.

And he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. Now, I remember reading that recently, and I need to look up the commentaries to find out what people say about this verse, because it's a peculiar one, isn't it? What do the commentaries say?

[14 : 10] So I looked up some of the good commentaries on it, and they all say the same thing. They all say, well, we're not quite 100% sure about any one episode or one instance where this can be a description of it, but we believe that it refers to the Garden of Gethsemane.

I'm okay with that. I think that it does refer to the Garden of Gethsemane. But it says in the days of his flesh. I'm not persuaded that it was only the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus offered up loud cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death. I believe, I tended to believe, that there were several occasions when this happened. And this is one of them. At the very beginning of his ministry, as he was becoming more and more aware, and as he was coming to terms increasingly with the horror of his death. Now, you might respond by saying, well, was he not always aware of his mission? No, he can't have been. Was he aware as a six-month-old baby? No, he wasn't. He was a human being as well as being God.

And as a human being, as a six-month-old baby, he wasn't aware of the horror of what lay in front of him as a 33-year-old man. It had to be a growing awareness.

And I believe at the very beginning of his ministry, remember that his ministry is not just some random series of events like conversations and miracles and all the rest of it. It was his preparation for what lay ahead. And here is not only a growing awareness, but a growing willingness.

Now, be careful. I'm not saying he was ever unwilling. But this is what the verse says. He says, he learned obedience through what he suffered. It doesn't say that there was ever a time when he wasn't.

[16 : 17] But his suffering, including his time in the wilderness, was the means whereby his obedience was learned.

Willingness and awareness were a growing process in the mind and in the consciousness of Jesus. Now, with that in mind, if I'm right, then for the devil to come and say to him, why don't you change these stones into bread?

What he's trying to do is he's trying to derail the process by which Jesus is being made aware and willing to face what is coming to him.

And if he derails it, then we've lost it. The plan is derailed. So I hope you can see that it's not just a question of, well, he's hungry.

It's logical. He's got the power to do it. Why doesn't he do it? It's because if he does it, he takes his eyes off the work that the Father has given him to do.

[17 : 33] And the devil has won. We remember that the command of God to Adam was that he make use of the fruit, the provision that he gave to him.

It's quite strange, isn't it? That here we have eating again. And Adam was invited to eat any of the fruit of the garden except the knowledge of good and evil.

Here's Jesus obeying the command of the Father to go into the world and to give his life as a ransom for many. And here is the same serpent.

And he's trying to derail him from obeying the command of the Father by presenting him with another alternative.

So that's the first thing. And I hope we'll see all of the three of these temptations in relation to the cross. Next thing is that he takes him up to the very top of the temple.

[18 : 35] I don't know how this happens, by the way. It's not important how it happens. We're not told. But he takes him right up to the top of the temple where there's a great height. And he then preaches a sermon to him.

The devil preaches a sermon to Jesus. And it looks as if he doesn't need a Bible. He's got it off by heart. He knows the words that he's want to quote to Jesus. And the text of his sermon is Psalm 91.

That's why we sang it earlier on. And here's what it says. It says, Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place, the Most High who is my refuge, no evil shall be allowed to befall you.

No plague shall come near your tent, for he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.

Now, not only does the devil know his Bible, but he knows his hermeneutic. He knows how to preach it. And he's actually bang on. He knows what this psalm is about. It's a prophecy about Jesus.

[19 : 40] There's a lot the devil does know, even though there's a lot he doesn't know. He's right. It's about the promised Messiah. So he says, Well, here's the thing, Jesus.

Let's look at it this way. If this is God's word about you, then God's promise is that you will be protected. And so let's tell you what.

Let's put this to the test right now. Let's see whether God will actually produce the goods. Let's see if he will come good on his word. I know you believe it. So it should be easy to prove if you're the son of God.

Throw yourself down. We both know, by the way, you're not going to do it. You're not going to do it. I know that. But if you refuse, is that because you actually are trusting God, or is it because you're afraid you're going to fall to your death?

How do you know that God is going to make good his promise in the future? What did I say last night about the serpent chipping away at the trustworthiness of the Father?

[20 : 52] Now here's where the temptation came in for Jesus. The entirety of Jesus' mission rested on the Father's trustworthiness.

The Father's trustworthiness requires a test to make sure.

And the test would ultimately come when Jesus laid down his life on the cross. Because in so doing, he was going to give himself entirely into the hands of the Father.

That's what he meant when he was on the cross and he said, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. What he's doing is he's taking God at his word.

Entirely and only at his word. For example, in Psalm 16, you will not abandon my soul to shame or let your Holy One see corruption.

[22 : 09] But in so doing, on the cross, Jesus himself isn't protected by the Father in his death because Psalm 91 doesn't come to fulfillment because he has to suffer alone.

There are no angels to bear him up lest he strike his foot against a stone. There is no rescue. He has to come to the point of death alone.

He has to give himself. But in so doing, he believes and he trusts that the Father will raise him up on the third day. And here is the serpent coming and saying to him, are you sure?

Are you absolutely sure that this is what God is saying? What did I say yesterday about the serpent and Eve? He said, did God really say that?

Did God really say, tell me again, what did he say? Do you really believe that? He's doing the same thing to Jesus. He's saying, well, let's think about these words. Are you really sure that God is going to?

[23 : 18] He's testing the trustworthiness of God. And Jesus says, I 100% trust the word of my Father.

But then, the third one is one we all know. The whole story is one we all know where the devil takes him to a certain point in the world. I don't know which point that was.

A high mountain somewhere. There are no mountains where you can see the whole of the world. But that doesn't matter. He saw the whole world. And he says to him, he says, if you will worship me, then I will give you all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

Now, I'm sure we've read this often and we've thought on two counts this can't be. Number one, we've said, well, the world doesn't belong to the devil.

And secondly, it's so outrageous the suggestion of Jesus, the Son of God, worshipping or serving Satan in any way is just so outrageous that we say, well, that must have been an easy one to resist.

[24 : 35] We're actually wrong on both counts. Whilst the world and the universe does belong to God, ultimately, the devil does not have sovereign control over all things.

There is another sense in which he does. You remember what Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 2 says, where Paul calls him the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience.

And there are many places in the Bible where we're told that Satan does have a hold. We only have to look around you to know that. The eyes of the blind, Paul tells us in Corinthians that he has blinded, the God of this world has blinded the eyes of unbelievers.

It's a frightening prospect. There is a sense in which Satan does have a huge amount of control over the world in particular humanity.

So, in what case, secondly, in what sense is this temptation a real temptation to Jesus? because it is another attempt at presenting him with an alternative to his mission which was to involve suffering and death.

[25 : 56] It's an attempt to present him with a plan B, another alternative. And there were several times in the ministry of Jesus when this happened. I want to suggest to you three in particular.

number one was in Matthew 16. You remember when Jesus is having this conversation with the disciples and he's announcing to them that he's going to Jerusalem and there he's going to be handed over to the Gentiles and Peter says, far be it from you, this shall never be so.

Remember what Jesus said to him as a response to that. He said, get behind me, Satan. You are a hindrance to me. Why did he say that? That was quite harsh, wasn't it? Poor Peter.

He's always getting himself into trouble because of what he says. Peter's well-meaning. He just doesn't want Jesus to die. He doesn't want Jesus to be handed over. He wants him to be king. And Jesus says, get behind me, Satan.

And the reason he said that was because he saw that behind Peter's words stood the devil. The devil was somehow tempting Jesus by suggesting that there was another alternative to be ruler in this world.

[27 : 06] rather than go to the cross. Here's another one. And you may not agree with me in my interpretation but this is something for your discussion later on. Matthew chapter 14, I believe, when Jesus somehow withdrew away from the region of Judea to the district of Tyre and Sidon.

And there he comes across this Syrophenician woman. Remember that story? She comes to him, finds out where she is and she's got a daughter who's possessed by a demon. So she comes to him and she begs him, Lord, please help my daughter.

And he doesn't say anything to her. He responds in silence. And you read the story and you feel more awkward all the time.

You say, this is not like Jesus. This is harsh. It looks as if he doesn't want to be kind to this woman. He's been kind to everyone else and yet this woman comes to him and he's treating her. This is not like him at all.

And what's more, when his disciples tell him to send her away, he says this, it's not right to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs.

[28 : 15] You think, whoa, what's come over him? Well, here's what I believe was happening. This is one of these moments where Jesus is outside of his own people, is outside of Judea and he is receiving humility and reverence and respect and worship from someone who is not Jewish.

And he is suddenly struck by the prospect that there are people in this world who would make me king and who would honor me and who would respect me.

My own people want to kill me because they hate me. There are people in this world, perhaps loads of them, who would honor me as I deserve.

I think that's probably the best explanation I've ever heard why Jesus was silent. Of course, you know the end of the story, he did eventually cleanse the daughter and all was well.

but nonetheless, you have this dramatic moment. It seems to be a crisis moment in the heart of Jesus where I believe this was a temptation to him that there may be another route.

[29 : 36] And of course, the best known is Gethsemane itself. That 11th hour just before he's arrested where he goes on his own and he confronts the father and he says, Father, if it be possible, take this cup from me.

Now, here's the temptation in Matthew chapter 4. The serpent is presenting him with the option. There is a possible other way that does not involve your suffering.

And remember, he's becoming more aware of the horror of the cross in his own consciousness. And at the same time, Satan is saying to him, it doesn't have to be like this.

Let's make a deal. Let's come to an arrangement where we can work together. I'm not an unreasonable person. Let's work together in order for you to receive the honour that you deserve.

And Jesus' answer is absolutely no. Do you know why? Two reasons. one, because he is resolute in his determination to obey God in every detail.

[30 : 58] To do your will, I take delight. That's his aim. That's his purpose. Second reason, because of the extraordinary intensity of his love for you.

I don't know about you, but I find that one of the most difficult things to accept. Adam deserved the gift of God.

He was perfect. I didn't. I can understand why God would want to give Adam eternal life.

But here is the second Adam and he's now going to pay the ultimate price in order for me to have that same gift of everlasting life.

and I've got it because God has given it to me in the Lord Jesus Christ because the last Adam has undid undone what the first Adam did.

[32 : 24] Where he disobeyed God and died, the last Adam obeyed God and tasted death for all of us so that we could be made the righteousness of God in him.

So I hope you appreciate how all of this ties in with the forthcoming death of Jesus, the death that wasn't going to be experienced for the next three years and yet it's on the horizon.

it's in his mind with growing awareness and he is going to head towards it every day that he lives is going to be a reminder of what lies in front of him.

Every day is a day of resolute determination to complete the work and not until that final moment when it was finished did he stop because God so loved his people that he gave himself for us.

Let's pray together. Our Father in heaven we ask that you will remind us afresh of Jesus' determination.

[33 : 52] We have thanks Lord that at every turn no matter what was offered to him by way of an alternative that he chose the way of suffering because of how necessary it was for our salvation.

If he had taken another path none of us would be here. The world would be destroyed. We would be in a lost eternity and yet because he chose the path of obedience we are set free from sin and we get to enjoy the insurpassable benefit of being in Christ.

So Father in heaven we pray that you will remind us again of the privilege which is ours this day. And Lord enable us we pray in the elements as we take as we feel as we taste the symbols that represent the broken body and the shed blood of Jesus.

We pray that we will not only remember but that we would be nourished by the gospel by what he has done for us by him as he meets with us this is the Lord's table we thank you that you're not far off you're here right in this place feeding us feeding us with your word take away our sin we pray in Jesus name amen we're going to sing now and we're going to sing in Psalm 40 it's the traditional version we're going to sing from verse 5 to verse 8 Psalm number 40 on page 259 Psalm 40 from verse 5 O Lord my God full many are the wonders thou hast done thy gracious thoughts to us were far above all thoughts are gone and so on to verse 8 where we read these words that we believe are the words of

Jesus to do thy will I take delight O thou my God that art yea that most holy law of thine I have within my heart Psalm 40 and verse 5 to verse 8 and we'll stand to sing together!

[36 : 15] us! O Maria the wonders of us love thy miracle Jesus told to us for love, above all those are all.

In order not, not bread on them, to lead them to bread.

I seek for them, my new day, Lord, are now in number of love.

God, if I saw all the day, this time was all beside.

My ears, my Lord, sin all in love, I've learned his fault in fire.

[37 : 59] To the Lord, he swear my words, I come, the hope of sea.

Within the home, you know the blue and red spirits on me.

To thine will I take delight, O thou, my God, the light.

Yea, at most holy of thine, I am within my heart.

Let me just say a brief word, as we often do at a time like this, that explains the qualifications or the right that God's people have to sit at his table and to remember his death.

[39 : 31] And the passage I want to take is Romans chapter 8, where Paul makes a distinction between two groups of people. Those who, first of all, live according to the flesh and those who live according to the spirit.

Let me just read what he says. I think these words are self-explanatory. Those who live according to the flesh have no reason to sit at the Lord's table.

They're not guided by God. God has not opened their hearts, their eyes, their minds, and they simply live from day to day in their own way.

Those who live according to the spirit, on the other hand, are those whose hearts have been opened by the spirit and in whom God dwells.

Now, just let me read it. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh. But those who live according to the spirit set their minds on the things of the spirit.

[40 : 42] To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God.

For it does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. So I guess that's the question that we ask ourselves.

Where is our mind? On what does our mind say? Now, I'm not asking if we're being distracted. We're all distracted. And, you know, even when we come to worship, one of the biggest obstacles to worship is distraction.

I'm not asking that. God knows the struggles that we have. But ultimately, ultimately, at the root of who you are, where is your mind? What's your mind?

Is your mind on the flesh? Do you just want to please yourself? Or do you want to please God? I'm not asking if you please God perfectly.

[41 : 41] None of us do. But I'm asking, do you want to? Do you love God because he first loved you? And is your desire, is your longing to please him, to become more like him, to live in the light of his word and his commands?

Do you want to be led by him? If Jesus, if you were living at the time of Jesus, would you be one of these people like Mary? And even Martha, Lazarus, who just wanted to spend time with him, listening to him, drinking in his word, serving him?

Or like the disciples? Is that where you would be? If so, then that's where we are today, at the Lord's table. It doesn't really matter what century we're in.

It's the same Jesus. He's alive. He's with us. He's present with us. And just like the disciples wanted to be with him at the Last Supper, we want to be with him here today.

And that contrasts vastly with the other category of people. We can all remember when we belonged to that category, when we had no interest in God, at least most of us can, until God changed that.

[42 : 50] And until God gave us a real love and a real longing and a desire to obey him, to listen to his word, and to be forgiven from all our sins.

And so that's who should be. You know, this part of the service is traditionally called fencing. I've never liked that term. I have to say I've never liked it because it gives the impression that we're trying to keep people out.

We're not. God's word is an invitation. We'll see this tonight. God's word is an invitation. The gospel is an invitation to come. And yet, if your mind is not set on God, then you won't want to come.

Because coming to the table is not going to save anybody by itself. But if coming to the table is a mark of your confession that I love the Lord because he heard my voice, then this is the right place for us, along with God's people.

Now, we're going to sing together, and we're going to sing in Psalm number 118. It's the Sing Psalms version, and I think I may have given the presenter the wrong verse. And if I have, then my apologies.

[44 : 05] But it's verse 19. I think I've written down nine. It's not nine. It's 19. And we'll sing three verses because I don't want to take up too much time.

Sing Psalm 119. Sing Psalm's version, and it's on page 156, and it's verse 19. Throw wide the gates of righteousness. I'll enter and give thanks to God.

This is the gate of God through which the righteous came, come before the Lord. So we'll sing three verses from 19 to 24 as we prepare to dispense the elements.

So Psalm 118 and verse 19 on page 156, and we'll stand to sing. Psalm 119.

Come before the Lord. You answer me, I will give thanks.

[45 : 38] Salvation comes from you alone. The stone the builders have refuted Has now become the cornerstone.

Lord himself has done all this. It is upon the letter's light.

This is the day the Lord has made. In it let us take great delight.