

The temptation of Christ

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[0 : 00] And verse 32, Matthew 27, verse 32, and we'll read through to 44, a short section.

Again, hear the word of God. As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by the name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to the place called Golgotha, which means place of a skull, they offered him wine to drink mixed with gold.

But when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots.

They sat down and kept watch over him there. And over his head, they put the charge against him. Which read, this is Jesus, the King of the Jews.

Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, you who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself.

[1 : 19] If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross. So also the chief priests with the scribes and the elders mocked him, saying, he saved others, he cannot save himself.

He is the King of Israel. Let him come down from the cross and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God deliver him now if he desires him.

For he said, I am the Son of God. And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

As we, this evening, look at the temptations of Jesus Christ, you ought to be able to see that there's a symmetry between the cross and the wilderness.

Three times Jesus is tempted in the wilderness and three times Jesus is tempted on the cross. What is it about temptation? You know, why does temptation work?

[2 : 26] Or in the case of Jesus, you know, not work. You know, what is it about temptation? What does it seek to achieve? Well, you need to look at what the temptation goes after.

And as you look at the wilderness and as you look at the cross, it's very, very clear that the temptations are going after Jesus is the Son of God. In other words, prove it. You know, in the wilderness, prove that you're the Son of God.

If you're the Son of God, you know, you're hungry, you've just spent 40 days in the wilderness, go and make these stones into loaves of bread. Prove it. Prove that you're the Son of God. Yeah, and the rest of the temptations, though they don't say it in that way, follow the same suit.

On the cross also, if you're the Son of God, prove it. Save yourself, save us, come off the cross. Prove it. Temptation means that there's something at stake.

And this changes everything. One of the things that we need to notice is, before the temptation happens to Jesus in the wilderness, are the words that Jesus hears.

[3 : 39] Heaven is torn open. And from heaven comes this voice just before the temptations in Matthew 4. This is my Son with whom I am well pleased.

You know, that's incredibly assuring and comforting, isn't it? You know, imagine the heavens being opened, ripped open for you, and out of heaven comes this voice down to you.

You are my Son. You are my daughter with whom I am well pleased. You know, and then you're going to be sent off into the wilderness by the Spirit. But at least you go off in the comfort of hearing those words from God.

Totally assured of who you are. But then you go to the cross, and as the song rightly says, the Father turns His face away.

You know, even Jesus Christ said from the cross, my God, my God, why have thou forsaken me? Is the Father still well pleased with His Son?

[4 : 40] You know, Jesus was divine. In other words, He is deity.

He is God. Jesus is also fully human. And that's really quite important to remember. Fully human. Totally human, just like us.

Without sin. But nevertheless, human. He got tired. He wept. He got angry. He got hungry. They're human emotions.

They're human realities. It's part of living in a physical world with a physical body. You know, on the cross, is the Father still well pleased with His Son? My God, my God, why have thou forsaken me? You know, and more importantly, how can the Son know that the Father is still well pleased with Him? You know, many of us, you know, who have mobile phones and text people, you know, sometimes you can get into the habit of sending a text and then sending another text saying, did you get my text?

[5 : 49] You know, doubt creeps in? You know, did you get it? Are you sure you got it? Why does that happen? You know, even to the best of us, even when we have been told categorically, very clear, a couple of days can go past where we've heard nothing else, and then we start to doubt.

You know, it just creeps in. Do we hold on to what we knew to be true? You know, while I was in the States of my sabbatical, Jim Wilson, who has written several books on evangelism, his son, Doug Wilson, said this to me.

You know, we were talking pastor to pastor. We were talking as Christian to Christian, you know, brothers in Christ. You know, just laying it on the line. I knew that, you know, he was in America, so I could tell him anything that I want because he didn't know any of my friends.

You know, you know what you can get away with. And he said this to me, and I'll never forget it. He says, Daniel, never judge in the dark. Sorry, never doubt in the dark what you knew to be true in the light.

I thought, yeah, you're right. Never doubt in the dark what you knew to be true in the light. You know, sometimes we have to hold on to those things in the light, but also in the dark.

[7 : 15] Don't begin to doubt them. Do you know what? They were what? Half a dozen words. But it changed me for the rest of the day. Yeah, hold on to the things you know in the light.

So the heavens is ripped open. And from heaven we hear this voice. This is my son with whom I am well pleased. I'm not saying that Jesus doubted for a moment that the father was still well pleased with him.

I'm simply trying to express that Jesus has a human side with human emotions, human feelings, and everything else that goes with that.

Here's the other thing that you need to notice about the temptations of Jesus. Don't think for a moment that the reason why Jesus didn't sin is because he's God. You know, I hear this so often. Well, Jesus couldn't sin because he's God. Okay. But why didn't he sin? That's a different question. Couldn't is different than didn't. Jesus didn't sin.

[8 : 19] You know, we could get into a theological debate over whether or not Jesus could or could not sin. Jesus is God. He can't sin. This is how Bruce Ware puts it. I've shared this illustration with you before.

It's absolutely brilliant. I could never think of it, but he did, and so I'll share it with you. He says, imagine a man swimming, and he's going to swim from one shore to another shore.

But, you know, he needs to put in his hours, a bit like a marathon runner. You know, they need to do so many miles a day just to get their stamina up and their fitness up. And this man does the same.

And every day he goes out swimming, there's a boat that is just behind him. On the day where he is expecting to swim from one shore to another shore, several miles across the sea, say the English Channel, for want of an illustration, he gets into the water and begins to swim, but closely behind him is this boat.

Here's the first question. Could he drown? No. Because the boat is there and there's people in the boat to save him. But he swims to the other side and he's safe.

[9 : 27] Why didn't he drown? Was it because the boat was there? No. He didn't because he continued to swim. Do you get the point?

When we look at Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, when we look at Jesus in the wilderness, when we look at Jesus on the cross, don't be tempted to think that the reason he didn't sin was because he couldn't. There was always the provision of salvation there.

No, rather look at what he continued to do. Jesus didn't sin because he continued to obey the Father, just like the swimmer who didn't drown because he continued to swim. Okay? That's the importance of what Jesus does. What does Jesus continue to do for us? Yeah, so don't get hooked up on whether or not Jesus could or couldn't swim.

Rather focus on the fact that Jesus, sorry, sin, not swim. He walks on water. He doesn't need to swim. Rather focus on the fact that the reason Jesus doesn't sin is because he continues to obey the Father.

[10:34] Very, very different from Adam and Eve. You know, when Eve was tempted, Adam's the culprit. Yeah, Adam's, you know, through one man sin came, not through his wife.

You know, you women get it easy in that respect. But when Eve was tempted, could she have not sinned? Yeah, absolutely.

There was nothing in Eve whatsoever or in Adam that inclined her to sin. It was totally possible to not sin. So why did she sin? Well, she sinned because she didn't continue to obey God.

See? She was in a position where she had no sin in her life. She was totally sinless. And so she had all the ability, all the strength within her not to sin.

But she sinned not because she was kept from it, but she was sinned because she didn't continue to listen to the voice of God. Neither did Adam.

[11:35] You know, Adam, you've got to remember that as you read the story carefully, it's really quite clear that Adam is sat right next to her as she's being tempted. Right next to her as she looks at the tree and desires it for food.

You know, as all this happens, Adam, he should have said something. He didn't. Yeah, he failed and that is why through one man sin came. Something to take notice of.

Neither of them, Adam or Eve, continue to obey God. Hence why sin came into the world. So look at the Lord Jesus Christ and don't be caught up on the idea that the reason he didn't sin is because he couldn't.

Rather, the reason he didn't sin was because he continued to obey the Father throughout all of it. It's the same thing for us. How do you avoid sin?

There's only one way. Sin crops up in three particular ways. It's the same way as finding out what the will of God is. Desire, ability, and opportunity.

[12:38] You know, Satan looks for the opportunity. He looks to see if his temptations are going to correspond with your desires. And then he looks to see whether or not you have the ability to fulfill them.

He goes straight. He's very, very clever. Predictable. You know, why is it that even when we can know exactly what he's going to do, we still can't protect ourselves from him doing it?

Such is the deceitfulness. You know, I think that many of us, you know, having been tempted three times, give in on the fourth. You know, our stamina has gone down.

Our spiritual, you know, we're okay. We can get away with this. No, you know, some of us who are on diet plans can't even stick to that. You know, we get tempted with this and with that and the other.

Okay, okay. Just one more. No, I can't. Just one more. No, I can't. I really can't. Go on. It's Friday. All right then. Now, why does that happen? I think it happens for a very simple reason, that there's something about being tempted over and over again that wears us down, that wears us out.

[13:50] Satan knows what he's doing. The trouble is he's not getting anywhere with Jesus. Jesus continues to obey the Father. John Calvin has this to say.

He says that if Jesus had shown his sonship in the way that Satan wanted him to, the only thing he would have proved was that he was not the son.

Think about that for a moment. If Jesus on the cross actually gave the mockers what they wanted, the only thing he would have proved was that he was not the son.

What is it about Satan then that allows us to understand why he's so cunning and so deceitful? Well, Satan, as he tempts Adam and Eve, doesn't just do it for the thrill of it.

You know, something's at stake for Satan. You know, a lot of scholars will understand that when Satan began to tempt Jesus, something's at stake. You know, he says to them, you know, you will not surely die, which is the lie.

[15:17] But then he says something that is completely true. He says this to Eve, For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

Well, that's true. Absolutely true. God even affirms it in Genesis 3, verse 22, where he says, You know, what was Satan doing?

Well, what Satan does is that he exposes Adam and Eve to something that they knew existed, but they're saying that they could have it. You know, God had already told them that in the garden there's a tree of knowledge of good and evil.

What Satan is saying, yeah, do you know what, that knowledge is for you. No, God's saying that knowledge is not for you. You know, God puts in the garden this tree of knowledge of good and evil, but it's not for you.

We don't have any time to go into all that that means. But here's what I want you to think about for a moment. This requires a little bit of Bible reading, but it's worth it.

[16:31] What's at stake for Satan? Well, think about it for a moment. Why does Satan tempt Eve? Why does Satan tempt Jesus?

Why does he do it? Does he do it just for the thrill of it? Just to see if he can get somebody? Or is there something specific there? And I think the answer, as others have suggested, is the same reason for why he was kicked out of heaven.

Exactly the same reason. There's something about destroying the image of God. Satan goes after Eve. Why? Because she's made in the image of God.

But so what? He's an angel. Now, that's the problem. You know, why did Satan want to become like the Most High? We all read Isaiah. We all understand that Satan wanted to become like the Most High.

Why did he want to become like the Most High? Now we get unstuck. What's Satan's motivation for wanting to overtake God? Could it be, could it be that he knew that those who were made in the image of God would one day judge angels?

[17:42] Yeah, he didn't know that, did he? You know, Paul says to the Corinthian church, doesn't he? Yeah. Did you not know that one day you'll judge angels? Well, actually, no, Paul, I didn't know that.

Could it be, could it be that the reason why Satan goes after Adam and Eve in the way that he does is because he knew that the day was coming when humans made in the image of God would judge angels?

1 Corinthians 6, verse 3. Could it be? And is that the reason why he wanted to become like God or become like the Most High? Because no one would judge God.

Did he want to put himself in the position where he was free from judgment? It could be. We don't know. But it seems to give clarity on why he goes after humans in the way that he does.

You know, Satan doesn't come to earth and start a fire. He doesn't destroy God's creation. He goes straight after human beings. Why? Because they're the only thing in creation made in the image of God.

[18:46] I think, as others have suggested, that perhaps, maybe perhaps, that his motivation was because he didn't want to be judged by humans.

I don't know if you're a big fan of reading. Go away and read Paradise Lost. That comes out in the book very clear.

And the book is, as you know, Satan's envy of human beings made in the image of God. It's a thought. It's a classical thought. Whether it's right or wrong, we don't know.

But the point is, we all seem to understand that Satan seems to be going after the image of God the same here as he does with Jesus. Tempting Jesus because he is the Son of God.

Prove it. Prove it. So, the temptations of Jesus. Jesus is in the wilderness, tempted by Satan. And he's tempted in this way.

[19:46] If you're the Son of God, throw yourself off. Let God prove to you that he's well-pleased. Let God prove to you that he doesn't want to let your foot strike the ground. You know, prove that you don't want to go hungry.

You know, prove that God will rescue his Son. You know, that's the temptation and the last temptation at the cross. You know, God will rescue his Son. That's what Psalm 22 speaks about. Go on, Jesus. Call out to God and let God do it for you. Now, something's at stake. You know, there's been great debate over whether or not Satan understood whether or not Jesus had to die on the cross.

Is Satan trying to prevent Jesus from dying on the cross? You know, these temptations in the wilderness come down to this one thing.

If you are the Son of God, prove it. The temptations on the cross, it's the same thing. If you are the Son of God, prove it.

[20 : 47] Go ahead and prove it. You know, Donna McLeod says this. John Calvin said, as I said a moment ago, you know, if Jesus proved that he was the Son of God in the way that the mockers wanted him to, he wouldn't have been the Son of God.

Donna McLeod has this to say. He says, to be the Son of God is to be crucified. To be crucified is what it means to be the faithful Son of God.

In other words, to prove to the mockers, to prove to the tempters what they wanted to be proven, the only thing it would have proven is that Jesus was not the Son of God.

If he did what they wanted, the only thing it would have proven to them and to everybody else is that Jesus is not the Son of God.

You know, the question here is, what will Jesus continue to do? Remember the garden. Remember Adam and Eve. Look at how they fell into sin because they failed to continue to obey the voice of the Lord.

[21 : 47] So what's the question here? What will Jesus continue to do? Here's the preeminent temptation. Matthew 27 verse 43.

He trusts in God. Let God deliver him now if he desires. What does God desire? Is God still well pleased with his Son?

Is God going to rescue his Son like Psalm 22 says he will? Jesus says, For he said, I am the Son of God. Is God still well pleased with his Son?

You know, the temptation is great. It's addressing the father-son relationship. Let's come to the exhortation and let's start thinking about what this means for us.

You know, the first thing that it means for us is that Jesus continues to show that he is the Son of God by continuing to obey God. Very simple. The only reason we know that Jesus is the Son of God is because he does exactly what the Father wants.

[22 : 56] He lives, he dies, and he rises from the dead. In other words, Philippians 2, chapter 2, points out that obedience is an obedience until it's complete.

He became obedient unto death, even death, death, on the cross. In other words, obedience has to be fulfilled. It has to be continued until you get to the point where it's all done, it's all finished.

In Hebrews, it says, For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame. You know, Jesus is aware of everything that's going on. It's not that he doesn't understand the mockery or the temptations.

It's just that he chooses not to go down that road. He endures through it all. He continues. Look at what Jesus continues to do. Look at it. You know, we all suffer temptation, I think, in exactly the same way.

You know, sometimes we're tempted to think that men have particular kinds of temptations, and women have other kinds of temptations. Now, go away and read 1 John.

[24 : 01] The whole world suffers under the lust of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life. The whole world. You know, when you look at the story of David and Bathsheba, you know, that story is full of the lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

Too much attention is put on David, not enough attention is put on Bathsheba. And there's wonderful parallels there. We've been speaking about parallels in the Gospel of Mark.

Go read the parallels in that story. They're just remarkable, and how God teaches about what happens there.

1 John says that the world is passing away with all of its desires, but Jesus, in the wilderness, was suffered under the same type of temptations.

The desires of the flesh or the lust of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life. He is taken by Satan, and Satan says, turn these bread into stone. Lust of the flesh.

[25 : 13] I'm hungry. Now, don't you find it interesting as you read through Scripture how many people are tempted by food? Eve looked at the tree and saw that it was good for food.

Jacob, deceitful, deceitful Jacob. You know, we've recently got Donny Osmond's Joseph Technicolor dream coat.

It's great. It's wonderful to sit and watch. You know, you find yourself singing along. I've always imagined Pharaoh looking like Elvis anyway, so it was never a big deal. And now you're trying to have to explain the story.

You know, we focus on, oh, look how, you know, look how bad it is that Joseph, all this happened to him. Yeah, but look, but look at the terrible parenting that Jacob did.

Jacob destroyed his family. He destroyed his family. He set that up for it to happen. Not a good father. You know, we don't tend to focus on that bit because we like the other part of the story.

[26 : 24] Temptations, food. Remember how he got the position he did. Cheated his brother with a plate of stew. The whole world suffers under it.

Jesus is then taken up to a high mountain. Throw yourself off. Pride of life. God will rescue you. He's shown all the kingdoms of the world the desires of the eyes.

You know, window shopping. Why do adverts work? Well, because they go after your eyes. You know, I'm sure that, you know, the best advertiser in the world handbook had to be written by Satan. Lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. You think about all the things that people are wrapped up in. Pride of life, health insurance, insurance generally, all of this, all of that.

Lust of the flesh, gym memberships, diet plans, food, evenings, nights, it's all there. None of these things are wrong, but they have a tremendous way of being able just to take your attention off continuing to do what God wants you to do.

[27 : 41] What do we learn from Jesus? Well, here's the first thing that we learn from Jesus, the most important thing. He obeyed, and we are saved. You know, the parallel between the Garden of Gethsemane and the Garden of Eden is this, that where Adam failed in the Garden, and Jesus didn't.

Jesus passed the test in the Garden by saying, not my will be done, but yours. What did Jesus continue to do? He continued to obey his Father.

But here's the second point, and it's really a point about discipleship. Jesus is there on the cross suffering the mocking, suffering the temptation, but showing us very clearly that the way to handle temptation is to continue to do what God wants you to do.

In other words, love the Father more than the world. It's difficult. It's really difficult at times, but it couldn't be any more simple to love God more than the world.

It's a challenge, I know, for many of us. Sometimes it's a harder challenge than others, but it really does go at your relationship with God. Look at the last temptation of Jesus on the cross.

[29 : 00] What is it getting at? It's getting at, how's the Father going to treat the Son? And how is the Son going to respond to the Father? The temptation is attacking the relationship between Father and Son.

And don't think the temptations that you suffer as a Christian are doing anything different. They're going after your relationship with God, trying to seek and to destroy it.

Why? Because you're made in the image of God. It's a thing to be treasured and protected. You know, when Jesus speaks about discipleship also, he speaks about in terms of the cross.

Take up your cross and follow me. That's the example of discipleship that Jesus gives. So remember, temptation, when you face it, is after one thing.

Something's at stake. It's going after the fact that you're made in the image of God. Rather, keep your focus on Jesus. Here's what Hebrews says.

[30 : 04] It says, continue in your faith. Look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith. Consider him, in other words, think about Jesus a lot, who endured from sinners such hostility against himself so that you might not grow weary.

How do I overcome temptation? You know, I've always said, I can remember teaching, this is way back, I think it was when I was going over to Sheffield University and doing stuff for the university students there, you know, talked about a number of things.

One of them was temptation. You know, remember the three things when you come under temptation. They crop up, desire, ability, and opportunity.

You know, what if I find myself in a place where I'm being tempted? Well, if you have the opportunity to leave that place, leave. Well, what if I'm being tempted in my home with something on TV and no one else is in the house?

Well, you ought to leave the room. The trouble is you're not going to be depending on what your desire is. Okay. What about your ability? Do you have the ability to leave?

[31 : 14] Yeah. Do you have the opportunity to leave? Yeah. Desire. You know, this is the hub of temptation. What will you do? What is your desire?

What is your focus? So, remember the question as a final thought. What does Jesus continue to do? You know, I think it's a good question for us to finish on.

As you face your temptations daily, monthly, or whenever they come, what will you continue to do? What will you continue to do?

Hebrews gives us the answer. Look to Jesus, consider him, so that you don't grow weary. So that you don't grow weary. In other words, the temptation comes in ones, in twos, in threes, the fourth we give in.

No, look to Jesus, so that you're able to handle the fourth and the fifth and the sixth and the seventh. Are you going to fail? I can guarantee it. Why? Because we will still live under sin.

[32 : 16] But here's the point. Look to Jesus and it will become less each time. Resist the devil and what? He will flee from you. Amen.