

Jesus' Response to Temptation in the Desert

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Hi, everyone. In this session, we are going to be diving into Jesus's temptation in the desert. So if you have a Bible, I encourage you to grab it, and we will start in prayer.

Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit amen. Lord, we just thank you for your Word. We thank you for this time to come together and to dive into your Word and learn from you. Lord Jesus, we thank you that if we want to know more of who God is, we can look to you because you are the image of the invisible God. And if we want to know how to live in intimacy with the Father, we can look to you because you lived a perfect example for us as the Word made flesh.

So I just pray that you open our hearts, that you open our minds, that you make us fully aware of your presence where we are sitting right now, and that this time would give you glory and pray this all in your holy name, amen. In the name the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

A Calling to Fast

So during Lent, the church asks us to fast. And it asks us to fast for a couple of reasons. One of those reasons is that when our lives are completely full of stuff, the Holy Spirit cannot get in to do what He wants to do in us, right? If our schedules are completely full, if our budgets are maxed out, if every time there's a silent moment, we are filling it with some sort of media, whether it be scrolling on our phones or an earbud in our ears, which is something I struggle with, right? The Holy Spirit is trying to speak to us, but our lives are so full He cannot get in.

And so during the 40 days of Lent, whenever we literally rid ourselves of something in our lives, the Holy Spirit finally has space to move. And it might feel weird at first and it might feel awkward at first, but if we are willing to give that time or that margin to God in some way, He will move and we will see a difference from when our lives are completely full of stuff and stuff of the world to whenever we make space for God to speak to us, to teach us, and to lead us, right? And so that's one of the reasons that we fast during Lent.

The other reason is so that we can come up against our own human weakness, right? Because if you have ever failed at fasting during Lent, you are well aware of how weak you are as a human being. Whether you gave up coffee and you just couldn't make it, or you gave up chocolate, and you just made a bunch of excuses for the reason that you wanted to eat it or whatever it is that you gave up and you realized how much you depended on that thing in your life, and then you recognize, wow, I am nothing in the midst of temptation.

I am weak and I need a savior. I need God's strength in my life to make me stronger and to make up for where I am weak, right? And so those are beautiful things about Lent that draw us into our humanity, but also draw us into the goodness of God and how He wants to lift us up in our weakness. And the reason of course that we fast for 40 days is because Jesus fasted for 40 days. And if we are willing to go to the scriptures and study His temptation in the desert after His fasting, we can learn a lot about fasting, we can learn a lot about the nature of temptation and how He is calling us to combat it in our lives.

Matthew 4:1-11

So grab your Bible and we're going to be opening up to Matthew 4:1-11, and we'll be reading there. And so this is what it says:

"Then Jesus led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for 40 days and 40 nights after which He was famished. Then the tempter approached Him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to be transformed into loaves of bread.' Jesus answered, 'As it is written, man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.' Next, the devil took him to the holy city and had Him stand on the summit of the temple.

Then he said to Him, 'If you are the son of God, throw yourself down for it is written, He will command His angels concerning you, and with their hands, they will raise you up lest you dash your foot against a stone.' And Jesus said to him, 'It is also written, you shall not put the Lord your God to the test.' Finally, the devil took Him to an exceedingly high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in their splendor.

Then he said to Him, 'All these I will give you if you will kneel down and worship me.' Jesus said to him in reply, 'Depart from me, Satan. It is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and Him alone you shall serve.' Then the devil departed from Him. And suddenly angels came and ministered to Him."

Reflection on Matthew 4:1-11

It's absolutely beautiful, and there's so much for us to learn. So first what I would like to do is just draw out a couple of things that stood out to me as I was praying through these scriptures, and then we'll use that to see how temptation comes into our lives and how we can answer that following Jesus' example.

So the first is that Jesus did not go into the desert on His own, right? It says that He was ushered by the Spirit into the desert, so He went out of obedience to God. So the scripture also says that God is never the one who tempts us, but God might lead us into a place of weakness where we would be more vulnerable to temptation. And that's exactly what happened to Jesus, right?

Because Jesus was walking into His mission, and again, He was going to be the example for us on how we are to live. Yes, He was God, but He was also human. And the scriptures also tell us that He experienced everything that humans experience in their weakness except sin.

And so it makes sense that Jesus would experience temptation, that He might even be tempted, but that He would overcome it. So He walks into the desert out of obedience to God.

The second thing is that the devil, of course, tempts Him in His weakness. He had been fasting for 40 days, right? He was not at his best, He was not at his strongest mentally or physically, and that's when the enemy comes in and tries to whisper in His ear. The next thing I noticed, and this is so important because we see this throughout the Word of God, that the devil does not offer Jesus anything He does not already have, right?

We actually see this in Genesis when the serpent goes and talks to Eve, he says like, you will eat from the fruit of the tree and you will be like God. The thing was, Eve was already like God. Eve was made in God's image. The devil was offering her something that God had already given her, but he was offering her a shortcut, and he was offering it to her on her own terms so she could grab it without obedience to God. And it's the same thing that we see here, right? The first thing is that the devil offers Jesus dominion over created things, right? Jesus is hungry and He says, you can take these stones and you can turn them into bread. God had already given Jesus dominion over all things. At the end of the gospel, He says, all authority in heaven on earth has been given to me, right?

Jesus performed many miracles that are similar to what the devil was tempting Jesus to do. The difference was that Jesus did those miracles to glorify God. The devil was tempting Jesus to take what God was already offering to Him, but make it a shortcut and do it without God on His own terms. We see the same thing in the second thing that the devil attempts Jesus into, right? He says, right, if you were to throw yourself from this mountain, right, the angels would catch you, right? And then He quotes the scriptures. Jesus was already fiercely, deeply loved and protected by God. The devil was tempting Him to test God on his own terms. Jesus resist that temptation.

And then the last one, of course, whenever he says, if you will just bow to me, I will give you all the kingdoms of the world. God had already given that to Jesus, but Jesus had to do it God's way. He had to live this life, right? He had to suffer and die on the cross for the sake of salvation of the world. That's how He was supposed to gain His Kingship over all things. The devil was saying, if you'll just worship me, you can skip all that and I will give it to you. That's part of how the devil temps. He always offers a shortcut to what God wants to give us if we will only submit to Him and go a longer way.

And then notice the next thing that the devil did. He quotes scripture, but he twist it. Every time, if I can go back to my scriptures, every time that he quotes it, he makes it about Jesus. And the next thing the devil does is he tries to use God's truths to draw Jesus into selfishness. He tries to make everything about Jesus. And what does Jesus do? He responds by quoting scriptures that glorify God every single time. Whenever the devil tries to make Him turn the stones into bread so that He can feed Himself, Jesus says, man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God, He turns it back to God.

Whenever the devil tries to tempt Him to throw Himself off of the ledge, right, He says, you shall not put the Lord your God to the test. He turns away from that temptation into selfishness and chooses to make it about God. And then when he says, if you'll just bow down to me, I'll give you all of these kingdoms, Jesus responds and says, "You shall worship

the Lord your God and Him alone shall you serve." So every time He makes it about God and not about Him. And that teaches us so much about the nature of temptation and how we should be interfacing with the enemy when we are tempted, right?

Choosing to Be Content

So the first thing is that the enemy will almost always try to tempt us when we are weak or where we believe we deserve something from God that He is not giving us. So whatever that is in your life, whatever you're tempted to think about, maybe God is holding out on you or just something you have a human weakness for, that is where the enemy is going to try to come in and tempt you away from God and make it about you. That's where he's going to start to speak doubt into your life and say, don't you just want to get this on your own terms? Like why are you suffering? Why are you obeying? Why are you taking the long road when you can just have this thing? If you'll just nod your head to me, you can have that thing. You don't even have to follow this path, right? So wherever we are weak, that's where we are most likely to be tempted. And so one of the ways guard against that is by choosing to be content. If we are just content with our lives, if we are content with the things God has given us, if we are content with following Him, then we just have a less weaknesses for the enemy to exploit, right?

Living Intimacy with The Father

The second thing is that the enemy will almost always give us something that we already have, right? He will tempt us in the way we see ourselves and our identity, and he'll try to say, if you do this thing, you'll finally feel like you've made it. And then God's standing here and saying, you don't have to do anything you already loved. I've already given that to you. I am just asking that you walk in my ways and that you obey me, that you don't circumvent this process of following my paths.

So whenever you start to be tempted, it's a good idea to ask yourself, what am I being offered in this temptation? And do I already have it? Right? And then the other thing is that the enemy will try to twist truth about God, to draw us in to selfishness, to try to make the Word of God about us and our desires and our wants instead of our lives glorifying God. And that is a very dirty trick because it seems so good so often.

So how do we combat those things? Well, how did Jesus combat those things? If we are to look at Jesus' life, the number one thing about His life is that He lived intimacy with the Father all the time, right? Jesus did not walk into the desert unprepared because He had been living intimacy with the Father His entire life. That means that He had been going to God in prayer. He had been honest with the Father. As we see later in the agony in the garden, where He's saying like, I don't really want this, but I'll do it if you want me to, right? We see a spirit of honesty with God.

We see a spirit of truth whenever He goes into prayer and spends time with God. He also was a man who was living out His Jewish faith in a way that He was participating in the life of the Jewish faith. And He was also participating in memorizing the scriptures. And this is so important because whenever the devil came in and starting using His own faith to try to tempt Him, He knew the truth and He knew it intimately. He knew what the scriptures said about

God, and He knew what the scripture said about Him so that whenever temptation came, He could counter what the truth, because He knew what the truth said and He could call it to memory.

Questions For Reflection

These are such important things for us to hold onto when we are facing temptation. So here, just a few questions for you.

Where do you feel like God is not giving you what you want in your life? Could that be a place of weakness where anger or ingratitude can usher in the possibility of the offering of a shortcut?

How can you actually develop contentment and gratitude in those spaces, recognizing that God might be doing something there that you just don't see yet?

In what areas of your life are you most likely to be tempted? Where are you weak? Where do you have dependencies? When you think about those places where you're most likely to be tempted, why is that? Those are good things to dig into in prayer so that you can invite the Holy Spirit into those spaces and He can offer you strength.

Do you have a regular thriving prayer life, or you are intimate and honest with God?

Are you preparing for temptation even when you're not weak? Are you allowing God's life to come into you and flow out of you? Because when His strength dwells in you, you're just not as likely to give in.

And then the last one is, do you know His Word? Are you spending time in the scriptures in such a way where you know what God says about you, and you know how God is trying to lead you in your life so whenever those temptations come in, you can counter with the truth, because here's the thing, we can counter with the truth we do not know. If we do not spend time in the Word, if we do not know what God is saying about us, if we do not know what matters to Him, then when the enemy starts to speak lies, what kind of truth will we respond with? We have to know what God says about us to be able to respond in those truths.

The Ultimate Victory

But thank God that Jesus offers us such a beautiful example of how to counter these temptations. So I invite you to pray with these things, especially on this retreat, to dive in, to let the Holy Spirit come in so that you can know yourself and through your self awareness, you can better fight temptation. But just remember, no matter what, even though Jesus was unbelievably successful, we may not always be successful. We are weak. We do struggle with sin, right? We do have a proclivity to want to try to circumvent God's plan so we can just get what we want.

But the ultimate temptation is to give into shame that when we fall, the enemy whispers, you can't go to him. you can't get up, you can't show him what you've done, you can never come back from this, right? And the Lord invites us above all else to resist that temptation to no matter how we fall, no matter how many times we give in to pick ourselves up, to refuse to quit, and to run to Him, that is the ultimate victory. It is there that we can repent, it is there that we will receive His mercy, and the angels will minister to us and give us strength for the journey. So with that, let us pray.

Closing Prayer

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen. Lord, we just come to you recognizing our weaknesses, recognizing where we do seem to think that you're holding out on us, that there's something good that we want to grab hold of. And we would just not rather obey you, we would rather not sacrifice, we would rather not follow your ways because we are weak and because we are sinful, but thank you for your grace.

Thank you for the way that you invite us in over and over and over. And I ask that throughout this Lent, you would give us a supernatural strength to know who you see us as, to know your Word, to know the truth, to be content with the life you've given us, to hear your voice, so that when the enemy starts to whisper, we can counter with the lies and we can say, depart from me, Satan.

For the Lord says, you will worship Him and serve Him alone. And that is what I will do. I say this all in your holy name, amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.