

The Temptation of Jesus

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Date: 15 August 2021

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[0 : 00] Well, as we turn to this passage, maybe a familiar passage to some of Jesus' testing or temptation in the wilderness.

What I would like to invite you to see is that here Jesus is reliving or reenacting the history of Israel during its time in the wilderness, but rather than, as with happened with Israel, failing the test. Jesus passes the test. Jesus succeeds, but not just as a private individual who succeeds on his own behalf, but rather one who succeeds on behalf of all of his people, all of those who will put their trust in him.

Sometimes we have a tendency when reading the Bible to individualize it and see it as something of a how-to manual. And the way in which we might read this passage would therefore go something like this.

Jesus is showing us by how he resisted the devil as to how we are to resist him as well. By following that example. Now, that is true, but I would say that is secondary to the fact that he is showing us firstly and foremostly and chiefly and supremely what he has done in defeating the devil and in perfectly obeying his father.

[1 : 46] Not as something that he is simply doing for his own benefit, but for ours. So that when we do come to that application of how we can resist the devil, because believe me, we must know how to do that.

We do have an adversary whose deep desire, whose longing is to ruin us. That when we seek to resist the devil, we will do so out of a position of knowing what Christ has done already for us. Because we do so out of his victory rather than trying to battle the devil alone. So Jesus here, we see him resoundingly, wonderfully succeeding where Israel failed by faithfully obeying his father's commandments where Israel did not do so.

Jesus is the obedient son that Israel failed to be. And for you and me, friends, if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, that makes the world of difference.

Throughout Matthew's gospel, and particularly the early stages, the inspired evangelist Matthew has been portraying Jesus as Israel.

[3 : 09] He's portraying Jesus quite deliberately as Israel. He says in Matthew chapter 2, verse 15, with respect to Jesus and his family taking him to Egypt, he says, this was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, out of Egypt I called my son.

Out of Egypt I called my son. That's Hosea chapter 1 and verse 11, which reads, when Israel was a child, when Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

We also read in Exodus chapter 4 and verses 22 and 23, then say to Pharaoh, this is what the Lord says, Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, let my son go so that he may worship me.

God described himself as a father to the nation of Israel, his son. And after being redeemed from slavery in Egypt, Israel was tested in the wilderness for 40 years.

And if you know anything about that story, it was a catalog of tragedies on their part and of repeated judgments on the part of God.

[4 : 39] And yet his long-suffering faithful mercy through that episode, through that long period in the wilderness.

But at the end of it, all but two men of that entire generation perished outside the promised land because of their disobedience.

And what Matthew is showing Jesus as being is this true Israel and this faithful Israelite, because now Jesus, having been called out of Egypt, has passed through the waters of his baptism.

That's what's just happened in the previous chapter, in chapter 3. And we read as being led by the Spirit out into the wilderness, similar to the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud leading Israel through

the wilderness.

And he spends how many days and nights in the wilderness? Forty. Forty. Forty. A symbolic number to refer to the 40 years Israel spent in the wilderness.

[6 : 00] And he's gone there for a purpose. And that is to be faithful. That is to be obedient. That is not to deviate from God's commands. That is to be the successful son of God, where Israel was not.

Because what we have to remember is that whilst all of Jesus' responses to the devil are from Scripture, aren't they?

He says it is written, doesn't he? They're all from Deuteronomy. They're all from Deuteronomy chapter 6 and 8, which is about Moses on the plains of Moab, as the people are about to enter into the promised land, telling them, retelling them about their failures, about their disobedience, and about God's great mercy in the midst of judgment towards them.

And so once again, Jesus is pointing to the fact that he is remembering God, where Israel so often forgot God in the wilderness.

And that's a point to remember right at the outset, isn't it, friends? Is Jesus' refrain throughout this passage? What does he say three times? It is written.

[7 : 27] It is written. It is written. The centrality, the authority, the unbreakability for Jesus of the written Word of God.

And that's what we have to remember. In all our decisions, in all our struggles, that is our compass. That is what helps us to keep our bearings in the midst of a world that has gone further and further and further, in our particular setting, away from the truth of God's Word.

What brings us back is, as the Word of God says, to the law and to the testimony. If that's what Jesus sets store by, that's what we should set store by to the very Word of God.

It underpins Jesus' fight with the devil. He goes to the Scripture. But we should also notice as well that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.

He was led by the Spirit for this specific purpose, for this confrontation, for this encounter with Satan. So we must remember as well, it was all part of God's plan for Jesus.

[8 : 41] The devil wasn't getting the upper hand here, and all of a sudden, Jesus was led out into the wilderness, and the devil appeared to try and thwart God's plans.

God led Jesus into the wilderness specifically for this encounter. Well, first of all, we see the first test, the first test that happens.

And again, we see it mirroring the experience of Israel in the wilderness. What's the first test? The first test is a test for provision.

Jesus has been fasting, and we can't imagine the level of hunger very probably that Jesus was experiencing at this point because he's fully man.

It reminds us of that fact. Jesus hungered. Jesus thirsted. Jesus sorrowed. Even Jesus wept. And Jesus rejoiced.

[9 : 48] He felt the full gamut of human experience and emotion, and yet without sin. And here we find him hungry.

He must have been so hungry. Think for a moment as to the level of hunger Jesus was experiencing when Satan, and this is so like him, isn't it, looking for what he perceives to be the weak point, the chink in the armor.

He says, if you're the Son of God, if you are the Son of God, you can turn these stones into bread. Tell them to become bread. And that's the refrain of Satan. If you are the Son of God, if you are the Son of God, prove it.

And also, provide for yourself. You're the Son of God. Why are you awaiting food when you could simply make food for yourself?

[11 : 04] Think of the power you have. You could tell these stones to become bread, and they would become bread, and then you would be satisfied.

Satan is trying to get Jesus to provide for himself rather than rely on his Father. But Jesus, even though he is very hungry, and we shouldn't try and diminish that, the fact that he would have been extraordinarily hungry, he knows that feeding himself in this way would be to fail to trust his Father and his provision and his providing it in his own good time.

Now, this mirrors Israel. Israel's hunger in the wilderness was to show them that hearing and obeying the word of God was the most important thing in life.

And they grumbled against God, and they failed to remember his word in their experience in the wilderness. Whereas Jesus chose to go hungry rather than disobey God, and he passed the first test, because Jesus responds with words from Deuteronomy, chapter 8 and verse 3, man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Remember, says Moses in Deuteronomy and chapter 8, remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these 40 years? For what reason?

[12 : 51] To humble and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands, that is, whether or not you would obey him.

He humbled you, causing you to hunger, and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Jesus succeeds in that task where Israel had failed, even at one point despising the manna that they'd been given and complaining about it.

And so, that does remind us when we remember firstly that Jesus obeyed on our behalf and therefore kept a perfect obedience before God, we can remember that first comes the word.

First comes the word. And with regards to provision, we can try to circumvent God's good timing in giving us what he knows we need, and we go after what we want instead on our good or our bad, rather, timing and seek to provide for ourselves, mistrusting God that he actually has our best interest at heart and he will provide for us in his own good timing.

[14 : 28] If we don't wait on the Lord to provide, we get, in one famous case in the Bible, Ishmael, not Isaac.

And Jesus does demonstrate that one way to resist temptation is to look to the Lord's provision and where it seems not yet to have come to continue to wait and to look to his word.

My hope is in his word, as the psalm says. Amen. Amen. Who do you run to when you're tempted? We should run to Jesus because he is the one who is tempted in every way and yet without sin.

And we need to fight the tempter with Jesus' words, with Scripture, because man cannot live on bread alone but in every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

And Jesus sets the tone here for his next responses which are also going to come straight from Scripture. But Satan has another trick, doesn't he?

[15 : 46] The devil has another trick. What's the trick that Satan pulls here with the second test? He can quote Scripture too.

He says, well, two can play at that game. And that's something for us to remember as well, isn't it? Satan knows Scripture. So we had better know Scripture very, very well because every heretic under the sun, every false teacher quotes Scripture.

We had better know the Scriptures ourselves so that if someone seeks to twist them or misapply them in the way that Satan does here, we know how to come back to that with Scripture because that doesn't stop Jesus from quoting Scripture back.

But what the devil does is quote Psalm 91 because the next test, the first test was provide for yourself, doubt God's good provision for you.

The next one was you can do anything you like and God will protect you. it's protection that the next test concerns. And he quotes Psalm 91 verses 11 and 12 saying, on the top of this pinnacle, can you imagine how high this would have been above Jerusalem in the temple, on the temple?

[17 : 20] If you're the son of God, throw yourself down. The evil of the devil, so evident here. throw yourself down for it is written, he will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

it's in Scripture. Surely, if you were to leap off here, this promise in Scripture seems to suggest that if you were to do that, God would protect you.

He would intervene and stop Jesus from coming to harm. Angels would swoop to rescue him so that he wouldn't strike his foot against a stone.

What's Jesus' response? It is also written, do not put the Lord your God to the test. So, Jesus responds to this twisting of Scripture with Scripture to give us the right interpretation of it.

Because we look at this passage in Psalm 91 and say, well, does the devil have a point here? Isn't it a promise for protection?

[18 : 45] But no, not in this context, because to create or to contrive a situation where you try to force God's hand into protecting you, or indeed to provide for you, is to put him to the test.

So, it can't possibly apply in this situation. God deals with us on his terms, not ours. And so, to demand a miraculous proof of a promise on our terms would be sinful, it would be wrong. And again, we're seeing the reenacting of Israel's history, but this time rather than with failure, with success, because Israel doubted God's protection in the wilderness, despite from being delivered from disaster time and time again.

And in doing this, they tested God. In Jesus' day, this unbelieving testing of God was still going on with the demand for a sign from him.

But God is not promised to do anything. God is not bound to do anything. He's not promised to do himself in the manner that he's promised to do it.

[20 : 04] Do not put the Lord, your God, to the test. Deuteronomy 6, 16, going into 17. As you did it, Massa, be sure to keep the commandments of the Lord, your God, and the stipulations and decrees he has given you.

They even asked in the wilderness, is the Lord really among us, despite the astonishing demonstrations of his power and of his protection over them.

So we can remember from this passage and draw the application that Scripture cannot contradict Scripture, and the way to understand a difficult part of Scripture is with another place in Scripture. And we take, therefore, Scripture as a whole, what the Apostle Paul calls the whole counsel of God, the big picture. And that's how we apply Scripture rightly.

But to move on, the third test is power. Do you see how Satan is ramping up the temptations as well? This is how he operates with us.

[21 : 15] Something quick, something that he thinks will be easy, something subtle, first of all. So we started off with turning stone into bread in the wilderness.

But where have we reached by the third temptation? The top of a mountain and all the kingdoms of the world. Now the sad fact is that with ourselves he needn't ratchet it up very much because we can so easily succumb at the early stages of temptation.

We so easily yield to him. But because Jesus is not giving an inch, the temptation intensifies, the temptation increases as he tries ever more desperately and outlandishly to get Jesus to step off his mission.

The third test is power. Firstly, provide for yourself. Secondly, God's going to protect you.

Throw yourself off this high temple and you'll be protected. Thirdly, though, I can give you power. I can give you power.

[22 : 36] Power that's seemingly beyond imagination. He showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.

All this I will give you, he said, if you will bow down and worship me. Now, was this in Satan's power to do this? Could the devil have given someone all the kingdoms of this world?

Was it within his power to do that? We know of Jesus calls Satan the prince of this world and he has a certain amount of power over that which is not as yet in the kingdom of God.

But whether he had the ability or the right to be able to do that, he's certainly brazen enough to promise it. And that's what Satan does.

He promises the world. He promises that which he is very likely not able to deliver. And that is what he holds out as the final temptation.

[23 : 49] That is, you can be ruler over all of these kingdoms if you will simply worship me. And of all the temptations.

This third is the one that seems to provoke the strongest reaction from Jesus. He's been calmly responding until now.

Satan says one thing, Jesus responds, it is written, and then quotes it, and that is it. But why is it that this temptation moves him to say, away from me, Satan.

Away from me, Satan. For it is written, worship the Lord your God and serve him only.

Deuteronomy 6 and 13. It's because the devil, we don't know how much he knew of God's plan in taking Jesus to the cross in order to suffer and die for us before being exalted.

But what the devil is offering Jesus is the crown without the cross, a shortcut to glory without fulfilling the mission for which he came, which culminates so clearly at Calvary.

[25 : 23] And that's what brings out Jesus' indignation towards Satan, that he would even suggest such a thing of a crown without a cross.

Because it's only through his humiliation, which began even at his incarnation, his taking the form of a servant, but which will be, which will culminate in his sacrificial death.

It's only through that that his exaltation will come. It's only having passed through the death of the cross and through the tomb that Jesus will then be raised up in power, and then not only raised, but brought to the very throne of God to be seated at the right hand of God and given authority over heaven and over earth, and shortcuts do not interest him.

And so he tells Satan to depart and hits him with another piece of scripture, worship your God and serve him only.

This was something that again Israel had failed to do, even at the mountain at Sinai, when Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments, they were at the foot of it and had made for themselves an idol and were worshipping it.

[27 : 03] And then at various episodes throughout their time in the wilderness, they were drawn into idolatry. Jesus will not bow down before anyone other than his father.

Now again, that's wonderful, but it's wonderful for us because this is a shining example of something Jesus did throughout his earthly life, which was to perfectly obey God.

Have you ever perfectly obeyed God, even for a minute? from his first breath in Bethlehem to his last on the cross, Jesus fulfilled all righteousness.

He was born of a woman. He was born under the law. and part of what he had to do was keep it faultlessly.

Again, not for his own benefit, for us, on our behalf. And in doing that, he obtained for us a perfect, a perfect righteousness, something we could never attain to, not a hope of attaining to, and yet he accomplished it for us.

[28 : 40] So that, realizing we have no righteousness of our own before God, and that is what we need in order to be received into fellowship with God again, we forsake any hope in ourselves and in our own good works or in anything that we think will commend us before God.

And we receive and we rest entirely on Jesus and his perfect righteousness obtained for us, and on his sin bearing death on the cross for us.

A perfect righteousness granted to us by faith, and all our sins reckoned to him on the cross. the great exchange. And it's part of that that we're seeing being displayed here.

Our hope could not have been placed in Israel, the nation. They had singularly failed to be the faithful, successful son of God in their history.

ministry. But Jesus, the true Israel, the true Israelite, is the one who faithfully fulfills that commission.

[30 : 02] And he reminds us too, by his refusal to accept any shortcuts, that for us there is no crown without the cross. there's so much nonsense in certain spheres of the evangelical churches, particularly in the West, about having your best life now.

And you're entitled to all this blessing and no hardship and no affliction whatsoever in this life. It's all about blessing, it's all about victory. And the call of Jesus to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me, is just drowned out amidst this health, wealth, prosperity, so called gospel.

But if our Savior, we follow a crucified master, refused a shortcut to glory, then neither, yet then so should we.

We should refuse any shortcuts as well. The crown without the cross is the tempter's age-old lie. We will get the crown, friends, but only in the next life, not in this one.

It was for the joy set before him that Jesus endured the cross. And where else do we hear this language if you are the Son of God?

[31 : 33] If you're the Son of God, if you're the Son of God, come down. That was the last test because Jesus was tested throughout his life at various points.

This is just a clear example of an episode of that. But on the cross, people are saying, if you are the Son of God, God, come down.

Did he? No, he did not. He did not. Out of a zeal, a love, a determination, an unfathomable commitment to save people, to save people who would otherwise be hopeless and lost without any shred of saving grace.

He held on to the very end so that we would have a super abundance of grace poured out on us so that we would be saved.

And so, when the devil tempts us, we must always operate out of a knowledge that he has already been defeated by Jesus.

[33 : 02] Rather than trying to fight him in open territory on our own, the armor of God is the armor of God. It is the armor that God has worn in Christ in a decisive victory over Satan.

He has been defeated. He is yet to be destroyed, but that destruction is assured. And so, yes, we take the applications of example from how Jesus resisted the devil, but we don't diminish, we don't forget that what we are seeing here is a victory of Jesus on our behalf.

And in our daily temptations, we have Jesus. Don't we? We have a great high priest who was tempted in every way and yet gloriously without sin.

That's the uniqueness as well of Christianity. The one true God has a son, and he is interceding for those who have put their trust in him. And he was tempted as we are.

He knows what it is to be tempted. He is able, in fact, the writer to the Hebrews tells us to sympathize. To sympathize.

[34 : 35] So, Jesus succeeded where Israel had failed, and this was so throughout his earthly life, not just this particular one time, this symbolic time of testing that Matthew tells us about here.

In fact, Luke says in his account, because he has a very similar account, there he is more demonstrating that Jesus is the last Adam, succeeding where Adam failed in the garden in the face of Satan's temptation.

But Luke says the devil left him until an opportune time. That is, it was ongoing throughout his ministry. But right until the end, through the garden of Gethsemane and the cross of Calvary, Jesus never, ever sinned.

That is his perfect obedience for us. Do you know what I am looking forward to just finally? Just finally, because of what Jesus has done for us.

Not sinning again. never, ever sinning. When I am conscious of my sin, I am conscious of how I have grieved God. Because yes, sin is dealt with there on the cross and that is a wonderful thing.

[35 : 58] But when we sin afresh and when we sin as Christians, we are sinning against light. We are sinning despite our knowledge of how wonderful and how good God is.

And so, what I am really looking forward to is being in that place where it won't be possible for me to sin again, to be tempted and to give in to temptation.

And it's because of what Jesus has done in his victory over the tempter and over sin that we will, there will be a time, there will be a place where all of us, if we trust in Jesus, we will sin no more. and we too, because of Jesus, we will be able to live in perfect obedience to the Father and never ever fall into sin again.

And so, we thank God and we praise God for that inexpressible gift of Jesus, the one who has done everything for us, so that that will be the case. Amen.

[37 : 01] Amen. Amen.