

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “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.’” Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’” Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Introduction

I have a few statements and a few questions for us all as we begin to look at our passage this morning. Needless to say, we’ll loop back on them at the end too.

Satan knows the scriptures and Satan quotes the scriptures. Can you? Do you?

Christ’s Humanity and Ours

When we look at this section of Matthew’s Gospel, The Temptation of Christ (or, more properly, The Testing of Christ, since that’s what the word means. The difference between a test and a temptation is found in the tester’s motivations and expectations; the devil tempts that the believer might fail God’s standards of faith and so sin; God tests that he might determine and sharpen true character, with no focus on making the believer fail.) When I was rereading the passage, I almost missed one of the details in the text because of its familiarity. It says that Jesus was “Led by the Spirit” into the wilderness to be tested. Note that he was led to that place by the Spirit but was tempted by Satan. Let’s look first of all at Christ’s humanity.

Key Human Needs Experienced by Jesus:

- Hunger: Experienced after fasting in the wilderness and during ministry.
- Thirst: Notably while carrying the cross and on the cross.
- Fatigue/Exhaustion: Tired from ministry demands, needing to withdraw to rest.
- Physical Pain/Suffering: Experienced through whipping and crucifixion.
- Need for Solitude/Prayer: Regularly withdrew to connect with God.
- Mortality: Experienced death.

Key Human Emotions Experienced by Jesus:

- Joy: Experienced in obedience to the Father and in his ministry.
- Deep Sorrow/Grief: Wept at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35) and over Jerusalem.
- Righteous Anger/Indignation: Displayed when clearing the temple and toward religious hypocrisy.
- Compassion/Tenderness: Moved by the needs of the sick, hungry, and children.

- Anxiety/Distress/Agony: Experienced intense mental anguish in the Garden
- Surprise/Amazement: marvelled at the faith of a Roman officer.
- Love: Felt for his disciples, friends (Lazarus, Mary, Martha), the rich young ruler.
- Loneliness/Abandonment: Forsaken by friends and temporarily by the Father on the cross.
- Frustration: The lack of faith in his disciples and the generation.

The writer to the Hebrews explains for us some of the reasons for the need for Jesus to come in the flesh. Heb 2:17-18 “For this reason (Jesus) had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” And further on in Hebrews 4:15-16 “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” These are key pieces for us to understand when we look at temptation.

Also 1 Cor 10:12-13 “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind.

And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.” And then

James 1:13-15 “When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”

Look how strong these statements in scripture are. “each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed” “when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

The Temptations

So, let's look at The Temptations themselves. Not the 1960s pop group from Detroit, in case there's any confusion out there. Matthew's Gospel is widely considered to have been written for a Jewish readership, and on them the parallelism would not have been lost between Christ being led into the wilderness, fasting for forty days to then be tested and the people of Israel being led into the wilderness for forty years to be tested. Deut 8:2-5 “Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. 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 the LORD... Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.” Hold onto that passage as we look at each of the temptations and Christ's response.

Just before we do that, indulge me in a brief sidebar with a topic for you. It is somewhat germane since we've moved into the season of Lent, but may I ask do any of you fast? Do any of you fast regularly? Do you know that Jesus expected that we would fast? I'm not suggesting that it would be for forty days as he did on this occasion, but did you

know that he expects that we will fast? In the Sermon on the Mount in Matt 6:16-18 Jesus says “When you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” Twice he says “*when* you fast” Not if, but when. Jesus’ disciples didn’t fast when he was with them, but Jesus makes it clear later in Matthew’s Gospel, in 9:13-14, that they will after his death. “Then John’s disciples came and asked (Jesus), “How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?” Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; *then they will fast.*”” Time doesn’t permit us to go into more detail on this, but I do want to emphasise that it is invariably linked with spending time in prayer. Perhaps that should be this week’s homework – even though it has been half term! Are any of you familiar with the concept of the five-minute microteaching technique? A 5-minute microteaching session is a condensed, five-minute demonstration focusing on one specific skill or learning objective, used to practice, refine, and receive feedback on teaching techniques. It involves a fast-paced, highly structured approach—often using a “hook,” concise modelling, active learning, and a quick check for understanding to ensure maximum impact in minimal time. To me, this section – which Jesus will have reported to his disciples, since he was alone at this time – feels like a microteach masterclass in managing a time of testing or temptation. So, the, what is at the heart of these three temptations?

1. Self-reliance
2. Testing God
3. Compromising Principles

Self-reliance

First temptation, verses three and four “The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” There will always be the risk for us that we will be tempted to think that we live independently of God, can manage everything by ourselves and to forget our utter dependence on God – making us to be gods ourselves.

Testing God

Next, putting God to the test, verses five to seven: “Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “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.”

Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Key to understanding this particular temptation is the knowledge that Satan quotes scripture incompletely, missing out the important verses specifying that it is when we are walking in God’s chosen path for us, not when we step out of line to test him. At the beginning I pointed out that Satan knows scripture and that Satan quotes scripture at

us, but to quote Wiersbe; “We can prove almost anything by the Bible if we isolate texts from the contexts and turn them into pretexts.” When we use scripture, we need to understand that quoting a text out of context runs the risk of making it a pretext for something that it was not intended for. We need to be able to support a particular concept in scripture from more than a single, isolated text. I make no apology for again encouraging us all to know our Bibles – in this masterclass that Jesus gives for dealing with temptation his response every single time is to quote scripture back at Satan.

Compromising Principles

And then the third temptation, the temptation to compromise our principles. Verses 8-10 “Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’” In Jesus’ masterclass he finishes by telling Satan to go packing. All well and good for Jesus, you may say, he’s the Son of God after all. But think back to what we read in Hebrews about his humanity. Heb 2:17-18 “For this reason (Jesus) had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” And further on in Hebrews 4:15-16 “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.” Jesus sends Satan packing and that’s what we are called to do too. 1 Pet 5:8-9 “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.” James writes about this too. 4:7-8 “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and *he will flee from you*. Come near to God and he will come near to you.” It’s a recurring theme in the Apostles’ writing. Here’s Paul in Eph 6:10, 13, 16ff “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.” “Therefore, put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.” “In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” Scripture is crystal clear about us making a stand against Satan and sending him packing, just as Jesus did. We’ve been clear that the means of sending him packing is to know God’s word and use it. I’ve been clear in my encouragement for us all to know scripture better in order to do so, so that we can quote texts in context so that they are not pretexts for our behaviour. But just because we send him packing doesn’t mean he won’t be back. Luke’s Gospel provides us with a little more colour here where we read in 4:13 that “When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.” Satan came back to tempt Jesus again with the same temptations. Later in Matthew’s Gospel, in chapter sixteen we read “The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven. He replied, “When evening comes, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,’ and in the morning, ‘Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a

sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.” Jesus then left them and went away.” And then again, later in the chapter we read “From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” The testing didn’t go away, it came back again and again during Christ’s lifetime, just as it will in ours. But the overarching principles about how to resist the desire to rely on ourselves rather than God, to put God to the test or to compromise our principles remain the same. We should be aware, though, that Satan went away but came back to tempt Christ again when the opportunity presented itself. For us, it means that we have to go back again to 1 Cor 10:12 “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.” Oscar Wilde famously wrote in *Lady Windermere’s Fan* “I can resist everything except temptation” Unwittingly, Wilde illustrates one of the key elements of temptation – it can be resisted, and as believers we have the reassurance from God that we won’t be tempted beyond our ability to endure it and we will be provided with a means of escape from it. Provided, that is, we take it!

Conclusion

As I read and prayed and prepared to preach on this passage I noticed something that I had never noticed before. As we’ve discussed, the three concepts that constitute Christ’s temptations were to rely on ourselves, forgetting our reliance on God, to put God to the test and to compromise our principles. It only occurred to me as I prepared this material how potent the Lord’s Prayer is as an antidote to these tests. Matt 6:9-13 Jesus says: “This, then, is how you should pray:

‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.’”

Here, then, is the reminder – should we need it – of our dependence on God, our need to hold as the highest authority God’s will and his Kingdom. **Amen.**

Summary of [Matthew 4.docx](#)

Main Passage

The document explores Matthew 4:1-11, where Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness and is tempted by the devil after fasting for forty days. The devil tempts Jesus three times: to turn stones into bread, to throw himself from the temple, and to

worship the devil in exchange for the kingdoms of the world. Each time, Jesus responds by quoting scripture, resisting the temptations.

Key Themes

1. The Importance of Knowing Scripture

- The devil knows and quotes scripture, sometimes out of context.
- Believers are encouraged to know scripture well, to avoid being misled and to resist temptation effectively.

2. Christ's Humanity

- Jesus experienced real human needs and emotions: hunger, thirst, fatigue, pain, solitude, joy, sorrow, anger, compassion, anxiety, love, loneliness, and frustration.
- Hebrews 2:17-18 and 4:15-16 are cited to show that Jesus' humanity enables him to empathise with human weakness and temptation.

3. The Nature of Temptation

- Temptation is common to all people, but God provides a way to endure it (1 Corinthians 10:12-13; James 1:13-15).
- The difference between testing and temptation lies in the intent: God tests to strengthen, Satan tempts to cause failure.

4. The Three Temptations

- **Self-reliance:** Temptation to act independently of God.
- **Testing God:** Temptation to force God's hand or act presumptuously.
- **Compromising Principles:** Temptation to gain power or advantage by abandoning core beliefs.

5. Practical Application

- Jesus' responses to temptation are a "microteach masterclass" in spiritual resilience.
- Fasting and prayer are highlighted as expected spiritual disciplines.
- The Lord's Prayer is presented as an antidote to temptation, reminding believers of dependence on God and the need to resist evil.

6. Ongoing Nature of Temptation

- Temptation is not a one-time event; it recurs throughout life.
- Believers are called to resist, stand firm, and use scripture as their defence, just as Jesus did.

Conclusion

The document encourages readers to deepen their knowledge of scripture, rely on God rather than themselves, avoid testing God, and refuse to compromise their principles. It closes by connecting the Lord's Prayer to the themes of dependence, obedience, and deliverance from evil.