

Matt. 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards He was famished. The tempter came and said to Him,

“If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”

But He answered; “It is written,

‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Then the devil took Him to the holy city and placed Him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written; ‘He will command His angels concerning You,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not dash Your foot against a stone.’”

Jesus said to him,

“Again, it is 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 splendor; and he said to Him, “All these I will give you, if You will fall down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written,

‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only Him.’”

Then the devil left Him, and suddenly angels came and waited on Him.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection Questions

1) **The Context:** The text tells us that the Spirit (the Holy Spirit of God) actively led Jesus into the wilderness in order that Jesus might be tempted by the devil. By stating that God's Spirit had an active role in leading Jesus to this place, Matthew shows the reader that this series of temptations is part of **God's plan**. It is strange to think of temptations being part of God's **plan** for Jesus and yet they are. God is very intentional about having Jesus endure this difficult test before Jesus' ministry begins. Why would the timing of this trial be important? (e.g. after Jesus' Baptism and before His ministry). What does God remind Jesus of during this time of trial/temptation? How does God glorify Himself through Jesus' responses?

2) The Greek term, "peirazein", found in this text means both to "test" (implying hope of passing) and to tempt into sin (a trial that pressures and "intends" failure). God allows this "test" with the hope and confidence that Jesus will pass the test. The devil actively "tempts" Jesus with the hope that Jesus will fail; falling for the temptation. God allows certain tests to befall us knowing that there will be elements of victory if we trust Him to take us through it. This period of testing probably revealed some things to Christ about His own resolve and His relationship with His Dad and the power of His Father's Word. How has God used a period of trial in your life to remind you of the ways in which you are utterly dependent upon Him and to teach you about the virtues that He desires to strengthen in you?

3) The scripture tells us that this time of trial took place in the "wilderness". What have we learned from some of the tests in the wildernesses (illness, joblessness, difficulty with family) of our lives? How have those times actually gifted you and prepared you for the next challenges and/or graces you were to receive in your life?

4) Scripture tells us that "God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5). How have certain trials in your life humbled you to the point where you were made open to God's grace in a new way?

5) Jesus **only** answers the devil with scripture. What does this method tell us about Christ's own humility as He places Himself within His own religious tradition and His reliance upon God's Word? Scripture tells us that we are to "resist the devil and he will flee" (James 4:7). It also tells that God's Word is the "sword of the Spirit" (Eph.6:17) helping us defend against the devil's attacks. Knowing this, how are we called to imitate Christ's response to the

devil? (e.g. imitate Him by using only scripture to respond). Why is it foolish/dangerous to engage in a conversation with the devil (father of lies) using our *own* words and our *own* reason?

6) Other Biblical characters such as, Abraham (Gen 22:1-19), the Israelites (Deut. 8:2), David (1 Sam. 24:3-7, 26:6-12), Job and Paul (Gal. 1:17-18) endured long periods of trial, temptation and testing before they were employed by God for the work that He had for them. Scripture tells us “Blessed is the one who endures temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love Him.”(James 1:12). How have seemingly endless times of trial in our lives actually laid the groundwork for some important work that God had for us? What kind of “reward” did you receive at the end of your resistance to evil in the temptations and trials?

7) We know that there are evil things that happen in our world (poverty, starvation, violence, ignorance, racism, sexism, classism ...etc.). But do we acknowledge the fact that there are evil forces [i.e. the devil and demons, powers and principalities (Eph. 6:12)] behind some of these events and entities that desire destruction and despair? What are some of our responsibilities (being children of Light, children of God, children who carry God’s victory) to combat these evils in our world? (through prayer, fasting, sometimes direct action).

8) First temptation; the temptation to use one’s power (given by God) for personal gain. The scripture tells us that Jesus was genuinely famished after having been in the wilderness that long without food. It was a very real physical temptation to want to turn the stone into bread, and He knows that He has the power to do it. Jesus refuses the temptation to feed Himself (using God’s power) and to offer a sign that He is the Son of God by doing this. Instead He answers with Scripture “One does not live on bread alone but by every Word that comes forth from the mouth of God.”(Deut. 8:3) How does waiting upon/feeding upon God’s Word, God’s instruction help us to resist the temptation to use our power for personal gain?

9) The second temptation; is to put God to the test just as the Israelites did at Massah. The devil tries to tempt Jesus to demonstrate publicly that He is the Son of God by showing how angels will come to His aid just as scripture has outlined. Jesus knows that God has another plan to reveal His Sonship through self-sacrificial love (i.e. The cross). Have you ever been tempted to demonstrate your “sonship/daughtership” in God through Spiritual or

supernatural means rather than by self-sacrificial love? What did you choose? Why?

10) Third temptation; the devil asks Jesus to make a deal. The devil will give Jesus charge over every human being, every human structure (evil ones that oppress others, other ones that simply do not know that God loves them) if Jesus will bow down and worship him. This is a very real temptation for Jesus in relation to His mission. Here Jesus is being offered a “short” cut to “save” humanity from pain and suffering without any personal pain, humiliation, fear, ongoing struggle with evil. This is a very personal temptation for Jesus as it is directly related to His ministry and mission. But Jesus can name this as a temptation because He knows that God did not send Him simply to save humanity from pain and suffering but also from sin. Salvation from sin requires the act of the ultimate self-sacrificial love (God suffering and dying for the sake of humanity). Even though the “short cut” is tempting, Jesus knows the very real price tag of bowing to the devil’s plans. (e.g. the offer of salvation to all humankind is thwarted and His mission is dead). Again Jesus responds with Scripture (Deut 6:13) “Worship the Lord your God, and serve *only* Him.” When the devil tries to set the agenda, Jesus remembers God’s Plan. In what ways are we tempted to take “short cuts”? In what ways have we been tempted (through impatience or mistrust) to sign up for the devil’s plan rather than God’s plan?

11) **Point of interest:** Jesus’ temptations echo the temptations that the Israelites suffered in their desert experience.

- 1) The temptation to satisfy a physical need in a way that is not God’s way and the temptation to mistrust God as provider of all things. (See Exodus 16 when the Israelite’s complain bitterly about food.).
- 2) The temptation about testing God. The Israelites were tempted to test God at Massah with their complaints about water (Ex. 17:2).
- 3) Temptation to fall down and worship golden calf (false cheap imitation) at the base of a high mountain (site of a high mountain is where Jesus’ third temptation takes place). (Exodus 32).

12) At the end of this passage, we see angels coming to minister to Jesus. The time of testing is over for the moment and God sends His emissaries to comfort Jesus. When have you experienced God’s awesome comfort after a time of trial? Do we take time to thank God for those moments of extraordinary grace?