

## Jesus in Training: *Tempting Jesus*

Matthew 4:1-11

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on January 29, 2017

### Introduction

- ❖ This month we've been in a series called *Jesus in Training*, where we're looking at some of the early episodes in Jesus' life before his more familiar public ministry. Last week, we covered his baptism. His commissioning service. Where Jesus was publicly affirmed by the Father as the Beloved Son with whom he is well pleased.
  - ▶ And you'd think the next thing we would read about is Jesus going throughout all Galilee teaching and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. Which is what you find in chapter 4:23. But that skips over a crucial part of the narrative.
    - **Because right after this baptism** – where Jesus experiences the Spirit of the LORD falling fresh on him and a voice from heaven affirming his sonship – **he's immediately led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.**
- ❖ We don't like to hear that. That doesn't make sense. **We imagine the conflict, the struggle, the trials, temptation, and tears – they come first.** Before we experience God. Before we're filled with his Spirit. Before we're baptized. Once we experience God in a profound way, those things are in the past. Now we walk in his victory. Now we serve in his strength.
  - ▶ But this text doesn't match up. His commissioning led to conflict. **His baptism didn't lead to victory. It led right into struggle.** Right into a trial. Right into the furnace of temptation. What's happening here? Why is it all backwards?
- ❖ Or maybe we have it backwards. **Why do we assume the closer you get to God or the more committed you are to serving him and doing his will – that the better life will be?** That it'll get easier. That trials will get smaller and temptations get weaker.
  - ▶ That's the assumption. But that's not the experience of Jesus. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and following the Spirit's leading. **His life was pleasing to the LORD. But he wasn't granted a more peaceful life.** He was led into the wilderness to starve and to face the strongest of his temptations.
- ❖ **This morning we have to face the reality that trials and temptations are going to be ever present in the Christian life.** You can't avoid it or mitigate it by surrendering more to God. Pleasing God more won't get you a more peaceful life. **What we see in the text is that – it's because he's pleased with you – he's going to put you through trials and temptations.**
  - ▶ We need to tell the brothers and sisters we baptized this morning to prepare themselves for a fight. And if you've been baptized, you need to prepare for a fight. I've divided this message into three parts. First, we'll consider the normalcy of temptation, Second, the essence of temptation. And third, the resistance of temptation.

### The Normalcy of Temptation

- ❖ Our first point is a continuation of the point I've been making. Let's consider the normalcy of temptation within the Christian life. Temptation should come at no surprise the more familiar we are with the Bible and the more familiar we are with our own hearts. **I'd argue that there is not a single second of a single day of your life when you're not susceptible to sin.**

- ❖ **Temptation doesn't require the devil or one of his demons to always be there.** The devil is not omnipresent like God. He's not everywhere at the same time. So he's not always there in your life actively tempting you.
  - ▶ **But even still, you have to be on guard – not just for an enemy on the outside – but an enemy within.** The Bible calls it our flesh (our sin nature). Apart from Christ, our sinful flesh is in charge. But if we're in Christ, our flesh has been defeated – but not eradicated.
  
- ❖ For the Christian, the good news of the gospel is that through your faith in Christ – **sin's penalty** is paid for and at the same time **sin's power** over you is broken. Like I said, your sinful flesh has been defeated. It's been crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20). It no longer has mastery over you (Rom. 6:22; 8:9). You're free to choose righteousness, to choose holiness.
  - ▶ But until you're glorified, until you're conformed completely into the image of Christ, the desires of your sinful flesh remain (Gal. 5:16). Sin's penalty is paid for. Sin's power over you is broken. **But sin's presence in you remains.** That's why we're commanded in Scripture to stay vigilant against sin. **We're warned in Romans 13:14 not to make any provision for the flesh, to not gratify its desires.**
  
- ❖ **Christian, until you're perfected in Christ, your sinful flesh hungers to be fed.** It yearns to be gratified. That's what temptation is. It's your sinful flesh crying for you to feed it. That's why you can't put all the blame on the devil.
  - ▶ **Temptation is not this little red devil on your shoulder whispering ideas into your ear – ideas you didn't already consider.** No, all the devil does is fan the flame of your flesh's desire to sin. He doesn't plant sinful desires that weren't already there. So that's why I say there's not a moment of the day when we're not susceptible to sin. Even when the devil's not there – we're still at risk.
  
- ❖ But there's another reason why temptation is part of the normal, daily experience of the Christian life. It's not just because of our own flesh or because of the devil. **It's because there's a divine purpose behind temptation.**
  - ▶ **God wants us to be tempted.** I would never say he wants us to sin. And I'm not saying he's the one tempting us. James 1:13 makes it clear when it says, *“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.” But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.*” (1:13-14) That's exactly what we've been saying.
  
- ❖ So God is not the tempter. The devil is or we are (we tempt ourselves; we tempt others). But it doesn't come from God. Another way we could say it is like this: **Temptation doesn't originate from his hand, but it has to pass through it.** God is sovereign. He could, at any time, close his hand and prevent the devil (or prevent us) from tempting. So if he lets temptation pass through his hand, then he must have a plan for it. He must have a purpose.

- ❖ **What's going to help you is to understand that in Greek the word for *tempt* could also be translated as *test*.** It depends on the context and the intention of the one doing either the tempting or testing. So even in our passage, the word for "tempt" (what the devil does in v1) is the same as the word for "putting God to the test" (what we're not supposed to do in v7).
  - ▶ Or go back to James 1 and the famous verse, "*Count it all joy when you face trials of various kinds.*" Again that's the same word. It could've said "when you face *temptations* or when you face *testings* of various kinds".
  
- ❖ It all depends on context and intention. If the devil is in view then he intends for you to fail the test, and so it's properly translated as a temptation. But if God is in view, he intends for you to pass and for you to gain from the experience, so we translate it as a test or trial.
  - ▶ **So earlier when I said, "God wants us to be tempted", it would be more proper and more precise to say, "God wants us to be tested so he allows us to be tempted by the devil."** That's precisely what's happening back in our text in v1. It's the Spirit of God who leads Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. God wanted his Son to be tested so he allowed him to be tempted.
  
- ❖ **But what, you might ask, is God's purpose behind testing us?** Just consider what James wrote in his epistle, "*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials (temptations) of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*" (1:2-4) So the trials we face (which often come in the form of temptation) are meant to test our faith in order to produce and to perfect something within us.
  
- ❖ I don't pretend to be much of an athlete so I'm hesitant to use this example, but I think about my experience in collegiate rowing. I remember some of the grueling workouts on the rowing machine or doing endless burpees or running up and down hills. **Depending on the context and intention, what I experienced could've been properly defined as torture.** It certainly felt that way most of the time.
  - ▶ **But of course from the context of our sport and the intention of our coach, it was a workout.** A painful, dreadful, kind of workout. But there was a higher purpose. Coach knew that we'd only get stronger, only get faster, only get better if we were subjected to such grueling workouts.
  
- ❖ **You don't become a stronger and more effective athlete by watching others workout and others practice.** You have to go through the trials yourself. You have to be tested. It's no different for the Christian. That's why you have to face temptations.
  - ▶ I realize some of you are struggling with strong temptations in your life right now. And you're experiencing more failure than victory, so you're pretty discouraged. **But I hope you recognize by now that God has not abandoned you.** I know you're in a wilderness of sorts, but remember it's because he led you there. You're being tested. He's trying to produce and perfect his holiness in you.

## The Essence of Temptation

- ❖ I hope you see why the Christian life is a constant fight against temptation, why the struggle is part of the normal experience of Christianity. Now let's consider the three particular temptations that Christ faced and try to pinpoint the essence of temptation.
- ❖ We're told in v2 that he fasted without food for forty days and forty nights (the limit of what the body can handle). And by the end of it, he was hungry. The tempter then comes to him in v3 and says, "*If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.*"
  - ▶ **Now understand that the devil is not trying to get Jesus to doubt whether or not he's truly the Son of God.** He just came from his baptism where he heard a heavenly voice affirming his sonship. Jesus knows who he is. He's not tempted to doubt that.
- ❖ **What the devil is doing is challenging the notion of what it should look like to live as the Son of God.** "If you're the Son of God, should you really be starving like this? Should you have to suffer like this? You deserve better than this. You're not being treated like a Son of God. Go ahead and feed yourself with these rocks. You can do it. You deserve it." **Essentially the devil is tempting Jesus to doubt his Father's care and provision.**
- ❖ **Many have drawn a contrast here to Adam and his temptation.** The First Adam had plenty to eat in the Garden and yet fell for the devil's lies. While the Last Adam starved in the wilderness and yet conquered against the devil.
  - ▶ **But they're similar in that, in both cases, the devil questioned the love of the Father and tried to get his victim to doubt God's provision of their needs.** "If God really loves you why would he hold back the fruit of this tree? If God really loves you, would he want you to hold back food and suffer like this? Maybe he doesn't love you. Maybe you just have to take care of yourself."
- ❖ **The First Adam bought the lie, but the Last Adam retorted with Scripture.** Look at v4. "*But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."*" He's citing Deuteronomy 8:3. Which comes from a chapter where Moses is recounting God's provision after their forty years of wandering in the wilderness, and how he let them hunger so they'd learn that man doesn't live by bread alone.
  - ▶ That word *alone* suggests that Jesus is not saying food is unimportant. He's just denying food's absolute importance. **It's not more important than your obedience to God.** Having a well-fed, healthy body is not more important than a well-fed, spiritually-healthy soul. Food is good. It's just not God.
- ❖ But that's how the Tempter works. He takes good things. Legitimate needs. And if God's not meeting them (for whatever sovereign reason), then the Tempter comes across like a helpful friend. Looking out for your interest. **In a sweet voice, he'll make points that seem sensible enough.** "If you're hungry, you should feed yourself. If you have a need, you should satisfy it. If it itches, scratch it."

- ❖ **And then he'll raise questions that seem reasonable enough.** “Did God really say you couldn't do that? Is that really fair? Is that really what's best for you?” And suddenly you're not so sure. Suddenly you're **doubting God's Word**. And if you keep listening to that soothing voice, you'll soon be **denying God's Word**. You'll start questioning its authority or its plain interpretation. And then in short order, the devil will have you **defying God's Word**.
  - ▶ **And once you've fallen into temptation, that sweet Tempter will rip off his mask and reveal the face of a terrifying Accuser** (cf. Zech. 3:1; Rev. 12:10). That's what the name Satan means. That's what Jesus calls him in v10. He's the Accuser, who no longer speaks sweetly. Now that you've sinned, he lashes out at you. Calling you guilty, telling you you're unworthy to go to God.
  
- ❖ Don't get played by the devil. Familiarize yourself with what he's trying to do. For example, **to unmarried people** he's going to speak softly and say, “You've got desires for sexual intimacy that are good and natural. Why aren't you satisfying them? I know you're holding out for someone who meets God's expectations but maybe those are too high. Maybe they're unattainable. If he hasn't provided yet, maybe you should take matters into your own hands.”
  - ▶ **And once you buy the lie, once you defy God's Word, the devil is going to change his tune in an instant. He'll begin to rain down guilt and shame.** I wouldn't be surprised if some of you here have fallen for the sweetness of the Tempter and right now you're experiencing the rage of the Accuser. If that describes you, then keep your eyes on this Jesus in our text and see how he's fighting for you. **Your only hope before the Accuser lies in how Jesus handles his own temptations.**
  
- ❖ So let's go on to the next one. In v5, the devil takes Jesus to Jerusalem, to the top of the temple, and says, “*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, lest you strike your foot against a stone.”*”
  - ▶ In the first instance, the devil tempted Jesus to doubt God's fatherly provision. **This time he's tempting Jesus to test the Father's loyalty. To make God prove his love.** He incites Jesus to leap off the temple. "You're the Son of God. Of course he'll intervene to rescue you." This time the Tempter cites Scripture himself. He points to Psalm 91:11-12. To a promise of God's angels to protect the faithful.
  
- ❖ **But Jesus knew the difference between God rescuing someone in danger versus you trying to manipulate God to force him to act in your favor.** He responds by citing Deuteronomy 6:16, which references the episode at Massah where the Israelites put God to the test. They were testing God's faithfulness to provide water, expecting a miracle from him.
  - ▶ **They were basically demanding divine intervention as proof that God is really for us and that he really loves us.** So Jesus recognized that needlessly putting himself in harm's way just to test God is selfish and rooted in unbelief. Instead he's willing to trust his Father's love and protection and he won't demand a sign.

- ❖ But isn't that what we're tempted to do? **We try to make deals with God. We seek a sign. We want him to prove his love.** "If you're really for me, Lord, then prove it by answering this prayer. Prove it by making this or that happen in my life."
  - ▶ How many times have we thought to ourselves, "I would totally believe God or I would totally do his will or take that risk for him *if*? If I saw a miracle. If I experienced the supernatural. If he proved himself to me without a shadow of doubt."
    - But Jesus refused to give in to that temptation. He refused to put his Father to the test. He trusts him too much to feel the need to do that.
  
- ❖ So the devil pulls out his strongest temptation. In v8 he takes Jesus to a very high mountain and shows him all the kingdoms of the world and offers them to Jesus if only he bow down and worship the devil. **He essentially tempting Jesus to shortcut God's will.** To achieve the same effect in the end but avoid suffering in the process.
  - ▶ **It's the argument of the end justifying the means.** It's the father trying to provide for his family but tempted to cut corners to bring home a little extra during the holidays. It's the parents who want to give their children a quality education but tempted to compromise their integrity to get their kids into the "right" school. **You could argue from a pragmatic standpoint that the good ends justify the dubious means. But you'd be speaking for the devil.**
  
- ❖ Consider the deal he offered Jesus. It's great from a pragmatic standpoint. **Satan was willing to hand over his power – to surrender his reign of terror over the earth.** Jesus can then establish his earthly kingdom and sit upon his throne without firing a shot.
  - ▶ **The devil is offering Jesus everything God promised his Son, yet with one big difference. He offers it without a cross.** Jesus can have it all without having to die a brutal, shameful death.
  
- ❖ **Russell Moore** makes a great point here.<sup>1</sup> He says if Jesus accepted, that would mean the immediate cease of all war and violence. There would be perfect peace on earth. No more hunger, poverty, or slavery. No more disease or cancer. All the horrible events in history that have take place since that day would've never happened. It sounds like paradise on earth.
  - ▶ Moore says Satan was willing to make this deal because he doesn't fear a Christian kingdom on earth ruled by Christian values and ethics. **He fears Christ, especially Christ's ability and willingness to shed his blood as an atonement for our sins.**
  
- ❖ That's because Satan's accusations only work if there is unforgiven sin to accuse. So he's quite comfortable with peace on earth, as long as he can wreak havoc in the courtroom of heaven. **He'll put up with paradise on earth, as long as he gets to condemn all of humanity – with no shed blood of a Savior available to redeem them.** He's willing to give Jesus everything as long as he bypasses the cross.

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<sup>1</sup> Russell Moore, *Tempted and Tried*, 152.

- ❖ The devil's lies worked on the First Adam. But not Last. Unlike Adam who remained silent while the serpent tempted, Jesus spoke up and shut the devil's mouth with the Word of God. He makes reference to Deuteronomy 6:13. "*You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.*" (v10)

### **The Resistance of Temptation**

- ❖ Jesus resisted temptation. Now as we saw, the essence of it was to cast doubt on God's fatherly love, his fatherly provision, his fatherly protection. Jesus rejected those lies. He resisted. And there's so much we can learn from him for our own efforts to resist temptation.
  - ▶ **Think about how he cited Scripture in order to deflect the flaming arrows of lies coming from the devil.** Jesus was deft with the sword of the Spirit, the word of God (Eph. 6:17). He knew just the right verse to use and he had it memorized. He didn't have to fumble around searching his Bible.
- ❖ On a practical level, Jesus' example should be all the more motivation to get into the Word and to memorize more of it. It's pretty naive to think we'll stand a chance against temptation *without* the Word stored up in our heads and hearts. **If Jesus had to rely on Scripture, then we're definitely toast if we try to face temptation relying on just our own wits.**
  - ▶ Consider making it a goal to memorize a whole chapter of Scripture. Pick a popular one like Psalm 23, 51, or 103. Maybe Romans 8 or Colossians 3. Or go big and try to memorize the entire Sermon on the Mount, which we'll start studying in March.
- ❖ **But besides looking to Jesus as a perfect example of how to resist temptation, we need to trust in Jesus as the Perfect Savior – who comforts us when we fall to temptation and strengthens us to jump back into the fight.**
  - ▶ Instead of just considering how Jesus cited Scripture, consider where he was citing from in the OT. As I said, those verses came out of either Deuteronomy 6 or 8. And remember, those chapters are referring back to the years when Israel was in wilderness facing their own temptations. And how long did that last? Forty years. And what did they experience right before being led into the wilderness? They had to pass through water – the Red Sea to be exact.
- ❖ Do you see what I'm getting at? Jesus passes through the waters of baptism, and then he's led into the wilderness to face temptations for forty days and forty nights. These are no mere coincidences. Jesus is fulfilling all righteousness.
  - ▶ **We already saw how Jesus succeeded where Adam failed. And now he's succeeding where Israel failed.** God's people keep failing. And let's be honest, you and I – despite our best efforts to resist temptation – will keep failing.
- ❖ But Jesus never fails. He perfectly obeys the Father's will. He fulfills all righteousness. **That's how he plans to save humanity: By fulfilling a perfect obedience in our place.** By living a life of righteousness in our place. By dying as an atonement for sin in our place. **He plans to save us by becoming our substitute.**

- ❖ And that is what the devil fears the most. **He would love nothing better than to convince Jesus to reject a life of suffering as a substitute for the people. And instead to embrace a life of strength as a great example to the people.**
  - ▶ Here in the wilderness he's trying to get Jesus to be like every other religious leader in the world. To be a great example. An example of spectacular power and strength or even an example of righteousness. People will love him. People will flock to him.
    - But in the end, the devil knows the people will be condemned. **You and I will be condemned if all we have in Jesus is an example to follow.**
  
- ❖ If this morning you're feeling the weight of your failures – of all the times you fell into temptation in just this past week – know that Jesus resisted the devil and rejected the offer to live a life of strength as a great example, and he joyfully embraced a life of suffering as a substitute in your place.
  - ▶ If you trust him, if you receive him as your Savior, **the forgiveness** he purchased by his substitutionary death – can be yours. And **the righteousness** he fulfilled in his substitutionary life – can be yours. And **the Spirit of God** – same Spirit that led Jesus into the wilderness and through it unscathed – can be yours. This is the good news of the gospel that I hope everyone of us freshly receives this morning.