

Jesus Resists Temptation

Matthew 4:1-11

¹ Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. ² After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The Tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread." ⁴ But Jesus answered, "It is written: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God." ⁵ Then the Devil took him into the holy city. He placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ and 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 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." ⁷ Jesus said to him, "Again, it is written: You shall not test the Lord your God." ⁸ Again the Devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ He said to him, "I will give you all of these things, if you will bow down and worship me." ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, "Go away, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only." ¹¹ Then the Devil left him, and just then angels came and served him.

If you're starting a new job, what would you expect your first day of work to be like? You probably would hope that the boss would take it easy on the new guy at first. He should let you get your feet wet, get to know your way around. You'd like to see how things are run first, before you really started going at it. When Jesus began his job as our Prophet, High Priest, and King, it didn't seem that the Father was interested in having his Son start our slowly. At his baptism at the Jordan, the Holy Spirit equipped him to carry out the job of destroying the devil's work. But God didn't start him out with any preaching dates. He didn't begin his ministry by gathering up some of his close followers. The first job God had planned for his Son was to go face to face with mankind's greatest enemy. Matthew tells us what his first job as our Savior was like. *Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil.* In Luke's Gospel we're told that this tempting went on for forty days. For forty days Jesus would face the same temptations that you and I face. He would suffer through those temptations, just like you and I suffer. Jesus was attempting to do what no person could ever do. Although the temptations flew his way for more than a month, just three specific temptations are recorded. The devil tempted Jesus to show discontent. He tempted our Lord to show distrust. He even tempted Jesus to disregard God's command. It is important that we take time to consider what he did when he faced Satan's sinful seductions. Where we spend eternity depends on Jesus resisting temptation.

In tempting God's people to sin for thousands of years, the devil had learned a few tricks. And one of those was to hit people where they are weakest. That was what the devil did when he tempted Jesus to sin. Matthew tells us, *"After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry."* For some reason God chose the setting for his Son to face off with Satan to be in a rather remote area. There was no place for our Lord to catch a bite to eat. Before I go and exercise at the Y in the morning, I make sure I have a full breakfast. For some reason God wanted his Son to be starving when he battled the devil. And Satan tried

to use his physical condition against him. Matthew tells us, *“The Tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread.’”* It made sense. Why should the Son of God go hungry when he was well equipped with almighty power. He miraculously provided Israel with bread from heaven for forty years. He could easily turn stones into bread and have a bite. The devil was not concerned about Jesus’ well being. He was tempting Jesus to sin by showing discontentment in his hungry state.

It was God’s will that Jesus spend more than a month in a desert without food. And Jesus was willing to do that. To combat the devil’s attempts to get him to be discontented, Jesus used the most powerful weapon there is: *“It is written: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God.”* Jesus quoted a passage that reminds God’s people that man’s existence does not depend on the food he eats. It depends on what God says. Jesus wielded the sword of the Spirit and resisted Satan’s temptation to show discontent.

Our Lord passed this test. As tempting as it was to turn stones into bread and fill his hungry belly, Jesus remained content in the hungry condition that God left him in. So the devil tries wielding the word of God himself to get Jesus show distrust for God’s promises.

The devil took notice how Jesus used God’s Word to fend off one temptation. He decided to challenge him with that Word. Matthew tells us, *“Then the Devil took him into the holy city. He placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, and 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 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”* Okay, this temptation seems easy at first. Throwing yourself from highest point of the temple was suicide. The drop was a couple hundred feet into the Kidron Valley. But then God did promise to send angels to protect us. It’s found right there in Psalm 91. Or don’t you really trust what God promises you. With this challenge the devil thought he had Jesus. If he jumped, it was suicide. If he didn’t jump then he wasn’t trusting God’s promises.

Of course, Jesus didn’t jump. And it’s not because he didn’t trust God’s promises. Matthew tells us, *“Jesus said to him, ‘Again, it is written: You shall not test the Lord your God.’”* Jesus took the sword of the Spirit right out of Satan’s hand and showed him the right way to use it. God promises to protect us. But he doesn’t want us to recklessly put our lives on the line. You don’t test the Lord that way. That’s what God first told Israel when they grumbled about not having enough to drink in the desert. That’s what Jesus told Satan as he stood at the highest point on the temple.

So our Lord resists this second temptation. He didn’t give in to test the Lord. He resisted all temptation to distrust God’s promises. So the devil tries with one more ace up his sleeve. This time he tempts Jesus to disregard God’s commands.

For this temptation the devil takes our Lord up to a very high mountain showing him all the kingdoms of the world. Then the devil made a rather inviting offer. *“I will give you all of these things, if you will bow down and worship me.”* Jesus knew what it would take to defeat Satan.

He know about all the suffering and the death that awaited him. It wasn't going to be easy to destroy Satan. But then the devil offers and easier way out. Satan would simply hand everything over to Jesus, if Jesus did one little thing: *"bow down and worship me."*

How could Jesus do such a thing? Bow down to the one who ruined God's perfect creation. Worship the one that he came to destroy. Never! *Then Jesus said to him, "Go away, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only."* Then the Devil left him, and just then angels came and served him. What would Jesus gain by disregarding God's command to worship him only? He wouldn't gain a thing. He'd lose to Satan. He'd lose the world. He'd lose his own Father's favor. He couldn't take the easy route. Instead, he obeyed God's commands. He resisted all temptation.

The first battle was a victory for our Lord. It would not be the last. Satan would even use Jesus' close disciples to tempt him. On one occasion Jesus was explaining to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem to suffer, die, and rise again. Peter takes Jesus aside and begins scolding him, *"Never, Lord, this will never happen to you."* Jesus resisted that temptation, telling Peter, *"Get behind me, Satan!"*

Why did Jesus have to endure temptation? He had to resist temptation because you and I don't. We are just like our first parents. We are not always content with what God wants for us. We don't always trust what he promises. We test him time and time again. We treat his commands like mere suggestions that we can take or leave. And God cannot tolerate that. He calls for his children to listen and obey. And if you don't want to listen and obey, then there's a place where we should go where we spend eternity never listening to his voice again.

But God doesn't want that for you and me. He wants us to be close to him forever. That's why he sent his Son into the world. That's why Jesus battled Satan the way he did. It why he resisted all temptation. It wasn't easy. But it was necessary. Scripture tells us how Jesus suffered when he was tempted. We see that in the Scripture before us. Scripture says he was *"tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin"* (Hebrews 4:15).

On the last day of his life, he did the same. Wicked men accused him of wrongs that he never did. But he resisted all temptation to prove his innocence. Soldiers beat him ruthlessly, but he resisted all temptation to fight back. He'd walk through a gauntlet mockery and insults. But he resisted all temptation to condemn them all. And when his own Father turned away his loving face and emptied all his wrath upon him, Jesus resisted the temptation to just walk away. You and I now enjoy a lasting and loving relationship with our God. That's because from his first day on the job to his very last, Jesus always resisted temptation.

I'm thankful that I've never had a job like that. I appreciated the bosses I had that slowly eased me into the job. But I'm more thankful that our Savior went all out from day one. He didn't slow down until the serpent was crushed. Thank you, Lord, for resisting all the temptations that we did not. Thank you, Jesus, for paying the debt we owed and winning forgiveness for every sin.