

SERMON

Sunday, June 24th, 2018

Matthew 4: 1-11

The King's Battle & Ours

TEMPTATION IS MAN'S OLDEST PROBLEM.

From a Letter to the church: "I am so full of myself. What I don't understand is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise. So if I can't be trusted to figure out what is best for myself and then do it, it becomes obvious that I need something more! For if I know what I am supposed to do, but still can't do it, and a power within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions, I obviously need help! I realize that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't do it. I decide to do good, but I don't really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time. – This is the apostle Paul from a modern paraphrase of Romans 7.

AN IMPORTANT STORY

1. Mark this important passage, because it has large scale ramifications, and small scale application;
2. On a large Scale, Matthew is telling us about a battle between the King of Kings and the Prince of Darkness (good vs. evil)
 - a. In Matthew 1a, we learn of the King's Pedigree, his lineage, his royal heritage, his ancestry.
 - b. In Matthew 1b, we learn of the King's arrival, his lowly birth;
 - c. In Matthew 2, we see the adoration of the King by Persian Kingmakers (wise men);
 - d. In Matthew 3a, we see the forerunner of the King – the Herald of the King in John the Baptist;
 - e. In Matthew 3b, we see the affirmation of the King and His true nature – Father, Son, Spirit.
 - f. In Matthew 4, we see the King's enemy, and an assault on the King's Credentials
 - i. It is as if a veil has been drawn back, and we are allowed to see behind the curtain. Evil Exists, and Opposes not just the King's purposes in the world, but the King himself.
 - ii. This sinister figure has shown his face from time to time –
 1. in the form of a serpent at the world's dawn, at
 2. Gethsemane, just prior to the crucifixion,
 3. and now – just prior to the public ministry of the Lord.
 4. Of course, the evil one also attempted to kill Christ as a baby, through Herod's slaughter of the innocents under age 2.
 5. In Matthew 4, we are witnessing the first major assault on Christ as an adult.
 - g. But the King's Enemy is our enemy too:
 - i. He is the adversary of God's people – 1 Peter 5:8 /Genesis 3.
 - ii. He is like a roaring lion on the prowl seeking to devour (1 Peter 5:8)
 - iii. He is the "God of this Age" – 2 Corinthians 4:4
 - iv. He is the "prince of darkness" (Ephesians 6:12) who blinds the minds of unbelievers, so that they can't see the light.
 - v. "Prince of the power of this air

vi. Lucifer, the serpent, the great Dragon, the evil one, destroyer, tempter, deceiver, spirit that works in sons of disobedience

h. Questions:

- i. Will Jesus remain pure, or is this King only show, but not substance?
- ii. Can he rescue sinners. Is He powerful enough to deliver us out of the clutches of the Prince of this World? Will He win?

3. On a Small Scale – We learn how to deal with our own temptations by watching our Lord. Our temptations are just as subtle & relentless, and often, just as difficult to overcome/outrun. We can live in victory. We can overcome defeat.

WHAT IS THE CONTEXT?

1. Jesus 30. His earthly father Joseph likely has been gone for 18 years. He has just been anointed to begin his public ministry, and it is 3 years before his death on a cross. He is in the process of choosing his disciples, and he hasn't preached his first sermon. He is in the first days of his public ministry.
2. Notice it is the Spirit who leads Jesus When Jesus teaches us to pray in the Model prayer – lead us not into temptation, he is helping us to acknowledge 1) temptations are intense; 2) they are personal, and 3) the consequences of failure are huge.
3. The Wilderness? This was rugged terrain, often referred to as “the Devastation”, a frightening area East of Jerusalem filled with nothing but barrenness and rocks.
4. He was alone – No one was there to help him, and this was a dangerous place.
5. He was fasting – for 40 days and 40 nights. – While his spirit would have been strong from the prayer and meditation, his body was weak. He would be uncomfortable in the barren landscape, the heat.
4. The Evil One was there- The King's Enemy is our enemy too:
 - a. He is the adversary of God's people – 1 Peter 5:8 /Genesis 3.
 - b. He is like a roaring lion on the prowl seeking to devour (1 Peter 5:8)
 - c. He is the “God of this Age” – 2 Corinthians 4:4
 - d. He is the “prince of darkness” (Ephesians 6:12) who blinds the minds of unbelievers, so that they can't see the light.
 - e. “Prince of the power of this air” (Ephs. 2:2)
 - f. Lucifer (Isaiah 14), the serpent, the great Dragon (Rev. 12:9), the evil one (1 John 5:19), destroyer (Rev. 9:11), tempter (Matthew 4:3), deceiver (Genesis 4:5), spirit that works in sons of disobedience (Ephs. 2:2).
5. One pastor said, that if you read this in the right light, your hearts will be moved to fear, and your blood will chill.

WHEN DOES TEMPTATION COME?

1. During times of stress and physical exhaustion – Jesus was hungry, tired, alone;
2. At the point of major spiritual breakthroughs, certain seasons of life – Birth of Christ, Public Ministry, Gethsemane. When you are at the intersection of a new spiritual season of life. The enemy may try to keep you from crossing that threshold; Satan nips things in the bud.

3. At times of spiritual victory¹ – old adage: walking with the devil, he will leave you alone.
 - a. Jesus had been especially consecrated, fasting 40 days & nights. He was seeking God’s will in prayer; Publically Faithful – in his baptism;
 - b. Humble – Baptized by John;
 - c. Approved by God- This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.
 - d. Application. You may be in your prayer closet and experience a season of refreshing. If you and God in partnership are doing damage to Satan’s cause. You have been unlocking the treasury of heaven to make rich those whom he wants poor;

HOW WILL THE TEMPTATION COME?

1. With malice - John 10:10 – the thief comes to steal, to kill, to destroy; Purpose is to harm you.
2. With Deception
 - a. He appears to be on your team –
 - i. Jesus, you’re hungry. Jesus,
 - ii. God loves you too much to let you get hurt;
 - iii. Jesus, I’ll let you have the people you love so much. You won’t have to go to the cross. The Bible tells us that he masquerades as an angel of light. (2 Corinthians 11:14).
 - iv. Jesus told us that sometimes wolves dress up like sheep (Matthew 7:15);
 - b. He is the Master of Half Truths
 - i. With Adam & Eve – “Did God really say that” (Genesis 3)? The tree of the knowledge of good and evil will make you like God. But he didn’t tell them the whole story – which was what God had said – that the knowledge wasn’t for them.
 - ii. In 4:3, he says “If you are the Son of God, then . . .” He casts doubt
 - iii. Then twice, he quotes scripture – the 1st time – from Psalm 91:11-12 – which says the angels won’t allow the Messiah to fall. Satan leaves out the part of Psalm 91 that says – when God is your refuge, then God will protect. In other words, when you are in God’s will, then God will protect. Jesus replied with another scripture – from Dt. 6:16. Don’t put God to the test.
3. With a direct lie. In the third temptation, Satan told Jesus that the Kingdoms of the world would be his if Jesus would only worship Him. Jesus saw through the lie, would you? If Jesus had bowed down to worship Satan, then the joke would have been on Jesus. Satan would not have budged.

WHAT WERE THE THREE TEMPTATIONS?

1. Temptation to Self-Preservation - Turn stones into bread - Nothing wrong with eating. So, what was the temptation? Look at Jesus’ answer: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by the word of God – Satan, you are proceeding on the false assumption that the physical sustains life, but it isn’t bread that keeps me alive, but it is the creative, energizing, sustaining power of God. My powers weren’t made for this purpose. Matthew 6:33 – Seek first God’s Kingdom, and all these things will be added unto you.
2. Temptation of Performance - Jump from the pinnacle of the Temple – Herod had a royal portico on the southern wall of the Temple at the top of the mountain, about 450 feet high. James, the Lord’s brother, was thrown off of

¹ Charles Spurgeon. Sermons on Crises in the Life of Jesus. Message titled “Tempted of the Devil,” pp. 33-40.

the Temple here, and that's how he died. If Jesus jumped, and God saved Him, then he wouldn't have to suffer. People everywhere would see the miracle, and they would love him.

This is the temptation to perform. If I just work harder, then you will like me. I won't have to be despised and rejected. This also wasn't true, because later Jesus raised someone from the dead, and he still went to the cross. If they had crowned him king and bypassed the cross, all would have been lost.

3. Temptation of Power & False Purpose - Worship Satan – If Jesus bowed down to Satan, then Satan would give him the keys to the Kingdom. I will give you all the kingdoms. The temptation for Jesus wasn't power or wealth, but the people. The battle could be won now, and Jesus wouldn't have to go to the cross. To whom should we bow down? Who is the Lord of our lives? What are your idols?

WHAT IS THE COMMON DENOMINATOR?

1. Temptation always touches you at a point of legitimate need: All three of these things touched Jesus at a core need in his life. Physical hunger, a desire to be loved and to lead the people to safety; a desire for the battle to be over.
2. Each Temptation was designed to create distrust in God, and would be an act of rebellion. Surely God would want us to take the job with more money? Surely he would want us to have relationships that will take us places. Surely, we don't have to be that spiritual all the time, right? And so on. Short testimony.
3. Each temptation will lead to hurt–
 - a. When you indulge the temptation for bread/physical things of this life over God's plan, you may get the bread, but you will miss the bread of life.
 - b. You may get the job or the grade, but you will always regret cheating or manipulating to do it.
 - c. You may get the relationship of your dreams, but you learn that lasting, fulfilling relationships come when they are done God's way.
 - d. You may get the big house and the big car, but you will discover how empty and unfulfilling those things are. You never know who loves you.
 - e. You may obtain the power, but you discover that to stay in power requires continued isolation.
4. The Common Denominator is Us –
 - a. Even the devil cannot tempt you without your permission – James – temptation flows from your own evil thoughts/ desires. Never been tempted to sniff airplane glue. If there were not a corresponding emotion, you wouldn't be tempted. I've never been tempted to sniff airplane glue.

SEVEN WAYS TO AVOID TEMPTATION?

1. Taste and see that the Lord is good.
 - a. When you want to know what the counterfeit is, you study the real thing. CS Lewis said "It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."
 - b. When you are satisfied in Him, temptations reach you less
 - c. Remember who you are, and to whom you belong. – Illustration of driving in S. Korea with permission from adults, but not my parents. I decided not to drive, because I thought about what might happen, and how I would disappoint my parents.

- d. Bible Study, Prayer, and Worship fill your life up with depth, love, and mercy and guidance. The helmet of salvation is your protection. The Bible is your sword – Get the Bible from your coffee table at home into your mind and heart. That’s how Jesus fought temptation.
- e. Know that His Will is always best

2. Take Responsibility for your life

- a. You begin to figure out temptation when you quit blaming others. Blame is “Be Lame.”
- b. Some blame God – God told me to leave my wife and marry this beautiful young lady. By the way, we met at church. Hope it wasn’t Grace Street. God never contradicts his word

Doesn’t matter how good your feelings are. “God wants me to be happy justifies a whole bunch of sins. God does want you to be happy, but he wants you to be holy more. You will never be happy when you ignore God’s Word. The rules and principles of this book will lead you to happiness. Anytime you ignore this, you are headed for stress, guilt, depression, resentment, anda bunch of other emotional hang-ups.

- c. Devil did not make you do it. –
 - i. 1 Corinthians 10:13 – God will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear, but when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out. I couldn’t help myself. It was impossible to resist. I had no choice, but to give in. You are calling God a liar. I had no choice. May be tough, embarrassing, difficult. God will make a way out.
 - ii. Tell the devil to go – James 4:7 says that if you resist the devil, he will flee. When there isn’t an opening in your heart, he won’t stay. We do it in Jesus’ name, not ours, and humbly, but firmly.

3. Keep Temptations at arm’s length wherever possible – Ice cream in the grocery store is much better than ice cream in the refrigerator. To illustrate, I follow the Billy Graham rule when counseling with people – don’t counsel with a woman by myself. There will always be someone close by. Debbie always knows where I am, and/or the staff. Why? Just smart. Martin Luther’s famous quote works here: If your head is made out of butter, don’t sit near the fire.

4. Make Your Choice Ahead of Time –

- a. before you get into circumstances that make it more difficult. Make your character choices when you are clear-headed, and your emotions aren’t over-engaged. Think some things through – If you see \$100 on the side of the road, know now what your decision will be before you get into it.
- b. Think through the consequences of your temptation– this might be fun at the moment, but what will happen. If I get engaged in an extramarital relationship, where is that going to lead, and am I prepared to pay those prices. If I cheat in this little way, where will it lead me, etc.

5. Ask for Help – If you are an alcoholic and you find yourself in a situation where you are tempted to drink, call someone you trust, and make the call.

- a. Ask God for help. He has a 24 hour hotline. He already knows. He just needs us to admit it. Why don’t we ask? We don’t want help. We know its bad and we know there will be a kickback for it. Sometimes we really want his help, but we don’t ask, because we keep falling in the same thing again and again, and we are too embarrassed. Don’t be that way. His patience isn’t like ours. If you have to come to God 200 times a day, he wants you to. Jesus went through everything we do, so you have someone to help.
- b. Find a safe person, or a safe group. Someone who will listen and keep confidences, and who has a commitment to scripture.

6. Divert your passion to other things that really matter to you – If you love animals, and you’re being tempted by something over here, then indulge yourself in what is pure and beautiful. Philippians 4:8 – “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – thing about such things.

7. When you fall or fail, confess and get back on track immediately. Don't ride the wave of your disobedience to more sin. God is faithful to forgive and cleanse. Come home now.

ONE FINAL THOUGHT -

1. "Do not lead us into temptation" Jesus teaches us to pray, "Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil." When we say "don't lead us into temptation, this is the reminder that temptations are dangerous, and affect us deeply.
2. "Deliver us from evil." The second part of that statement, however, is "to deliver us from evil." In this particular case, we see the Holy Spirit leading Jesus into the wilderness – for the specific purpose of delivering him from evil. Not forever, but his course was set. When you yield to temptation, you keep dealing with the temptation. When you find victory over it and faithfulness to God and yourself, evil is defeated for some time.
3. Paul Again - I tried everything and nothing helps. Is there no one who can do anything for me? The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does help. We know longer have to live under a low-lying black cloud of condemnation. He didn't think your problem was remote or unimportant – struggling mess of humanity in order to set it right.

CONCLUSION – too great a temptation by Joel Gregory. He took the church of all churches, prestige, honor of man, set for life financially, power. But it wasn't what God wanted for him. He quit the church in misery, lost his wife to divorce, and became a traveling insurance salesman for a while. God has restored Him, and he is now a preaching professor at Truett Seminary in Waco, but who knows what his life was supposed to be?

INVITATION