

Lesson 9: Overcoming Temptation Part 2 Matthew 4:1-11

Memory Verse: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5).

Text: ¹Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. ³Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." ⁴But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" ⁵Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In *their* hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" ⁷Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'" ⁸Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" ¹¹Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

Monday

Last week we talked about the first temptation recorded for us in Matthew chapter 4. We saw three keys to overcoming temptation. They were:

1. Exalt the spiritual over the physical,
2. Trust in God over self, and
3. Know the word of God; write it on your heart.

This week we want to continue our discussion by looking at the second and third temptation recorded for us here. In the second temptation, Satan takes the Lord to the pinnacle of the temple and says, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written” ...and he quotes Psalm 91 verses 11 and 12, “He shall give His angels charge over you, ... in their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.”

In the temptation Satan quotes the Scripture accurately, but he twists the word of God in Psalm 91 in a very subtle way. He makes a false application. Satan takes a passage about trusting God and uses it to justify testing God. He was trying to get the Lord Jesus to act presumptively, that is in a way that presumed upon God’s grace and would also draw sensation and attention to Himself. Jesus responds simply by quoting Deut: 6:16, “You shall not tempt [or better ‘test’] the Lord your God.”

The Hebrew verb used in Deuteronomy 6:16 is *nāsâ* (נָסָא). It means to test, try, prove, assay, put

to the proof or put to the test. The older English translation of this verb as “tempt” used in the KJV, NKJV, AV and ASV also means “put to the test” or “prove.” As our language has developed, though, “tempt” no longer carries this idea. The word is now commonly understood as “enticing one to do wrong,” a solicitation to sin. This English shade of meaning is often unfaithful to the Hebrew word and can cause no small amount of confusion, so today it is just better to translate and understand *nāsâ* as “test.”

In the Bible, God often “tests” people (e.g. Gen. 22:1; 2 Chr. 32:31). He does so not as a “solicitation to sin” (James 1:13), but to try them, revealing their true character and quality. Such testing by God is specifically with the intent to refine the character of man and reveal the truth of his heart that he might be either broken or proved and learn to walk more closely with God (Ex. 16:4; Deut. 8:2; Judges 2:22; 2Chr. 32:31; Ps. 26:1-3).

Now what is lawful for God to do, beloved, as the rightful sovereign over His creation, is oftentimes unlawful for us. This is one of those times. God has the wisdom, love, knowledge, mercy, judgment and capacity to rightly test His creatures. We, on the other hand, do not have any of these things as He does, especially with regard to Him. So He commands us very simply in Deuteronomy 6:16, “You not shall put the Lord your God to the test” and authorizes only one exception (Mal. 3:10).

This is, of course, one of the things that makes the “word faith” movement and the money grabbing faith healers associated with it so grotesque. They purposely and continually teach people to violate this commandment in a myriad of ways. They treat God, not as sovereign, but as some sort of cosmic bellhop at their beck and call, as one who is somehow obligated and beholden to them. This is a form of blasphemy. To take the sovereign position and rights that belong to God and transfer them to yourself or someone else is blasphemy. Satan is always tempting people to this kind of thinking, which sets self on the throne of your life rather than God.

The Lord Jesus responds correctly and gives us a fourth key to overcoming temptation: **4. Avoid presuming upon the grace of God and others (v. 7).** You might say, “I would never put God to the test.” Oh really? Have you ever been about to sin, do something that you knew was wrong, and then went ahead and did it anyway? What did you do when you made that choice? You presumed on the grace of God. You willfully chose to put Him to the test. It’s just **like** saying to yourself, “That’s OK. God will forgive me,” or “Oh I’ll just pray about it later and it will be alright. We’ll make it all pax later.” Though, I’m sure you wouldn’t ever speak so crassly even in your own heart. You might just intentionally ignore the feeling of conviction, reasoning, “It’ll be alright this one time.”

The painful truth, beloved, is that all of us presume on the grace of God, almost every day. I’ve fallen into that trap grossly before, and I’ve had to beg God to forgive my foolish presumptions on His grace. You know why that’s so terrible, because it treats the precious blood and agony of Jesus given for our sin like some kind of cheap talisman. It’s like saying, “Yeah Lord, I know

you suffered and died for my sin, now let me just walk all over you some more. Don't worry, I'll make it quick this time." It is very ugly. But Jesus said, "I'm not going to have any part of that. I will not presume upon God's grace and protection. You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."

There are other ways to presume upon the grace of God. You can presume upon His grace in prayer, by trying to manipulate Him with certain words or by failing to say, "Your will and not mine be done." You can presume upon grace by saying, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and do this or that," when you should say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that" (James 4:15). And by extension, if you should not presume on the grace of God, then you should not presume on the grace of others either: your spouse, your boss, your children, your church (e.g. Eph. 3:18-25). There should be no, "It's easier to ask forgiveness than permission," mentality in your family or your work life. Keep it set as a principle: I will not presume upon grace, and you will go a long way in the fight against temptation.

In what ways have you presumed upon the grace of God in the past? How did it make you feel afterwards? _____

What should a person who presumes on grace and tests God do to make things right? _____

Tuesday

One of the more interesting things about the second temptation recorded by Matthew is that there was an unbiblical but popular Jewish tradition, a midrash, claiming that the Messiah would first appear and declare Himself to Israel by descending from the pinnacle of the temple. If Jesus had done this, then undoubtedly many throughout the country would have immediately proclaimed Him the Messiah and His whole work of redemption would have been short-circuited.

Jesus refuses to perform an act simply to draw this kind of vain-glory to Himself, and this shows us a fifth key to overcoming temptation:

5. Avoid seeking the praise of men, personal recognition and self-exaltation (v. 7). If the praise of men, recognition and self-exaltation are the motivations behind an action you are about to take or a sentence that is about to come out of your mouth, then I can guarantee you that what you are about to say or do will be sin, springing from a heart of vanity and pride. If you want to live for praise, live for the praise of God, to praise Him and to bring Him praise. If you want to live for recognition, live for the recognition of God. And if you are to ever be exalted, let it be

God that does the exalting and not yourself. We all know how petty and how common it is for people to gear conversations towards bringing themselves praising and scratching the itch of their own ego. Christians should be on their guard against it.

Do you find yourself battling against the desire to be exalted and to have the praise of men? If not, are you human? What can we do to guard against this desire? How can we wage war against it in our hearts? _____

How can the Scripture help us out here? Be specific? _____

A sixth key to overcoming temptation is this: **6. Be diligent in your study and application of Scripture (vv. 6-7).** This goes beyond simply memorization, which we discussed last week.

Satan, as you can see, quoted Scripture in an effort to tempt Christ to evil. But the Lord knew a few things about the Bible, all of which are clear from His response. First of all, He knew that you don't take Scripture out of context. Second, He knew that you don't read portions of Scripture in isolation from other passages of Scripture, but that you read it as a whole, interpret it as a whole, one text in light of other texts. Third, the Lord apparently knew that you have to understand Scripture well enough to know when someone is misusing it. To do that you have to be a student, a diligent student of the word of God. Satan's misuse of Scripture here was on a point of application as I said yesterday. It takes a careful and discerning student to recognize something like that.

You, in your lifetime, have probably heard people try to use Scripture in all sorts of ways to justify things that are in fact sinful. How many husbands, for example, have used Eph. 5:22, "Wives, submit to your own husbands..." as an excuse to have lousy attitudes, lord it over them, and be otherwise unloving rather than living as Christlike, self-sacrificing servant leaders.

I've heard people twist Scripture to justify not going to church, something that God clearly commands them to do multiple places in the Bible. I've heard people use Scripture to justify not tithing or bringing any offerings to God, though He commands these things very specifically. I've heard a woman use Scripture to justify divorcing a faithful husband, though she admitted that he had been faithful, attentive, loving, never cheated or done even the least thing to harm her. She left him for an abusive unbeliever (talk about trading down). I've heard people very close to me use Scripture to justify lying, though God is clear that He is the God of all truth, hates all lies and does not allow for them under any circumstance. (Rahab, incidentally was blessed and saved because of her "faith," and not because of her lie. Scripture says this very specifically.) I've heard people use Scripture to justify abortion and all manner of sin.

Do you think that Satan, demons, sinners, and yes even your own deceitful hearts are above enticing you into evil by twisting Scripture? If you do, you're wrong. Being diligent in your study of the word is a powerful key to guarding your heart and overcoming temptation.

All of us should be regularly reading the Bible, but we should also be doing a regular more in depth personal study of God's word. Hopefully these Sunday School lessons will be a part of that, but how else can you make this happen in your schedule? _____

Are there certain portions of Scripture that you have a strong desire to study in greater depth? What are they and why? _____

What kind of things can you use to help you in the task? _____

Wednesday

We come today to the third and final temptation of Christ recorded in Matthew chapter 4. Satan offers the Lord the rule of all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, if He would only fall down and worship Him. Satan, of course, has these things to give. The temptation was not a bluff. He is the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31, 14:30) and the "god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4) and has been since the fall of man in the garden. His rule under the superintending providence of God, however, is temporary. Though, he was certainly seeking to make it permanent in this temptation.

Satan offers the Lord Jesus what He was already on the way to getting back through His blood sacrifice on the cross. Jesus was already on His way to redeeming the world and to paying the price that He might take the scroll, the title deed to the earth, as we see in Revelation 5. He was already on His way to doing what was needed, that He might sit on the throne as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords reigning over all the nations, all the redeemed peoples, that He would buy out of sin, slavery, grief, judgment and despair with His own blood.

Satan offers the Lord Jesus a short cut. He says, in effect, "Skip the cross; skip the suffering; go right to the end; go straight to the second coming; take back the world right now. There's just one requirement. Worship me." Satan always suggests to us that the world of business, the world of politics, the world of reputation, the world of money, the world of possessions, or the world of whatever our heart desires can be ours . . . if only. All we have to do to get these things is to go after them in the way of the world, to set aside God and prostitute ourselves to a

false god. And when we set our hearts on money, prestige, popularity, power, easy selfish happiness, or some other idol, then we are doing exactly what Satan wanted Jesus to do: putting the false god, self, first and the true God last. Here we see the seventh key to overcoming temptation:

7. Avoid the wrong means to the right end (v. 10). We have a special word for using the wrong means to achieve a right end. It's called "compromise," and we deal with it all the time. We want peace in our home, so we fail to discipline our children in their sin. We want security for the family, so we follow the boss' unethical business practices. Lawyers want to win a just case, so they cheat on discovery. Pastors want unity in their churches, so they water down the truth of God's word, and they don't preach certain subjects. We want to have close friends, so we don't confront them at the point of their deepest need. "Jesus," Satan says, "You can have the world right now, justice and peace and a glorious reign. It just requires a brief little compromise on your part: bow down and worship me."

Is it wrong to want peace in your home? Is it wrong to want security, to see justice done, or to desire unity in your church? Is it wrong to desire close friends? No. All of these are worthy and scriptural desires. Is it wrong for Christ to possess the nations of the world and all their glory? Absolutely not. He already has them in one sense now and will have them to the full when He returns. He will rule and reign in precisely the way Satan tempted Him to do immediately, and it is perfectly right that He should as our God and King. But, what is completely wrong is achieving these wonderful and right ends in the wrong way, through sin.

What do you think of the phrase, "The ends justify the means"? What would Jesus say about that? _____

Was there a time when you were seriously tempted to compromise to achieve what you felt was a good end? How did you respond? _____

The eighth key to overcoming temptation is this: **8. Know that you cannot receive from Satan what God has promised (vv. 9-10).** It is a lie. The blind in this temptation was not that Satan could give Christ the rule of the nations and their glory. The blind was that it would ever be worth having on those terms. The world would not be a paradise, because a lie would have now been at the center of the universe rather than a truth. Christ would have received the world, but it would have been a world with the sin problem unresolved. It would have been a blight and a misery forever. Satan promises joy, but he delivers death.

Beloved, hear me. The only one, who will ever give you the true joy and happiness that you

desire in your life, is God alone. Proverbs 5:3-5, “For the lips of an immoral woman **drip honey**, and her mouth is **smoother than oil**; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two edged sword. Her feet go down to death, her steps lay hold of hell” (emphasis added). Sin and temptation promise joy, but it is an empty promise. At best they deliver a temporary superficial satisfaction with grief and shame and misery and finally death to follow.

We need to go after the real stuff. We need to be like Abraham and set our hearts on a heavenly country and a heavenly city. Why should we settle for the cheap substitute that temptation offers? Why should we settle for the brief yet ultimately disappointing pleasures that sin produces? Why should we settle for what will only hurt us in the end? By God’s grace we can have the peace that passes understanding; why should we settle for foam-on-top-of-the beer junk that will soon pass away?

Thursday

We come today to the last two keys to overcoming temptation seen in Matthew 4:1-11. The ninth key is this:

9. Resist temptation immediately (v. 10). Satan tempts the Lord to worship him. The Lord Jesus immediately responds, “Away with you Satan!” From the verb tenses discussed last week in Mark’s and Luke’s parallel account, we conclude that for forty days and nights the Lord endured this wicked tormentor, responding immediately every time to what probably amounted to hundreds of temptations. Satan finally comes to the ultimate issue: “Take the glory that is due to God alone and give it to the creature” (Rom. 1:21-23). “Commit the sin of the first Adam,” he says. “Commit the sin of all his progeny.”

Finally the Father gives the Son leave. He has fulfilled the requirement. He has passed the initial testing and shown Himself to truly be the spotless Lamb of God. It is enough. The Son knows it. He has fulfilled the Father’s will at this time. The Father gives Him leave to exercise His rightful authority and instantly the Lord Jesus dismisses Satan like the vile dog he is.

We learn from the Lord’s response here and from His responses to the other temptations that we should resist it immediately. The Lord didn’t have to sit around and think about it. He didn’t have to say, “Well, Satan, that’s a very interesting offer. Let me take some time to consider it.” No, not at all. Don’t treat the temptation like some dirty magazine, setting it aside and saying, “I’ll decide later, if I’m going to look.” You’ve probably already lost at that point, because you’ve already started to compromise. Resist it immediately just like Jesus did. He did not hesitate. He immediately said, “Away with you Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve.’”

Do you hesitate in the face of temptation? Does that make it easier or harder to overcome? _____
_____ What makes us hesitate? _____

How can you become stronger and better able to recognize and resist temptation immediately?

A final and crucial key we see in this text to overcoming temptation is:

10. Face suffering and embrace hardship for the glory of God (v. 10). We see also in the last temptation that the Lord Jesus would not allow the prospect of suffering to tempt Him into disobeying God.

Much sin is entered into, beloved, because people are afraid of suffering. For example, children and adults lie to avoid the consequences of telling the truth. And yet, even in that case the sin at best provides a delay in owning up to the truth. Perhaps you will fool a person, but you will have to account for your every word before God. It is far better to confess to God, commit yourself to Him, and confess to others and face the heartache. Why? Because then God will help you to stand and He will see you through.

Many Jews and Islamic people never confess Christ out of fear of suffering and hardship at the hands of their families. But these “light and momentary afflictions” are as nothing compared to the joy of God’s glory.

Beloved, Jesus chose suffering and hardship over sin, and it proved amazingly glorious later. If you have to face suffering because you obey God and don’t give in to temptation, then it will also be glorious for you later. But if you sinfully avoid suffering and hardship, then it is only a delay, because shame will come later rather than glory. Embrace hardship for the sake of God, and it will work out in the end.

Are you ready to embrace hardship and suffering in your fight to overcome temptation and sin? Hebrews 12:3-4 says, “For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.”

Paul’s says in those verses that the Hebrews had not yet fought against sin to the point that their blood had been spilled; and I think we could almost all of us could agree with that. But his point is, Beloved, that it would be perfectly reasonable and right for them to do so. If the fight against sin and temptation requires it, then amen, so let it be. Don’t become “weary and discouraged” in your souls. Rather, “consider Him who endured such hostility” on your behalf and didn’t hesitate to shed His own blood for you.

Friday

We have these last two weeks in Matthew 4:1-11 seen 10 keys to overcoming temptation in our lives:

- 1. Exalt the spiritual over the physical (v. 4).**
- 2. Trust in God over self (v. 4).**
- 3. Know the word of God and write it on your heart (vv. 4, 7, 10).**
- 4. Avoid presuming on the grace of God and others (v. 7).**
- 5. Avoid seeking the praise of men, personal recognition and self-exaltation (v. 7).**
- 6. Be diligent in your study and application of Scripture (vv. 6-7).**
- 7. Avoid the wrong means to the right end (v. 10).**
- 8. Know that you cannot receive from Satan what God has promised (vv. 9-10).**
- 9. Resist temptation immediately (vv. 4, 7, 10).**
- 10. Face suffering and endure hardship for the glory of God (v. 10).**

I ask you to spend some time today prayerfully considering these 10 principles. Consider honestly, in the privacy of your own heart, how you are in fact doing in your struggle against temptation and sin. Where are you weak? Which of the above areas are you falling down in?

I honestly believe, beloved, that if we will take the example the Lord gives and earnestly pursue it in our own lives, we will become a joyful, spiritually fruitful and powerful people. These principles will guard us and greatly help us in the struggle to overcome temptation. Times of refreshing will flood our souls and we will joyfully draw ever closer to God through His Spirit.

The problem in our lives is not with the solution. It is not with the word of God or the example of Christ recorded for us. The problem, beloved, is that we have yet to faithfully implement the solution. We have yet to faithfully live in the way He has shown.

Would you be an overcomer? We have ten keys from this passage. Let us take them and prayerfully implement them. Let us call upon Him and ask for His grace to make us strong in the fight against sin, that we may present ourselves to Him as being alive from the dead, and our members as instruments of righteousness to God (Rom. 6:13).