

Jesus Overcame Temptation for You

I. He replaced doubt with certainty (vs3,4)

II. Instead of testing God, he trusted him (vs5-7)

III. He denied self-veneration for adoration of the Father (vs8,9)

*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” ⁴ Jesus answered, “**It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’**” ⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “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 answered him, “**It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’**” ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “**Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’**” ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.*

Last Wednesday, in the early morning hours, tornados ripped through Arkansas, Tennessee and Kentucky taking nearly 50 lives, destroying farms, homes and vehicles, tearing up trees and knocking down power lines. Dormitories on the campus of a university in Tennessee were ripped apart and thankfully no one was killed. A student of that campus was interviewed. She was in her dorm room when the tornado destroyed it. She recalled that she and her friends heard something that sounded like a loud train, and when the room began to shake they ran into the bathroom and piled into the bathtub. She said they could feel the suction of the tornado pulling at them. They scared for their lives and prayed to God to save them. This student said that at that moment she thought they were all going to die. I can't imagine the emotional trauma those young adults must be experiencing. As I pondered this story, I couldn't help but think, “What if this had happened to me and my household? How would my children overcome that terrifying experience?” Then I had to stop and fold my hands and thank the Lord that he kept his protecting hand over us.

As I studied this text from Matthew 4:1-11 this week I couldn't help but see a connection between overcoming a horrific experience and being overcome by temptation. While we live in this world as Christians our actions, words and thoughts reflect our thankfulness to our Savior for his gift of forgiveness and eternal life. The devil knows this and tries his hardest, especially with us Christians, to sway us to walk another path. Unfortunately, many times he is successful. It bothers us that so many times we fall for the devil's temptations, because we knew better, we tried so hard, and despite our best efforts we failed. At times when we reflect on how we continue to step into the devil's snare over and over again, it's hard to overcome our constant failure. It's frustrating. It takes a toll on our emotions and our souls. How do you overcome this trauma to your heart and mind?

Look at your Savior in this story from Matthew 4. Jesus had just been baptized by John in the Jordan River. We heard his Father approve him as worthy to carry out his plan to save humanity from sin, from death and the devil. He first made this plan public to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. There, in Paradise, Satan succeeded in felling the first Adam, who was perfect and holy. Because of his sin, the whole world became infected. Now that ancient serpent will attack the second Adam, Jesus, to frustrate his work to save humanity from sin. As we see the devil try to rob the world of its Redeemer, we can take comfort and see that the devil does not succeed. God's Word tells us, “**The very reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.**” (1John 3:8) So listen as Jesus overcomes temptation for you.

I. He replaced doubt with certainty (vs3,4) Matthew takes us into the wilderness with Jesus immediately after his baptism. He tells us that the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert for the sole purpose of being tempted by the devil. This shows us what kind of Messiah we have; one who is completely obedient and willing to be subjected to testing to show that he is the true Israelite in whom there is no sin. Scripture only records three specific temptations at the end of the 40 days and 40 nights Jesus spent fasting in the desert.

In the first temptation we see Satan up to his old tricks. In the Garden of Eden he used food to con Adam and Eve. He does the same here. In the Garden cast doubt, “Did God really say you can’t eat from any tree?” Here he questions, “Are you really the Son of God? Prove it to me. I know you’re very hungry. Wouldn’t some nice, freshly baked bread sound good right now? You have the power, don’t you? You’re the one who fed your people Israel with bread in a desert for 40 years. Surely you can perform this simple feat.” The devil always makes his temptations look attractive. Bread would sound good after fasting for 40 days. Jesus was hungry and at a point of least resistance. But the real temptation for Jesus wasn’t to give in and satisfy his hunger, it was to use his powers for selfish reasons rather than to put confidence in the certainty of his Father’s Word.

Satan still uses this ploy with you and me. He asks us to doubt God’s Word and to rely on our own intuition and reasoning. He whispers in your ear, “Did God really say? Did God really say you shouldn’t lie? Did he really say that a child or teenager should actually listen to their parents? Did he really say you should speak to other adults with respect? Did God really say that sex is a gift for a man and woman in marriage? Did he really say that you should pay taxes? Couldn’t you just forget to file some of your income this year? The government won’t notice it. Did he really say you should forgive one another?” How many times do we doubt what our God says and listen to Satan’s lies? One too many...

How did Jesus overcome this temptation for you? He said, “Yes, actually, I am the Son of God. And no, I don’t need to use my powers to provide for myself. My Father will supply my every need. He’s promised it in his Word. I don’t live on bread alone, but also, and most importantly, His Word is what I eat. That’s what sustains me.” Instead of doubting that his Father wouldn’t provide for him, Jesus placed his confidence in the certainty of his Father’s Word. The Father kept his promise. He sent an angel to strengthen Jesus after Satan left. The Word was the true bread that sustained Jesus.

Your true bread comes from the mouth of God. His Word gives you eternal life, gives you guidance and the only source of strength to live. Ordinary bread can’t do that, even if it does say *Wonder* on the package. And notice that Jesus says that we will live on *every word of God*, not just the ones we choose to listen to. So when Satan questions, “Did God really say?” You can confidently answer back, “Yes, actually, God did say.” I will, therefore, respect God’s gift of marriage, despite what society says. I will forgive. I will obey my parents and respect other adults. I will report my taxes honestly. When Satan comes to tempt you, do not doubt God’s Word. Place your confidence in the certainty of his Word.

II. Instead of testing God, he trusted him (vs5-7) In the second temptation the devil takes our Lord to Jerusalem. Remember, that in Jesus’ day, the roofs of buildings were flat. The pair stands on the highest part of the roof of the temple. Here Satan pulls out another one of his old tricks. He quotes Scripture. But he uses for evil purposes. He says to our Savior, “So you rely on God’s Word as your bread, do you? Well, then throw yourself off the roof for God has promised in his Word that he will send his angels to rescue you.” Satan was trying to instill false trust. “If you don’t do this, you’re not trusting God’s promise.” Satan wanted him to test God’s promise.

That would be like a soldier walking into an insurgent stronghold with no weapon and no body armor and praying that he will walk out unscathed. Or like a man walking down the middle of 31W at five in the

afternoon and expecting God will keep him from getting hit by rush hour traffic. You and I wouldn't be so foolish as to test God's promises in this way. But we do test God in other ways.

In Malachi 3 the LORD brought an accusation against the leaders of the people of Israel. They had been skimping on their church offerings. God said to them, "**Bring a generous offering to the temple and see if I don't throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.**" (Malachi 3:10) Don't we do the same, when we hold back with our offerings and think, "If I'm generous with God, how will I provide for my family?" Or when we hold back with our time and talents and think, "If I volunteer for something at church how will I ever get things done at home?" We test God when we don't trust that he will take care of us.

How did Jesus overcome this temptation? He always put his full trust in his Father's promises. When he went to the cross to die for your sins, he did not think, "Well, here I go, Father. I sure hope you're right about this." No. We see complete trust in his Father when he breathed his last breath, "Into your hands I commend my spirit." He entrusted his soul to his Father's care. He knew his death would secure salvation for all people. He knew his Father would not abandon him to the grave. He trusted his Father to take care of him, even in death.

You too will trust your Father's promises. One of those promises is, "**I have plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.**" (Jer 29:11) If this is true, should we expect our good and gracious Father to bless our congregation with the gifts we need to support our congregation and to build a new facility? Yes. If this is true, should we expect that the Holy Spirit will bring more souls to our congregation who need to hear the Word of God? Yes. But...this doesn't mean we that we sit on our purses and wallets. This does not mean that we sit on our feet. God also promises us to be generous with him and he will be generous toward us. He tells us, "**Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.**" (Mark 16:15) He also says, "How can they know about my word if someone isn't sent to tell them about it?" (Rom 10:14,15) Trust his promises that he will bless our work. We still need to get off our butts and do that work. Don't test God. Trust his promises.

III. He denied self-veneration for adoration of the Father (vs8,9) Finally, the devil takes Jesus to a high mountain and shows him all the kingdoms of the world with all their glory. "**All this I will give to you if you will bow down and worship me.**" We might think, "This is a no-brainer. Jesus isn't going to worship Satan!" But this was a very real temptation for Jesus. Remember where Jesus came from. He had left his kingdom on high, the King of kings and Lord of lords, to come to earth and take the form of a lowly servant. Jesus had also given up the full use of his divine power. How great it would have been for Jesus to use his power to destroy the armies of Rome and free his people Israel from oppression. The people would love him! The Pharisees and teachers of the law would believe in him. Satan gave Jesus other opportunities to give in to selfish power during his ministry. On one occasion a crowd of people wanted to make Jesus king. Satan didn't want Jesus to worship him. Satan wanted Jesus to worship himself, to take glory away from his Father.

The devil is so good with this tactic today. He doesn't place the kingdoms of the world at your feet. He puts our hobbies and recreation, our animals, our yard work, our sleep, television and video games, time and money and says, "Worship these." How often do we fall for this one? Every day. Too often I place a higher priority on me than on God and his Word and his worship.

Jesus overcame this temptation for you, once again, by using the same tool you have to fight Satan's temptations; the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. Jesus said, "**It is written, 'Worship the LORD your God and serve him only.'**" Jesus didn't just say these words. He lived them. Throughout his ministry Jesus often said that his glory meant nothing and that all he wanted to do was to give glory to his Father. And to give glory to his Father he did everything his Father asked him to do. The Father demanded that the whole human race live everyday without sin, to never fall into temptation. Jesus gave glory to his Father without giving into temptation once. He overcame Satan, sin and death, all for you.

So when Satan spreads before you possessions, time, money, you can give glory to your Lord Jesus instead of yourself and say, "No. These are God's possessions, his time and his money, and I will glorify him by managing them to the best of my ability." Glorify your Father and his Son Jesus with every task that he gives you.

Dear friends, this is the season of Lent. Lent is a time of self-reflection and repentance. It's easy to see that Satan is still very active among us Christians. We fall for his temptations so many times. But today we have seen that where we fail, Jesus succeeded. He overcame temptation for you. So when you see the dark clouds of temptation descend on you, when you feel the swirling winds of temptation, when you are depressed because Satan sucked you up away from your walk with Jesus, then look to Jesus. Turn to him for forgiveness. And when Satan comes, with Jesus' power say, "Go away Satan!" And he will. But remember: he'll be back. Peter reminds us that he is a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1Peter 5:8) When he does return, look to Christ, who was tempted in every way, just as you are, yet he was without sin. (Heb 4:15) Ask him to help in time of need. He will provide a way out. (1Cor 10:13) He's promised it. Today and everyday, look to Christ, who overcame temptation for you. Amen.