

Tempted, Tried & Victorious
 Matthew 4:1-11, 28:1-10
 Michael Felkins
 Grand Avenue Baptist Church
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“He is risen!” This morning we celebrate the victory that our Savior achieved in His resurrection from the dead. And the amazing news is that His victory is our victory. His ultimate victory is seen in the single act of His resurrection from the dead.

Leading up to the pinnacle of His victory are key victories that culminate in His rising from the dead on the third day. All along the journey of His life, Jesus won victory after victory in what we might call battles for what it meant for Him to be the Son of God.

Last Sunday in Matthew 3:13-17, we examined Jesus’ baptism and how, at His baptism, He submitted to the Father’s plan for Him to fulfill all righteousness; the Spirit descended like a dove, and the Father spoke saying, “This is My Son, with whom I am well-pleased.”

Jesus didn’t begin His ministry in a synagogue or at the temple but in the wilderness. In the wilderness, the enemy, Satan, tempted Him to sin. He wanted to destroy Jesus and His mission to save sinners by dying on the cross and rising from the dead for them. But, as we will see, Satan would not win this battle nor any other battle in Jesus’ life.

Jesus is the True Son of God who defeated Satan in the wilderness, in the Garden of Gethsemane, on the cross, and death itself. Jesus proved He was the Son of God when He rose victoriously from the dead on the third day.

Here is what we are going to do this morning. We are going to examine Jesus’ temptations in the wilderness and see how this victory led to His victory in the Garden of Gethsemane and culminated in His victory on the cross and resurrection from the dead. At every turn in His life, Jesus defeated Satan’s attempts to destroy His mission to save His people. It is in these victories that we find hope of victory in our temptations to sin.

Here is the main point: I can have victory over temptation because of Jesus’ resurrection.

I. The Spirit doesn’t leave God’s children when they are tempted (v. 1)

Look at v. 1:

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

What Matthew is doing in v. 1 and in his whole Gospel is to continue to teach us that Jesus is the True Son of God. Here is what I mean. After Jesus passes through the water of baptism, He goes into the wilderness for forty days to be tempted by the enemy.

Now, remember what Israel did when they were delivered from Egypt? They passed through the water of the Red Sea and then went into the wilderness. They were in the wilderness for 40 years because they disobeyed God not long after their deliverance. Now, Jesus, the True Son of God, passes through the water and goes into the wilderness, but Jesus will succeed where Israel failed.

But let's rewind even further back in Israel's history. Let's go all the way back to creation in the Garden of Eden. In the Garden, we see the First Adam was tempted by Satan, and he failed. Now where the First Adam failed in the Garden of Eden, Jesus, the Second Adam, will succeed in the Garden of Gethsemane. One commentator said:

The first Adam was in a beautiful garden. The last Adam was in a barren, forsaken desert. The first Adam ate freely of things except for one forbidden fruit. The last Adam ate nothing for forty days. The first Adam was physically strong. The last Adam was on the verge of death. The first Adam blew it. He was the ultimate "Adam Bomb." He gave in to the temptation of Satan and thereby plunged all of humanity into a lost and hopeless situation. The last Adam, Jesus Christ, did not bomb out. He came through, and in so doing, He reveals to us who He is, the One who conquered sin.¹

Jesus succeeded where Adam and Israel failed. Now, do not conclude that Jesus was Plan C; he was not. Jesus' success was to prove that only God in Christ and by His Spirit could save His people. Here is the deal, Jesus had to walk the same path that those before Him walked and yet never sin in order to save His people by ultimately dying on the cross for their sin. At the core of Satan's temptation of Jesus is to get Him to take a bloodless path to glory. Satan wants Jesus to abandon His mission of suffering in order to save His people, but the truth is that is the only way. The True Son of God must suffer, die and rise from the dead in order to save His people.

In v. 1, Matthew says it was the Spirit that led Him into the wilderness. The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted for two reasons. One is to reveal that He is the True Son of God. The second reason is that Jesus could relate to sinners who struggle with temptation. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way in Hebrews 2:17-18 and 4:15:

Therefore, he had to be like his brothers and sisters in every way so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in matters pertaining to God to make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸For since he himself has suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted . . . ^[4:15] For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin.

This is amazing news for us! It means no matter what sin we struggle with and what temptation constantly attacks us, Jesus is a merciful High Priest who effectively prays for us. He feels sympathy for us as we struggle. He is not shocked by our sin because, according to Hebrews 4:15, He has been tempted in every way we have, except He never sinned.

So, as our compassionate High Priest, Jesus, says to us,

¹ Jon Courson, *Jon Courson's Application Commentary*, 21.

“I understand why you struggle. I understand why you are so anxious or critical or lustful or cynical or hateful or unforgiving or vengeful or lazy.”

Jesus understands because He was tempted at every point, yet He never sinned. He doesn't blow off our sin and say, “I understand, and it's okay to sin.” No! He became like us so that He could relate to us, help us, and strengthen us in our time of need so that we can defeat our sin.

So, just as the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, He remained close to Him. He never left Him. Now, on this side of the resurrection of our Great High Priest, Jesus never leaves us. He is with us by His Holy Spirit, and He is our Advocate and Intercessor for us before God.

Friends, the Spirit of Jesus is near us and with us in our struggle with sin. Let's call on our Savior to help us in our moment of need.

Remember our main point: I can have victory over temptation because of Jesus' resurrection.

II. Temptation to sin comes at our weakest moments (Matt. 4:2)

Look in v. 2:

After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

Jesus started off His wilderness temptations physically weakened by a forty-day fast. Hunger will make us not only make us physically weak, but it will weaken us morally and spiritually.

On the other hand, when we are tired, hungry, or sick, we become less alert to the spiritual danger in front of us. We are vulnerable when we are weak. It causes our resistance to be low. Yet, Jesus never waived in His battle against temptation to sin, and so He will help able strengthen us in our struggle.

Remember our main point: I can have victory over temptation because of Jesus' resurrection.

III. The temptation to doubt God's presence and provision (vv. 3-4).

Here is what we need to keep in mind as we examine Jesus' temptation. His temptations are unique, and yet they are universal. Jesus' temptations are unique to Him and His role as the Son of God, and yet, as categories of temptations, they are universal temptations for all of us.

Let's look at Jesus' first temptation in v. 3:

Then the tempter approached him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

It is believed that in the wilderness where Jesus was tempted, there were millions of small white limestone rocks that resembled little loaves of bread. So, when the Tempter came to Jesus, He didn't have to stretch Jesus' imagination very much when he told Him to turn the stones into bread. They already looked like bread.

While Jesus was weak and hungry, Satan seized the opportunity to question who Jesus was as the Son of God and question the Father's provision for His Son when he said,

“If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

Satan was trying to sow seeds of doubt about His Father's love, protection, and provision in Jesus' heart. He wanted Him to turn away from the Father because He was allowing Him to suffer, although He was His only Son.

In Psalm 2, God promised that Jesus would be King. Yet, Satan was trying to get Jesus to assert His authority now. If he could get Jesus to believe God was not caring for Him, perhaps Jesus would take a shortcut to the throne. Satan's plan was to get Jesus to bypass Gethsemane and Golgotha so He could not be able to save God's people from their sin.

It was like Satan was saying:

If You are the Son of God, the beloved of God, then why are You out here in the wilderness starving? You desire food, so make Yourself some food. After all, You are God's Son. Look, Jesus, God is holding out on You. His plan is not a good one. He is not even providing for You in this moment. He does not love You. He is not with You. You should just satisfy Your desire for food now and be done with it.²

Friends, this will not be the last time Satan would question Jesus' Sonship. He did all he could to get Him to grab the crown without going to the cross.

Look at how Jesus responded to Satan's temptation in v. 4:

"It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Jesus was not fooled. He was well acquainted with the version of this temptation. Adam and Eve fell for it in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 3:4-5, Adam and Eve bought the lie:

But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

In other words, Satan was implying to Adam and Eve,

God is not being good to you. He is actually holding out on you. If He loved you, He would not be withholding the fruit of this tree from you.

In the same way, Israel flunked the same test in Exodus 16:3. When the people of Israel were traveling in the wilderness, they became hungry, grumbled, and complained against God and Moses.

The Israelites said to [Moses & Aaron], "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in the land of Egypt when we sat by pots of meat and ate all the bread we wanted. Instead, you brought us into this wilderness to make this whole assembly die of hunger!"

Israel doubted God's plan, presence, and provision. Even after He had delivered them from slavery in Egypt by parting the Red Sea, they grumbled and complained against God. Their complaint was absurd.

So, Moses went to the Lord and made his request, and the Lord made manna from heaven rain down and gave them quail to eat. Their failure was that they didn't trust God to provide, nor were they humble in their request for food.

² Adapted from a quote by David Platt in *Christ-Centered Exposition: Matthew*, 69.

You see, it is not that they could not request what they needed. It is okay to ask God for what you need, but the spirit of your request reveals what is in your heart. It was how they requested food. They doubted God's goodness, kindness, and mercy, and so they complained and grumbled against the LORD God.

But here is the good news—Jesus didn't fall for it. Jesus knew the word of God, and so when He fought this temptation, He went to the word for strength. He quoted Deuteronomy 8:3. I want to read it to you in its context so you hear how He succeeded where Israel failed.

[The LORD] humbled you by letting you go hungry; then he gave you manna to eat, which you and your ancestors had not known so that you might learn that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

Jesus was letting Satan know that He had food that he did not know about, and that was the promise of God's presence and provision. Jesus humbled Himself and trusted God's plan and provision. He was not going to do an end-run around His suffering in order to satisfy His immediate craving.

Friends, the temptation of self-gratification for Jesus was unique to Him. You'll never be tempted to turn stones into bread; however, you will be tempted to doubt God's plan, presence, and provision. Have you ever been there? Have you ever been suffering for so long that you begin to waver in your trust in God's plan, presence, and provision for you? I am ashamed to say that I have. Friends, at some point in your life, you will be tempted to fulfill your own selfish desires. This temptation is universal to us all.

We have desires and needs that are God-given, and most often, they are good. **HERE IS THE WARNING FOR US!** The realm of our desires is where the enemy works on our hearts and minds. He is able to take a good desire and twist it into a wicked, sinful desire. Just think of our basic desires for food, drink, sleep, sex, and the desire to be liked and loved.

The enemy is able to take our need for food and turn it into gluttony. He is able to take our need for sleep and turn it into sloth. He is able to take our desire for sex and turn it into lust, pornography, adultery, homosexuality, and transgenderism. Satan is a liar, and He will lie to us to make us believe that God is holding out on us or that God made a mistake and His plan is not good. He wants us to believe God is not providing for us and that He will not meet our needs. Then Satan tempts us to fill those cravings with our own sinful plans and provisions.

Pastor David Platt has a great observation of this text. He says our Enemy is so skilled at attacking us where we are most weak that many followers of Christ believe their sinful desires define who they are. Platt goes on to say that as a Christian, you are a child of God, and just because you are a child of God does not mean you will never have sinful desires.

What it does mean is that, as Christians, we are called to fight temptation. We are called to trust God in the fight. Some of us will fight the temptation to some sins for 40 days, but some of us may fight the temptation to sin for 40 years. For some of us, our fight with some sins will last a lifetime. It does not mean God is not with us. On the other hand, it means He is even closer to us. He is our ever-present help in our time of need.

So, how do we fight these temptations? We fight in the same way our Savior did. We go to the word of God. We remember it, believe it and fight sin by believing that God has given us this good

weapon for spiritual warfare. We trust in God and believe that He is good. We fight the thoughts that God is against us or withholding His mercy from us.

We look at Jesus, who on the cross fought sin until it cost Him His life. We hold fast to Him, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, was buried, and then rose victorious from the dead so that He will help us in our time of need.

Remember our main point: I can have victory over temptation because of Jesus' resurrection.

IV. The temptation to test God is the temptation not to trust God (vv. 5-7)

All of these temptations, in some way, seek to undermine Jesus' trust in God. Satan is a liar and a deceiver, and so he often changes his strategy to undermine our trust in God. This is what He did in Jesus' second temptation.

Satan changed tactics, and he took Jesus to the very top of the temple. Then, once again, he questioned whether Jesus really was the Son of God when he said,

“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down.”

This temptation was not cloaked in questioning God's provision. Instead, it was cloaked in questioning God's protection of His Son. Then if that was not enough, Satan went a step further and quoted Psalm 91:11-12. And, of course, he misapplied in order to make his point.

For it is written: He will give his angels orders concerning you, and they will support you with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

All Satan needed Jesus to do was just slip up one time. All He needed Him to do was not trust God's word of affirmation at His baptism, where God said Jesus was His Son and in Him, He is well pleased.

Instead, Satan wanted Jesus to prove He was God's Son by doing something sensational. He tempted Him to throw Himself from the pinnacle of the temple.

But Jesus saw through this deception, and so His reply was short and to the point.

“It is also written: Do not test the Lord your God.”

He quoted Deuteronomy 6:16, which actually was a comment on Exodus 17:1-7 where Israel tested God. Here is the connection.

In Exodus 17:1-17, the people were thirsty. They went to Moses and demanded water to drink. It was not a humble request but a demand as if God owed them. Moses replied in v. 2,

“Why do you test the LORD?”

The people's sin of testing God really meant they were not trusting God's provision and protection in the wilderness. Satan thought Jesus would fall for the same temptation as Israel did, but just to make sure, He misapplied Psalm 91.

Although Jesus was physically weak and in great need of food and water, He was not taken in by this deception. This strikes two for the enemy.

This temptation, like the last, was for Jesus to take a bloodless path to glory. Jesus knew there was no avoiding the suffering of the cross in order to get to the glory of the resurrection to save His people and bring glory to God.

Friends, we must be very careful, for we have an enemy who will come to us in our weakness and in very subtle ways and tempt us to misuse God's word.

Friends, we can use Scripture for righteous or unrighteous causes. When our lives are difficult and we are in great need, we will be tempted to question God's love, God's faithfulness, God's presence, God's provision, and God's protection. Like Israel, we will be tempted to complain against God and about our circumstances and literally think,

"Is God with me? Did you save me only to kill me in this desert? Don't you love me? Can't You see the suffering I am going through?"

Listen to me; Satan will say to you,

"If you are a child of God, why is He causing you to suffer in this way?"

As a Christian, you are a child of God, and you are precious to the Father. He has a purpose and plan for your life. But you do not know all of what His plan entails. Some of that journey will be filled with trials and tribulations. And in those trials and tribulations, God calls you to trust Him and let His glory shine through your simple faith in Jesus.

Friends, Easter reminds us that our Savior is a Man of Sorrow, and He knows our pain. Our Savior's path to glory was not to check out of the suffering but to trust God and let Him hold Him and even carry Him as He walked each step to Golgotha. Then because of His unwavering trust, He was raised from the dead on the third day.

Friends, because Jesus didn't do an end-run around His suffering, that means He will not abandon you in yours.

Remember our main point: I can have victory over temptation because of Jesus' resurrection.

V. The temptation of power or self-exaltation (Matthew 4:8-10)

Let's look at Jesus' third temptation. In vv. 8-10:

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ And he said to him, "I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰ Then Jesus told him, "Go away, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."

Satan has deceptively been throwing shade on God in the first two temptations. Now he removed the mask and revealed himself. He took Jesus to a literal high mountain, or at least in some way, Jesus was able to see the splendor and glory of all of the kingdoms of the world before Him, and Satan offered them to Him if He would worship him.

Why would this even be a temptation to Jesus? It seems like a wasted opportunity by the devil, but it is not. Satan gets to the point here. He straight up offered Jesus a bloodless path to glory: No pain, no suffering, no being crushed by sin in the Garden, no sweating drops of blood, no being arrested, no being mocked, no being humiliated, no going to trial, no being whipped by a cat-o-nine tail, no being stripped naked and nailed to a Roman cross, no spear in the side and no death. Satan was tempting Him to seize God's glory without the pain and suffering of the cross.

But Jesus knew there was no salvation for His people without all of those things. That was why He fixed His eye on God and, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross and scorned its shame. Dr. Russell Moore writes in His book, *Tempted and Tried*,

Jesus refused to exchange the end-time exaltation by the Father for a right-now exaltation of a snake.³

Jesus knew His path to exaltation was through the cross. There was no other plan and no other way. This is why when we come to the Garden of Gethsemane, we hear Jesus, in another moment of physical weakness and suffering and even temptation, come to the Father and humbly ask three times:

“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”⁴

Jesus didn’t give in to the temptation in the Garden of Gethsemane. Instead, He denied Himself and took up His cross, and walked the path set before Him so that in our times of temptation, He can strengthen us. As the writer of Hebrews says:

Let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us,² keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer, and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.⁵

The words, “He . . . sat down at the right hand of the throne of God,” mean that Jesus was raised from the dead and because He was raised from the dead, He helps us when we are tempted or as our main point says: I can have victory over temptation because of Jesus’ resurrection.

We must fix our eyes on Jesus, not on ourselves or on sin. We resist temptations by fixing our eyes on Christ, who was victorious over sin and death. Friends, we have victory over temptation because of Jesus’ resurrection. —He is risen!

³ Russell Moore, *Tempted and Tried*, 131.

⁴ [*Christian Standard Bible*](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Mt 26:39.

⁵ [*Christian Standard Bible*](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Heb 12:1–2.