

JESUS SAYS, “IT IS WRITTEN...”

Matthew 4:1-11

Key Verse: 4:4

“Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”””

In today’s passage, we can see a great battle between Jesus and the devil. It was a fierce engagement physically, mentally and spiritually. Jesus fought this battle as a representative of all human beings. Jesus won the battle with the words of God. The temptation Jesus faced is not just an ancient story. We face the devil’s temptations every day in various ways. We are vulnerable to the devil’s temptation. When we fall into temptation, we are defeated, miserable and slaves of the devil. To live a victorious life, we must overcome temptation. Let’s learn what the devil’s temptations are, and how to overcome them.

First, the meaning of Jesus being tempted (1-2). Verse 1 begins, **“Then.”** This means it was right after Jesus’ inauguration as the Messiah. Jesus received the Father’s words of love and affirmation as the Son of God. It seems that Jesus was ready to start his messianic ministry. But there was something very important that Jesus needed to do first. Verse 1 says, **“Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”** Being led by the Spirit indicates that it was God’s will for Jesus to be tempted by the devil. Why? It was because Jesus had to defeat the devil’s temptation as a representative of mankind where Adam had failed.

In what respect did Adam fail? After God planted the beautiful Garden of Eden for Adam, he commanded, **“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die”** (Gen 2:16-17). God gave Adam nearly unlimited freedom to enjoy God’s blessing. To maintain it, Adam had to obey just one command. It was not an option, or advice, but God’s command, which required absolute obedience as a matter of life and death. This command was given to help Adam live in a right relationship with God. It was God’s expression of love for Adam. But Satan twisted the words of God, ignoring the freedom and blessing God had given and magnifying the one restriction. He planted doubt about God’s love and relativism toward God’s word. The devil said, **“You will not certainly**

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die...For God knows that when you eat of it you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:4-5). When the woman heard the devil’s words, she might have thought, “Wow! This is very encouraging. Your words seem to give me freedom—the key that unlocks my potential.” The devil always whispers, “You don’t need to take God’s word so seriously. It is just one teaching among many. It is not a matter of life and death.” In this way, he persuades us to take God’s word lightly. When Adam was persuaded by the devil, he failed. At the root of his failure was a relativistic attitude toward the word of God. This is pride, thinking that his idea was better than God’s idea. What happened? Just as God had said, Adam was sentenced to death. This death was not just physical, but also spiritual—eternal condemnation. He was cast out of paradise to live in a cursed world full of pain and suffering.

Why did Adam’s failure become such a serious matter to us? It was because as the first human being, Adam represented all human beings. Romans 5:12 says, “**Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned....**” This is the “principle of representative.” We find this in many ways. For example, in the U.S. House of Representatives, each Congressman represents his entire district. The point is Adam represented all people; his failure became the failure of all mankind.

Just as Adam was a representative, so Jesus is a representative of all mankind (Ro 5:14). St. Paul refers to Jesus as the “**last Adam**” (1Co 15:45). Though both are representatives, in terms of their actions and the results, they are very different. The first Adam disobeyed God and brought condemnation and death to all mankind. The last Adam obeyed God and brought justification and life to all mankind (Ro 5:15-17). Also, the conditions of their temptations were not the same. The first Adam was in a beautiful paradise, with abundant provisions. The last Adam, Jesus, was in the wilderness after fasting forty days and forty nights, and he was hungry (2). It was not easy for Jesus to overcome the devil’s temptations. However, to become the Savior of all people, Jesus had to confront the devil and defeat the temptations in our place. This is why God sent Jesus into the wilderness.

Second, Jesus defeated temptations (3-11). Jesus was tempted by the devil through three things: bread—which is related to our need for security and can also be compared to money, fame and glory—which is related to our need for

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honor, and to worship the devil, which is idolatry, and related to our deep need to worship. We all experience these temptations in our daily lives. Let's think about each of them.

The first temptation (3-4). After fasting for forty days and forty nights, Jesus was extremely hungry. When we are hungry, we think about food more and more; soon everything begins to look like food. One person, after fasting for three days, went outside and saw the snow. It looked like bread. Maybe to Jesus all the stones in the desert began to look like bread. At this moment, the tempter came to him and said, **“If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread”** (3). The devil provoked Jesus to use his power as the Son of God to solve the bread problem. The reality of genuine hunger is a serious problem to many human beings. For most of us Americans, this is hard to understand. But around the world people die of starvation every day. This was the case in Jesus' time as well. After experiencing extreme hunger in his body, and thinking of all the hungry people, Jesus might have been tempted to solve this problem as a priority. The economic problem always seems very serious. But if we pay full attention to this problem, we will go astray from God. We will become like Esau, who exchanged his birthright for a bowl of stew (Gen 25:32-34). This is why some students are too busy for Bible study, some professionals are slaves to their boss, and many women will do anything to marry a rich man.

How did Jesus respond? Let's read verse 4. **“Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.””**” Jesus did not deny that man needs bread. We need bread. Jesus taught us to ask for **“our daily bread”** in the Lord's prayer. We should study hard, get a good job and make enough money. But Jesus emphasized that man needs more than bread. Man is made in the image of God with a soul or spirit. The real essence of a man is spiritual life that is nurtured and maintained only by the word of God. Man's nobility and greatness comes from the spirit within. If man loses this spirit, he loses everything. Once, when people were hungry, Jesus fed them with five loaves and two fish out of his great compassion. When they saw this sign, they tried to make him king by force. They thought if Jesus became king, their bread problem would be solved and they would live happily ever after. They lost spiritual desire and were only interested in eating. Jesus said, **“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life”** (Jn 6:27).

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Also, Jesus said, **“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life”** (Jn 6:63).

Jesus’ words in verse 4 are a direct quote from Deuteronomy 8:3, which says, **“He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna...to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”** When the Israelites traveled through the desert, it was hard to find food and water. God provided manna—food from heaven—for them, not monthly or weekly, but daily. They had to get up early and gather just one day’s portion every day. God trained them to humbly depend on him alone. He wanted them to know that the source of their lives is God. We need to acknowledge God, depend on God and thank God moment by moment. Sometimes we think that we need God for spiritual life, but we can earn bread by ourselves. But if God does not give us strength and wisdom, we cannot earn our daily bread. In truth, everything comes from God (Dt 8:18). In every situation or circumstance we need to listen to God and depend on God. Then we can be happy and our lives are meaningful and fruitful.

Recently, we heard through M. Daniel Yang how God is working in Rwanda. Rwanda is where a terrible genocide claimed the lives of over one million people in 1994. The nation was devastated socially, politically and economically. After attending the East Africa Regional conference, M. Daniel visited Rwanda for a few days. He led Bible study based on Matthew 4 with eight students at the U. Rwanda in Kigali. They found in Jesus’ words the real solution to their own problems and their nation’s problem. They decided to become Bible teachers wherever they go. Moved by this, Daniel postponed his return to America to study the word of God with them for two months.

The second temptation (5-7). Jesus won the first round. But the devil did not concede. He launched a second attack. He took Jesus to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple (5). This was probably the southeast corner of the temple, which was 300 feet high. From there, they could see the city of Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside. The devil said to Jesus, **“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down”** (6). Then he quoted Psalm 91:11-12: **“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.’”** No one can survive such a fall; it was

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certain death. But the devil provoked Jesus to throw himself down, suggesting that God had to keep his promise to send angels and rescue him. Then Jesus would become a superstar. He could advertise himself as the Messiah. This was the temptation of great fame and glory through miraculous displays. Human beings are very vulnerable to fame and glory. Some people are willing to share bizarre, raunchy or even violent events via Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat and Instagram to suddenly become famous. If they gain a few followers, they invest themselves more and more until they become slaves of fame and self-glory seeking.

The point of Psalm 91 is to trust in God, and in return God will protect us from all harm. The devil took two verses out of context and used them to try to get Jesus to test God’s power, love and faithfulness. If Jesus did that, his relationship with the Father would be destroyed. How did Jesus respond? Jesus answered him, **“It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test’”** (7). This is quoted from Deuteronomy 6:16 and has a background in Exodus 17. The Israelites were dehydrated and thirsty; it was serious. Then they doubted whether God was among them. They had experienced God’s love so many times. But in a critical moment, they forgot all that God had done for them and hardened their hearts and became rebellious. Jesus’ words, **“Do not put the Lord your God to the test”** teach us what kind of attitude we should have toward God and his word. We should not test God’s word, love and power with hard hearts. We should trust God, love him, thank him and believe his word. God loves us with an unfailing love and has demonstrated it through Jesus’ death and resurrection. God always works for the good of those who love him in any situation. God is mighty to save and none can resist him. Let’s trust our loving, good, mighty God.

The third temptation (8-10). Though the devil lost the second round, he did not give up. He came back again with an even greater challenge. He took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. There is an expression, “Seeing is wanting.” Though we may have no desire, after seeing something fantastic, suddenly the desire arises to possess it. This is why visual advertising is so effective. The devil knows this. He didn’t show Jesus just one kingdom, but all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. To become the ruler of one kingdom is not easy. But the devil offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if he just bowed down and worshiped him one time. How easy it would be to

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do so. But behind this offer there lay a great danger. To bow and worship is not just an outward act. It is to surrender with loyalty and commitment. The one we worship is our Lord and we belong to him as his servant. Satan tried to turn Jesus’ heart and mind from God the Father to himself.

How did Jesus respond? Jesus said to him, **“Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only’”** (10). These days many commercial calls come, offering good deals on travel or health insurance. If it sounds profitable and we begin to think about it, we get caught. But Jesus did not entertain the temptation, even for a second. Jesus refused to compromise and resisted the devil absolutely. James 4:7 says, **“Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”** Jesus also declared that God alone is the object of worship and that devotion to him should be wholehearted and exclusive. If we worship anything else, it becomes an idol. Only God is worthy of our worship, because he is our Creator God and our Redeemer. In this way, Jesus defeated all the devil’s temptations. Then the devil left him and angels came and attended him (11).

Third, how to defeat the devil’s temptation. First of all, we need to depend on Jesus. As already mentioned, Jesus represents all mankind. Jesus’ triumph over the devil’s temptation was not just a personal triumph but was on behalf of all people. Still, it does not automatically apply to all people. We must claim this victory by faith. 1 Corinthians 15:22 says, **“For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”** To be in Christ means to receive him as Lord and Savior. It is to trust him and rely on him at all times. Whenever temptations come, we need to come to Jesus and ask his help. The devil’s temptation is so sweet and powerful that we cannot defeat it with our own wisdom and strength. But when we depend on Jesus, he will help us to overcome it. Hebrews 4:15-16 says, **“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”** Jesus knows our weaknesses and how we are vulnerable to Satan’s temptations. He never rebukes us or feels burdened by us. Whenever we come to him, he always welcomes us and helps us defeat the devil’s temptations and live victorious lives. Let’s come to Jesus as we are.

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Secondly, Jesus wants us to follow his example. Every time Jesus responded to the devil’s temptation, he said, “**It is written.**” Then Jesus quoted God’s word from the Old Testament exactly. Jesus respected the Old Testament as God’s word. Jesus understood the deep meaning in the context of the passage. Jesus relied only on God’s word to defeat the devil’s temptations and break down his stronghold. Jesus relied on God’s word as the most powerful weapon in spiritual warfare. Paul refers to God’s word as “**the Sword of the Spirit**” (Eph 6:17). These days, many people trust the words of books written about the Bible which are not the Bible, as well as the words of philosophy and psychology. These kinds of words sound reasonable and are appealing, but they have no power to defeat the devil. Only the word of God itself can defeat the devil’s power.

In our time people are skeptical about claims of absolute truth. Because we have been exposed through the Internet to so many different cultures and ideas we realize there is a great diversity in the world. In some sense, this has been helpful. However, we must not regard the word of God as one of the ideas in our world. We should not be ashamed to carry the Bible because it is the living word of God which can save us, nurture us, protect us from the devil’s temptation and equip us to do good works. Let’s love the Bible, read the Bible, memorize the Bible and obey the Bible. Let’s carry the Bible wherever we go as our great weapon in spiritual warfare and to be a witness to others. Then we can live a victorious life.