

Tried and True

King of Heaven: The (Un)expected King

Matthew 4:1-11

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January 3, 2021

Please open your Bible to Matthew 4 and we'll begin with reading our passage.

Matthew 4:1–11¹

¹Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴But he answered, "It is written,

*"Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."*

⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and 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 will command his angels concerning you,"

and

*"On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone."*

⁷Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

*"You shall worship the Lord your God
and him only shall you serve."*

¹¹Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

This is the Word of the Lord.

THE SETUP (1-2)

A Bible student is always asking questions of the passage they're studying. Do you know the most important question to ask in Bible study? The fundamental question we must try to answer is why is this passage here? Why did the biblical author include this passage in his book? And why did God include it in our Bibles? What is the human author's intention? And what is the divine author's intention?

So, why is Matthew 4 in our Bibles? One way this chapter is often used is to teach us how to stand up under temptation. Is this the primary intention of the author? As Jesus' disciples, there's certainly

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

a lot to learn from him about temptation. And if I had more time this morning, I'd develop some strategies for resisting temptation. But I don't think that's the primary reason this chapter is in Matthew. And because I have limited time, I want to zero in on the main purpose of this passage.

So, what is the main intention of this passage? I think it's all about what it means for Jesus to be the Son of God. And its purpose is to show us that Jesus is unyielding in his commitment to accomplish his mission of saving his people from their sins.²

The reason I say this is in part due to the context of this passage. Remember what happened at the end of chapter 3, after Jesus' baptism? There was a voice from heaven, the very voice of God the Father. And he said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

As we said last week, when God says Jesus is his beloved Son, he's showing that Jesus is the true Israel. Israel was also called the Son of God. And Israel was tested in the wilderness for forty years. Now, Jesus comes into the wilderness for forty days and he too is tested. And in each of Satan's temptations he appeals to Jesus as the Son of God. It's explicit in the first two temptations and implied in the third.

And in response to each temptation, Jesus appeals to Deuteronomy 6-8. This was no accident. Deuteronomy 6-8 are all about Israel's time in the wilderness. Jesus is showing that where Israel failed the test in the wilderness to trust and obey God, he will succeed. Where they fell, he will stand.

God not only calls Jesus his beloved Son. He also said he was well pleased with him. As we said last week this is an allusion to his role as the suffering servant.

As God's Son, Jesus had a mission. A mission to save his people from their sins by living the life we fail to live in our sins and by suffering in our place, paying the price we deserve for our sins. God has made this mission clear in the first three chapters of Matthew. And now Satan wants to throw Jesus off course in this mission.

But Jesus will not be thrown off course. He will fulfill his mission as the Son and the servant of the Lord. That's what this passage is about.

So, with that in mind, let's now walk through the three temptations of Christ. Notice that there is geographical movement in each of the three temptations. The first is in the desert. The second on the pinnacle of the temple. The third on a very high mountain. I believe that Jesus was in the wilderness the whole time. He wasn't literally beamed to the temple and the mountain. These are probably visionary temptations. But they are very real nevertheless. It's as if the stakes get higher with each temptation.³

FIRST TEMPTATION (3-4)

In the first temptation, the tempter says to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread" (v. 3). I don't think the devil is calling into question Jesus' identity as the Son of God. He's assuming it. But he's calling into question God's care for Jesus. It sounds a lot like Satan's questions to Adam and Eve.

² Mike Bullmore, "[Operation Rescue Threatened: The Temptation of Jesus](#)"

³ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament

“You are the Son of God, aren’t you? There’s dignity in that role. It doesn’t make sense for a Son of God to go without food for forty days! God even provided manna for Israel. And now, you’re left to starve to death. But none of this is necessary, Jesus. You’re actually God. You can whip out a miracle and turn these stones into bread.”⁴

But Jesus answered him from Deuteronomy 8:3, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (v. 4). Jesus is hungry, very hungry. Every fiber of his body is crying out for food. But as Jesus says somewhere else, his main food is to do the will of God (Jn. 4:34). Life is about more than food. Christ’s life was lived by every word that comes from the mouth of God.⁵

And what are the words that come from the mouth of God? In the most immediate context, they are “You are my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” The words that gave Jesus his marching orders. The words that set him on his mission to save his people from their sins. And he would not be deterred from this mission.

Sure, he could exercise his divine power to turn the stones to bread. But in order to accomplish his mission, in order to fulfill the role as the true Adam, the true Israel, he had to live as a man. As Philippians says, “Jesus ... was in the form of God [but] didn’t count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself and took the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (2:6-8).⁶

SECOND TEMPTATION (5-7)

Satan has a ready answer for Jesus. If Jesus can quote Scripture, so can he. Look at verses 5-6. “Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you,” and “on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.”’”

What’s going on here? The devil is saying, if you’re so sure you can trust God and take him at his word, then prove it. In Psalm 91 God made a promise that he would protect his people when they fall. A promise that applied to all people who trust in God. How much more should it apply to God’s special Son! If you really trust God, why don’t you put his promises to the test? If you’re not willing to do a miracle yourself, why don’t you make God prove himself through a miracle?

This is a common temptation. A temptation to make God prove he is God through giving us signs and wonders. But those who truly trust God will take him at his word.

Jesus responds to Satan with words from Deuteronomy 6:16, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test’” (v. 7). Jesus knows that if he were to throw himself from the temple that would actually prove he didn’t trust God. And Jesus wants to prove throughout these temptations and throughout his whole ministry that he will trust God to help him accomplish his mission. He is unyielding!

⁴ Cf. France

⁵ Bullmore

⁶ Mike Andrus, “[Getting Victory Over Temptation](#)”

Later in Matthew 26, Jesus is tempted in a similar way. Tempted to abandon his mission if he's the Son of God. Tempted to show signs and wonders so people will believe. When Jesus is on the cross, the people who passed by derided him and said, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." The chief priests and scribes said, "Let him come down from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him" (Mt. 26:40, 42-43).⁷

We know how Jesus responded to this temptation. The same way he responded to Satan. Just because he was suffering, that didn't mean God didn't desire him. It didn't mean he wasn't the Son of God or that the Father wasn't well pleased with him. And it didn't mean Jesus couldn't trust the Father.

Jesus was committed to his mission. To succeed where Israel failed. And to suffer on the cross for our failure.

THIRD TEMPTATION (8-11)

Let's look now at the final temptation. "The devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, 'All these I will give to you if you will fall down and worship me'" (v. 8).

Satan doesn't call Jesus the Son of God here, but I think it's implied. When he shows him the kingdoms of the world, I think he's alluding to Psalm 2 where God says to the messianic king, "You are my Son" (v. 7). "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession" (v. 8).

Satan knows that God promised the Son he would give him all the kingdoms of the world. But all of that looked a long way off now. He's suffering in the wilderness. So Satan isn't promising to give Jesus anything he wasn't already promised. He was simply saying there's no need to wait for it. There's no reason to suffer for it. You can have it all now. Take the shortcut, Jesus!

But Jesus won't compromise his worship of God and his love for God. And he won't compromise his mission of suffering. So he quotes Deuteronomy 6:13, a line that comes right after the call to love God with all your heart, soul, and strength. He says, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve'" (v. 10).

Jesus is the servant of the Lord. And he will serve the Lord by suffering to save his people from their sins. He won't have the crown without first going to the cross.

Later in Matthew 16, Jesus is tempted again to take the crown without going to the cross. And again, he rebukes his tempter in a similar way that he rebuked the devil. Right after Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God (v. 16), "Jesus began to teach his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.' But Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man'" (vv. 21-23).⁸

⁷ France; D. A. Carson, "Matthew" in *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary

⁸ Carson; France

Jesus won't have the crown without first going to the cross. He is completely committed to fulfilling his mission. But make no mistake, he will receive the crown. After Jesus went to the cross, he was raised from the dead. And then right before the Great Commission, he said to his disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Mt. 28:18).

And God not only provided for Jesus the crown that was promised to him. God also provided for his material needs following his temptation.

Look at verse 11. "Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him." This word ministering is used in other parts of Scripture to refer to feeding. Jesus trusted that God was able to provide for him. And he wasn't willing to compromise his mission as he waited for God to provide for him. He didn't need to tap into his status as God to provide for himself. He didn't need to sell his soul to Satan. His God provided for his material needs; he fed him. The angels spoken of in Psalm 91 did come to care for him. And the kingdom was given to him.

Jesus is tried three times. And he proved himself true. The true Israel. The true Son of God. Where Israel failed, Jesus succeeded. Where they fell, he stood firm. So he can now serve as a substitute for us. He is our perfect, spotless, righteousness. And he is our perfect and all-sufficient sacrifice for sins.

We're sinners in need of a Savior. Jesus is the Savior we need. He is our perfect high priest. The one who can serve as a mediator between sinful humanity and a holy God. Hebrews 4:15 says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Do you want mercy? Do you want grace? They will only be found in Jesus. Have you placed your faith in Jesus to save you from your sins? If not, today is the day of salvation. Turn to Christ in faith.

And what about for those of you who are believers? As disciples, we need to resist temptation. As his disciples, we are to be conformed into the image of the true Son of God (Rom. 8:29), who resisted temptation. And there are many passages that speak of this. We're called to resist the devil and he will flee from us (Jas. 4:7). We're called to take up the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit. In other words, like Jesus we're called to wield the Word of God against Satan's schemes (Eph. 6:10ff). But that's not the main thing *this* passage is about.

The main thing this passage is about is Jesus' success, not about how we're to keep from failing.

My friend Mike Bullmore tells a story about his father. It's an unusual story in our day and age. He was the epitome of faithfulness. He attended one church for his whole life. Was married to one woman for his whole life. And he even held the same job for his whole life. For forty-five years he served in one place, operating a woodworking shop in Wisconsin.

As Mike got older he began to see that his dad's faithfulness to his work was the way he provided for his family. And he was grateful for the loving way his dad provided. But he didn't really understand it all, until one day as a teenager he got to go to work with his dad and see him in action.

He observed how his dad dealt with his workers in the shop. He watched how he communicated with architects on projects. And he saw how he treated the vendors. He got to see up close and

personal how his dad made the bacon. This gave him a much greater appreciation for the way his dad provided for the family.

Matthew 4 teaches us indirectly how Israel failed in their vocation as the Son of God. It teaches how we fail to stand up to all kinds of temptations. Lust, pride, greed, the desire for glory, etc.

But we also see Jesus at work! Jesus went to work for you. He was faithful to provide salvation for you. We're familiar with his work on the cross. But have you ever seen the finer details of his work?

His work in the wilderness was all part of the way he came to save us. His success, his obedience, and his righteousness are now offered to God in place of our failure, our disobedience, and our unrighteousness.

When we see our Savior at work, it should give us a greater appreciation for the great lengths he has gone to provide for us, to save us from our sins.

COMMUNION

Jesus didn't turn stones into bread. He didn't exercise his divine power in the face of temptation. But eventually he did do a miracle with bread. He turned five loaves of bread into a meal for over five thousand people. And it was all to teach the crowds that he was the bread of life.

He said, whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. What he meant was that whoever believes in Jesus has life. Bread and wine are a picture of the way Jesus provided eternal life for us. His body was broken for us like bread. His blood was poured out for us like wine. If we believe in his sacrifice for our sin, we can be forgiven and given eternal life.

So, if you are a believer, we invite you today to come and remember what Christ did for us. We invite you to come to the Lord's Supper to be nourished through faith.

If you have not yet placed your faith in Christ, then I would ask you to refrain from participating in this meal. It is only for those who are a part of the body of Christ.

Instead, I would ask you to consider the gospel this morning that is represented in this meal. To consider that you are a sinner, but that Christ is the Savior. Place your trust in God by believing in Jesus. Believe that his righteousness can serve as a substitute for your sin. Believe that his sacrifice can serve as the penalty for your sin. If you believe on Jesus, you will be saved.