

THE VOICE OF THE DEVIL: “ALL THIS I WILL GIVE YOU IF . . .”

(Matt 4:1-11)

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“I can resist everything except temptation,” quipped Oscar Wilde. He also said, “The only way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it.” Mae West confessed, “I generally avoid temptation unless I can’t resist it.” “Those who flee temptation generally leave a forwarding address,” observed Lane Olinghouse. And from the most-quoted source, Anonymous, comes this statement: “Nothing makes it easier to resist temptation than a proper upbringing, a sound set of values, and witnesses.”

Two weeks ago, we saw that three times in Scripture the Devil speaks. We find his speech first in the third chapter of Genesis, then when we come to the Book of Job, and finally in the Gospels where he is tempting Jesus. In Genesis, the Devil is slandering God to man. In Job, he is slandering man to God. In the Gospels, he is facing the God-man in the wilderness. Having studied in previous sermons the first two occasions of the Devil’s speech, today we will focus on the last of these three episodes: what is often referred to as “The Temptation of Jesus.”¹ This incident is recorded in all three of the synoptic gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Let’s turn to Matthew’s account and begin reading with the first verse of the fourth chapter.

¹Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.

²After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

⁴Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

⁵Then 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.’”

⁷Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do 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 splendor. ⁹“All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

¹⁰Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

¹¹Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him (Matt 4:1-11, NIV).

To speak of this story as “The Temptation of Jesus” is somewhat misleading. *First, it is not so much of a temptation as it is a test.* The Greek word in verse 1 translated “to be tempted”² always signifies “testing” in the Gospel of Matthew, and this is the meaning of the word in almost all of its occurrences throughout the New Testament.³ Matthew makes it very clear that the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness in order that He might be tested by the devil.² The initiative for the test lies with God; the Devil is only the agent who implements the test. No doubt Satan’s intention was to persuade Jesus to do wrong, but the initiative for the test was with God. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the testing of Jesus occurs after His baptism and immediately prior to His public ministry. At His baptism, God declares Jesus to be His Son. Now God arranges for Satan to test Jesus to see whether He is worthy of that assessment.⁴ Furthermore, this testing is parallel to the experience of Israel in the wilderness. After experiencing the Exodus from Egypt and the establishment of the covenant relationship, Israel underwent a season of testing in the wilderness. This parallel is emphasized by the fact that all of Jesus’ answers to the Devil are drawn from Deut 6-8, the very passage that describes Israel’s experience in the wilderness. Jesus is the embodiment of Israel and the fulfiller of her hopes, and He repeats in His own experience the experience of Israel—with, of course, one major difference: whereas Israel failed its test in the wilderness, Jesus succeeds and demonstrates His worthiness of God’s declaration.

A second reason why it is somewhat misleading to speak of this story as “The Temptation of Jesus” is that *to say “the” temptation may suggest this was the sum-total of Jesus’ struggle against Satan.* Both Mark and Luke present this testing as something that was on-going throughout the entire forty-day period.² The three temptations are the culmination of a forty-day test. Luke makes this very clear when he states, “When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left Jesus until an opportune time” (Luke 4:13).

So then, “The Temptation of Jesus” was really a test and it was only one of many tests faced by Jesus.⁵

Now, let’s examine the three temptations that culminated the testing of Jesus. The first temptation:

. . . ²After fasting forty days and forty nights, Jesus was hungry. ³The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

⁴Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

This temptation makes sense only if we understand the fasting to have been commanded by God. Furthermore, the Devil is not inviting Jesus to doubt His sonship but to reflect on its meaning. “Jesus, since God has declared that You are His Son, surely this means that *You* have the power and the right to satisfy Your own needs. Jesus, assert Your independence from God and take care of Yourself.” “No,” answers Jesus, “ the Scriptures teach that man cannot survive without God. My Father will take care of My needs.”

Next comes the second temptation:

⁵Then 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.’”

⁷Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

From perhaps some 180 feet above the ground, the Devil says, “So, Jesus, You believe that Your Father will take care of You? Well, then, certainly You, the Son of God, know in Psalm 91 that God promises to protect the faithful. Jump! If Your Father is who He says He is and You are who He says You are, then You have nothing to fear.” “No,” replies Jesus, “the Scriptures teach us not to test God by failing to obey Him.”⁶

Finally, the third temptation:

⁸Again, 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.”

¹⁰Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

At this point, the Devil drops his disguise and reveals his true purpose. “Jesus, enough of this Son of God stuff. See the world and all that it has to offer?—You can have it all! You can claim Your proper inheritance, and You don’t need God to do it! God wants You to suffer and to die. But You don’t have to do that! You can have the crown without the cross if You will just worship me!” And Jesus responds, “Get away from Me, Satan! You know very well that whoever or whatever I worship, that is who or what I will serve. The Scriptures teach that we are to worship the Lord God, and we are to serve only Him. Get away from Me!”

In short, Satan offered Jesus a shortcut: “turn the stones into bread”—You don’t have to endure discomfort and pain; “jump into the safety of God’s arms”—You don’t have to walk the pathway of danger and hardship; “worship me”—You can be king without dying on a cross. But Jesus did not succumb to Satan; instead, He silenced Satan. Jesus accomplished the Father’s will not by asserting His own power and authority, but by humble obedience, selfless service, and sacrificial suffering. By trusting in the Father to provide for His physical needs, Jesus shows us how to love God with all of our heart. By trusting in the Father to protect His spiritual well-being, Jesus shows us how to love God with all of our soul. And by trusting in the Father to present to Him all that had been promised, Jesus shows us how to love God with all of our strength.

Shortcuts. Oh how tempting they are! Students read *Cliff’s Notes* or watch the movie rather than read the book; they cheat on tests; they purchase papers off the internet; they may receive a good grade but they miss an education. Construction contractors cut costs and cut corners; structures collapse and people are hurt. Athletes take suspicious supplements to achieve speed, strength and stamina; their bodies suffer and sometimes shutdown. Company executives pad the numbers and cook the books for profit; businesses go bankrupt, jobs are lost, Wall Street is shaken. And the examples are endless. There are no shortcuts to physical and spiritual well-being. The next time you hear otherwise, recognize the sound for what it is: it is the voice of the Devil.

Adam and Eve had it all but lost it all, because they listened to the Devil. They were seduced by Satan’s suggestion that what they already had was not enough. In their striving for more they sadly settled for less. Job had it all but lost it all, because the Devil took it from Him. But he remained faithful to God and God gave it all back to Him. God

was not fooled by Satan's slander. Jesus had it all but sacrificed it all, in order that you and I may some day have it all. Jesus did not yield to Satan's temptations.

Look again at the Devil's assault on Jesus—*physical fulfillment, spiritual security, and deciding one's destiny*. These are still the three avenues that Satan uses to attack you and me today. It is time to take the test. Here it is in the form of three questions: (1) What will I eat? (2) Who will I trust? (3) What will I do?

What will I eat? In other words, will I depend on God or on myself for my survival? Who will I trust? In other words, do I believe that God's way is best even when it is not easy? What will I do? In other words, what is the purpose of my life and how will I seek to fulfill it?

The bad news is, no one except Jesus has ever received a perfect score on every test every time. The good news is, Jesus has left us His answer sheet. *What will I eat? Who will I trust? What will I do? Buzzzzz . . . time's up. What are your answers?*

¹This series of four lessons follows the format of G. Campbell Morgan, *The Voice of the Devil* (Baker). Helpful for its historical perspective is Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History* (Cornell University Press, 1988).

²πειράζω (*peirazō*) – Matthew's infinitive πειρασθῆναι (*peirasthēnai*) expresses purpose; Mark and Luke's present participle πειραζόμενος (*peirazomenos*) indicates an on-going process.

³In 36 New Testament occurrences it clearly indicates tempting to do wrong only in 1 Cor 7:5 and Jas 1:13-14. R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (InterVarsityPress/Eerdmans, 1985), 96.

⁴Susan R. Garrett, *The Temptations of Jesus in Mark's Gospel* (Eerdmans, 1998), 59.

⁵Cf. Heb. 4:15.

⁶Israel in the wilderness failed in their obedience and thereby put God to the test (Deut 6:16; cf. Exod 17:1-7; 1 Cor 10:9).