



Temptation & Testing – Part 4
Matthew 4:1-11
GCSP – 07/05/2008

How many of you have made an error in judgment this week? If your hand isn't up you have simply made an error in remembering.

Some errors in judgment are pretty harmless while others are literally life threatening. I can make an error in judgment on how close to the end table I am when setting down my bottle of water and only have to clean up a spill, but if I make an error in judgment as to how close I am to the side of the road on top of Kenosha Pass it will more than a little water that needs to be cleaned up.

I spoke last week about the preparation involved in order to successfully pass a test. If you are taking a science or algebra test you need to study and practice; the same is true if you are taking a test to get licensed to sell insurance or securities. The better prepared you are the more likely you will be able to pass that test.

Most Christians are not prepared for the life tests they will face. Most have made a colossal error in judgment as to the importance of God's Word in their life. They have ignored the necessity of studying and practicing, and thus they are simply ill-equipped and unprepared for the life tests they will face. Nor are they prepared for the attacks of Satan and his demons.

Turn with me in your Bibles to **Matthew 4**.

Matthew 4:1-11

Let's pray.

As I have mentioned in each of the last three sermons in this passage, the phrase in **verse 1**, "**to be tempted**" most often means to be tested, or to be proved. Jesus was prepared for His testing. He spent forty days in the wilderness with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

In this short passage we have been studying four strategies, or tactics, that we can easily duplicate in our lives to be prepared for any testing or temptation that comes our way. And just like Jesus, if we utilize these strategies in our lives, we too will have victory over the devil.

1. Jesus spent adequate time alone with God. The power and strength that is required to get through a time of testing is well beyond our human capabilities. The source of our strength is God. Spending time with God is the first priority if you want to pass the test and experience victory. So get away from your phones, your televisions, and your computers and get alone with God. Most of us cannot carve out forty days but if it important enough you can set aside a few days at the very minimum.
2. Jesus made sure He was led by the Holy Spirit. Control freaks struggle with this one. Being filled and led by the Holy Spirit requires emptying yourself of self; it

requires relinquishing control of all things to the Spirit's capable hands. Being filled by and led by the Holy Spirit is an all-or-nothing proposition. Nobody can operate by being a little bit filled with the Spirit. You can't hang on to some of the control and still be totally led by the Spirit.

3. Jesus fasted for spiritual focus. He was obedient in this vital yet neglected discipline, and in doing so He visibly demonstrated that He was not under subjection to His flesh. His spiritual health and well-being was much more important than indulging His physical appetites. When we show God that we desire Him above all other things through the discipline of fasting, He releases blessings upon us that would otherwise be withheld. Fasting intensifies your focus on the things of God.
4. Jesus relied on the Scripture. Jesus relied on God's Word to overcome temptation and to have victory in times of testing – and He didn't have a copy of God's Word in His robe, He quoted it from memory.

We have already spent time studying the first three strategies over the last three weeks and we will cover the last one tonight.

v. 3a

"And the tempter came..." The reason we must be prepared is that the tempter will come. There is no escaping the fact that the tempter will come. Now he may come and discover that you are not worth his time; he may immediately find that your life is absolutely no threat on his kingdom. So after a minor interaction with you; a minor tripping up of your life; a minor victory over you; he may move on. If this is the case with you, you were not prepared and the enemy, the tempter, found you to be easy pickings.

Before you allow the thought to enter your mind that it would be better to not have to do battle with the tempter, so maybe I should stay on the sidelines and not put myself in a position where the enemy takes notice, let me read to you **2 Timothy 3:12**.

"Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (NASB).

And before you go there, this is not a choice for the genuine Christian. You do not have the option of not living a godly life to avoid persecution. All throughout the Bible we are told time and time again to be holy just as God is holy. Holiness and godly living are the real evidence that you are a Christian. Apart from the fruit of holiness and righteousness and godly living in your life there would be a great measure of doubt as to the reality of your salvation. Genuine Christians will have the desire to live godly in Christ Jesus, period end of story.

And thus, the tempter will come. So the only question that remains is, how prepared will you be when those days arrive in your life?

As I mentioned last week, we can spend time with God, we can rely on the Holy Spirit to lead us, and we can fast for a short period of time for some of the tests we will face, but other times you will require lengthier times of preparation. In the case before us in **Matthew 4**, it apparently takes forty days if you are going to square off with Satan. So

do you want to be prepared only for small tests or do you want to be prepared for the big ones as well?

v. 3b

The first attack will be at the strength, or lack thereof, of your faith. The tempter will immediately attempt to make you question who you are in Christ. He starts his assault on Jesus by asking, "**If You are the Son of God...**" And he will start with you by asking, "If you are a Christian..." He loves to plant seeds of doubt in your mind.

- If you are a Christian, why are you struggling with your finances?
- If you are a Christian, why is your health not all it should be?
- If you are a Christian, why isn't your job working out, or why isn't your house selling, or why isn't your relationship with your spouse all that it should be?

And on and on it goes. Everything in your life that is not perfect in your eyes is fair game for the tempter to plant seeds of doubt in your mind. And it will all start with if. Make sure you are grounded in who you are in Christ. Make sure you understand that you are a child of the King and that your King has already defeated your tempter. Arm yourself with the fact that no weapon formed against you shall prosper; and that while in this world you will have trouble, Jesus has overcome this world; and that we are more than conquerors. Jesus Christ died in your place to secure your victory over the tempter and He now dwells within you to continually supply His power every time a test or a temptation presents itself to you.

Never allow the tempter to bring doubt into your life!

v. 3c

After the tempter attempts to place doubt in your mind he will begin a three-pronged attack. One of these attacks will appeal to your flesh. Jesus was just coming off forty days of fasting. **Verse 2** tells us He was hungry. So Satan appeals to His flesh by suggesting He use His powers to create bread from the stones at His feet.

What would be wrong with doing what Satan suggested? Jesus was hungry. He had already fasted for forty days. What would be wrong with using His power to create some bread to eat?

The problem is that Jesus had set aside His rights and His power in complete obedience to the Father's will. He demonstrated His power only as the Father directed Him to. Affirming His rights and His deity as the Son of God would have been to act independently of God the Father. This would be against God's plan. Jesus was being tempted to doubt the Father's Word, the Father's love, and the Father's provision. Satan was really saying, "Use Your own powers to supply what the Father has not."

Wow! How often are we guilty of this one? How often do we step in and use our own powers to supply what the Father has not? How often do we lack the patience to wait upon the Lord to satisfy our needs? How often do we supply our own needs even when it involves using credit improperly?

I can hear the tempter now – “turn this credit into a new car” or “turn this plastic into a new big screen TV” or “turn your savings into a bigger house”, etc. And all of us usually say, “Okay!” And the tempter has accomplished his objective.

But Jesus was prepared and He demonstrates the importance of knowing and applying God’s Word to our every situation in life.

v. 4a

“Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee” (Psalm 119:11 - KJV). A more literal translation says, **“Thy Word have I treasured in my heart” (NASB).** David knew this truth and Jesus knew it even more so. Jesus declares that we are much better off to obey and depend on God, waiting for His provision, than to grab satisfaction for ourselves when we think we need it.

If you are a genuine child of God, you can never justify complaining about and worrying about your needs. If you live by faith in Him and in obedience to His Word, you will never lack for anything you truly have need of.

Hold your place in Matthew and turn with me in your Bibles to **Philippians 4.**

Philippians 4:19

What percentage of your needs will God supply? How much do we need to help God out? How many additional jobs do we need to take? How many credit cards do we need to secure? Does God need your help to do anything?

Do you remember His words to the children of Israel when they were trapped between the Red Sea and the armies of Pharaoh? **“The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent” (Exodus 19:14).** In other words, “Sit back, shut up, and let Me handle things!”

Why can’t we learn to just rely on Him and on His provision? Or better yet, why are we not satisfied with His provision? Ah, now we’re getting somewhere. Maybe it’s not that you struggle with trusting God to supply all your need, maybe it is you want more than He supplies or you want it sooner than He wants to supply it. You are dissatisfied in God’s provision or you are dissatisfied in the timing of His provision – which is really saying you are dissatisfied with God.

Well if that’s the case, the tempter doesn’t need to bother you. That’s all he wants to accomplish anyway.

Beloved, God knows what you have need of before you know it. And more so than that, He knows exactly when you need it. You only think you know what you need and you only think you know when you need it. And if you truly had God’s Word hidden and treasured in your heart you would not be so anxious and you would not be so susceptible to the tactics of the tempter when he comes. You will always be better off trusting in God and waiting on His provision.

Turn with me in your Bibles back to **Matthew 4.**

v. 4b

Food is not the most necessary part of life. The living, trustworthy, life-giving, creative, powerful, sustaining, energizing Word of God is the most necessary part of life.

You will always suffer when you bypass God's Word – regardless of the situation you face or the decision you need to make.

v. 5-6

It didn't work the first time but the tempter again tries to plant the seed of doubt by saying "**If You are the Son of God...**" We should take note that he will always pound away at your faith and continually attempt to raise doubts in your mind.

After appealing to the flesh, a second front the tempter will attack appeals to your pride. And here is the subtlety of the tempter; he uses Scripture in his assault. Satan quotes **Psalm 91:11-12** in his attempt to trip up Jesus.

Before we get into the reason Jesus would be in sin if He followed through with Satan's demand, take just a moment to dwell on the implications of this tactic; consider for a moment the fact that Satan uses Scripture at times to get you off base and cause you to sin.

Satan didn't misquote the Scripture but he did misapply it. And before you allow your pride to accomplish Satan's job for him, stop what you are thinking. I can guarantee some of you are thinking about how other people you know misapply Scripture. You simply know that your application is right these other people in your mind are wrong. You have the one true meaning and application and they just don't get it.

Be careful. Let me share a struggle I have with the way some churches exhibit pride in this way. They will actually advertise that they are a "full gospel" church, implying that everyone else is lacking in their understanding or their application of God's Word. Now maybe in some cases they are right but I can guarantee you they are not perfect in their understanding and they are not perfect in their application, and a certain measure of pride goes along with thinking your church or your denomination is the only one that teaches and understands the full gospel.

Don't let pride shut your mind down. Don't let pride block any chance for the Holy Spirit to teach you something new. Don't read into God's Word, just read it and accept it even if it doesn't fit with your theology. I am as guilty of this as anyone at times. We must be careful. Make sure, make absolute sure, your theology and your doctrine is God's theology and God's doctrine. Or as Pastor Grady at Faith Freedom asks, "Is your doctrine working?"

Okay, let me put my soapbox away and get back to the application at hand. Why would it have been a sin for Jesus to throw Himself down off the Temple? He is basically saying, "If you won't use Your own divine power to help Yourself, let the Father use His power to help You." And quite honestly, how better to prove the fact that You are the Messiah than to miraculously survive such a fall in front of all Jerusalem?

v. 7

Jesus confronts the sin by again accurately quoting and accurately applying Scripture. The sin would be presuming upon God. Jesus did not need to prove to Himself that His Father cared for and would protect Him.

Secondly, and probably more significantly, no matter how noble or how important we may think our reasons are, to test God is to doubt God. And to doubt God is sin. Testing God or presuming upon God is placing your needs and your desires before His.

Yet how often do we do just that? How often do we misapply Scripture or even ignore Scripture and are left expecting God to bail us out?

MacArthur states, *"Those who willingly put themselves in the way of danger and temptation often end up blaming God when harm comes from their foolishness."* This is exactly what Adam did when God confronted him in his sin: **"The woman You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate"** (**Genesis 3:12**). Adam wasn't blaming his wife, he was blaming God.

MacArthur goes on to state, *"Our need is not to prove God's faithfulness but to demonstrate our own, by trusting Him both to determine and to supply our needs according to His own will."*

v. 8-9

Well, so much for the subtle approach – now Satan attacks head on. But in doing so he appeals to the final prong in his three-fold strategy; he appeals to Jesus' sense of entitlement by showing Jesus everything that could be His this very moment. "Why wait to possess what is rightfully yours?"

Satan's price is always immeasurably higher than he leads us to believe and he always delivers immeasurable less than he promises. In this case the cost is to bow down and worship him.

And every time we sin, we are doing just that.

v. 10-11

Jesus stands firm and again relies on the Word of God to defeat the tempter. He commands Satan to go, and Satan has no choice but to obey. And it is the same for us when we are walking in holiness and righteousness; the tempter cannot stay when we command him to go as long as we are prepared by spending time alone with God, being led by the Holy Spirit, we are fasting for God's purposes in our life, and we are saturated with the Word of God.

When the battle was over, when the time of testing had accomplished what God desired for it to accomplish, the Father sends His ministering angels to care for His own.

Quickly, I want to show you two other passages of Scripture to assist you in your preparation for you encounters with the tempter.

Turn with me in your Bibles to **Genesis 3**.

Genesis 3:1-6

Satan plants seeds of doubt, he appeals to the flesh, he appeals to pride, and he appeals to her sense of entitlement; the same three-fold plan of attack.

Now turn with me in your Bibles to **1 John 2**.

1 John 2:15-16

It's the same thing. Satan appealed to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life with Adam and Eve, with Jesus, and with us today. He continues to use this strategy because with the exception of Jesus, it has an extremely high rate of success.

Be prepared. Every time you are tempted to sin realize that the temptation will fall into one of these three categories; and then realize that Jesus has already faced it and He has already shown you the path to victory.

Rely on the Word of God and Satan will eventually have to leave when you command him to do so.

Let's pray.