

## THE KING TEMPTED

Matthew 4:1-10

When we read about temptations or testings in the Bible, we tend to equate these two as the same. It is helpful if we can recognize the differences in one versus the other.

Some good advice from Warren Wiersbe is for us to learn to distinguish between *tests* and *temptations*. Temptations come from our desires within us (James 1:12–16) while tests come from the Lord who has a special purpose to fulfill. Temptations typically have a common element of presenting a desirable or pleasing choice, while tests most likely involve a choice that would be an action that we would normally avoid doing. Temptations are used by the devil to bring out the worst in us, but tests are used by the Holy Spirit to bring out the best in us. Temptations seem logical while trials seem very unreasonable as in the case of Abraham being asked to offer his son Isaac.

All believers face similar temptations to sin (1 Cor. 10:13), but not all believers experience the same trials of faith. God’s testings are tailor-made for each child of God, and each experience is unique. The tests a new Christian have are likely to be very different from the tests which a mature Christian might encounter.

Have you ever considered how meaningless trails and temptations would be if we did not have freedom of choice? When you think about it, the basic difference between people who are free and those who are enslaved is the number of choices they have. Even people who go to prison and lose their freedom to choose in many areas of life still are faced with some choices they can make. People who are free measure their freedom by the extent of their ability to choose. However, in all the freedoms of choice that we have, we still have limits and our choices carry responsibilities. Now having said all of that, we have to admit there are certain things about which we have no choice. We cannot choose to have “no influence” on others. Our choice is what kind of influence we will have. We cannot choose to “not serve” something or someone. The choices of whom (or what) we will serve can be summarized into four subdivisions: God, the world, the flesh, or the devil. (In reality there are only two choices and that is God or Satan.) We may have many choices regarding *how* we serve. The ability to choose how we will serve the world, the flesh, or the devil deludes us into thinking that we have freedom even though we are actually enslaved to whatever we serve. The same argument can be made regarding worship. We will hold something or someone in highest regard or reverence. For some, this “someone” may be themselves.

We could make an argument that every temptation we experience is a **test** to determine whom (what) we will serve or whom (what) we will worship. We encounter temptation (or testing) every time we have choices to make. While the devil intended his interactions with Jesus to be “temptations,” God used these as if they were “tests” that show us how to pass the tests we encounter by having the resolve to do only the will of the Father. Many of our choices have already been “preprogrammed” and we respond automatically. We may call such automatic responses as “habits” or imprinting or even instinct. If our choices were programmed prior to our salvation (and many were), then we find our choices that are automatically made likely do not serve or honor God. The solution is to re-program ourselves – this is what Paul was talking about when he advised Christians to be “transformed by the renewing of your minds.”

The temptations that are constantly with us in life’s choices were experienced by Jesus.

### Face Off – 4:1

<sup>1</sup>Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Matthew 4:1 (NASB95)

We know that Jesus was born of the Spirit from conception in Mary's womb. However, as he began His ministry He was baptized (with water) of John in the Jordan River and was anointed (baptized) by/with the Holy Spirit from on high.

The first thing that happened after the proclamation from God that Jesus was His Son was not a "mountaintop experience" but a "wilderness experience." When the children of Israel came out of Egypt, they had a wilderness experience in which they learned that they could depend and rely upon God. God supplied their food, their water and their protection. So what was Jesus doing in the wilderness? He was proving or showing us that God is all we need in life! He was proving that God is sufficient.

We know from the other Gospel accounts that at the baptism of Jesus, God's voice from heaven declared Him to be the Son of God. Notice that God approved and affirmed Jesus before He was tested. We could also note that these tests that Jesus experienced while in the wilderness was after the Holy Spirit had come upon Him when he was baptized. Therefore, He was equipped to deal with the temptations He would encounter.

#### Temptation of Provision – 4:2-4

<sup>2</sup> And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. <sup>3</sup> And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." <sup>4</sup> But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" Matthew 4:2-4 (NASB95)

Jesus was there forty days and ate nothing. During this time, he was tempted by the devil. Later in the ministry of Jesus, He would declare Himself to be the Bread of Life. Now, as He was hungry and weak, the devil tempted Jesus to do things his (the devil's) way. The way of the devil is to think of self, first. There could be an appeal to helping others also, just think, if you could turn stone into bread how many hungry people you could feed. After all, this was the kind of Messiah the people were expecting.

Jesus' reply was not some great mystical proclamation; he simply used the words given to the nation of Israel through Moses. These words were available to all who wished to know them. In refuting the temptation of the devil, Jesus voiced His agreement with an endorsement of the teachings of the Old Testament. Notice that Jesus did not say that we didn't need any bread, but that physical food is not sufficient for humans to live a full life in response to their spiritual needs. Notice also that Jesus did not encourage us to treat the Word of God as a cafeteria menu where we can pick and choose what we will believe and what we will obey. We live by every word of God.

The gospels present what was happening to Jesus in such a way that we can see the spiritual significance. We don't always (maybe hardly ever) recognize the spiritual significance of things that are going on around us and inside of us. How would a realization that "the choices we make and the things we say and do have eternal consequences" influence what we would do? For example, how much time do we spend earning resources to buy food, preparing food, and consuming food compared to reading and meditating on and implementing the word of God in our lives? Which will have the greater eternal significance? These questions address the priorities of having a well-balance provision of physical and spiritual nourishment. We certainly need to achieve that.

What we haven't addressed is how do we obtain these provisions? The temptation presented by the devil was to just snap our fingers and make it appear with no effort on our part. There are people in our present-day culture who have bought into the idea that all they need to do is "snap" and food will appear. While God did provide "temporary" supplemental food

assistance with manna while the Israelites were in the wilderness, that was never intended to a way of life. We know that personal responsibility and hard work are essential in providing for the physical-need provisions of our families.

Is there a parallel issue related to how we obtain the spiritual nourishment that is needed to grow and mature spiritually? Are there Christians who are subscribers to the “snap” idea as the way to be nourished in our spiritual lives? What would be the equivalent to turning stone into bread as related to our eternal spiritual growth needs? We won’t try to answer that question here, but suffice it to say that the process of storing God’s word in our hearts takes individual time and effort and intentionality. If all we are doing is listening to a sermon on Sunday morning, then we may find ourselves spiritually malnourished. Learning is hard work and it should not be left just to chance or happenstance.

#### Temptation of Protection – 4:5-7

<sup>5</sup>Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup>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, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.’ ” <sup>7</sup>Jesus said to him, “On the other hand, it is written, ‘YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.’ ” Matthew 4:5-7 (NASB95)

Up to this point Satan had appealed to Jesus to become a social savior by feeding people. Now the appeal was to be a religious savior by demonstrating miraculous acts. Jumping off the pinnacle of the temple without getting hurt would really impress people. That act would rival what Elijah did in calling down fire from heaven. People would really be impressed; but, the real question is would they really be changed and delivered from slavery to sin. Not likely!

Being a great religious leader should not be the goal in the life of any minister. The goal should be to serve God and to minister His love and truth to other people for their benefit and to extend the Kingdom of God. The temptation today for some in the ministry is to make a name for themselves and what is done is a performance. When ministry becomes performance, then the sanctuary becomes a theater, the congregation becomes an audience, worship becomes entertainment, and man’s applause and approval become the measure of success. But when ministry is for the glory of God, his presence moves into the sanctuary. Even the unsaved visitor will fall down on his face worship God and confess that God is among us. With God “image is NOT everything.”

Jesus could see through the deception. Even though Satan could quote Scripture to make his case, the overall outcome of what he was tempting Jesus to do was not in keeping with the will and character of God. We can see that the devil did not quote Psalm 91:11-12 accurately. He left out “in all Your ways” which is an important limitation that would preclude doing something foolish to fit in with what people thought the Messiah might do. Jesus was careful to do only the will of His Father. We are encouraged to “test” God’s promises by doing His will; however, we are never to “tempt” God by asking Him to do something that would be contrary to His will.

#### Temptation of Power – 4:8-10

<sup>8</sup>Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; <sup>9</sup>and he said to Him, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.” <sup>10</sup>Then Jesus said to him, “Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.’ ” Matthew 4:8-10 (NASB95)

We can compare the temptation spiel of the devil that he attempted to use on Jesus with what he did in the encounter he had with Eve. There are similarities in that there was an appeal

to physical appetite, the desire for personal gain, and an easy path to power. The problem with what the devil offered versus what God's intent and outcome for the faithful is that all that the devil can do is limited and restricted to the "physical realm" and to the "realm of time," but what God provides is infinite and includes the spiritual and eternal.

In each case Satan slightly altered God's Word. Satan's temptations of people today often fall into the same three categories as we see in 1 John 2:16.

<sup>16</sup>For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 1 John 2:16 (NASB95)

It is ironic that all the things that the devil uses to "tempt us" already belong to us in God's provision when they are used within the boundaries of the limitations that God has set for our benefit and protection. The appeal to physical appetite should not have been an issue for Eve since she had access to the fruit from every other tree in the garden which was provided in great abundance. The temptation for personal gain goes away when we realize that when we follow God's way that we are co-inheritors of everything in Christ Jesus. By focusing on the long-term rather than the short term, we can have God's perspective of what defines success. Regarding having power or becoming like God: that is God's intent for us in that as we are conformed to His character that He will do for us anything we ask that is in keeping with His character.

What Satan was offering Jesus really belonged to Him already. Jesus Christ will reign on the earth as King of kings and Lord of lords. Having power over all the kingdoms of the world was not what Jesus rejected. What He rejected was the means or method by which He would receive this dominion. If Jesus followed the plan of salvation, He would endure suffering and rejection – even death on the cross. He could have had all that Satan promised Him at that very moment by simply bowing down and worshiping the devil.

Satan appeals to us and our desire to have power and he appeals to our impatience to have whatever, right now. By yielding to such temptations we adopt the devil's way and in effect exalt him to a position in our life that is rightly held only by God. But notice that what Satan offered was not the total package. All he could deliver were the "kingdoms of this earth" and we see in Matthew 28 that by following the will of His Father that "all power in Heaven and on Earth" belonged to Him. If we settle for the devil's way, then we miss out on God's best for our lives.

Jesus recognized the deception and the trickery and reminded Satan of the demands by Almighty God that we are to **worship** none other than God Himself. We are to **serve** no one other than God Himself. If Jesus had chosen to "bow down" to the devil then it would have been a ridiculous situation of the "greater" worshiping the "lessor." Since we are in Christ, then we have access to His authority and can rebuke the devil just as Jesus did when He was tempted.