

**Matthew 4: 1-11; “Overcoming the Evil One”, Sermon # 2 in a series entitled –
“These Sayings of Mine”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
March 17th, 2019, in the Morning Worship Service.**

I want to begin our time together around this text by asking this question: How can we truly teach and disciple others, concerning the power and wisdom of Christ to help us to live a righteous life, if we ourselves cannot overcome the evil one? I do not think that we can. But if we desire to overcome him we must take notice of how Christ overcame him. Here in these verses Christ has shown us how to overcome the Devil in 3 important ways which relate to these temptations which the Devil brought to Him. 1st of all – Man overcomes the Devil by deliberately partaking of every word of God. 2nd – Man overcomes the Devil by deliberately refusing to tempt God. And 3rd – Man overcomes the Devil by deliberately giving to God his exclusive worship and service. Let us thank God today that He has given us the wisdom through our Lord Jesus Christ, which shows us the way to overcome the evil one. Let us learn together now, how He did it.

1st of all – Man overcomes by deliberately partaking of every word of God.

In verses 1 and 2 of chapter 4 we see that the Spirit led Jesus up into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. Jesus prepared Himself for these temptations by fasting for 40 days and 40 nights, and afterward, it says, He was hungry. This was the point when the tempter chose to come to Him; when He was physically so weak. He knew Jesus had been fasting and he thought that he could now take advantage of his weakness to get Him to do something independently and apart from God’s express will for Him. Satan knows what sin is all about. After all, he was the one who rebelled against God’s purposes at the beginning of the world. And with him, it began with pride. He said – I will be like God. He thought to himself – I do not want God telling me what to do. I do not want God telling me what my part is, in the creation. I will convince others to rebel against God’s purpose and come with me to help me fulfill my own purposes. That is how sin began in our Universe.

With the first two people whom God made, sin began with the first woman Eve’s consideration of Satan’s false words. Rather than holding to the word of God and obeying it, she toyed with the suggestion that God would want her to act independently of His word. “Has God said?”, the Devil asked her. “Surely you shall not die!”, he lyingly asserted. It was the Devil, who it says in 2nd Corinthians chapter 11, verse 3, seduced Eve by his craftiness. He convinced her that she should act independently of God’s express will and word. She would take the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and she would eat it based upon her own reasoning about why she should eat it. I will become wise, she thought. I will become like God, she thought. But she was deceived by Satan’s false and deceptive words.

Eve would give some fruit to her husband he would listen to her voice, telling him to eat; that she was indeed wise. Adam wasn’t deceived as she was, but still he was willing to let go of the warning of God’s word to him – You shall surely die. He ate the forbidden fruit and plunged our whole race into sin and misery. And so to bring salvation to sinners everywhere, Jesus had to take in our place and pass similar tests of temptations to those which Adam and Eve failed in. Our Lord Jesus knew that the real life and strength of a man is not maintained or strengthened by physical bread alone. He knew that it is maintained and strengthened by partaking of every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Satan wanted to take advantage of the Lord Jesus in His physically weak state, and so he begins by first of all questioning His identity as the Son of God. “If you are the Son of God command these stones become bread.” Let us remember the reason why the Lord Jesus was here in this place of temptation; this wilderness devoid of any outward blessing. He was deliberately taking our place in terms of where sin brings us to. It always eventually brings a

person to a desolate wilderness in their experience where God's blessings for sustaining the life of their soul are very hard to obtain. Satan was trying to attack the Lord Jesus' faith, and His trust in His Father's providential care, to provide all that He needed. He was trying to get Jesus to do a miracle, to make bread from stones, to provide for His own necessities which would prove to Satan that Jesus was the Son of God. But Jesus refused to live by His own word as a Man, and He refused to live by Satan's word as the Devil, and thus He would be sustained and upheld in not giving in to this temptation.

But Jesus knew why He had come into the world. He had come into the world in order to pave the way for sinners to become righteous in God's sight. He did this by passing the test of the temptations which we cannot pass, and will not pass, until we come to Him for grace and truth; for life and wisdom. Jesus knew that His overcoming these temptations, would involve setting His whole mind and heart to being perfectly conformed to God's will, and His law, on our behalf. He would live His whole life righteously in the sight of God, so that we might be justified by His grace and sanctified by faith in Him. And so, when He was tempted, He did not say – I know that I am the Son of God, and now Satan, I will prove it to you by commanding these stones to become bread.

Jesus knew that He had nothing to prove to the Devil. He had everything to prove to God. Even though He was so very hungry and He was tempted to make the stones in front of Him into bread, He knew that He had come into the world to do the Father's will at every point. He knew that all sinners who would believe in Him for eternal life would be sanctified by His doing the Father's will. He knew that their whole salvation would have to rest upon His will which He would do perfectly on their behalf. He would not act independently of the Father's preceptive will at any point. He knew that this meant that He could not be diverted one iota away from the goal of submission to the Father's will, to suffer at many points, in relation to His obedience to God. He knew that this would be necessary in order to accomplish redemption. He knew that He could not do this miracle that the Devil was telling Him to do, without acting in a sinfully independent and selfish way. If He made the stones into bread He would not be trusting His Father to supply His real needs. And so He said – "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

This was exactly the right answer, for it came from the Holy Scriptures as the correct explanation to the Devil; of how He, Jesus, would be sustained during this time of His great physical hunger. It would be by every word which proceeds from God's mouth, not Satan's mouth, that He would be sustained in His body, and in His spirit, in terms of His human nature. And you and I must learn the same truth, and we must learn it very practically. It is God who is the giver of every good and perfect gift in this life, including food. But God actually sustains our life, not only by the physical bread which He supplies, but in reality by His secret word; imparting life and strength where He will. He is not confined to the physical means of created food to sustain any man. But His word is more than enough. Let us also see that the spirit is the life of the body, and thus it is the spirit's life which is the most important to be strengthened. Jesus' human spirit was sustained by the good word of God, because all of the Scriptures filled His heart and mind. And so His body continued to live even through 40 days and 40 nights of fasting, in accordance with the will of God.

You and I must come to understand this great truth, because it is a very important truth to the strength of your soul, and the health of your body as well. The nourishment and strength of your soul and body take place by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God, both preceptively and providentially. Keeping the commandments of God therefore, in this sense of which we are speaking, brings life and health and peace when the keeping of them is also being nourished by the truth of Christ's grace; which grace He purchased in part, by undergoing these temptations and passing the tests of righteousness. When I say that the keeping of God's word

and His commandments brings life to the soul, it is not legalism that I am talking about; it is learning to feed upon God's word, by receiving its truth and digesting it in your heart and mind; partaking of this bread of life, in order that you will be satisfied with what God gives to you in truth, more than anything sinful that Satan might offer you.

In terms of being saved, it is certainly true that regenerative life in the New Birth comes from God alone, but it comes in connection with faith in the gospel and every word of God. And so, the sustaining and nourishing of that life in the soul of that believer in Christ, comes from the Spirit's working to sustain, encourage, enliven and strengthen that life by His precious and powerful working in accordance with every word of God. When a believer walks in the Spirit, they are actually able to feed upon the blessings and benefits of Christ's faithfulness by regularly partaking of the spiritual bread of the word of God. This is how we resist temptation. And this is how we learn to live the Christian life. So whether it is physical life that we are talking about, or a spiritual life lived to God, the principle of truth is the same. Man does not live by earthly bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

2nd – Man overcomes the Devil by deliberately refusing to tempt God.

Verse 5 – “Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, 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 shall give His angels charge over you’, and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.’ “Jesus said to him, ‘It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’” Now, you have to ask yourself the question – How did Jesus get from the wilderness to the top of the temple for this second temptation? Satan is a spirit. How was this done? Well, it appears that Satan must have carried Jesus there bodily, with his permission, for the purpose of tempting him. Satan took him there; probably flew Him there carrying Him. Even though demons are spirit beings, they have the capability of interacting with the physical creation at many points. This was one of those points, and God the Father ordained that Satan would do this very thing, without bringing harm to Jesus at all.

Let us understand that the Bible is very clear – Satan can do no more than he is given permission by God, to do to you, dear Christian. And what God gives permission for him to do in relation to his temptations which he brings to you, is, under God's good hand, His grand design to enable you to overcome the Devil by Christ's grace; to build your faith in Him, and to establish you in righteousness. The Bible teaches us very clearly that that every evil angel has his actions most definitely bounded by God so that they can do no more than what God ordains that they do. Think of Job in relation to what God ordained and permitted. He called Satan to a heavenly convocation of all the angels, to appear before Him, and there He has a conversation with him about what he can and can't do to him. Satan has a certain amount of liberty and latitude within parameters of what God ordains, but he cannot go beyond what God has set for him taking actions or liberties to utterly destroy him.

Job 1: 12 – “Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person.” In bringing these instructions and these boundaries, God did not at all participate in any evil deed that Satan perpetrated against Job. God was completely righteous in what He ordained and permitted because He knew that He would be doing Job good in and through all that transpired, even what was most difficult to accept in the providential ordering of his personal losses –the death of his children, the loss of his property, the loss of his friends approval and that also of his wife, and the loss of his health. All the evil of an angel's deeds comes from themselves, even as all the evil of any man or woman's deeds comes from themselves.

Let us understand this clearly. The language of verse 5 is very explicit. “Then the devil took Jesus up into the holy city and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple. He did not walk with Him into the Holy City Jerusalem and walk him up to the top of the temple. He took Him up into the Holy City of Jerusalem by air, and set Him down on the pinnacle. That was a supernatural feat

in itself, and Satan knew right well that God the Father would not permit him to drop the Lord Jesus even though he might have wanted to. It is good that you and I understand that God is infinitely greater than Satan in power, and can easily enforce His will with any creature, angelic or human or otherwise at any time. Nevertheless, this was not a staged encounter but a real encounter between the Jesus Christ the Man and Satan, the Adversary, the Devil.

Now we read in verse 6 that once again Satan questions the identity of Christ as the Son of God, and that he would have Jesus prove that he is the Son of God once again, this time, by having Him throw Himself down from this great height of the pinnacle of the temple, for it is written....” So – Satan says – You will quote the Scripture to me Jesus, to prove that God will sustain you, without your having to turn the stones into bread? Therefore, if you will trust in the word of God to supply your needs, do you also trust in the promise of the word of God for your ultimate safety? For it is written – “He shall give His angels charge over you, and In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.” Prove this to me and to all the people who are looking up at you from below; that you are the Son of God, and cast yourself down and let the angels catch you! If the promise of the word of God is true, then they most certainly will. And if not, we shall know that yours is a vain confidence in God!

Once again, we must marvel over the cunning of the Devil, that he would tempt the Lord Jesus to do this rash act. But let us remember that all that Jesus was being tempted with was not only meant to prove His righteousness by His obedience to God’s word, but it was meant to establish our obedience to God’s word, by His grace which He purchased for us, so that we might be faithful to God. Psalm 91: 11 and 12 was the passage which the Devil quoted from, and it is a Psalm which does refer directly to Christ and all believers in Him. It was true that God had given the good angels charge over the Man Christ Jesus, and it no doubt was their joyful task and privilege, to in their hands bear Him up, when the Father sent them, at many points in His earthly ministry. Before He went to the cross, when He was being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, when Peter pulled out a sword and cut off the High Priest’s servant’s ear, Jesus said to him – “Put your sword away Peter, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.” “Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?

But what Satan was asking our Lord Jesus to do was to presume upon that watchcare and test it to prove that it was true. Satan was saying to Jesus – If God’s word is true, it will cover any deliberate decision on Jesus’ part to throw Himself down to prove this great point to Satan that He was the Son of God. The part of the quotation of those verses which Satan failed to quote was the end of verse 11 – “to keep you in all your ways”. But it is possible that Satan deliberately left this part of the verse out in order that Jesus would complete it and thus agree with him that it was O.K. to throw Himself down. The issue was the word of God, and Satan knew it, so he will try to twist this promise into something that will include a presumptuous action on Jesus’ part. And so, the Lord Jesus, perceiving the deception, answered Satan – “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’”

In other words, taking rash actions which put yourself in danger of physical death, trusting that God will preserve your life because He is faithful to His word and has given angels the charge to watch over you, this is a sin. God is supposed to rescue you when you have rashly decided to deliberately do something which endangers your life because you know that He is able to do it? But you want Him to do it on your terms and according to your will. Jesus calls this testing God, and He would not do it. Neither should you. Years ago, when I was a young Christian, I went with a close friend of mine from West Liberty on a ride to a nearby city, and he decided to put me to the test in the way that we are talking about here. He was not a Christian yet, but I had been witnessing to him, telling him about faith in Christ and the need to be converted to Christ. Well, my friend decided that he wanted to test my faith. He put the pedal

to the metal on a gravel road and got going about 70 miles an hour without telling me what he was doing. And I said to him – “Bill, why don’t you slow down!” “You’re going too fast!” And he looked at me, and said – “Where is your faith?” And I said to him – “Bill, I am not worried about my faith; I am worried about your driving!” I was trusting in the Lord at that point, that no matter what happened that I was in God’s good hands.

But, I needed to show my friend Bill that what he was doing was putting me to the test and putting the Lord also to the test, as though the Lord had to protect both of us while he was engaging in reckless driving. He could have killed us both. In this case of Jesus being tempted, Satan was trying to pit this Scripture in Psalm 91 against the first Scripture which Jesus quoted in Deuteronomy 8: 3. He was trying to say – If you are trusting that God will provide bread for you at the right time, then You will also trust that God will provide protection to You at this time when You throw yourself down? You can prove it! But Jesus would set these two Scriptures together and use the right Biblical formula; comparing Scripture with Scripture.

What can we learn from this about our testing the Lord? I believe that what we should learn is that when you are being tempted by the Devil to sin, it is the best possible thing to do, to trust in the Lord word in a calm and quiet way, both for spiritual strength and for direction in terms of what you should do. When being tempted by the Devil, remember that it is a most important thing that you do not tempt God. You have nothing to prove to the Devil. You have every reason to trust in God and keep His commandments. Christ was tempted here and passed the test so that you can pass your particular tests. Therefore, do not attempt anything rash, or draw wrong conclusions about the various difficult situations of your life, as though God does not see, or will not help you in the time of your greatest need; whether you are in danger or whether you are in great need of grace or wisdom. Complaining against the Lord, questioning His ability to provide what you need is not the way to go. God is the God of all flesh, and nothing is impossible for Him. But He never expects you to do some rash action to prove anything to anybody, most of all, to Satan when he is tempting you. You should never test or tempt the Lord by questioning whether He is with you or not. If you are a Christian, He is with you. He will never leave us nor forsake us.

Concerning the temptations of the Devil, to try to get you to do some rash act because you think that you are an utter failure in living the Christian life, or you have sinned in some way that you think that God cannot forgive you or help you; this is not the right way to think. The solution is not to harm yourself or to put yourself into physical danger because you have not lived up to all the truth that you have been given. You may not sense God’s presence with you, you may believe that you are being attacked by the Devil now, and He is trying to get you to do something rash, like leaving off going to church or walking away from your faith in Christ, or even something as drastic as taking your life. Do not go astray in your heart! Do not tempt or test the Lord by saying – “Is the Lord with me, or not?” But rather pray and believe that He is working in your life to teach you all your need to learn and to show His good way of doing things by faith in Him. If you have sinned, take words and return to the Lord. As Psalm 130, verse 3 says – “If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?” “But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared.” And verse 7 – “O Israel, hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption.” “And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.” This is the reason that Christ died. This is why He able to save you to the uttermost, and give you grace, because He passed this test.

Now 3rd – Man overcomes the Devil by deliberately giving to God his exclusive worship and service.

Verse 8 – “Again, the devil took Jesus up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.” “And he said to Him, ‘All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.’” “Then Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan!’”

“For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’” So once again, Satan picks Christ up and carries Him up to an exceeding high mountain, one of the mountains which were round about Jerusalem; or to some very high mountain at a greater distance, and he shows him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. Now, we know that he could not have shown Christ any of the kingdoms of the world literally, even from that high vantage point, but I believe that what he did was that when he brought Christ up on this high mountain, he somehow projected a vision of all of these kingdoms before the Lord Jesus, portraying these things to Him with some visual representation of them before His eyes.

Luke’s gospel says that the Devil showed Him “all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time”. “All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.” “Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours.” The temptation which the Devil set before Christ was this. If you worship me, Jesus, I will give you authority over the kingdoms and nations of the world, to rule over them like I do now. Satan is called by the apostle Paul in 2nd Corinthians 4: 4, “the god of this age”, the one who blinds the minds of the unbelieving lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God, should shine on them.” And John in 1st John 5: 19 says that “We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.” It is in this sense that the Devil has authority over the nations and kingdoms of the world; He has this authority and he rules by deception, and by influencing millions to believe lies so that they fear dying all of their life, and thus are easily led by Satan to fulfill every evil impulse to sin.

I believe that Satan was trying to offer Jesus a largest share in what he the Devil thought was his glorious kingdom; a rule which maintained an independence from God’s rule, a rule which would establish a rival rule to God’s righteous rule, a rule which was utterly selfish and sinful. But Jesus would not have it. “Away with you, Satan!” “For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’” Jesus knew that this was one the main reasons that He had been sent into the world; to destroy the works of the Devil. Jesus knew that He could not therefore, by-pass the cross. For as long as He did not go to the cross, the Devil’s deceptive rule over the kingdoms and nations of the world would continue indefinitely. But if He went to the cross, the ruler of this world would be cast out of His position of being able to deceive everyone in all the nations, and by His death the purchase of the elect people of God would take place, and the eventual triumph of the gospel among the nations would come to pass. John 12: 31 – “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.” “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.”

Let us glory in the fact that Jesus overcame the Devil in this temptation as well; the temptation to compromise with evil and the evil one, in order to live for the passing sinful glory of the kingdoms of this world. To rule over the kingdoms of this world is really a great thing, but only if it is done in righteousness. This rule now righteously belongs to our Lord our Lord Jesus Christ, and as this age continues, you will eventually see the all the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ. He has purchased the right to rule over them all by laying down His life and shedding His precious blood. He now has all power and all authority in heaven and earth, and our God shall be glorified in His ruling the nations. Brethren, let us not live for the passing glory of this world, or in trying to get glory for ourselves, but may we live to bring glory to the One who loved us and given Himself for us, so that we might be set free to worship God, and serve Him only.

