

THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS: OBEDIENCE

Matthew 4:1-4

Matthew writes,

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. **2** And after fasting forty days and forty nights, He was hungry. (Matthew 4:1-2, ESV)

Mark writes,

12 The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. **13** And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him. (Mark 1:12-13, ESV)

As we can see, Mark deals with Jesus' temptation in two verses, and gives very little detail.

And Luke writes,

1 And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness **2** for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. (Luke 4:1-2, ESV)

Luke makes a very important point; Jesus was being tempted the entire forty days. We don't know what those temptations were, only the three major temptations at the end of the forty days, but those forty days brought temptations that probably would have ended us quickly. The final three were the most intense temptations Jesus had faced in His life, not only because Satan himself was there badgering Him, but because of the physical weakness Jesus was suffering by the end.

TRANSITION: The first temptation came directly toward Jesus' most pressing physical need.

BODY VERSUS SOUL

3 And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” (Matthew 4:3, ESV)

I’ve always “heard” this temptation as a challenge to Jesus’ identity: IF You are the Son of God; IF. IF You are really who You say You are. IF You have this special identity. IF. That’s certainly possible.

But I think that it’s also possible, and perhaps even more likely, that the devil did not approach Jesus as an enemy, but as a friend, which is how he approached Eve in the Garden: **Did God *actually* say that you aren’t allowed to eat from any tree in the Garden?** I think it’s possible that Satan didn’t come to Eve as an adversary or enemy, but as a concerned friend, someone who sympathized with her, and validated what she was already beginning to ponder. I think Satan came to Jesus in the same way: This is horrible! How long have you gone without food? Oh, you poor man! But you’re the Son of God, so just turn these stones into bread, and you can eat!

This temptation was very simple: meet your physical needs. Put them at the top of the list. Give your body priority over your soul and spirit. Scratch that itch. Satisfy that desire. As long as no one is being hurt, then it’s ok; in fact, it’s more than ok, it’s positively good. Besides, it’s no one else’s business but yours; if you want to turn stones into bread, then just go ahead.

4 But he answered, “It is written, “ ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ” (Matthew 4:4, ESV)

There is so much to Jesus’ response.

1. He elevates Scripture by citing it instead of answering from His own thoughts.
2. He brings Deuteronomy 8 to mind, where Moses strongly commands the people of Israel to obey God at all costs.
3. He puts His spiritual needs ahead of His physical needs, no matter how strong and urgent His physical needs are.

Let's talk about these points.

JESUS ELEVATES SCRIPTURE

He rests completely in the authority of the written Word of God (as He does in the other two temptations as well). Remember, Jesus Christ is the Living, Eternal Word of God. He is the Person of the Trinity who gave voice to the will of God, and who Himself embodies everything that God is. Everything that Jesus said, by definition, is God's authoritative Word. He could have said to Satan, "Look, pal, I'm going to stay faithful to My Father in heaven, so you can just go play in traffic," and it would have been God's eternal, authoritative Word. Instead, Jesus reaches back 1,500 years, and quotes the Word He gave to Moses: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God.

Jesus responds by giving Scripture its full authority. **It is written**, He says in response to all three temptations, quoting from Deuteronomy each time. Here He quotes Deuteronomy 8:3. I think it would be worth turning to Deuteronomy and looking at chapter 8. Moses is speaking to the people of Israel; not those delivered from Egypt, but their children.

JESUS AND DEUTERONOMY 8

This is such an important chapter that I want to take you through it, at least quickly, so let me invite you to turn in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 8.

Moses gave the theme of the chapter in the first verse:

The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers. (Deuteronomy 8:1, ESV)

Moses reminded the people of Israel the purpose of their forty years in the wilderness:

2 And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that He might humble you, **testing you to know what was in your heart**, whether you would keep His commandments or not. (Deuteronomy 8:2, ESV)

Of course, Yahweh knew that they would not obey Him, but they needed to know that they would not obey Him, and that their relationship with Him was based on their faith, and not their good works.

Moses explained what Yahweh wanted them to understand:

3 And He humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. (Deuteronomy 8:3, ESV)

For forty years there was really no self-sufficiency among the people of Israel. God led them; they didn't pick their own route. At the outset God let them hunger, and they were powerless to find food. But Yahweh then fed them on manna the entire rest of the time. He caused them to be fully dependent on Him, to press home the truth that food was less important than His Word.

Moses reminded them that God's favor was not grudging and stingy, but abundant in every area of life:

4 Your clothing did not wear out on you and **your foot did not swell** these forty years. (Deuteronomy 8:4, ESV)

Moses reminded them that since Yahweh delivered them from Egypt, He had the right to their undivided love and obedience for the rest of their lives and the life of the nation:

5 Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you. **6** So you shall keep the commandments of the

Lord your God by walking in His ways and by fearing Him. (Deuteronomy 8:5–6, ESV)

Moses reminded them that the future blessings of God were purely gifts of grace, and not anything they had earned or deserved:

7 For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, **8** a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, **9** a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. **10** And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land He has given you. (Deuteronomy 8:7–10, ESV)

Moses warned them against becoming proud of what they had received by God's grace:

11 Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments and His rules and His statutes, which I command you today, **12** lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, **13** and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, **14** then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, **15** who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, **16** who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. **17** Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' **18** You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may confirm His covenant that He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. (Deuteronomy 8:11–18, ESV)

And Moses warned them that if they did give in to pride and self-regard, the Lord would destroy them just as He destroyed the pagan nations around them:

19 And if you forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. **20** Like the nations that the Lord makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the Lord your God. (Deuteronomy 8:19–20, ESV)

So when Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:2, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God, He wasn't quoting an inspirational poster or calendar or internet meme. He was defining what it means to be a faithful, righteous child of God, and what it means to be truly alive in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

TRANSITION: Jesus prioritized His soul above His body.

SOUL OVER BODY

Putting your physical life ahead of your spiritual life will cost you everything. Think about what it means for Jesus to say, **Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.** Jesus was literally starving to death. He had reached the point of severe starvation. Death can occur at 45 days, although some people have lived as long as eight weeks before dying. Let me say it again: Jesus was slowly dying. But even in that state of severe starvation, even with the loss of virtually all body fat, even with His muscles being consumed as food, even with His proteins breaking down and His organs beginning to fail, He refused to put His physical needs ahead of His spiritual needs.

He lived what He Himself taught in Matthew 16:26,

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? (Matthew 16:26, ESV)

TRANSITION: Let's bring this home.

BRINGING IT HOME

What did Jesus accomplish through His temptation?

HE DEMONSTRATED HIS COMPLETE AND TOTAL RIGHTEOUSNESS BEFORE THE FATHER.

This wasn't just showing off. First, Jesus had to be completely sinless and righteous in order to die for His people.

16 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. (Hebrews 4:16, ESV)

26 For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. (Hebrews 7:26, ESV)

22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. (1 Peter 2:22, ESV)

HE EARNED THE RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS IMPUTED TO US BY FAITH.

What's more, God justifies us when we trust in Christ by giving us credit for Jesus' own righteousness, as though we had lived His life, as faithfully as He lived it, as sinlessly as He lived it. Since every sin deserves eternal judgment, no matter how small or trivial a sin it is, it would have done us no good at all to impute an ALMOST-righteousness to us. God's requirement is perfect sinlessness; anything short of that deserves eternal hell. The Westminster and London confessions both say this: **God imputes Christ's active obedience to the whole Law and passive obedience in His death as their whole and only righteousness by faith.**

The righteousness that Jesus earned by His holy life and death is imputed, in its fullness, to His people through faith.

JESUS DEMONSTRATED THE MEANS BY WHICH WE ARE TO RESIST TEMPTATION.

Jesus is the perfect Man, and He showed how a perfect human being lives. Scripture is the means of resisting temptation: **It is written!** But Scripture is more than the MEANS of resisting temptation; it is the REASON we are to resist temptation. We might answer a temptation by saying, “No, I don’t want to,” or “No, my mom wouldn’t like it,” or “No, that wouldn’t be good for me.” The problem with these statements is that they are focused on me, not the Lord. If any man ever had the right to say “I,” it was Jesus Christ, who is the I AM, after all. But even Jesus, who had every right to say “I,” answered with the written Word of God. His aim was to please His Father; He didn’t resist temptation because of His own preferences, but because God had spoken. If the Son of God rested on the authority of Scripture, how much more should we?