

THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

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Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11

In this period of self-introspection and allowing God to work in our lives, we try to see how we can increase prayer and fasting. We should be careful that we take these disciplines carefully and not use them as 'lucky charms' to get God to do what we want Him to do. Prayer and fasting are serious disciplines that are given to the church. Jesus Himself said that some evil spirits can only come out by prayer and fasting.

Sometimes we face difficult situations in our lives that require us to pray and fast. We must remember that fasting is not an end in itself; it's always a means to an end. Fasting is a means to getting closer to God. We don't say, "My intention is to fast for 40 days. No. My intention is to fast for 40 days so that I can grow closer to God." The whole idea in depriving yourself of something that you've always had is that when those cravings come, you use those cravings as a catalyst to draw close to God and say, "Lord, I come to You. I want You to make me more spiritually aware so that I can hear Your voice." Those are things that we need to be bringing to the Lord.

I remember a friend of mine who was fasting from meat for 40 days, and right about the third quarter of Lent, he was at some place where they were having a barbecue. He just couldn't take it. Looking at the meat cooking, the aroma – he finally said: Normally eating food means I chew it, then I swallow it. Fasting is not doing that. So, if I don't swallow...

Don't go that way. Fasting is a wonderful discipline that God has given to us to use, to draw near to Him.

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 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.'"

Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand 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 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.'" Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord, Your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took Him to a very 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 fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'" Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.

If you were to divide this passage, it would fit very neatly into what would be an essay form. It has an introduction, a middle content and then a conclusion.

The introduction: *Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry.*

Then we have the three temptations;

And finally, the conclusion: *Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.*

I'd like for us to look at the introduction very briefly. It's something that could be puzzling for us at some times, because the first line says – *Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit* (capital S, which means the Holy Spirit) *into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.* When you look at that a second time, you must ask the question: The Holy Spirit led Jesus to be tempted? How is that? Does God tempt us?

That's where we need to be careful when we start asking the questions. We need to be very clear what the text is saying here – *then Jesus was led up by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.* God does allow us to go into places where we may be tempted. God will allow it, but God doesn't bring the temptation because temptation can only come from the one who has evil intent. And God has no evil intent in Him. He is altogether good. But God as a loving Father, wants us to grow up. And so He will say, "It's going to be a little bit trying for you to go through this, but I know that you can go through it." How do we know that?

1 Corinthians 10:13 says – *God is faithful, He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.* So, even as you get into a temptation, you can confidently say that God has allowed me to go through this; but He knows that I am capable of overcoming this particular temptation.

Then two other beautiful thoughts in this verse that say that God not only knows how much we can be tempted, but He will also provide a way out so that we can endure it. God will provide a way out of that temptation as well. So, when we face temptations, we need to think this is going to make me stronger because God has allowed it. Also, I know that I can overcome this temptation because God has allowed it and then I need to look for that escape route that will take me out of that temptation.

Actually, this 4th chapter of Matthew is positioned over the book of Deuteronomy where it says that God was testing the children of Israel to see whether He could trust them to carry on the things that He had for them. Remember that Israel was God's chosen nation, to be a light to the world. And yet we see that they couldn't fulfill all that they were asked to do. Jesus comes into that same position and goes into the wilderness, faces the temptation of the devil, and overcomes it. So, Jesus becomes the true Israel, and we, as followers of Jesus, ones in Him, are then the new Israel – that's now the theology would go.

Jesus goes back to Deuteronomy and answers each one of the temptations from the book of Deuteronomy, chapters 6 and 8.

First Temptation:

And the tempter came and said to Him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread. 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.'"

After 40 days, Jesus was hungry. Satan comes in and says, "Here's a beautiful way to tempt Jesus – tempt Him in His moment of weakness." It's a physical weakness. So, he comes to

Jesus and says, “If You are the Son of God...” Why is he using that statement? If you look at the previous chapter, 3:13 – *Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?” But Jesus answering said to him, “Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he permitted Him.*

If I can transgress for just a couple of moments here: When you think about baptism, there are so many thoughts that come to us, and I think it gets clouded by all the theological dimensions of baptism – infant and adult, and all of that. But there’s a critical point that Jesus brings about baptism. He didn’t need baptism. John was baptizing for the redemption and forgiveness of sins, and Jesus didn’t need that baptism because there were no sins to be forgiven. He was sinless. When John pointed it out, Jesus says, “Permit it.” Then He says something very interesting, “Permit it at this time, for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Somehow righteousness and baptism go together. I’m going to leave that for you to think about. Among many other scriptures that talk about baptism, this is one line that Jesus Himself tags on to baptism, that righteousness is also a part of baptism; that baptism helps that.

But I want to go on... *After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water, and behold the heavens were opened and He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him. And behold a voice out of the heavens said: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.”* This is My beloved Son... If You are the Son of God...

“If You are the Son of God, then turn these rocks into bread. You’re hungry Jesus, take care of it. You are the Son of God, aren’t you?” That’s what we all just heard! If You are the Son of God, then turn these rocks into bread. Jesus then points out and says, *“It is written, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”*

What a wonderful line for fasting itself, as we think about giving up something. Jesus was hungry. He says: The most important thing, Satan, at this point is not that I fulfill my hunger. If I want to eat just because I am hungry, then my fasting is in vain. But He said, “It is the will of God that is most important, on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”

I wonder as you fast (and some of you may be fasting) whether that begins to be the end, that you say, “Lord, I want to hear beyond the things that I’ve been hearing till not. Lord, I want to have such an intimate relationship with You that I hear Your whisper, that every direction that You want me to turn, to the left or to the right, I will be able to go because I’m so connected to You. Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. Satan, that’s what I am doing, that’s why I am here.”

Notice at the conclusion, that after He had overcome this temptation, angels came and ministered to Him. God has a way of taking care of us. We remain faithful and God then accomplishes what He needs to accomplish. Jesus was fasting, He was hungry. Satan came and offered Him an alternative which Jesus could have done. But Jesus said, “That’s not the focus here. The focus is for Me to be able to hear the word of My Father.” And that must be our focus too, during this time.

Second Temptation:

Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand 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 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.'

What is Satan doing? Jesus used scripture to thwart Satan's first temptation, and now Satan comes back with scripture to try and trip Jesus in a second temptation by using Psalm 91, saying, "If you fall, your feet will not hit the stone, because I will hold you." Yet, when you look at it, you will see that Satan has turned it. The Bible doesn't say – throw yourself down and I will not let you get hurt. The Bible says, when you fall, I will be there to hold you. Jesus says to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord Your God to the test,'" as it was in Meribah when the children of Israel tested God, again using words out of Deuteronomy.

Third Temptation:

The devil took Him to a very 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." That's what Satan wants, isn't it? He wants our worship. He cannot stand us worshipping the true God. And if he cannot have our worship, then he will try and somehow thwart our worship.

How many of us know that Sundays, when we try to come to church, is one of the most difficult mornings. That's the time that arguments happen, that's the time that things don't work, that's the time children play up; all kind of things happen on a Sunday morning that disappear during the week. It's seems like the overcomers who land up here on Sunday morning. sometimes, it's just sleep that beckons. Satan thrives in those situations because he doesn't want us to worship a true God. 'I'll give you all the nations of the world if you will bow down and worship me.' And Jesus says to him, again quoting from Deuteronomy 6: "*Go, Satan, for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.'*"

I think there are a few takeaway points that we can glean from this particular passage of scripture. I want to suggest three principles that we can use as we look at this passage and say: Jesus overcame temptation, how can I also be an overcomer.

1. Just because you can, doesn't mean you should.

Jesus could easily have turned stones into bread. But should He have done that? He answered that well because He didn't do it. For you and me, that's the principle that must be a guiding light for us. Just because we can do something shouldn't mean that we do it. We need to be very careful about the things we can.

A man, who was a director on the board of Goldman Sachs, a millionaire doing very well, was privy to information that the board had. And he passed that information to a friend who used it to make a lot of money. This man was prosecuted and brought to justice, and he served a five-year sentence in a New York prison. The principle 'just because you can doesn't mean you should' was at work here. He had the information, and thought he could use it where he shouldn't have. The judge who sentenced him said, "I haven't seen such a good man standing in front of me. All your life you have done only good. You have helped so many people, built institutions. And one mistake like this has brought about your downfall."

A month or so later, in a class, a young girl was seated, dreading the lecture that was about to happen. She was a student at Harvard and the professor was a guest lecturer. As he began to speak, she pulled herself as low as she could in her seat, because the man who was speaking was the man who had prosecuted her father. I say this to you only because sometimes we think that the things we do, don't affect other people. They do! Sin not only infects; it affects as well.

So, the principle, as we look at this passage is: Just because you can do something doesn't mean that you should. If you were to ask the question 'why?' I'll give you three sub-points.

- It may not be the right thing to do – as we saw in this particular example.
- It may not be the right time to do so. It might be the right thing to do, but may not be the right time. God may be training people to trust Him. Then when we jump in, we may short circuit what God is trying to do. Jesus was hungry in the wilderness; God let Him be hungry right through, but provided for Him after He came through it.
- It may not be the best use of the power that you have. Remember David, a king – came out of his balcony, saw a woman bathing. He could have turned around and gone it, but he didn't. His eyes lingered, he called for her because he had power. He could do it but he shouldn't have done it. He called her to him. She had no option but to come. He slept with her and sinned. She was already married to Uriah the Hittite. Then one sin followed another. Just because he could, he did it, but he shouldn't have.

2. **Just because God can, doesn't mean God will.** God can do anything that He wants but we make a big mistake in thinking that just because God can, God will in our lives.

Let me give you an example in my own life. Many of you know that I had an issue with my back – four herniated discs. There didn't seem that anything could be done. We had seen many doctors. Then, miraculously, God healed me, overnight. Four herniated discs, and I'm healed. I haven't had a back problem since then, and it's been twenty years.

But I also have diabetes for thirty odd years. I'm insulin-dependent. And God hasn't healed it. I know God can, because He healed my back. He hasn't healed my diabetes yet. How can I misuse this principle which is: Just because God can, it doesn't mean He will? By saying, "Okay, If God can heal my back, He can certainly heal my diabetes. So, Lord I'm going to trust You. Tonight, I'm going to stop my insulin and all my medication. I'm waiting for You to heal me because You touched my back."

The principle here is just because God can do something, doesn't mean that He will do it in your life. we need to be very careful how we put God on the stand in the things that we do. Fasting and prayer, especially during Lent, could lead to some of these things that we need to be careful about. We may say, "Lord, this is the one thing that I'm bringing to You during this period of Lent. I know You can do it. By the end of these forty days, I'm going to be done with it." Maybe that's not the will of God even if God can do it. That is why it is so important to first draw near to Him, to be discerning and sensitive to the things that God wants to do. It doesn't stop me from praying for healing because I know God is capable of healing. But to assume is to be

presumptuous. To assume that if I stop the medicines that He'll heal me is being presumptuous of God.

- 3. Just because Satan wants something doesn't mean that he should get it.** Satan wants our worship and he will do everything to distract us from true worship. Many, many times I sit in this chair and I bind things that I see going on in church. I bind things that I believe are distractions, in the name of Jesus. Satan wants to come and distract you from worship. Somebody who walks in late begins to be a distraction – you turn and you've lost sight of the Lord. He can use simple things like this. That's his agenda. If he cannot get your worship, then he will distract you from worship.

He can even give you the lesser thing wanting you to forsake the greater plan of God. Let me illustrate this to you. Let's say that God has been speaking to you and saying: I want you to go and share the gospel with so-and-so. That's when you turn into a Moses and say: "Lord, let me refer You back to the book of Exodus, to see all those things that Moses had. Lord, I have those same things. All those excuses, Lord. I just cannot do it." God continues to impress upon you that He wants you to go and speak the Word to this person. Then Satan comes along and he says, "You know the Daily Breads that they have in church. Take a copy and give it to this person. They can read it and they will come to know God." And in your mind you are thinking: Ah! I can give a Daily Bread, and that's a great thing. I'm a Christian and I'm giving it to somebody to read. I also remember that the Bible says that God's word shall not return back void. So, you take the Daily Bread and give it. But maybe, it is that God knows more about the situation that you do. Maybe God knows that the person can only be persuaded by word of mouth, that he is not a reader, that he/she is not someone who is easily taken in by the written word. That's why God was telling you to go and speak to that person. Satan says, "Just give the Daily Bread," and in our minds we are thinking that's a good thing.

So, the lesser begins to be what we follow rather than the greater, while the lesser has no potential to do anything that God wants it to do. Because that is the will of the evil one, not the will of God. Satan will bring a whole lot of things into our lives, but that doesn't mean that we should fall for it or settle for it. Even though it seems like a good thing, even a biblical thing (he used scripture) or even something that convinced us that God would want this. Yes, God might want this, but not in this situation.

So, as we look at these temptations of Jesus, I want you to keep in your mind these three principles:

1. Just because you can do something, it doesn't mean that you should. Why? It may not be the right thing to do, it may not be the right time to do it, or it may not be the best use of the power and authority that you have.
2. Just because God can do something it doesn't mean that He will do something.
3. Be careful about the way Satan can come and try and tempt you and lower the standards so that His will is done.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for this narrative of Your Son, and how He went through these temptations and came through victoriously. Lord, as You allow these kinds of things into our lives, help us to recognize that You know that we can be victorious. Help us never to settle for the lesser and forsake the greater. We pray that we will never get presumptuous and force

You to do something that is not part of Your will just because You can do it. Lord, show us during these days how to be more sensitive to Your leading, to Your Spirit. Help our conversations to be intimate, Master, and help us to be just more discerning in the things that we are hearing around us, the things that we see in Your Word, and how to hear Your words clearly in our lives. We submit to You, Lord. in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.