

Main Idea: We’re learning how to prepare for temptation in 2016 by looking at Jesus’ temptation experience in Matthew 4:1-11. As our Savior, Jesus encountered and overcame three temptations.

I. Scene #1: The setting of Jesus’ temptation (1-2).

II. Scene #2: The specifics of Jesus’ temptation (3-10).

A. The devil tempted Jesus to perform a miracle for Himself (3-4).

B. The devil tempted Jesus to prove Himself (5-7).

1. His strategy: He used religion to cover up his deadly intent.

a. He took Jesus to the House of God.

b. He quoted from the Word of God.

c. He talked about the angels of God.

2. His aim: He wanted Jesus to act presumptuously towards God.

a. Beware of using a Bible verse and ignoring the context of that verse.

b. Beware of using a Bible verse and ignoring other Bible verses.

3. Jesus’ response: He quoted Deuteronomy 6:16.

a. He made it clear He would not do what Israel did at Massah.

b. He made it clear that He would not question the care of His Father.

c. He made it clear He would not use His position to justify self-focused action.

C. The devil tempted Jesus to promote Himself (8-10).

Application: From Jesus’ temptations we learn...

1. We have a powerful enemy.

2. We have a far more powerful Savior.

3. We need the continual help of the Savior to overcome the enemy.

We’re learning how to prepare for temptation in 2016 by looking at Jesus’ temptation experience in Matthew 4:1-11. As our Savior, Jesus encountered and overcame three temptations.

To prepare for today’s message, I’d like to read an important related text.

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 2:14-18

Suppose you received a call that your best friend was in the hospital, and so you went to visit. As you entered the room, the sight took your breath away, for you hardly recognized him. He’d lost a bunch of weight since you’d last seen him three weeks ago. His face was twisted with pain and life-sustaining tubes were coming out of his body.

“What happened to Pete?” you asked his wife in amazement. “The last time I saw him he seemed just fine. I can’t believe my eyes!”

She shook her head and responded slowly, “He was fine until fifteen days ago.

That’s when he started taking some so-called ‘health supplement’ he learned about from a trainer at the gym. In fact, the trainer gave him a free week’s supply to try it out. Pete took the tablets for four days, seemed fine, said he never felt better in his life, and then on the fifth day he collapsed, and has been going down hill ever since. Until today, that is. The doc says they finally figured out what medicine to give him to counteract the poison that was killing him. He should be out of the hospital by the end of the week.”

Fifteen minutes later you leave the room, stunned, and not just because of your friend’s predicament. Your head is spinning because you go to the same gym where Pete goes, although he does the morning workout and you go in the afternoon. What’s more, you’ve had the same trainer, and just yesterday that trainer gave you a seven-day supply of the same ‘health supplement’ Pete took. You were actually planning to take the first pill that very evening with your meal.

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For an earlier development of this passage, see the Temptation series at WBC in 2009..

Now answer this. Would your knowledge of Pete's experience affect what you did with that 'health supplement'? It's a no brainer. Knowing that your friend just about died from taking those pills would prompt you to take action to put as much distance as you could between yourself and those pills.

Frankly, that's the purpose for our current series, *Preparing for Temptation in 2016—Learning from Jesus*. I'm thankful that there's an antidote for sin, which of course is the Jesus Christ and His redemptive work. Which means anyone who puts their trust in Him can be healed from the destructive effects of the poison of sin.

However, Christ intends to deliver us not only from the effects of our sin, but from its presence. He taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation (Matt. 6:13)." So yes, there's hope once sin has occurred, but how much better it is to stop the sin ahead of time, and to do that we must get down to business about the subject of temptation.²

To put it simply, my aim in this series is this. I don't want us to end up in the hospital. I want us to learn how to detect and resist the voice of the tempter when he offers us his miracle health supplements. That's why last week we began to ponder the temptation of Jesus in Matthew 4, for it's here that we learn from our Savior how to resist temptation.

Every day you and I are bombarded with temptations, and quite frankly, we cannot stand in our own strength. We need Jesus. We need His wisdom to detect the subtleties of the tempter. We need His power to resist the enticements that captivate our fleshly desires. We need His atoning sacrifice to break the power of canceled sin.

And we need (and have) His example.

Last time we examined the first scene of Jesus' temptation in Matthew 4:1-11, which is the setting, and then the first temptation in scene two. Let's do a quick review, and then work our way through the second temptation.

I. Scene #1: Consider the setting of Jesus' temptation (1-2).

Verses 1-2 "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry."

Then, says Matthew. There's the setting. Right after Jesus was baptized, and right after God the Father announced, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased (Matt. 3:17)," *then*...the Spirit of God led Jesus into the desert to be tempted. Matthew makes it clear that in the Lord's temptation there was both divine control (He was "led by the Spirit into the desert") and the devil's attack ("to be tempted by the devil").

The same is true for us. "There has no temptation taken you except what is common to man. God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able (1 Cor 10:13)."

Why would the Spirit lead Jesus into a place where He would be tempted? Jesus was tempted in order to show His humility, His humanity, His holiness, and His unmatched love for sinners.

² I'm indebted to John Owen's insight, taken from chapter nine in *Of Temptation*: "Should you go into an hospital, and see many persons lying sick and weak, sore and wounded, with many filthy diseases and distempers, and should inquire of them how they fell into this condition, and they shall all agree to tell you such or such a thing was the occasion of it,—“By that I got my wound,” says one, “And my disease,” says another,—would it not make you a little careful how or what you had to do with that thing or place? Surely it would...The case is so with entering into temptation.”

II. Scene #2: Consider the specifics of Jesus' temptation (3-10).

In the first temptation...

A. The devil tempted Jesus to perform a miracle for Himself (3-4). In verse 3, "The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.'"

Let's look at the devil's strategy, the devil's aim, and Jesus' response.

1. *His strategy: He appealed to a legitimate need.* Bread is a good thing. You need bread to live. If You're the Son of God, Jesus (like the voice from heaven just said), then this should be no problem for you. And if Your Father loves you, like He said, surely He wouldn't want You to be hungry. So go ahead. Turn these stones into bread.

2. *His aim: He wanted Jesus to act independently of God.* Did Jesus have the power to turn stones into bread? Without question. It wouldn't be long before He turned a sack lunch into enough bread to feed 5,000 hungry men.

But when the Son of God left heaven to come to earth, He laid aside the independent use of His omnipotence, humbled Himself, and chose a course of self-denial that would take Him to the cross. Would He now renege on that commitment? Would He act independently of His Father?

Verse 4—"Jesus answered, 'It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

3. *Jesus' response: He quoted Deuteronomy 8:3.* By quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, Jesus made four things quite clear. One, there is something more important than bread. Two, He wasn't going to use His power for personal gain. Three, He wasn't going to act independently of God. And four, He was going to live by God's Word, for that's the kind of life that pleases God, a Bible-focused, Bible-saturated, Bible-directed life.

That's where we left off last time. Now let's consider the second temptation.

B. The devil tempted Jesus to prove Himself (5-7). Verses 5-6 "Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

That's interesting. Where did the devil take Jesus this time to tempt Him? To the wicked city of Corinth? No, to the holy city, Jerusalem. And where in the holy city? To a bar? No. He took Him to the holiest place in the holy city, to the *temple*.

Does it surprise you to see the devil going to God's House? My friend, the devil loves religion. It's one of his favorite tools of the trade. Notice his strategy here, for you'll see it in your own life, perhaps today.

1. *His strategy: He used religion to cover up his deadly intent.* And in this case, not false religion either. He used three legitimate, God-given objects in his attempt to get Jesus to dishonor His Father.

a. He took Jesus to the House of God. Amazing. The devil took Jesus to the temple, to the place Jesus later referred to as "His Father's House" (John 2:16). In fact, he took Jesus to the highest point of the very place God Himself had authorized as *the* place where sinful human beings could find mercy and forgiveness.

Was this a vision, or did the devil actually transport Jesus from the desert to the temple peak? The text seems to indicate the latter, that the devil actually took Jesus to the House of God. And there...

b. He quoted from the Word of God. Specifically, from Psalm 91:11-12. "It is written," he said.

Please notice that the devil knows the Bible. In warfare any general worth his salt makes it a priority to know his enemy. The devil knows God—remember he used to serve in His presence. And the devil knows God’s Word—he despises it but he knows it and loves to use it with susceptible targets.

And please notice a third religious implement in the devil’s toolbox...

c. He talked about the angels of God. “He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

What was the devil before he tried to usurp the place of God? He was an angel. What are angels? Hebrews 1:13 says they are “ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation.” God created angels to serve Him, but of course, this angel, Lucifer, rejected that role, for he wanted to be served rather than serve.

It’s interesting to hear the devil quoting Psalm 91 which records what God commands angels to do. He’s quoting the commands he should have kept and violated.

Let me point out again the devil’s strategy. He takes Jesus to the House of God, quotes from the Word of God, and talks about the angels of God. What’s he doing? He’s using religion to cover up his deadly intent.

Frederick Bruner comments, “Where the first temptation smelled like a bakery, the second has the aroma of a Greek Orthodox liturgy at Easter. While the devil in the first temptation had tried to reach Jesus through his weak spot, his hungry stomach, he now tries to reach Jesus through his strong spot, his faith in God’s Word (by which Jesus had held off the first temptation). If the evil one cannot make us carnal perhaps he can make us fanatical; if he cannot make us supersecular by seeking wonder bread, perhaps he can make us superspiritual by suggesting leaps of faith.”³

That’s what was at stake in this second temptation.

2. His aim: He wanted Jesus to act presumptuously towards God. If you are the Son of God—and You are, remember? That’s what the voice just said—then throw Yourself down and take God at His Word. Let that crowd down below see that here’s a man who really believes the Bible, and let God above see that here’s a Son who doesn’t just *say* He believes His Father but *shows* it.

It’s time to name it and claim it Jesus, that is, if you really believe the Bible.

A few years ago a Wisconsin mother took the stand to defend her husband against the charge of murdering their own child. The parents had failed to take their sick child to the doctor, and sadly, their eleven-year-old daughter, Madeline, died of undiagnosed diabetes. Leilani Neumann told the jury in her husband’s trial that she thought her daughter’s March 2008 illness was a test of her religious faith and she didn’t take the girl to a doctor because that would have been “complete disobedience to what we believe.” She also testified, “We thought even the lifelessness was something that she would come out of. Everything for us is about faith. It is about trusting in God. We either believe in God’s word or we don’t.”⁴

Brothers and sisters, the devil loves to use religion to get us to act presumptuously towards God. He even uses the Bible to entice us to claim God’s promises, but as Jesus will make clear in His response, there’s a difference between *trusting* God and *testing* God.

This is a good place to mention two warnings regarding our use of the Bible.

³ Frederick Dale Bruner, p. 108.

⁴ <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/32191966/>

a. Beware of using a Bible verse and ignoring the context of that verse.

What's obvious in Matthew 4:6 is that the devil quoted the Bible. What's not so obvious is that he left out part of the verse he quoted, *and* completely omitted the next verse which says, "You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent (Ps. 91:13)."

Any idea why the devil didn't mention to Jesus a verse that talks about stomping on a serpent?

The truth is, you can use the Bible to justify just about any course of action, including sin, *if* you take a verse out of context. In Bible study context is critical. Look at the verses that come before and after the particular verse you are considering. Sure, some verses talk about healing, but what's the context of those verses? And not just the context of the book either. Make sure you consider the context of the whole Bible, for the proper interpretation of one verse must be consistent with the message of the rest of the Bible.

b. Beware of using a Bible verse and ignoring other Bible verses. That's the very point Jesus makes in His response. The devil said, "It is written."

To which Jesus replied in verse 7, "It is *also* written." The devil quoted Psalm 91:11-12. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:16. What's Jesus doing? He's doing what we must do. He's comparing Scripture with Scripture and thus interpreting Scripture in light of Scripture.

Now, with those two warnings in mind, look carefully at verse 7, "Jesus answered him, 'It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.''"

3. Jesus' response: He quoted Deuteronomy 6:16.

What do we learn from Jesus' response? He made three things perfectly clear.

a. He made it clear He would not do what Israel did at Massah. That's the context of Deuteronomy 6:16. Jesus quoted the first part of the verse. Here's what the rest of the verse says, "Do not test the LORD your God *as you did at Massah.*"

Moses is talking here to the Israelites just prior to his death, and he challenges them not to do what they did at Massah.

What did they do at Massah? Exodus 17:2 tells us, "So they quarreled with Moses and said, 'Give us water to drink.' Moses replied, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?'"

"And he called the place Massah and Meribah," says Exodus 17:7, "because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, 'Is the LORD among us or not?'"

So at Massah Israel questioned God and demanded that He prove His love for them by giving them water. Israel, God's *son*, tested the Lord.

But by quoting Deuteronomy 6:16 Jesus made it clear that He was a Son who would not do that. He would not *test* His Father.

b. He made it clear that He would not question the care of His Father.

Remember, Jesus is out in the desert. He hasn't eaten for forty days. But unlike Israel, He's not grumbling. Jump off of the temple? To prove that My Father cares for Me, you say. Why would I do that? I don't need Him to do something spectacular to prove His love for Me. Do I trust Him? With My life. Will I test Him? Never.

Beloved, one of the reasons the Lord allows us to experience times of testing, like Jesus faced in the wilderness, is to give us the opportunity to trust Him.

Oswald Chambers makes a vital point in his classic book, *My Utmost for His Highest*:

The word *temptation* has come to mean something bad to us today, but we tend to use the word in the wrong way. Temptation itself is not sin; it is something we are bound to face simply by virtue of being human. Not to be tempted would mean that we were already so shameful that we would be beneath contempt. Yet many of us suffer from temptations we should never have to suffer, simply because we have refused to allow God to lift us to a higher level where we would face temptations of another kind.⁵

Well said. Temptation isn't itself sin. Temptation is a revealer. We learn a lot about ourselves, specifically about our level of spiritual maturity, but what tempts us.

Put a little tikes toy in front of a three year old and tell him he's not to touch it. Now that's a temptation! But for *him*, not for you. Put the toy in front of you, and it's no problem.

Of course, put a stack of \$50 dollar bills on a table with no one watching, right next to a stack of shiny pennies, and which entices the three year old this time, and you?

The point is, temptation is a revealer. It reveals something to us about what we value. Listen again to Oswald Chambers:

A person's inner nature, what he possesses in the inner, spiritual part of his being, determines what he is tempted by on the outside. The temptation fits the true nature of the person being tempted and reveals the possibilities of his nature. Every person actually determines or sets the level of his own temptation, because temptation will come to him in accordance with the level of his controlling, inner nature.

Temptation comes to me, suggesting a possible shortcut to the realization of my highest goal—it does not direct me toward what I understand to be evil, but toward what I understand to be good.⁶

In other words, I go after what I *want*, and what I want is what I consider to be *good*. For the three year old, it's a little tikes. What is it for us?

I found an interesting article this week entitled, "*Men And Temptation: Five Temptations That Often Entrap Men.*"⁷ The author identifies the five most common temptations that entrap men:

1. Work
2. Competition
3. Sex
4. Pornography
5. Deception

Men, these temptations are revealers. They reveal what we consider to be *good*, and therefore *want*. And can't afford to be passive in these areas.

And ladies, what about you? Do you know where you are vulnerable? I ran across a very insightful article by Rick Thomas, entitled, "*Men are tempted to lust – Women are tempted to be lusted after.*" I recommend every woman read it.

The article begins, "Porn is a two-way street. Pornography is not just about a man who is seeking a sexual object to devour with his eyes and heart. It is also about a woman who wants to be "devoured" by the eyes of another man."⁸

Then Thomas observes, "There are millions of women who do love God, but are tempted to the lustful sin of manipulating men to gaze at them. They are gaze capturers.

⁵ Reading taken from Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, Sept 17, 2016

⁶ Reading taken from Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, Sept 17, 2016

⁷ <http://www.askmen.com/entertainment/austin/men-and-temptation.html>

⁸ <http://rickthomas.net/men-are-tempted-to-lust-women-are-tempted-to-be-lusted-after/>

Are you a gaze capturer? Do you secretly enjoy the power (perverse security) you feel when guys look at you? Do you secretly enjoy the ability to control (perverse security) a man by your beauty?"⁹

In the article there's a personal testimony from a wife who is very transparent:

I have gone through the trauma of discovering that my husband was viewing pornography. I thought it was a problem that only involved explicit material. I never knew or even thought that any woman who was not properly dressed was tempting him to sin...

The pain and suffering we went through was the worst thing that ever happened in my life. BTW, God healed me of cancer. The saddest thing of all was that I never knew how men looked at women or what they were thinking when they looked.

This broke my heart. I never knew how the clothing of a woman affected the men around me. My husband never told me how it affected him.

I followed the secular way of clothing myself without realizing how I was contributing to the problem...

Can you see how deceived I was? Worst of all I thought I never looked like them—those who unashamedly trafficked in porn. I was under the impression that my clothing was tasteful and sophisticated. I was completely oblivious to what effect I had on the men and women around me.

Call me naive, but I never knew that our fathers, husbands, brothers, and pastors lusted after women. I thought it was only the unsaved and *perverted* people who “really” needed Jesus. But it was in my own church, my own home, and my own marriage.

My appeal is to our leaders, husbands, and fathers to help us, protect us, lead us:

- Tell us what it is about our clothing that is unacceptable.
- Tell us why it is unacceptable.
- Tell us what it is all about.
- Tell us how we can cause men to stumble.
- Tell us what is happening in the minds of the men around us.

If you will speak honestly to us and love us enough to tell us the truth about porn, then many wives and daughters will be grateful and willing to humble themselves into more God-centered ways of thinking and dressing.

Many husbands are not leading their wives this way. Many mothers are not modeling modesty to their daughters. I fear for the next generation of wives, mothers, and daughters who will be even more naked than they are now.¹⁰

I know how a man is tempted to respond at this point. “Listen. I’m just looking. And I’m asking the Lord to help me.”

And a woman could certainly respond, “Listen, it’s not my problem if men struggle. I’ll ask the Lord to help them.”

But listen again at Jesus. *Do not put the Lord your God to the test.* He made it clear He would not do what Israel did at Massah, nor would He question the care of His Father. Nor this...

c. He made it clear He would not use His position to justify self-focused action. He would not jump off the temple to prove His deity. He would not force His Father to send the angels. To the contrary, He would deny Himself, and not just this day,

⁹ <http://www.askmen.com/entertainment/austin/men-and-temptation.html>

¹⁰ <http://rickthomas.net/men-are-tempted-to-lust-women-are-tempted-to-be-lusted-after/>

but all the way to the cross. As He later would say, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28).”¹¹

Please don’t miss what the devil is doing here. Notice the progression in these two temptations. He’s moved from bread to the Bible. As Bruner explains, “The first temptation is to aim at our weakest spot, where obviously it is easiest to make a person fall. But the second technique, surprisingly, is not to aim at our next weakest spot; more cleverly it is to aim at our strength. This is a kind of spiritual jiu-jitsu. For if it is easiest to get us where we are weakest, it is next easiest to get us where we are strongest. This is so because strength is not an obvious problem.”¹²

Again, well said. *We’re Bible believing Christians. We believe the Book. We live by the Book. We defend the Book.*

That’s good, but please keep in mind that where we think we are strong, we are also vulnerable. And that’s because the devil knows the Book, too, and he knows it better than we do.

Please realize that the evil one’s tactics often involve using Bible verses to justify action that flatly contradicts other Bible verses.

“You’re not going to talk to her, are you, not after what she did to you! Why, she lied about you and you know what the Bible says about lying!”

Yes, the Bible clearly forbids deceitful talk, but does it have anything to say about giving people the silent treatment?

By the way, church-hoppers often fall prey to this line of attack. “You deserve a better church,” the tempter suggests. “You’d be lowering your standards, why, you’d be lowering *God’s* standards if you stayed in that church, with all its problems.”

Certainly, the Bible makes it clear that problems must be addressed in churches, but doesn’t it also have something to say about the cancerous effect of a critical spirit?

The demon Screwtape had this to say about how he used the temptation to church-hop to knock Christians off course. Screwtape, of course, is the fictional character in C. S. Lewis’s classic, *The Screwtape Letters*, a book which records the advice the senior demon, Screwtape, to his junior demon in training named Wormwood. Here’s what he said as he began letter #16:

My Dear Wormwood, You mentioned casually in your last letter that the patient has continued to attend one church, and one only, since he was converted, and that he is not wholly pleased with it. May I ask what you are about? Why have I no report on the causes of his fidelity to the parish church? Do you realise that unless it is due to indifference it is a very bad thing? Surely you know that if a man can't be cured of churchgoing, the next best thing is to send him all over the neighbourhood looking for the church that "suits" him until he becomes a taster or connoisseur of churches.

The reasons are obvious... The search for a "suitable" church makes the man a critic where the Enemy wants him to be a pupil. What He wants of the layman in church is an attitude which may, indeed, be critical in the sense of rejecting what is false or unhelpful, but which is wholly uncritical in the sense that it does not appraise—does not waste time in thinking about what it rejects, but lays itself open in uncommenting, humble receptivity to any nourishment that is going. (You see how grovelling, how unspiritual, how irredeemably vulgar He is!) This attitude, especially during sermons, creates the condition (most hostile to our whole policy) in which

¹¹ In the words of Philippians 2, “Who being in very nature God...made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.” Servants don’t make demands. They serve. And that’s what Jesus came to do.

¹² Bruner, p. 108.

platitudes can become really audible to a human soul. There is hardly any sermon, or any book, which may not be dangerous to us if it is received in this temper. So pray bestir yourself and send this fool the round of the neighbouring churches as soon as possible.¹³

Yes, justifying self-focused action is the devil's objective for us. Which is why in the first temptation the devil tried to get Jesus to perform a miracle for Himself; and in the second, to prove Himself. It's the same in the third, which we'll look at next time, the Lord willing.

C. The devil tempted Jesus to promote Himself (8-10).

Application: From Jesus' temptations we learn...three lessons.

1. *We have a powerful enemy.* 1 Peter 5:8 says he's prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. It's the truth, beloved. We have a powerful enemy.

2. *We have a far more powerful Savior.* We've seen a taste of His power in Matthew 4, but He's just getting started. He's going to do miracles at the end of Matthew 4, including healing the diseased and setting free the demon-possessed. And He's going to deliver a powerful message we call the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7 and conclude it by calling on people to believe His words and put them in practice. He's going to calm the storm in chapter 8, and give sight to a blind man in chapter 9.

And it's all going to climax when He the King rides into Jerusalem on a colt in chapter 21, and willingly goes to the cross in chapter 27, where He dies in the place of sinners, and leaves His tomb and returns to heaven in chapter 28, crushing the serpent's head.

Yes, my friend, we have a powerful enemy. But we have a far more powerful Savior!

3. *We need the continual help of the Savior to overcome the enemy.* This is the key to overcoming temptation. We need what God has graciously offered to us, the *continual help* of the ever-present Savior!

The hymnwriter gives us a fitting prayer of response...

*O let me feel Thee near me, the world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle, the tempting sounds I hear;
My foes are ever near me, around me and within;
But Jesus, draw Thou nearer, and shield my soul from sin.*¹⁴

¹³ C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, letter #16.

¹⁴ *O Jesus, I Have Promised*, by John E. Bode (hymn #369)