

## Matthew 4:1-11 - Temptations

When we hear of Jesus' temptation by the devil, part of us thinks "big deal." Jesus got off easy. They are barely temptations! What about real temptation—pornography, the money or things our employer would never miss, the lies that become routine, the hateful and vulgar words that spew out of our mouths. Those are the big things we deal with. How would Jesus have done if He had faced the real temptations we face—sex without the constraints of conception or the responsibilities of love ... the love of money that dreams how you would spend your lottery winnings ... the difficulty in finding reasons not to throw your co-workers under the bus to get ahead ... the luster of a good grade through the lie of cheating. Jesus got off easy! Or did He?

The worst temptations are not the temptations to sin but the temptation to reject the Lord, to give up on His Word, and to deny His eternal truth. This is what Jesus faced for us and this is the real temptation that hides underneath all those other temptations. The greatest temptation Jesus faced is the fear that His heavenly Father was holding out on Him—that the cross was not the only way to save a fallen world and that suffering could have been avoided. The greatest temptation Jesus faced was that if His Father in heaven really loved Him, He would not ask Him to do what He did. If the Father in heaven really loved Jesus, He would give Him the desires of the moment as well as eternity—no Thy will be done but my will.

The greatest temptation Jesus faced was the belief that God could have made His life easier, a short cut or a whole series of short cuts. After all, if the Father loved Him, would He not want Jesus to live an easier life, a happier life, and better life? Whether we like to admit it or not, this is the big stuff that hides behind lust and desire. It is not simple sins that appear to live on the outside of our lives but the hard temptations of trust and faith that test our hearts. This is what Jesus faced. This is what we face.

The worst temptations to dog you every day are the ones the devil sent to Jesus. We think the naughty sins are the big temptations; sin is only a tool. Satan uses sin to achieve the bigger purpose of separating us from God. That's how Satan uses sin and immorality, the fear that God could have or should have given you more than He did, the envy of others, and the doubt that hides in our hearts believing God loves others more than He loves me. These Satan uses to deprive us of the comfort of God's love, the joy of His forgiveness, and the hope of His good and gracious will.

The worst temptations we meet up with are hidden in the whims of the moment and the doubts that if God really loved us, He would give us the desires of our hearts. Families who ache for a child and the baby does not come. Hard workers who never seem able to catch a break. Good intentions that are dumped on every time. Here comes Satan into our hearts making us think that there is a

love bigger than the cross and that kind of love would give us what we want and what we think we deserve.

The worst temptations to stalk us come down to the tests and trials of this mortal life and the nagging fear that if God really loved us, He would make all of them go away. If God loved us, He would fix our marriage, fix our kids, fix our lives. After all, there has got to be an easier way of life than the daily grind of house, home, job, and sleep?

But of course, Jesus faced this. His temptation was not easier or different than ours. The devil met Him where He meets us. But Jesus met the devil with more than a stronger will than we have. He met the devil with the truth of God's Word. The devil only lies. Even when the devil quotes Scripture, he turns it into a lie. The only response to lies is truth that cuts hard, cuts deep, and cuts clean. If we stand, we stand not on our own but in this truth.

We always seem to assume that the devil wants to make us bad and to do bad things. But the devil does not so much care if we are bad or if we give into the temptation to sin. It is enough that we become suspicious of God's good and gracious will, that we learn to be skeptical of God's motives and doubtful of His Word, and that we do not trust His compassion or His promises. The best temptation of the devil to crack open your faith is to put a question mark where God has put a period. It is our worst temptation.

Why? Because we begin to think that doubts are not so bad, perhaps even normal. Because we begin to think that we must do for ourselves what we do not believe God will do for us. Because we begin to live less by faith and more by sight. When the devil has brought us there, we are done.

Jesus resists the temptation of the devil—not as an example to show us what we can do or should do on our own. No, Jesus is no inspirational example of what we can and should be. He stands in our place to show us that the truth of God's Word is stronger than the devil's lies. He stands in our place to keep us from being comfortable with any distance between us and God, between us and His Word.

Man really does not live by bread alone. Our bellies may be full and our lives empty. We live by the Word that does what it promises—in water that gives life to the dead, in bread and wine that feed us eternity, and in the voice that speaks and our sins are forgiven. God really will command His angels and they will bear us up—not as servants who do our bidding but as the instruments of God who protect and defend us from our real enemies and not merely the imaginary ones we think we are fighting. You really do have only one God so it had better be the right God—the One who loves you more than life and who dies to rescue you from death.

What can you learn from Jesus' temptation is not how to squeak by the devil but that the Lord is good, His gracious will shall not disappoint you, His mercy is new every morning, He loves you as the sinner you are but refuses to leave you in your sins, He is not a good times God but is with you

in suffering and will not go back on His promise. Lies are no refuge for the weak. Only the truth is strong enough to save us. That strong truth is the Word of the Lord that endures forever.