

Sermon: Matthew 4:1-11 The temptation of Jesus

Big idea: We can defeat the temptations of Satan by following the example of Jesus - trusting in God's promises and in using his word as a weapon against Satan.

Introduction

(Play video – final scene of the good the bad and the ugly))

Ah westerns. The great classics of movies. Here we have the classic battle of the good guy vs the bad guy. And while everyone knows that the good guy will ALWAYS win in the final epic dual, there is always that tense moment of whether or not good will prevail.

Whenever I read the temptation of Jesus I imagine the same sort of scene. On one side we have Jesus, Son of God and on the other we have Satan ready to face each other down. Now we all know that Jesus is going to win, after all Jesus is God has complete control of Satan, but there is that tense moment in the story where we hold our breath and see if Jesus is able to resist the temptations which Satan shoots at him.

Now while we all know that Jesus will resist and in the end completely defeat Satan, he also shows us how in our own lives, when we are having our own showdowns with Satan, how we can resist temptation.

So let's get stuck into the passage and start off by looking at Satan's first temptation.

First Point: First Temptation

Make Point : Satan doesn't always tempt us with blatant lies – he twists the truth

Now just give some background Jesus has just been declared to be the son of God by God after his baptism. If you remember the clouds open and God's voice comes down saying "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." And straight after we have Jesus being led out by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted. And so, after a forty day fast Satan comes. His first temptation comes in vs 3 ""If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Now this is a really sneaky way of trying to get Jesus to trust in himself rather than in his father. See, what Satan is saying is "you haven't had anything to eat in forty days and God your Father clearly isn't providing for you...so why don't you trust yourself over God and use your power to save yourself". What Satan is doing is trying to get Jesus to Question God.

Illustrate point

It's similar to when Satan comes to us today. One thing we often hear is that we constantly need to get ourselves more stuff be it more money or cars or possessions or houses or more whatever. We need to get these things for ourselves because the world tells us that we can't trust God to provide for us. Instead we need to look after ourselves. We are challenged to trust in ourselves rather than in God. It's almost like Satan says – "If God really does care for you, why don't you have a house, or more money, or

a better job?" "If God really cares for you, why are you struggling in life at the moment – why are things hard?"

Explain point

So how does Jesus go with this First temptation? Well he doesn't take it sitting down but strikes back at Satan by quoting scripture "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Without even hesitating Jesus shuts Satan down with God's own word but on top of this Jesus trusts that God will be faithful to his promise to provide everything that we need. By trusting in God's word and his promises Jesus easily passes the first temptation.

Second Point: Second Temptation

Make Point

So after this defeat Satan starts his second temptation. Satan takes Jesus to the highest point of the temple and says "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.'" Now this is really sneaky. Satan uses God's own word, in particular a passage from psalms, to try and tempt Jesus! He uses God's word to try and get Jesus to sin against God! But how is this sin? How would jumping off a temple and getting God's angels to come and help him cause Jesus to sin? Well Satan is saying that simply trusting in God's promises is not enough; you need to test them to make sure God will follow through. He is once again challenging g Jesus trust in God.

Illustrate point

In today's world we still have Satan using God's word to cause people to sin. A good example of this is something called the prosperity gospel. People who teach the prosperity gospel say that God wants you to be incredibly rich and always in good health. They base this on passages such as Mark 4: 25 which says "Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him." They then imply that this means that those who have lots of money will be given more. Now obviously this isn't true. When you look at the passages around Mark 4:25 its clear Jesus is talking about faith in this verse. But Satan is able to use God's word to make people sin. But what about the way WE test God – if God loves me, he'll give me a better job – asking God to meet OUR terms. Asking God to fulfil OUR expectations, rather than his. E.g. I need a spouse, I need a better job, I need a house, I need blah blah blah... But maybe God DOESN'T give us more money BECAUSE he loves us! Perhaps He knows we would be worse off with MORE! Maybe we CAN trust God and be content with what we have?!

Explain point

So how does Jesus deal with this bullet from Satan? Satan has just quoted scripture and so how can Jesus come back? Well once again Jesus forces Satan onto the back foot by quoting another passage "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Jesus refutes Satan's use of scripture and

quotes a passage once again which shows his faith in God's word and his promises. He stands firm against the tempter through his trust in God and cuts down the temptation by his use of God's word.

Third Point: Third Temptation

Make Point

So once again we have Jesus completely defeating Satan's temptation and remaining true to God. It is the third and last temptation however where Satan tries to get Jesus to completely turn away from God. After leading Jesus to a mountain where all the kingdoms of the world could be seen Satan says "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." What Satan is offering here is a temporary solution. Jesus knew that every kingdom on Earth would be placed under him. For God to be able to do that however, Jesus would have to be crucified first. What Satan is saying is that "You can avoid that, I can give you everything you want right now.....IF you will worship me instead of God".

Illustrate point

Today Satan offers us the same **temporary** solution. As Christians we face all sorts of challenges in this world. From persecution to the daily battles of temptation. Satan offers us an easy alternative. He says to us that it's much easier to worship him – to just give into the world. To be lustful, to be greedy, to keep wanting more, to only look out for ourselves. Satan offers us a short cut through this life where we give in and worship him, whether we know it or not. It reminds me of interest free loans for stuff – nothing to pay for 2 years – but then the payback is huge – easy now, but eventually you pay for it the hard way.)

Explain point

So how does Jesus respond to this final temptation. Once again, without even hesitating Jesus launches himself at Satan declaring "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'. In Jesus' mind there is no other way to live life other than to live according to God's word. There is no alternative, no short cut which is WORTH living. Only a life which is lived in service to God and others is worth living. Jesus, for the last time in this temptation, uses his trust in God's plan and the word of God to throw down the temptation of Satan. There is a BIG lie here – the big lie is that Satan's way IS easier and more enjoyable and more free. But it's not. Living under God's laws are actually a BETTER way to live. The sermon on the mount will clear that up for us shortly! We may face temptations and persecutions, but it's still actually a BETTER way to live in the end. We have to trust God with that too. That we're better off under God's leadership than the worlds / Satan's.

Conclusion

What Jesus does in this passage though is he shows us how we can stand against these lies. He gives us an example to follow and gives us two main ways that we can resist Satan

1. Using God's word as a weapon against Satan

In each of the temptations, we have Jesus responding with a passage from scripture and using it as a weapon against Satan. We need to do the same. If we can look at areas of our lives we let God down, and memorise a verse which speaks against our own personal sin, we can use it as a weapon against temptation. So for example I often struggle with laziness and so after asking for a verse against it I came across Colossians 3:23,24 which says ²³“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, ²⁴since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.” Whenever I’m tempted to do a really shoddy job on whatever work I’m doing, I recite this passage to myself. By using God’s word I can rest Satan’s call for me to be lazy.

2. Trusting in God’s promises

Throughout the entire Temptation Jesus never loses sight of God. He never moves his trust, as we are so often tempted to do. Throughout it all he keeps his trust in God and in his promises. To resist temptation we need to do the same. Promises such as Matthew 6: ³¹“So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'.....But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” When we start believing Satan’s lie that we need to be providing for ourselves remember that God has promised to look after you in every way.

I’ll finish today with one last verse. It is another promise of God which we need to trust in. It comes from 1 Corinthians 10:13 and says “And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”

God doesn’t allow us to face any temptation which we can’t stand against. But to stand against them we need to trust in him.