

When The Devil Tries to Make You Do It

Matthew 4:1-11

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The wilderness described in this passage is really a scary place even today. It's a chaos of frightening hills east of Jerusalem, down the back slope of the plateau that rises about a mile above the Dead Sea. It is so stark; the area is known as the Devastation. Today there's a rugged road winding up, a back road from Jericho that will take you right through area. It's nothing but bareness, rocks and jagged cliffs scorching in the sun. Really pretty much forsaken by God and man. No place I would want to pitch a tent!

Now Imagine yourself being there all alone. The hot dust stinging your cheeks and eyes. The coyotes starting to howl. Jesus was smack dab in the middle of that. No one would be there to help Him, offer him dinner, bolster his courage, or offer a comforting word. It sounds incredibly dangerous. How horrendous for Jesus as a man to think that he's stranded there for 40 days and 40 nights with no place to lay his head, and not a scrap to eat.

Not only was the place and circumstance dangerous, but Satan was there waiting to pounce!

So, what do we have to learn from Jesus' experience in desert? It seems overwhelming.

Does anyone remember Jesus' first dilemma? Satan tempts Jesus to be just like God by presto change-o, turning stones into bread.

And what's Jesus' reply? "Man does not live by bread alone." Wow, don't you wish you were that quick on your feet? He's quoting the Bible from Deuteronomy. Good answer. He doesn't fall into the trap; of trusting himself instead of God.

So, how can this story possibly apply to our lives? Let's think of an example of how we trust ourselves instead of God. Sure, we can't relate to the devil offering us some King's Hawaiian Rolls if we were famished, but temptation can come to us in many forms. Have you ever had the fear of not having enough of something and scurried around to hoard anything? Say toilet paper during the pandemic, food before a snowstorm, or panicking when the stock market goes south? Afterall, last week was scary. Do we ever completely rely on ourselves? --- The Devil in this story suggests that

we can master temptation by doing this. Yep, he'd probably tell us to take the advice of Oscar Wilde who said that; "The only way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it." However, here, JESUS shows us as a human being we can live well by trusting in the word of God.

Remember the second temptation? The devil wants Jesus to manipulate God by throwing himself off the Empire State Building. Oops, my mistake, I guess that woke you up! It was the pinnacle of the temple Satan told him to jump off of, and test God to see if he would save Jesus from death by suicide. And what's Jesus' reply? Now again, he quotes God's word from Deuteronomy, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' I think it would pay us to read and re-read that book. But again, how could this temptation possibly apply to us? Well can you think of any way that you've ever tried to test or manipulate God? Have you desperately prayed to God that "God if you just do this for me, I will do this for you?" I think it has crossed my mind! Isn't this slightly akin to trying to force God's hand?! I wouldn't exactly say it was like praying "Thy will be done." But Jesus shows us that testing God is not where it's at...so what does he do? He shows us where ultimately to place our trust. In God's Word.

The temptations story of Jesus suggests that the conspicuously human Jesus resists temptation, and trusts God. He calls us to be disciples of his way of being.

The tempter puts Jesus to the test in three areas and attempts each time to sabotage his trust in God and rely on his own judgment. But Jesus chooses to deny himself. Maybe Jesus is showing us that the right choice is to deny our own judgment and TRUST IN GOD and to stop trying to be sufficient to ourselves. This loss of self-sufficiency then becomes freedom.

So, getting to the tempter's final proposition in this passage it says:

⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

It seems more like an out and out bribe than a temptation, doesn't it? But Jesus knows if he tests God, he knows he will bow down to Satan because he won't trust God but trust the word of Satan. So again, what does Jesus do to shut Satan up? He answers with Gods Word from Deuteronomy. Yep, again he is quick on his feet! He quotes the book of Deuteronomy like the back of his hand, saying:

“Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name,” and I bet you know another place in the Bible referring to what God here has to say here, how about the First Commandment? “Thou shalt not have any other gods before me.”

We probably don't think we bow down to the devil, but perhaps we can relate to it when we think about bowing to materialism, security, and prestige. Or maybe when giving in to our NEED TO CONTROL THINGS to gain power and be certain of how things turn out. You know... to make sure that they turn out the way WE WANT THEM TO!

Perhaps here, Jesus teaches us that faith doesn't do away with the hardships that are part and parcel of this life, but rather gives us the courage to stand amid them, like the one who was tempted as we are and thereby knows our struggles. This same Jesus now invites us to find hope in our struggles by living out God's Word.

So, we see here clearly, temptation was not avoided at all costs and it's not once and done. It was inevitable for Jesus, and it is inevitable for us. “Whatever form temptation may take; it may be passed through by means of trust in God to provide what is needed. The “tester's” power is real, but it is limited.” (David Lose)

Surely the Good News of this story is that we can combat temptation like Jesus by trusting in the Word of God and in closing I think this is expressed well in the words of Contemporary Christian artist's Amy Grant and Michael W. Smith's in the song: “Thy Word is a Lamp Unto My Feet”. In closing listen closely to them:

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet.
And a light unto my path
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet.
And a light unto my path

When I feel afraid,
And think I've lost my way
Still, you're there right beside me
Nothing will I fear.
As long as you are near.
Please be near me to the end.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet

And a light unto my path
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet.
And a light unto my path

I will not forget.
Your love for me and yet
My heart forever is wandering
Jesus by my guide
And hold me to your side
And I will love you to the end.

Nothing will I fear.
As long as you are near
Please be near me to the end.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet.
And a light unto my path
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet.
And a light unto my path
And a light unto my path
You're the light unto my path.

MAY IT BE SO FOR US TODAY AND EVERY DAY. AMEN