

7/14/24 Christ Fellowship

What Would Jesus Do About Temptation?

Matthew 4

Okay, so here's today's scenario. You are walking in the woods, enjoying God's creation when you realize...you are lost. Very lost. You continue walking hoping to see something familiar but it just gets worse. You turn around and walk the way you came but now nothing looks right and you have no idea where you are or how to get home. And now it's getting late and it will be dark soon. And just when you are about to panic, an old man walks up out of nowhere and says, *"Hey, you look lost. Do you need some help?"*

The fellow tells you that he comes out here all the time and he was born and raised around these woods and he would be glad to show you the way to the road if you wanted him to. The old guy looks trustworthy enough but you tell him, *"No. I'm going to trust my heart on this one and I'm going to go this way."* But he says, *"Oh, no! Don't go that way. That way leads to trouble. Come this way."*

But again, you say, *"No sir, thank you but I feel deep down that this is the way to go."* The old gentleman says, *"Oh, please come this way. I've been here many times and it's the only way to safely get out of here."* You respond with, *"Yea, but I feel that my aura is leading me to safety this way. Thanks though."* Now, how do you think that story is going to end? You're going to fall off a cliff and get eaten by bears or something, right?

Well, do you know what is worse than getting lost in the woods and following your heart to make it out? Getting lost in this world and following your heart to make it out. **Jeremiah 17:9** says, *"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"* Just "following your heart" has ended more marriages, killed more jobs and ruined more lives than any other motto.

But if we can't trust ourselves to get us out of the jams we get ourselves into and the problems we inevitably have in this world, what should we do? Well, do you remember the little rubber bracelets that were so popular a while back that had printed on them, "WWJD"? What would Jesus do? That's still a great question and a way better motto to live by than "Follow your heart", not to mention, "Follow your aura."

So, for the next few weeks, we are going to be looking at some common life situations or problems and we will ask just that question: what would Jesus do? But unlike just wearing a bracelet and then trying to use our brains to figure out what Jesus would do, we are

actually going to see what Jesus DID. And this week, I'll ask you to turn in your Bibles to **Matthew chapter 4** where we will see what Jesus did when He was tempted to sin. Obviously, temptation itself is not a sin. Jesus was tempted and we know He never sinned. So, we will see what His secret was to staying pure.

There once was a man named Benedict of Nursia who lived in the 500's AD and he wanted desperately to avoid temptation. His idea was to live in a lonely cave wearing clothes made of hair with what little food he had lowered to him on a rope. That didn't work so he threw himself into a clump of briars and thorns until his whole body was bleeding. You know what happened? He was still tempted to sin. So, if we can't keep from being tempted, how can we overcome it? Let's read **Matthew 4, verses 1-11** and we will see what Jesus did.

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." 4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" 5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6 "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.'" 7 Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." 10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" 11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

At the end of **chapter 3** we see Jesus being baptized and here in **chapter 4** He is immediately tempted in the desert after fasting for 40 days. I have heard it said that Jesus being baptized was His formal proclamation of His Kingship. It is a scene that involves the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and all are coming together to pronounce Jesus King as He comes up out of the water of the Jordan.

Well, if that is His proclamation of being King then His overcoming temptation in the desert is His demonstration of His worthiness to be King and reign over the Kingdom His Father would give Him. He faced the full force of Satan's temptation and deception and scheming and overcame all of it with the power and sovereignty of a King.

But in this we see some clear insights into Satan's strategy and we see the way out as well. We see what being stuck in the woods looks like but we have Jesus the Man to show us the way out. And while Satan will never tempt us in exactly the same way He tempted Jesus, we can see three main ways that Satan will tempt us. He will tempt us in our physical needs, our emotional needs and our psychological needs. Let's look at it closer.

The first temptation in **verses 1-2** are for physical needs. Jesus was hungry after fasting for 40 days. No kidding. Those are some of the most obvious words in all scripture. I don't know about you but when I fast, about 40 minutes goes by and I start thinking I'm hungry. I can't imagine 40 days. But in this too we can learn something. Like I said, the baptism of Jesus was a great victory and He was announcing His Kingship in doing that. And after every great victory you have in your life, you should just prepare to be tempted.

How many of you have ever left a church service here on Sunday morning just glowing from the time of worship and praise and fellowship we had here and you left the building and got in your car and Satan started hammering on you about something? He can't stand for you to be on the mountaintop. And he knows if he can tempt you and you give in to that temptation then down in the valley you go. So, just expect it. Maybe it's Sunday, maybe it's Monday. But Satan is smart and he knows how to push your buttons.

Look at the buttons he pushed with Jesus. In the first and second temptations, Satan starts by saying, "*If you are the Son of God...*" That was not the last time Jesus would hear those words. As He was dying on the cross, some of the people there made fun of Him by saying, "*If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.*" (Matt. 27:40) But with Satan's words I see a couple of insinuations there. First, it's a question. Are you really the Son of God? Really? You claimed to be at your baptism. But are you really?

But also, there is acknowledgment. Since you are the Son of God, why are you hungry? Why doesn't your Father take better care of you? If you are His Son, why doesn't He feed you? I mean, why not just do it yourself. You deserve it, Son of God.

Have you ever heard Satan tell you that you deserve something? You're a good person. Why don't you just take it? You deserve it and obviously God is not going to give it to you. Just take it. Sound familiar? That's a button we like to have pushed. We like to be victims. I'm mistreated. I'm overlooked. I deserve this. I deserve that. I'll just do it.

I'm reminded of Joseph in the Old Testament. He was sold into slavery by his brothers then falsely accused and imprisoned. Most people would have lashed out, spiraled down and been mired in sin in any number of ways. But Joseph knew God was watching. He said

several times that God was with him. He knew God uses the temptations sent our way as tests and tests, when passed, are rewarded. So Joseph was able to say all those years later to his brothers, *“You intended to harm me. But God intended it for good.”* (Gen. 50:20)

No, God does not tempt you to sin but He will use those temptations that Satan brings against you as tests and He wants to reward you for those tests when you resist Satan. So, with God watching and God with us and since we know He wants to reward us, we can overcome Satan.

Let’s look at the next way Satan tempted Jesus. Look at **verses 5 and 6**. *Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6 “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.’*

This is considered to be an emotional temptation. We saw that Satan tempted first with a physical need. Now we see an emotional need. We don’t know how they got there but Satan and Jesus went to the highest point on the temple. This was probably the eastern side of the temple that overlooked the Kidron Valley and historians report that this was about a 450-foot drop from the top of the roof to the valley floor.

Again here Satan says, *“If you are the Son of God”* ...prove it. Prove it to yourself. Prove it to God. Prove it to everybody. Prove it to me. We all want to feel important. We all want to be somebody that people look up to. We all want to make our mark on society and have people remember our names. And do you know what that is? Pride.

Ooh, Satan loves a proud person. Satan can use a proud person. Satan loves it when you use the words “I” and “me” a lot. And this proves that even Satan knows scripture. He quotes **Psalms 91** to make the temptation even more tempting since it sounds religious and pious. But had Jesus tested God by jumping off the temple it would have been doubting God as well. If you have to test something, it means there is a potential for failure and we know God cannot fail in anything He wants to do.

We never need to prove God’s faithfulness to us. We just have to prove our faithfulness to Him. And we do that by trusting Him to determine and supply our needs according to His will. (MacArthur, Matthew, pg. 95) And anything less is sin. And that is what Satan was trying to get Jesus to do but Satan failed a second time.

The third temptation was a psychological temptation. Look at **verses 8 and 9**. *Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."*

Temptation number one was what Jesus could do for Himself. Temptation number two was what the Father could do for Jesus. And temptation number three was what Satan could do for Jesus. And this third temptation was shrewd because Satan knew - and Jesus knew - that all those kingdoms had been promised to Jesus anyway. Satan is just offering them right now. Do you see how psychologically appealing that would have been for Jesus?

Never mind going to the cross. Don't worry about dealing with all the religious backstabbers. You don't have to mess with healing all the riffraff. Just take it right now. I'll give it to you. Why be a suffering servant when you can be a king? It's the same scheme Satan used with Eve in the Garden of Eden. In **Genesis 3**, Satan told Eve to go ahead and eat the fruit because *"God knows that when you eat of the tree you will become like God."* It's what you want. Just take it on your own terms.

I want you to think right now of what your goal in life is. Is it to be a success in business? Is it to make a lot of money? Raise a family? Retire? Nothing wrong with any of those necessarily. But how is God leading you in that? Is it going to be the long way? The hard road? Probably. And how is it that Satan and the world want you to do it? Just cheat a little. Cut some corners here and there. Nobody will know or care, right?

I remember many, many years ago I was having a conversation with my boss at the time. I was complaining that it seemed like everybody in the world had some sort of scam going. You know it seemed to me like everybody was cheating or taking advantage of people someway. And my boss agreed with me. He said that made him so mad that you just couldn't trust people anymore. He said it was so sad. And then he said, *"And all I have going is this little thing I do that helps me cheat on my taxes a little bit. But it's not as bad as most people."*

God says, *"Trust me."* Satan says, *"You can do it yourself. You just need to have a little edge on people."* Ask Eve how that turned out for her. She couldn't wait. But Jesus did and proved Himself King of all kings.

But do you notice the one thing Jesus did in all three temptations? For all three, He quoted scripture. He didn't say that doesn't feel right. He didn't say that's against my religion. He didn't even go with His heart. He went with scripture.

Our old friend Clay Lifo sent me a survey he found online just this past week. It was a survey of people who read the Bible as opposed to people who didn't read the Bible. Basically, it said that people who read or listen to the Bible at least four days a week are over 200% more likely to share their faith, over 200% more like to disciple others and over 400% more like to memorize scripture. I wish they had asked how much more likely they are to overcome temptation because it has to be as high as that.

See, that's the secret. When Satan comes at you and says, "*Hey, let's go do that thing we like to do*" and you try to talk your way out of it, you lose. If you try to convince him (and yourself) that it's not that bad, you lose. When you try to follow your heart, lose! When you justify it by recalling all the good things you do so you deserve it, lose! You can't out wit or out talk Satan. He has been doing this very thing since literally Adam and Eve and he is good at it. He's bigger, badder, smarter and he cheats at this game so you have to turn to the rock of God's Word. You have to repel that devil with scripture.

Now, when I say that, some of you are thinking, "Well, okay. Next time I'm tempted I will open my Bible and find something to help me overcome Satan." Eh! You lose. Too late. I'm telling you Satan is smarter than that. He will distract you or bore you or overwhelm you or something because if you don't already have that scripture lined up and ready to go, you will lose.

You know we love the sixth chapter of Ephesians around here, right? It's where we get *Semper Stantes* from, Always Standing. That passage tells us to put on the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness and the shield of faith and all the others. But the one offensive weapon we have is the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. And that original Greek word for sword means a small dagger-sized sharp blade. It's not the big two-handed broadsword. It's smaller and quicker and easier to use.

What that means is when Satan attacks you with temptation, you can't just say, "Well, the Bible says I shouldn't do that." Because Satan will talk you right out of that position. What you have to have is a verse or a small passage ready to go in your hip pocket or better yet memorized so you can say, "No, Satan, it is written..." Just like Jesus did. That's the man in the woods telling you how to get out. Trust Him. He's been there and He knows.

So, when you are tempted to be afraid of the future: **Isaiah 41:10** – "*Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*"

When you are tempted to worry: **1 Peter 5:6-7**: *“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”*

When you are tempted to lust: **Job 31:1** says *“I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman.”*

When you are tempted to lie or steal or gossip or overeat or cheat at work or anything else: **1 Corinthians 10:13**, *“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. 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 endure it.”*

You memorize whatever scripture you need to and when Satan comes calling with that tired old lie about how it will be fun and nobody will find out, you take out your sword and you jab him in the throat with it. You are a new creation. You don't do that stuff anymore. Your relationship with God through His Son Jesus has changed you and you are no longer a slave to sin like you used to be. You are now a child of the one, true King and it's time to act like it, church!

Am I talking to you today? Do you have the assurance of Heaven because of what Jesus did for you? I'd be willing to bet not everybody here does. We all think we are going to Heaven but how do you know? Well, you know when you come to that place in your life like Airielle did lately where you believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins and because He did, you have made Him Lord of your whole life. And when you did that, your life changed. You aren't perfect now and your life isn't perfect but even the people around you have seen a change in how you live, how you talk, where you go and what you do and especially how you respond to temptation.

If you have never made that decision before, now is the day of salvation. We still have water in the baptistry. Airielle was baptized just like Jesus was baptized. And He commands us to be baptized. Do it today. Make that decision right now as the music plays.