

Sermon on Matthew 4:1-11 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Jesus fights for you.

This week someone mentioned hitting an exploding golf ball to reveal the gender of a baby. A fun, non-fire-starting way to do it! Incited some ribbing about whether or not the husband would be able to hit the ball!

Had me thinking about swing dynamics and how you might improve your approach, mechanics of the swing, and contact with the ball. The first step for the pro is to analyze the swing you have. Watch it.

Today and over the next couple of months, we want to do just that with our lives. We want to analyze our “swing” and tweak it, or scrap it altogether, for the better way.

We will begin in earnest a series called Kingdom Ethic, studying the Sermon on the Mount to discover the way of life in Christ. What we are called to, and the radical nature of following Jesus when the “Kingdom is at hand.”

Bridging to how we might live - which there seems to be a fair bit of opinion floating around as of late - we start with awareness of how not to live.

What’s more, recognizing the Tempter that is furiously trying to move us off the mark, to rob Jesus of glory. The fish bite the lure because they think it is a bug - we don’t want to fall for it.

Jesus’ defeat of temptation gives us what to avoid and how to avoid it as we live in him.

Jesus fights for you.

Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus, freshly off of being baptized, is brought into the wilderness where he is faced with temptation - the cunning invitation to subvert the authority of God. And in his experience and response, we learn much about how we too are tempted and how we must fight.

We will look at the Forms of Temptation, Fighting Temptation, and the Fulfillment of Temptation. Hopefully, all of it will stir us and embolden us to live!

1) Forms of Temptation

We meet a character here that is making his first appearance in the New Testament.

If we have our bearings in the older books we know him as the Accuser. The fallen angel that in the first verses of Job asks permission to afflict the righteous man to prove he would curse God.

The antagonist in the cosmic battle for glory and grace.

Later, another apostle will charge the church with keeping watch, acquainted with the arrows the Tempter will sling.

1 Peter 5:8–9 “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. [9] Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.” (ESV)

To resist we learn both a firmness in our faith and the places in which he likes to devour us.

Satan never gets creative but he is very consistent. It's unlikely you will experience temptation to a never-ending list of new types of sin but instead, you will likely deal with the same one that has lingered so long. The same ways of breaking us down and leading us astray. So it is good to know his forms.

It is also good to know, for quite another reason, that God may use these things as testing of our faith. The Father doesn't instigate evil, but he uses circumstances to test our steadfastness. It is a way of growing in him. The refining of the church.

Here the devil hits Jesus with three types of temptation that still rule the day in the experience of life for believers.

a) Flesh

Primed by the Spirit and without food for 40 days (becoming the greater Moses in this case), Jesus is hungry.

The original Hebrew may allow for us to use the word hangry because he has been without for what is the medical limit before permanent physical damage happens.

Earlier this year some of us fasted. It was maybe a few meals missed or lunch for a week skipped. To remind us of our reliance on the Lord for all things, especially provision for life.

Few of us have experienced the fullness of hunger as Jesus would have been in this moment. Unbearable, all-consuming.

This is what Satan tempts him with. “If you really are the anointed One, you have the power to command rocks to become bread.” Seems reasonable. And he is right. Jesus could command anything to become a loaf of bread and satiate his physical hunger.

Eating isn't bad, or sinful. But Jesus knows that acting on this impulse would be a rejection of the Father's provision and he would be self-righteously making his own way. All the devil is saying is “feed yourself!”

Now this form of temptation probably won't come to use as the option to turn rocks into food, but we are familiar with living from base desires, “going with our gut,” we have found ourselves repeating the motto ‘if you feel like it go for it.’

For some it may even be acting in the hopes that you will feel something, anything. All of it though is putting self over purpose, flesh over identity. And it becomes a disregard of God's plan and provision for us. It colors our pursuit of pleasure, belonging, safety.

I see this in my own *swing!* In men's Bible study I was mentioning that it is far easier for me to see the ways others fall to temptation than it is to see for myself. But the Spirit hasn't let me off the hook this week! And this is why we need each other, to sharpen, uncover blind spots, to show where we have been following the flesh.

Jesus says that bread isn't enough. He has to live for something else. Every word that comes from the mouth of God.

b) Faith

Next he is tempted to force God's hand. While I call this form "faith" it is a faulty faith, thinking it requires something more than it does.

Taking Jesus to the 300 foot heights of the temple, Satan quotes Scripture for this temptation. Psalm 91, declaring the Lord as our refuge, our place of protection. And he says to Jesus, "go ahead, throw yourself down, prove again you are the Son of God because you know nothing bad will happen to you."

He misuses the Psalm to make a case for taking a risk to prove he has enough faith. "Surely you will not die..."

We have been hearing this one a lot these days - do you recognize it? My flesh doesn't like precaution so I make my stance about faith. "The lord will keep me safe."

We have no idea how true of a sentiment that is, but it doesn't always mean or look like we might prefer. This one actually becomes a way of life and we end up doing the devil's work for him.

All about self - prove yourself by jumping.

Risk is good and an effective way to excel, but stupidity is another thing. Jesus is not afraid of death, he knows it is what he has come to do, but he doesn't pursue it ahead of his time.

We can feel good talking the talk, but we end up presuming upon things God has told us not to.

Satan is implying that God is trustworthy only when he rescues us from suffering and danger. Jesus knew better... True faith recognizes this and perseveres through hard times.

Jesus says, "you shall not put the Lord your God to the test."

c) InFLuence

The final form is that of power. Now we have just spent nine months talking about weakness as the way so we are well versed in it. But notice the temptation.

Brought higher still Jesus is taken and shown all the kingdoms of the world. The devil's enticement comes, "You can have all of this, you can reign now without going through the trouble, just worship me."

On the face of it this may be the easiest form to recognize as wrong - 'worship Satan?' No thanks.

But he comes at us with the lure of power more subtly.

Influence, a good thing that becomes for us an ultimate thing and must be won at all costs.

Ewen had some gift money to spend and he collects Monopoly board games, we have national parks, Star Wars, Beatles... and now Monopoly "House Divided" which has the properties as States to win, votes to gain, and candidates to beat. Teaching kids from a young age to buy elections! On Wednesday we played and I was strategic, I won the game by having just three states, California, Texas, and Florida. Though Iona had triple the number of states, I edged her out in electoral votes.

But as we were putting the game away I confessed to the kids that I only won because I cheated. I needed to roll a 4 to get to Texas and while they were not paying attention I manipulated the dice.

That is the temptation in clearest terms. Jesus was destined to rule - all of these kingdoms would in fact be his - but not in this way.

This is another warning for us in relationship to politics but it also goes deeper into areas of integrity, the way we do business, the way we treat our neighbors, the way we attempt to "get what is ours!"

Falling for this temptation we end up serving master we are not meant to and we convince ourselves the ends justify the means.

Jesus says, worship the Lord your God and serve him only.

These are regular, tried and true forms of temptation, a flesh weakened by hunger and the wilderness, a faith set on testing God rather than trusting him, and the pursuit of power, influence where any way to rule over our opponent is what we will take.

They will come. Some of us are all too familiar even in this moment. The Spirit might just wake us up to it.

Like Jesus, there is a way to Fight.

2) Fighting Temptation

Jesus models it for us here. He fights with the Word. It shuts down the enticements of the devil.

All three times he quotes from Deuteronomy, where Israel had failed the test, as the New Israel shows he means to cling to the Word.

This matches with the first temptation in the garden when the tempting serpent says to Eve, “did God really say?” The challenge for us is that we often don’t know the answer! We are more likely to have some great coffee mug verses or take some lines out of context like the devil does here, than know Scripture deeply and richly.

This is not an exhortation for just stocking up on memory verses either, the way is to know and embrace what the Word says about us, about Jesus, and how we live in response to him. Knowing the principles of living by God’s word, not testing him, worshiping and serving only him.

“How do we resist this temptation? It is often remarked, accurately, the Jesus response to Satan with the word of God, a spiritual weapon powerful for tearing down the fortresses of the world. We should also notice what the quotations from

scripture say. We defeat Satan by living on the word that proceeds from the mouth of God, feeding on it with Hunger that surpasses our hunger for bread. We defeat Satan by trusting God, not by testing him. We defeat Satan by worshipping and serving God alone. When we do these things, Satan slinks away and Angels gather to minister to us. So, we resist Satan in the hope that we will gain the victory over him.” Peter Leithart

Really trusting what he says. Chris Renzema, a songwriter, has a song about innocence and trust that has the refrain “We’ve grown older than our God.” Sentiment that we know better now, throwing off silly youthful faithfulness for something more refined... and in that we miss Him.

Key then to fighting temptation is being people of the Word. To say it back to temptation when it comes. To cling to its promises. To walk with it as a lamp before us.

And the more we fight, the more we grow. Temptation builds spiritual muscle.

We could stop here. You have your strategy, you can recognize temptation.

But there is something else about this encounter that might actually be more important for us.

3) Fulfillment of Temptation

Stepping back to look again at the context. Jesus has been baptized into John’s baptism of repentance. When he comes to John, the Baptizer’s response is “whoa, I have no business baptizing you, you should baptize me!” But Jesus says it is fitting because he has come to fulfill all righteousness.

He has come to go all the way where Israel fell short. He has come to do something different. To bring redemption once and for all. The Spirit descends on him and God speaks making clear Jesus is his beloved Son.

Then it is into the wilderness to starve. To be assaulted by the Tempter.

None of us has ever known the full expression of temptation - To see it through, to resist it forever, to have never succumb to it. Jesus has. And because he has, you have reason to keep going.

Romans 3:21–26 “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—[22] the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [25] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. [26] It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” (ESV)

1 Peter 3:18 “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,” (ESV)

Hebrews 4:14–16 “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. [15] For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. [16] Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (ESV)

While we can strategize and determine to resist temptation, it is that Jesus has fought temptation for us that gives us hope and the resilience to keep going.

Our imitation of Christ is not what keeps us but our Union of Christ that does.

This is what it means for us to be “in Christ.” When we believe in him, that he lived a perfect sinless life, that he died an innocent death to take on the wages of our sin, that he rose to life, we are united with him. The Father looks upon us and sees Christ. His righteousness, his inheritance.

2 Corinthians 5:21 “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (ESV)

In Jesus then, your fight has been won. The war won. The cosmic accuser has been rendered defeated. New life has come. Hope has come.

This union frees us to fight - to live under the Kingdom Ethic Jesus models for us.

Jesus who feeds others miraculously (multiplying bread) - putting others first.

Jesus who trusts the Father to death on the cross to rescue others, you and me.

Jesus who reigns over all things, a reign that includes us, gives us purpose and real life.

Jesus fights for you. He is our hope - he has fulfilled and resisted temptation for us. He is who we worship. He is who we serve. Because he resisted, we can get back up again. When we fall for the devil's tricks, when our flesh aches for its whims, when our view of faith is skewed in on ourselves, when power becomes an opiate we can't say no to... We can turn away from those things, start again in Jesus. What mercy. What grace!

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Jesus fights for you.

Fight Right - Recognize the forms of temptation, see your faults, repent and believe. Turn again to Jesus for forgiveness and the strength to keep going. Eat the Word. Prioritize it in your life, study it with others, sharpen each other for the glory of God.

Good to pray for no temptation and we have to know that he provides us a way out when it comes.

1 Corinthians 10:12–13 “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. [13] No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but

with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” (ESV)

Find Rest - He fights for you. Jesus, his life for you, his death for you, his resurrection for you. Make him Lord - over self, flesh, faulty faith, influence. He is enough and in him alone can you find rest.

We have done a bit of swing analysis today - and we might need to keep at it. But there are new fundamentals to be had, to learn to swing again, to truly live.

All righteousness has been fulfilled. His name is Jesus and in him every day is a new day, a Kingdom day. Let's live!