



HOW TO OVERCOME TEMPTATION

A pastor once told his congregation, "I learned a great lesson from a dog." He said, "His master used to put a bit of meat or a biscuit or some kind of food on the ground, and he'd say to the dog, 'Don't eat that,' and the dog would run over and eat it; so, he'd hit the dog. And he'd put another piece of meat on the ground and say, 'Don't eat that.' The dog would go over and eat it, and he'd hit him again. Well, after a while, the dog got the message: eat, meat, get hit. So, the dog decided he wouldn't eat the meat."

But the man telling the story related how that the dog never looked at the meat. The dog evidently felt that if he looked at the meat the temptation to disobey would be too great. And so, he looked steadfastly into his master's face and never took his eyes off him, and thus the temptation never caused a problem.

Now, temptation works like that. As long as we stare at it, as long as we look at the bobbles or the bangles that Satan dangles in front of our eyes, as long as we entertain ourselves on that and feed on it, we're susceptible, obviously. And temptation is a very common problem for all of us; and, perhaps, victory over temptation is not so common. And the problem is the same problem the dog had; the problem is we entertain ourselves by looking at the temptation rather than staring into the Master's face.

How To Overcome Temptation

Now without any question, without any question at all, the biggest problem that Christians have is temptation. By far, it's the biggest problem. If you can eliminate temptation, you can eliminate sin.

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But the man telling the story related how that the dog never looked at the meat. The dog eventually felt that if he looked at the meat the temptation to disobey would be too great. And so he looked steadfastly into his master's face and never took his eyes off him, and thus the temptation never caused a problem.

Now, temptation works like that. As long as we stare at it, as long as we look at the bobbles or the bangles that Satan dangles in front of our eyes, as long as we entertain ourselves on that and feed on it, we're susceptible, obviously. And temptation is a very common problem for all of us; and, perhaps, victory over temptation is not so common. And the problem is the same problem the dog had; the problem is we entertain ourselves by looking at the temptation rather than staring into the Master's face.

I want us to get our eyes off temptation in a sense and I want us to focus on the Master Jesus Christ; and in order to do that, I want you to turn in your Bibles to the 4th chapter of Matthew. And I want to show you how to overcome temptation by showing you the perfect example of one who did, Jesus Christ. Matthew, chapter 4, and we'll consider verses 1 through 11.

Now, this message tonight is sort of slipped in the slot between the conclusion of Revelation and the beginning of our series on the body of Christ and the book of Ephesians. But it's one

that we feel is very important and have been a long time waiting to give. We believe God has led us to this subject for tonight, because this, as I said, is the number one problem that we face as believers.

Now, as I said before, in order to be victorious over temptation, we have to put our focus on the person of Jesus Christ. We cannot entertain ourselves with a temptation and then wonder why we get into problems.

There was an occasion where a girl became pregnant, and she came to the person that she was talk to – he was a youth director – and she said, “I don’t understand it. How could it happen? We prayed before every date.” The youth director said, “What did you do after you prayed?”

Real good. Started out with prayer, and then proceeded to get involved like that. Evidentially they started out with their eyes on the Lord and then took them immediately off the Lord, put them on each other, and the problem was obvious. The only way to overcome temptation is to look at Jesus Christ; it’s the only way. Get your eyes off of temptation and get them on Jesus.

You say, “Why should we look at Him?” The answer is in the book of Hebrews in several places, if you remember it. The Bible says in Hebrews 3:15, I think it is, “For we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities; but was in all points” – what? “tempted like as we are, yet” – what? – “without sin.” The reason we want to look at Jesus Christ in temptation is because we know He’s been there, and we know He is wise enough to show us the way out.

Why, Hebrews 2:18 says this: “For in that He Himself was tempted, He is able to help those that are tempted.” See, He’s been there. And so, in the midst of temptation we’re to fix our eyes upon Jesus Christ, not only for sympathetic understanding, but for victory, for He knows the victory.

And the apostle Paul said, “There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” You’re never tempted above that you’re able, never, not one time in your whole life after Christ, not one time.

We want to look at Jesus Christ. If you have trouble focusing on Jesus Christ in the midst of temptation, you haven't learned how to live the Christian life. The Christian life, my friend, is nothing more than practicing the conscious presence of Jesus Christ, that's all it is. Beautiful thought. That's all it is. Just constantly practicing the presence of Christ. It's never taking my eyes off Him.

Why do you think Paul says, "Pray without ceasing"? Because he wants you to keep your focus where it belongs. Why do you think he says, "Set your affections on things above and not on things on the earth"? Because he wants your mind to be in gear with God constantly, constantly, constantly. Now, we're going to see this, and I want you to see Jesus Christ when He was tempted, so that you'll understand why to keep your eyes on Him.

Now, in His temptation in Matthew 4:1-11, we see some tremendous things. I want to pull out three points: the preparation, the temptation, and the triumph; the preparation, the temptation, and the triumph. And having seen Jesus in His temptation, we're going to see victory, the possibility of victory, and we're going to understand why and how Satan operates; and I trust we'll learn to keep our eyes on Christ.

First of all, I want you to notice the preparation, chapter 4, verse 1, through the first part of verse 3: "Then was Jesus led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was afterward hungry. And when the tempter came to Him" – we'll stop right there.

Now, here we get the background. The first event in our Lord's ministry, which Matthew records after His baptism, is His temptation. Immediately after Christ's baptism, which you remember was a declaration of His ministry. The Spirit of God descended like a dove anointing Him. God's voice came out of heaven saying, "Thou art My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And Christ began His ministry, and immediately after he exaltation and the anointing at His baptism, He immediately went into direct confrontation with Satan.

And it's an interesting thing that is a very common experience of men. The times of special spiritual endowment or exaltation are followed immediately by occasions of special temptation. That's exactly what the Bible means when it says in one sense, "Let him that

standeth take heed lest he fall.” Satan knows that when we are at the highest pinnacle, we are most easily deflated.

Arnold Toynbee the historian made it clear in one of his books that the most dangerous period for a civilization is when it thinks it’s safe and no longer needs to face further challenges. Same thing is true of an individual. Same thing is true of Christians who have experienced some spiritual victory, and they’re misled to think that they can bask in that spiritual victory for an undefined amount of time. They cannot.

The Christian life is lived one moment at a time with focus upon Jesus Christ. And just because you have reached a point of spiritual victory at one time doesn’t guarantee your spiritual victory, even for the next moment. In fact, it almost always assures you that Satan’s going to hit harder than he has before. It’s the very precise point when we think we stand that we have to evaluate ourselves, lest we fall.

This was graphically illustrated to me in high school. We had a third string halfback whose name was Henry, and Henry wasn’t really too good. But his father gave a lot of money to the school. Anyway, he was on the team, and I remember we were winning this game 36 to nothing, and it was the last quarter, and it was just a couple of minutes to go. So, they put Henry in the game. And he came into the huddle, and he was so excited, just, oh, excited; first time all year. So, we just, “Calm down, Henry.”

Got in the huddle and we called a play for Henry. We were on about the sixth yard line, and we were going to go in for a touchdown. The quarterback got the ball, handed the ball to Henry, a hole open. The hole was so big you could have driven the Fifth Army through it, you know, just gigantic.

Henry grabbed the ball right into the end zone. He was so excited when he crossed the goal line. The glory of it all hit him. And I’ll never forget this as long as I live. Standing right there in the field. With the thrill of going over the goal line he was overwhelmed. He had the ball tucked under his left arm, and as he was racing to the end zone in all the glory, he was waving to the stands, and he ran right through waving to the stands. Boom, he hit the goalpost dead center. The whole goalpost went like this, “Mmm-mmm.” Split his helmet clear down the side, knocked himself completely cold, and the ball squirted up in the air and fell down. I

looked back on that and thought, “Now that is a perfect illustration of the moment of victory turning to abject defeat.”

You know, the same thing has happened in your life and mine, hasn't it, spiritually speaking. We just get up to the top, and all of a sudden Satan starts firing away, and we just come crumbling down. That's the way he works. He likes to find us in the moment of glory when our defenses are down. You see, that's why Jesus said, “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation.” Don't ever take your eyes off the adversary.

How graphically this is illustrated by the temptation of Christ. In full consciousness of His divine mission, just having experienced His baptism, His sacred human nature was filled through-and-through with the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. He was moving out to His great and glorious messianic ministry. His soul was aglow with the warmth of the Spirit of God, the joy of communion with the Father, the contemplation of a blessed work that lay before Him. Finally, after thirty years of obscurity He was going to step into the limelight. But it didn't last very long. No sooner was He anointed by the Holy Spirit, then the Holy Spirit Himself drove Him into direct confrontation with Satan.

Now, I want you to understand one thing that I believe with all my heart. I do not believe that Christ went into that wilderness on defense, I think He went in there on offense. My Bible says this: “Jesus was led up by” – whom? – “the Spirit.”

Listen, I don't think Satan wanted that confrontation. I think he would have liked to avoid that as long as he could. I think the Spirit of God made that happen, drove Jesus Christ into direct confrontation with Satan to establish his victory over Satan at the beginning of His ministry. And so Jesus Christ was put into direct and fierce contact with Satan.

Now, we have no right to assert that during the first thirty years of His ministry He was never tempted, because He was. Matthew 16:23, He says, “Get thee behind Me, Satan!” He evidentially recognized Satan. He understood what Satan was doing.

And you can go back when He said to His disciples, I think it was Luke 22:28, He says, “Ye are they who have continued with Me in My temptations.” Satan worked on Christ for a long

time. He said, “You are the ones who’ve been with Me in My temptations.” And they weren’t up there in this place when He was tempted.

I don’t think Satan ever let Christ alone. I think he tempted Him right down until He had Him sweating great drops of blood in the garden. Satan never let up on his attack; he wanted to overthrow the Messiah. And what better time could he take than this time, perhaps. If God was going to put Him in confrontation, he’d use this time to overthrow Messiah at the beginning of His ministry. So, the Holy Spirit leads Jesus Christ into conflict with Satan to prove victory.

Notice the character of the area. It says, “He was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness.” Now, the wilderness is an interesting place. The Old Testament calls this area, which is down between – well, Jerusalem is a plateau, and then the Dead Sea; and down on the edge of that plateau is called “the devastation,” and that’s this area.

George Adam Smith describes it this way: “It is an area of yellow sand, of crumbling limestone, and of scattered shingle. It is an area of contorted strata where the ridges run in all directions as if they were warped and twisted. The hills are like dust heaps. The limestone is blistered and peeling. Rocks are bare and jagged. Often the ground sounds hollow. It runs right to the Dead Sea, and there comes a drop of 12,000 feet down to the Dead Sea. In that wilderness” – says Smith – “Jesus would be alone, more alone than anywhere else in Palestine.”

But Jesus went there, first of all, to be alone, because prior to His direct conflict with Satan, He was alone with God: time for sustained prayer, a time for solitary preparation for His task, a time for communion with the Father. You’ll remember that Moses had to spend some time, Elijah had to spend some time, Paul even spent three years. These men had to spend time in preparation before God in meditation before they engaged in their ministries; and so, does Christ; and He spends this forty days preparing His heart before God.

In His perfect humanity, He needed that. He needed time for quiet thought. He needed time to collect Himself. He needed time to brace Himself for the life that was coming, to realize the tremendous change that was on hand from the obscurity of Nazareth to the limelight of Jerusalem. It was a time of preparation. And, you know, this was His strength. He was so

prepared for the conflict with Satan, by the time it came Satan was hopeless, didn't have a chance.

Jesus had spent that time with the Father as an example to us, that when we are in time with the Father preparing ourselves, the conflict and the contention of the adversary is certain ineffective. That's why the Bible says, "Watch and pray." Not only watch for Satan but be in communion with God all the time prior to Satan's temptations. And so, Jesus was.

I might add at this point just a thought that fits into this point, and that is that the greatest enemy of the Christian is spiritual unpreparedness. It's a failure to be ready for temptation. That's our greatest enemy; we're just not ready for it. We're not ready for it, because we're not watching for it. And, secondly, we're not praying; we're not in constant communion with God.

Peter illustrates this graphically, so perfectly. Peter was just a tremendous apostle, and he loved to be where Jesus was. But when he got removed from the presence of Christ, he faltered and fell and stumbled and denied Him. And the same thing is true with us. As long as we're focusing on Jesus Christ, there's resource. But as soon as we stop praying – that is we stop that constant communion with Him – we are vulnerable.

Now, I want you to notice the tempter. It says, "He was led into the wilderness to be tested by the devil, by the devil." Satan is real, there's no question about it.

I'm sure you remember the old story of the ink stain on the wall of Martin Luther's room in the Castle of Wartburg in Germany. There's a great big ink stain there, and it was caused by Luther one night. He was being tempted by the devil, and he picked up his inkwell and threw it at him. That's how vivid the devil was to Martin Luther. He's a vivid adversary. He's real. He is the tempter in every case. God never tempts. No man is tempted of God; the devil goes around doing the tempting.

So, we see the place and the person: the place, the wilderness; the person, the devil. Notice the plan; here comes the strategy, verse 2: "And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was afterward hungry."

Now, Jesus had been fasting for forty days; and as Luke puts it in his gospel account, “when they were quite ended, He was afterward hungered.” Evidentially, what this means was that Jesus never even sensed hunger during those forty days. Forty days without eating anything and He had no hunger.

You say, “How did that work?” I believe God gave Him supernatural endurance, supernatural endurance. During those forty days He was tempted, not just at the end of it, but during those forty days; for both Mark and Luke say that He was tempted for forty days – all that temptation in the midst of His communion with the Father, and the tremendous hunger, and He never sensed it. He was never conscious of it. I believe God gave Him a supernatural ability to sustain Himself without hunger.

Now, I want you to notice Satan’s approach. The temptations that Satan brings Christ – and there’s going to be three of them; and I’m going to open up some new areas of it I hope to you tonight. But the temptations that come could only come to Jesus Christ; they couldn’t come to me or you. I would not accept the temptation to jump off the pinnacle of the temple; no way. I could not possibly accept such temptations, because I can’t make stones into bread; nor could I possess the kingdoms of the world. They are not temptations that are universal for all of us.

But I want you to see a fantastic lesson here. Satan temps us at the point of our own abilities. Did you get that? Oh, that’s important. We are tempted through our gifts. The temptation was the problem for Jesus, the temptation was the problem of what to do with supernatural power, and so it could only come to one who was supernatural. The temptations that come to us are what to do with our gifts and our abilities. We’re always tempted according to our gifts and our abilities.

For example, a person who’s gifted with charm will attempt to use that charm to get what he wants. The person who’s gifted with the power of words will be tempted to use his command of words to produce glib excuses to justify his conduct. A person with a vivid and sensitive imagination will undergo agonies of temptation that a more stolid person will never experience. A person with great gifts of mind and intellect will be tempted to use them for himself to become the master, not the servant of men. And this is even true in spiritual gifts, my friends. If a person has the spiritual gift of teaching, he will be tempted to lord it over

others. If a person has the spiritual gift of whatever the case may be, the spiritual gift of healing even in the New Testament, he will tend to exalt himself.

Some of them in Corinth evidentially had the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues, and they turned it into a joke as they made a mockery out of it. And we could take the spiritual gifts that God gives us and we will find that Satan will tempt us right at the point of our gift to misuse it, because it's the one thing we do effectively, to misuse it for our own glory. It is always the fact, and the grim fact it is, that in temptation it is where we are the strongest that we must forever be on the watch. Satan does not want to lessen our strength at the point of our gift, he wants to use our strength for his advantage. If you do something well, my friend, that's exactly what Satan wants you to do, only he wants you to do it for him.

Now, we've seen the preparation. Let's look at the temptation beginning in verse 3: "And when the tempter came to him, he said, 'If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.' But He answered and said, 'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."'"

Now, there's temptation number one, Satan gets Him. First of all, Satan says, "If" – he always plants that doubt. "If You are the Son of God, then do this." And the "if" could just as well be translated "since." "I mean if You're making these claims, or since You're making these claims to be the Son of God, why don't You prove it?"

That's the way he always does it, sticks the doubt in there. "Well, you'd better prove it; you'd better verify it. Might not be so." If he can create doubt, he's got a foot in the door. He tempts us to doubt. He suggests again and again to our minds that terrible "if," harassing our souls with fear, the doubts of God's love, the doubts of God's revelation, the doubt that we're really saved, and many other doubts. Now, he knew that Jesus was God's Son, and Jesus knew that Jesus was God's Son, but Satan still began with a seed of doubt. And, oh, he uses doubt.

Then comes the temptation itself. And look, he told Him to make bread: "Turn those stones into bread." Now, it has been said that this is a temptation of the flesh, that what really is involved here is he's saying to Christ, "You're hungry, so make some bread." Well, the only problem with that is, if that's all there is to this temptation, it's no sin.

“What’s the sin of divine power making a little bread and eating it. There’s no sin there; nothing wrong with eating.” It’s not the lust of the flesh to have a little bread. There’s far more to this. If the only temptation was the temptation to eat bread, then there’s not even a temptation there, because there’s no sin involved – unless, of course, it was gluttony and Jesus was going to stuff Himself with bread, which is highly unlikely.

But let me show you what Satan’s saying here. You might word his temptation like this: “Jesus, did God say, ‘Thou art My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’? Did He say that? And then did God say, ‘You shall not eat’? Why, that’s really strange, Jesus, that God would say, ‘Oh, You’re My beloved Son,’ and then He would deprive You of food. It’s kind of strange. I mean no loving father is going to deprive his child of food. Why should You starve in the wilderness, Jesus? Why, you have the power as God’s beloved Son to turn the stones to bread. I mean didn’t history justify it, Jesus? Didn’t God give His people manna in the wilderness? Didn’t God say, ‘I will rain bread from heaven for you’? Didn’t God through Isaiah say, ‘They shall not hunger or thirst’? Didn’t God feed His people by repeated miracles in the wilderness? If God did all that for His people, my, couldn’t You do one little miracle and make a little bread?” Seems like no big deal. “But what would have become of God’s plan for Israel” – Satan’s thinking – “if they’d all died in the wilderness, God had to feed them, you know, got to take care of them. I mean what will become of God’s plan for the Messiah if You just die out here without food? You’d better make some bread there, Jesus.”

You see, the point of the temptation is not the feeding of the hunger, it’s the suggestion that what is going on is incompatible with Jesus being the Son of God. You see that? Satan is saying, “If You’re the Son of God, what are You doing being hungry? God has fed His people all throughout the centuries; You’re out here starving and you’re the most beloved of anyone.”

You see, here’s what Satan’s trying to do – watch it; mark it down. This is a temptation to exercise personal selfish authority to do what would satisfy His own wants. See, He felt hungry this time, He was hungry; and this was a temptation to be selfish. Satan is saying in effect, “You were born in a stable, but You’re the Son of God. You were hurried off to Egypt for fear of Herod’s wrath, but You are the Son of God. A carpenter’s roof supplied You with a home in the obscurity of a despicable town in Galilee You spent thirty years, but You’re the

Son of God. A voice from heaven proclaimed it in Your ears at the Jordan, ‘You’re the Son of God.’

“Listen, Son of God, what are You doing hungry? You’ve suffered enough indignities, Son of God. If You’re the Son of God, grab some satisfaction. Why linger for weeks in this desert wandering among these wild beasts and craggy rocks unhonored, unattended, unpitied, ready to starve for the necessities of life. Is this befitting the Son of God? Use Your authority; make some bread.” And after the temptation, Jesus says, “It is written.” He always used Scripture, didn’t He? “It is written.”

Son of God, full of the Holy Spirit – mark it – uttered the first words of His ministry, three words. You know what they were? “It is” – what? – “written.” Isn’t that what anybody’s ministry ought to be. That’s how He began His ministry: “It is written.” That’s a biblical ministry. He relied on scriptures. What did David say? “Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee.”

“He answered and said, ‘It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”’” What’s He saying here? What is He saying? Oh, listen; He’s pointing to the fact that food won’t keep a man alive unless God says he’s to live. Do you know that? You can eat all the bread you want, and if God says you die, you die, with or without bread. And you can eat no bread, and if God says you live, you live. Right? You don’t live by bread, “you live by every word that proceedeth” – what? – “out of the mouth of God.” God determines whether you live or die, not bread. Boy, what an answer, what an answer.

Jesus is saying this: “God wills that I live; and if God wills that I live, I will live, bread or no bread.” See? Tremendous truth.

Jesus says this, and here’s His answer: “I will not work a miracle” – you get this? – “which God has not willed in order to affect what God has willed.” See? “I will not take God’s control out of His hands and control My own life.” That’s what Jesus says. “I await My Father’s divine supply. When God’s ready to give Me bread, I’ll have all the bread I need, and not until.” You see, Jesus will not exercise His own will to supersede the will of God. Do you see it there? That’s it; that’s the whole key. Christ said this: “My food is to do the will of

Him that sent Me. I don't need bread. If God says I live, I'll live if I never eat another loaf." It's a tremendous truth.

The lesson is simple, Philippians 4:19, "But my God shall supply all your needs." That's it. You don't need to get up tight about it and say, "Oh, God; I don't have all my needs, God. I'm going to have to grab a little satisfaction, God, it's getting rough out here." Jesus said, "No."

My circumstances may be terrible. My life may be going down the drain, and Satan comes and says, "Hey, your life's really messed up, man. Such a sad life; lots of tragedy. Woo, it's not going well. Grab a little satisfaction; flip it up. Go over here, mm-hmm, looks good." See? A Christian steps back and says, "No, sir, Satan. I will never supersede the will of God. He'll supply."

Oh, how many times have we been tempted to run ahead of God, huh? How many times? "God, this is what I need; I'm going to go get it." See? My God shall supply half of your needs, right? All of them, all of them. God's end does not justify any means, no, it doesn't do it.

The lesson in this temptation is a beautiful one, so simple. In God's time and in God's way, He'll supply. And it is not for me, even the Son of God to presume on God's supply. "I cannot do it; it is not my prerogative. I will live by the mouth of God, not by my own making of bread."

Satan will tempt you that way. That's the lust of the flesh. Did you know that? That's exactly what it is. You know what the lust of the flesh is? "Oh, I need that. My body needs that," and you stop trusting the supply of God and you grab for something that God doesn't want you to have.

Now, watch the second temptation and how he builds it on the first one. The second temptation comes in verses 5, 6, and 7: "Then the devil taketh Him up into a holy city" – Jerusalem – "setteth Him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto Him, 'If Thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down; for it is written, "He shall give His angels charge concerning thee; and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a

stone.” Jesus said unto him, ‘It is written again, “Thou shalt not put the Lord thy God to the test.”’” Oh, this is tremendous. The devil comes back, and the devil is sharp. He is really sharp. He is the second sharpest. He knows what he’s doing, and he comes back with this very subtle approach.

Now watch this. The devil once again insinuates the doubt about Christ being the Son of God by adding the word “if” there in verse 6, though he knows it and Christ knows it. But he says in effect, here’s what’s in the devil’s thoughts. “If Christ will not prove His messiahship by working a miracle to save Himself from starving to death, if He won’t do this Himself, maybe He’ll prove His messiahship by letting God work a miracle.” You see, the problem in the first temptation was Christ would be doing a miracle independently, right, independent of God’s will; so, He wouldn’t do it.

So, Satan goes back and says, “Hey, Christ, why don’t You just get God to do a miracle Himself?” you see, that eliminates the problem with the first temptation, doesn’t it. “You don’t have to do it, Jesus. All You’ve got to do is just, hmm, swan dive off the pinnacle, and God will do the miracle.” That’s a pretty subtle temptation, because it eliminates the problem of the first temptation.

But you want to know something? This is a worse temptation. This is a worse sin. This is a terrible sin. You say, “What’s the sin here?” Well, in eliminating the problem with the first temptation, you know what you’ve done in this case? You put God to the test. You said, “Okay, God, here I go. You’d better do it.”

You ever done that with God? “God, I’ll give You till next Tuesday. God, if the phone rings in the next two hours, I’ll know it’s Your will.” You ever put God to the test? You say, “But I put out a fleece.” Don’t get upset about that fleece thing, that happened once, a special miracle God took care of. Not all of us can put out a fleece. Listen, that’s called presuming on God. “God, I got myself into this mess, now get me out.”

You see, Jesus would be tempting God. He would be putting Himself in a position where God had to get Him out of there, and that is the gross kind of sin. The psalmist prayed, “Lord, keep me back from presumptuous sins.” Don’t ever test God. Don’t ever test God. This is the

sin of presuming on God. Don't ever push God into a corner and say, "Now, God, You've got to get me out of this." Don't tempt God.

So many times, as Christians, we do that. We go someplace where we don't have any business being. We say, "Well, I'm here, God. Could You get me out of this mess?" What are you doing there in the first place?

"Well, God, I've really been going down the drain. Here I am down here at the bottom level of the drain. God, will You get me out of here?" Well, what are you doing down there to start with? You're doubly sinning, not only in the sin, but in the presumption that you put yourself in that place willingly, and then with the thing in mind, "Well, God will get me out of this." Don't presume on God. God is not your utilitarian genie.

There's another thought here too. This temptation is not only presuming on God, but it's taking the easy road to success. I mean let's face it; a prodigious sign like, you know, diving off the pinnacle of the temple and just coming to a nice soft landing on your feet carried down by angels, you know, I mean that would do it. I mean the whole town would say, "Woo, that's the Messiah." There wouldn't be any doubt about that, because you see, the Jewish people knew that Malachi said, "The Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come to His temple." And you can just imagine, they knew Malachi's prophecy; and here He comes. And always false messiahs promise to do that.

Theudas led the people out and he was going to do a great miracle. He was going to split the Jordan. He led the whole population of Jerusalem out and made a great motion to split the Jordan, but it didn't split obviously. Then the famous Egyptian pretender in Acts, chapter 21 I think it is, promised with a word that he'd lay flat the walls of Jerusalem. That didn't work either. Simon Magus promised to dive off the pinnacle of the temple. He did, and there was nothing wrong with the dive, but the landing messed him all up.

You see, Jesus could have come off the pinnacle of that temple and He would have been immediately accepted. But you want to know something? Now listen to this: He didn't come to be accepted; He came for – what reason? – to die. He came to be rejected. Read Isaiah 53. He came to be rejected. He didn't come for a popularity contest; He came to be killed.

So, if He'd have fallen to this temptation, He would have bypassed the cross, He would have sinned in perverting the reason of His coming. Public acceptance would have been what He was after, and that's not the case. You know, whenever you attract a crowd with sensations, all you get is a sensation-seeking crowd; and you've got to have a bigger one tomorrow or you can't keep them. His followers would have been lovers of sensation and not lovers of God. Remember in John 6:26 when the multitude followed Him across the Sea of Galilee, and all came running up, and Jesus said to them, "You seek Me, because you want the food," that's it.

You don't use God's power to test God; oh, no. There's no point, my friends, in seeing how far you can go with God, no point at all. There's no reason to put yourself deliberately in some threatening situation, do it recklessly and needlessly and expect God to rescue from it; that's tempting God. God expects the Son of Man and God expects you and I to take risks for Him, but He doesn't expect us to take risks just to enhance our own prestige.

Faith which depends on signs and sensations isn't faith at all. If you can't believe without sensations and if you can't just trust God without putting yourselves in strange positions and then begging God to get you out, then you don't understand what faith is. Faith that doesn't believe without sensations isn't faith, it's doubt looking for proof and looking in the wrong place.

So, Jesus refused the way of sensation, and He refused to put God on the spot. He refused to say, "God, if You don't act by this and this way, and this way and that way, I'm not going to believe You." He would not do that. He didn't want to pervert the plan of God and He didn't want to tempt God.

Satan tried a third temptation, verses 8 and 9: "Again, the devil taketh Him up into an exceedingly high mountain, and sheweth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto Him, 'All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me.'"

Jesus came to save the world; that's right. Didn't God say in Psalm 2:8, "Ask of Me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession"? Didn't He say that to His Son? Didn't God say, "I'll give You the world"?

Came for the world. Satan says, "I'll give You the world. Here it is. Want the world; see it all? You can have it." "What do I have to do get it?" "Bow down to me."

You see, that's getting the right end the wrong way. That's called compromise, compromise. Satan says, "Come to terms with me, and I'll give You the same thing You're looking for anyway." Oh, boy, compromise. Satan tempts to compromise so often. So many Christians compromise flirting with Satan, and flirting with the world, and entertaining the world in the world's attitudes and the world's desires and the world's objects.

"Come to terms with me," – Satan says – "I'll give you what you want. Don't put your demands so high; wink a little bit at evil and questionable things. You know, lots of people are doing them." Temptation was to advance by retreating, to change the world by becoming like the world, and it doesn't work. Satan is saying to Jesus in effect, "Look, why fight it all Your life; why don't You have me as an ally."

A triumphant progress to supreme earthly power, and such glory as no Jew or Gentile ever dreamed of could have been Jesus that day. All He would have had to do was bow to Satan; and He wouldn't do it, of course, because God only should be worshiped.

Verse 10: "Then saith Jesus unto him, 'Be gone, Satan, get out of here; for it is written, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.'"" Jesus wouldn't take any shortcut to the kingdom, none at all.

And I'll tell you, friend, Satan will tempt you to shortcut. He'll tempt you so often that way. He'll tempt you to bypass the consistent Christian life to get something that you don't need until God's good time and God's good way to give it to you. There's no shortcut to God's will.

Jesus experienced the ultimate in temptation, and I want to show you why. Satan tempts us until we yield, you know that. He just keeps tempting and tempting and tempting until we finally collapse. Now watch this: Jesus never yielded. You know what that means? That means because He never yielded, He took all the temptation that Satan could possibly give. Satan kept tempting Him, He never yielded.

You see, as soon as you yield, the temptation stops, right? Because Jesus never yielded, He took all the temptation that was possible to give. He took every bit of it. He had the ultimate in temptation. He declared His trust in God and said, “God will not let Me starve; I don’t need to make bread.”

The Evil One then suggested, “You show Your trust in a stronger way. You trust God; oh, that’s terrific. Show how much You trust Him by diving off here.” And the Lord says, “I will not put God to the test. I already trust Him; I don’t need to test Him.”

You get that? Any Christian who comes along and says, “Well, God, You’ve got to prove Yourself by doing this by next Thursday, or this by two hours from now; You’ve got to show me this; or something’s got to fall out of the sky; or let the phone ring or have a card come in the mail; or this” – you’re just putting God to the test and indicating you don’t believe.

And then the Evil One comes and says, “Well, why don’t You just ally with me, and You won’t have to fight it.” And Jesus says, “No, I’ll worship God and I’ll face the peril of death.” He refuses an alliance with Satan, chooses obedience and loyalty to God whatever the cost may be.

Now, what are the lessons for us here? Three lessons. Number One: Satan tempted Christ, and he’ll tempt you – watch it – to distrust the providential care of God. Did you get that? He’ll tempt you to distrust the providential care of God, and make you think you’ve got to get it all in yourself, provide for yourself, make sure you’ve got it all in control, to distrust the providential care of God. God will take care of you; He promised, He promised.

How stupid to take up your own problems. How stupid to become neurotic. Every time I get an ad that comes to my desk, and it has on it “Christian counseling clinic,” I say, “No, that’s not right, that’s not right.” It ought to be called “the doubters counseling clinic,” because if you trust God, what are you going to worry about? Satan will tempt you to distrust the providential care of God.

Second thing he’ll tempt you to do – get this – he will tempt you to presume on God, presumption or wanton appeal to promised safety. I always think of the illustration of 1 Samuel 4. Remember the children of Israel fighting the Philistines, big war conflict, Israel

was losing? Hadn't paid attention to God in years. But they were losing badly, you know. And what happens when you really get into a bad thing, and you start losing? All of a sudden you think about God. "Whoa, we've got to get God."

"Where's God? Where's God?" "God's over there in Shiloh where the ark is." "Oh, go get God." They run back to get the ark, run out, "The ark is here. Hooray, hooray!" And everybody's yelling, "Hooray, hooray, hooray." Guess what happened; the Philistines stole the ark.

God doesn't operate like that. God does not operate like that. You do not presume on God. And God wrote one word over Israel in that chapter, and that word was "Ichabod," and that means "the glory has departed." God says, "I'm not there anymore, folks. Sorry, I'm gone."

The third thing Satan's going to tempt you to do is this – listen to it: Satan will tempt you to ambition, and to fulfil that ambition in his way, not God's way. Remember James and John sent their mother to Jesus? Real, hmm, men's men. "Mother, would you go ask Jesus if we could be on each side of Him in the kingdom?" So, mother comes to Jesus and says, "Could my boys be on each side of You in the kingdom?" Jesus said, "You think they could bear what I'm going to bear?" You see, that wasn't the way to get the goal. Jesus said, "He that is least among you shall be" – what? – "greatest in the kingdom." You don't seek the elevated position; God's way is to be humble.

Judas, Judas wanted the kingdom. He wanted to be part of the kingdom, only he went the wrong way. He went Satan's way to get what he thought he wanted. If he'd have done it God's way, he would have inherited the kingdom forever, wouldn't he? Instead, the Bible says he hanged himself, the rope broke, and he dashed his body against the rocks below, and he went to his own place – that's hell.

So, Satan will tempt you to distrust the providential care of God. He will tempt you to presume on God, and he will tempt you to ambition to fulfil it in his way, not God's way. Isn't it easy to do that? Even good things like wanting to be a success in the ministry, and Satan will try to get you to do it your own way with your own ideas and your own methods, bypassing the faithful ministry of the Word of God and the things that the Spirit leads.

Well, in this kind of temptation, to whom do we turn? And we're going to get this temptation, we get it every day. Where do we go? We go to Jesus Christ, who in all points was tempted like as we are, yet without sin; and as long as we keep our eyes on Him, we know He's got the victory for us. Get your eyes off the things of the world, keep them on Jesus Christ.

You say, "Well, you can't go through the world with blinders on." Oh, yes, you can. You stand around drooling at the world's entertainments, the world's bobbles, the things that Satan dangles in front of your eyes and wondering why you fall.

Well, we see the preparation and the temptation. Look at the triumph very quickly, verse 10: "Then said Jesus unto him, 'Be gone, Satan!' – boy, who was in control of this one? – 'Be gone, Satan!' – I remember another time when He said, "Get thee behind Me, Satan." He had pretty good control over Satan – 'For it is written, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve. Get out!"'"

Oh, I like it. Remember Romans chapter 16 tells us, for the believer: "You know where Satan is"? The Bible says in Romans 16, "He's under your feet." I don't know what that does to you, but it makes me want to go stomp about ten times every minute. Whenever Satan gets on me – I'm kind of practical about that – whenever Satan gets going on me, I just get out of my chair and start stomping on the floor: "Take that." Then I say with Jesus Christ, "Be gone, Satan, get out."

May I add this thought? Jesus and Satan don't occupy the same heart at the same time. Do you know that? If your heart and mind is filled with the presence of Jesus Christ, there's no room for Satan there. See, that's why the Christian life boils down to that: Christ consciousness, keeping your eyes on Him, focusing on Him, thinking about Him.

You say, "Can you do that all the time?" No, you just do it one moment at a time, that's all, that's all. If my wife says to me, "Do you love me?" she doesn't want me to say, "I don't know, hit me in five years." No. She wants to be loved right now.

God doesn't want you to say, "Someday, God." No, right now, right now, right now. Your whole life lived now.

When I got married and went down the aisle, “Will you promise to love this woman till death do you part?” I mean I could say, “I promise, but I don’t know. I might not like her in two weeks. I haven’t even lived with her, you know.”

So, I thought to myself, “Well, I can’t love her forever, because I – you know, I just love her right now.” You know what; that now is still going on, and it’s better than it ever was. And, you know, she doesn’t want to be loved in the past or the future, she wants to be loved now.

And the Christian life is practicing the presence of Jesus Christ. When - yesterday? No. Tomorrow? No. What? Now. Now. Set your mind on Him right now, that’s all. Keep your eyes on the Master, and you can say with Him, “Be gone, Satan, be gone.”

Oh, and then I love verse 11. Oh, this is so good: “Then the devil leaveth Him;” – what else could he do? And watch this – “and behold, angels came and ministered unto Him.” You say, “What did they have, bread?” Lots of bread and other delicious things. And they must have cared for His physical needs, and just gave Him rest and comfort. Listen, don’t worry about God taking care of you, brother. If you can just bypass a temptation, in God’s time He’ll minister to you, every need you have in this world.

So, Jesus dismisses Satan. He’s defeated, but not destroyed; he’ll be back, he’ll be back. And the Word of God says, “The angels came, and they ministered to Him.” Listen, God takes care of His own. In God’s good time, every need of Jesus was met; and so, will yours be, won’t they – all in God’s good time. Don’t presume on Him, don’t distrust His providential care, and don’t try to get there your own way or Satan’s way. Just wait; trust Him; He’ll bring it to pass.

Jesus Christ was then exalted and lifted on high at the end of His ministry. All the temptation ceased. And someday that’ll happen to us. We’ll be exalted to be with Christ, and all temptation will pass away.

Now remember this passage and remember this, this is Jesus’ spiritual biography. Do you know how we know about this passage? Jesus must have told Matthew and Mark and Luke. He must have told them about His personal conflict with Satan. Nobody else was there, were they? This is Jesus’ spiritual biography. He was laying bare the inmost attitudes of His heart,

and Jesus is saying, “I’ve been there. I’ve been there. And I can take you in the midst of your temptation and I can help you, because I’ve been there.”

Jesus draws the veil back from His own struggle that we may see Him in His glory, and that we may join in His victory over temptation. Watch: your eye on Satan. Pray: – constant communion with God, never ceasing, presence of Jesus Christ pervading my thoughts. That is how to overcome temptation.

You say, “Well, I can’t seem to keep Jesus in my thoughts. I can’t think about that all the time. I mean how do you keep it in your mind?” I’ll tell you how. See this book? You hide it in your heart. You know something: the more you read this, the more it’s running around in your brain. Did you know that?

You know what? I have just realized this in the last few years of my ministry. Just about 24 hours a day, my brain is jammed with biblical truth. It’s running around there all the time, and I praise God for it, because the hardest times that I have as a believer is when I go on vacation, both days; and I just have to get away from the Word and other thoughts start coming into my mind that Satan can use to begin to apply temptation, and I am driven back to the Word of God to begin to read it that God’s thoughts might be in my mind.

Listen, folks, you start the day with something of God’s book. Get some of God’s thoughts in your mind, then go out to meet the adversary. Makes all the difference in the world.

A believer’s watchfulness is like a soldier. A soldier on the sentinel, let’s say, and he’s outside and he’s watching the enemy; and the enemy’s coming toward the fort. What does the guard do? Does he stand out there and fight the whole army? Not if he’s smart he doesn’t. He runs inside and reports to the Commanding Officer.

You know what a Christian does, the same thing. That’s what I’ve learned to do. “Hey, Lord, here he comes again. Get him. I can’t do it, Lord. I can’t do it, but You can. How am I going to get him? I don’t know if I can.” Watch. As soon as you see him coming, “Lord,” watch and pray. See? “God, here comes the adversary.”

So, the Christian doesn't attempt to fight temptation in his own strength. His watchfulness is in observing the approach of the enemy, and reporting to the commander: that's prayer. And he can give the victory, can't He.