

“Victory Over Temptation”

Matthew 4:1–11

Let us pray: Father God, as we listen to your word today, may the living word that comes from your mouth be written anew in each of our hearts. In the name of the Lord Jesus, we pray. Amen.

After Jesus was baptized and the Holy Spirit came upon him, the very first step of his public ministry was to go into the wilderness and be tempted by the devil. He went there led by the Spirit. Even when one is filled with the Holy Spirit, temptations from the devil do not cease.

There are important spiritual meanings in the fact that Jesus' first work was to be alone in the wilderness, to fast, and to overcome the devil's temptations. Scripture tells us that the Son of God appeared in order to destroy the works of the devil. For this reason, through this wilderness encounter, Jesus defeated the devil from the very beginning and then began his ministry.

This victory was given as a gift to us. Everything the Son of God did in the flesh, as the Son of Man, was done to restore what humanity had failed to do and to return it to us.

When Jesus came up from the Jordan after his baptism, the Spirit descended upon him like a dove, and he heard the voice of the heavenly Father saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt 3:16-17). When we were baptized, we were buried together with Jesus in those same waters of the Jordan; the Holy Spirit came upon us, and we became beloved sons of God. That is why the tempter approaches us in the same way he approached Jesus, saying, “If you are the Son of God.”

Through these temptations, Jesus restores three ways of life that belong to the children of God. First, a child of God does not live by bread alone, but lives by the word of God. Second, a child of God does not tempt God. Tempting comes from doubt, but a child of God lives by trusting God, by believing that God is with us and that he protects us. Third, a child of God does not pursue or live for the glory of the world, but lives to worship and serve God.

A well-known example of tempting God appears in Exodus 17. At a certain place in the wilderness, the people of Israel found themselves without water. They came to Moses and protested with strong unbelief. They did not say, “God is with us, so ask him to give us water.” Instead, they began with distrust, saying in effect, “I knew this would happen. God is not here. Moses, come out here. You bring us water.”

Moses answered them, “Why do you tempt the LORD?” And Scripture says, “They tempted the LORD, saying, ‘Is the LORD among us or not?’” (NKJV). Because they quarreled with Moses, the

leader whom God had appointed, that place was called Massah and Meribah. Massah means tempting or testing, and Meribah means quarreling. What were they testing and quarreling over? They were testing the patience of God.

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul explains this event by saying, "... they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." Moses struck the rock, and water flowed out. In truth, Christ, as the living water, was continually following them, providing not only physical water but also spiritual water. Yet the Israelites failed to let their faith be trained through difficult circumstances and instead allowed unbelief to grow, even though they had crossed the Red Sea and experienced the manna.

Tempting or testing means contending with God in unbelief. When we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "And do not lead us into temptation," we are asking, "Do not let our hearts become hardened so that we provoke God by treating him with unbelief."

Therefore, overcoming temptation is faith, the opposite of unbelief. In the wilderness, Jesus overcame, as one true human being, the test that humanity could not pass, and the way he overcame it is the answer given to us.

First, he overcame temptation by living under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and by remaining continually filled with the Spirit. Being filled with the Spirit is like being immersed in the Jordan River. That is why this event follows immediately after the baptism in the Jordan. Under the immersion of baptism, through which we are united with Christ, he brings us to the very point where we failed. He overcomes temptation there, and because of this, he gives that victory to us as a gift.

Second, he overcame temptations by the word of God. A life led by the Spirit is always connected to the word. Jesus overcame them by saying, "It is written." The fact that Jesus quoted three passages from Deuteronomy is deeply meaningful. In the name Deuteronomy, "deutero" means "again" or "second," and "nomy" means "law." It means that the law of God is written again. Where is it written again? In our hearts. When the law of God, once written in a book, is written again in our hearts through grace and life, that word enables us to be victorious.

In Deuteronomy, Moses repeatedly says that this law is not far from the people, but that the LORD is near them, placing this law on their lips and in their hearts. Paul re-quotes this passage in Romans 10:8 when he speaks about the law of life in Christ Jesus, saying, "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart," that is, "the word of faith which we preach" (NKJV).

The first passage Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy is 8:3, "Man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD" (NKJV). This means that we

truly live only when God's word is written again in us as living, revealed word, or rhema, awakened within our hearts. The second passage is Deuteronomy 6:16, "You shall not tempt the LORD your God" (NKJV). The next word is Deuteronomy 6:13, "You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him" (NKJV).

Thirdly, we overcome the temptations of the devil when we regard and apply Jesus' victory as our own in him.

The three temptations the devil brings are issues that constantly arise in our lives. First is the problem of daily provision, how we will live and eat. Notice that Jesus does not say we live only by the word and not by bread at all. When he says we do not live by bread alone but by the word of God, the Lord already knows our need for bread. This word includes the promise that God will also provide this to us.

The second issue is like being taken to the pinnacle of the temple. Even while doing God's work in the church, there is always the temptation to seek one's own honor and glory.

The third temptation is to look at the world with envy and to pursue worldly status, power, and recognition.

All of these temptations are forms of suffering for us. Yet the good news is this: Jesus went into the wilderness and bore all the sufferings of our lives. Like the event of the cross, this wilderness encounter transcends time and has an eternal effect on us. We only need to apply Christ's victory to ourselves.

An early Church Father, Ambrose, interpreted this event in this way: "... the first Adam was cast out of Paradise into the desert, ... you may observe how the second Adam returned from the desert to Paradise.... With their error canceled, he could recall them to Paradise.... So Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, is led into the desert for a purpose, in order to challenge the devil. If he had not fought, he would not have conquered him for me."

As God, Jesus could, of course, defeat the devil. But he had to overcome temptations as a human being for that victory to become ours. That is why he came as one of us.

For this reason, Jesus' temptation is a trial that restores the Garden of Eden. The failure in Eden was eating what should not have been eaten. Now Satan tells Jesus to turn stones into bread and eat. Christ refuses this and instead feeds on the word of God. Overcoming temptation means not listening to Satan's words and doing the opposite.

Adam and Eve sought to exalt themselves, trying to become like God, who is the true Temple and the pinnacle as well, and in doing so they fell. If they had trusted that becoming like God, if it

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were God's will, would be something God himself would accomplish, they would not have tested God by eating, trying to see whether they would really die or become like God. Instead, by listening to Satan's word that they would not die, they were in fact worshiping Satan.

Satan's words are all lies. He spoke to Jesus as if all the kingdoms of the world belonged to him, saying, "If You will fall down and worship me, all these things I will give You." But this was a lie. The kingdoms of the world already belong to Christ. Satan was lying to the rightful owner of all things.

He lied in the same way to Eve. He slightly twisted God's word, saying, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" When Eve replied, "No, God said we must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," Satan answered with another lie: "You must eat it. If you eat it, you will be like God." Yet instead of becoming like God, they became like the serpent and ended up siding with the devil (Genesis 3).

In this way, Jesus restored in the wilderness what humanity had failed to do in Eden. He also restored what Israel had failed to do in the wilderness. Israel was chosen as a community to show the nations that the living God was among them. Yet in the wilderness, they despised the manna and longed for the food of Egypt. They accepted the idols of the Canaanites. As at Massah and Meribah, they tested God with unbelief, doubting whether God was truly with them. The wilderness became a place of failure in loving and trusting God. But Jesus restored the wilderness into a place of victory, overcoming temptations through obedience to the word of God and through faith.

Dear brothers and sisters, when we experience confusion and failure in the wilderness of our lives, let us lean on Jesus Christ, who overcame temptations in the wilderness. Faith is leaning on him, like resting against a wall. The victorious Christ lives in us. Amen.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, in the forty days of the wilderness that reflect the journey of our lives, you overcame the temptations of the devil and gave us victory as a gift. Whether we have failed in the past, are failing now, or may fail in the future, we lean in faith on the word of God that has been spoken to our hearts today. We receive your victory as our own and trust that all our failures and sins are redeemed through your victory. Keep us from being deceived by the accusations of the devil. Help us honor and worship God by storing your word within us, and live fully into our purpose as your people who reveal that God is with us. In your victorious name. Amen.