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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes

## INTRODUCTION

We've just begun a long Jesus journey through the Gospel According to Matthew as we highlight the Parables and Miracles of Jesus. In this message, we're going to consider "The Miracle of Overcoming Satan." I'm going to examine the temptation of Jesus and give you some practical tips on how you can overcome the devil's trials and temptations.

Matthew 4:1-11. "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.' Jesus answered, 'It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. '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.'" Jesus answered him, 'It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him."

Remember, our definition of a miracle is an interruption of the laws of nature. There are several miraculous aspects in this encounter, not all of which were performed by Jesus. Satan actually utilized some of his miraculous power. Don't be surprised that the devil can perform miracles. In the book of Exodus, Pharaoh's magicians were able to copy Moses' miracles. And the Book of Revelation predicts the Antichrist will be able to perform miracles to deceive people. So don't be enamored with miracles, because not everything that is supernatural in this world is from God—Satan is capable of a few miraculous tricks as well.

But the primary miracle is the method Jesus employed to overcome Satan, and it CAN be duplicated by every believer today. As we think about dealing with the devil and resisting temptation, I want to share some general spiritual principles from this passage, and then conclude by giving you some personal take-away truths.

### **(1) WE OFTEN FACE GREAT CHALLENGES IMMEDIATELY AFTER GREAT BLESSINGS**

When we last saw Jesus He launched His ministry by being baptized. You would have thought He would have started preaching and healing right away. But instead, we read that immediately after His baptism, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. The verb literally means the Spirit "drove" Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted—it was if God *insisted* Jesus go and face Satan.

Growing up in the piney woods of South Alabama, I pictured the wilderness as a deep forest with thick underbrush with no roads or houses. But in my visits to Israel, I've seen the actual wilderness where Jesus was tempted. It is a barren, desolate landscape with no trees, and only

few bushes. So what's wrong with this picture? One minute Jesus is standing in the Jordan River with water dripping off his face as the Holy Spirit flutters down and God the Father spoke His approval. In the next moment, Jesus is a hungry, haggard figure under attack by the enemy. You need to know that sometimes immediately after you enjoy a tremendous blessing, you suddenly find yourself dealing with extreme trials or temptations. My late friend, Dr. Adrian Rogers, called it "the principle of the devil after the dove." He would say, "Whenever God opens the windows of heaven to bless you, the devil will open the doors of hell to blast you."

There are plenty of examples in the Bible to prove this principle. The prophet Elijah stood on the top of Mt. Carmel and challenged 450 prophets of Baal. He said, "If Baal is God, then worship him, but if Jehovah is God, then worship Him, but stop vacillating between the two." He said the God who answered by fire would be the true God. The prophets of Baal built an altar and danced around all day begging Baal to send down fire. They even cut themselves to entice their false god to send fire. Toward the end of the day, Elijah started to mock them. In the scripture he literally says, "Hey, where is your Baal? Maybe he's just out using the bathroom or he's hard of hearing!" Finally Elijah said, "That's enough. It's time for church!" Elijah looked up to heaven and simply said, "Show 'em who's Boss!" And, "CRACK!" fire fell from heaven and burned up the sacrifice. This had to have been one of the spiritual highlights of Elijah's life. But do you remember what happened immediately afterward? Elijah became discouraged and we see him pouting under a juniper tree saying, "God, that's enough. Take my life." He was so low he was asking God to end his life. It's the principle of the devil after the dove. Be prepared, because sometimes immediately after we enjoy great blessings we will encounter great challenges.

It's because God doesn't want us to become arrogant or complacent. Do you know why we have all these stories in the Old Testament about people who thrived, then barely survived? The answer is found in 1 Corinthians 10:11-12, "These things [Old Testament]...were written down as warnings for us...So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"

So don't be amazed if you're riding high in April and shot down in May. God allows us to experience trials and temptations so we don't become proud. Jesus allowed Himself to go through this temptation experience so it will be an encouragement to us as we deal with spiritual challenges.

## **(2) WE CAN RECOGNIZE SATAN'S TEMPTATION STRATEGY**

There were three specific temptations Satan tossed at Jesus, and they are the same temptations we face today. Satan isn't very creative. He is the opposite of God and God is the ultimate Creator. Satan is the same old tired tempter he's always been. He doesn't have any new tricks. He's stuck in a rut, and we really can recognize his strategy. That's exactly what Paul wrote when he observed, "In order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes." (2 Corinthians 2:11) Let's examine these three temptations and learn how Satan uses them today to tempt us.

### **Stones into Bread: Do something selfish to meet your physical needs!**

First, there was the temptation to turn stones into bread. Basically, Satan was suggesting to

Jesus: "Do something selfish to meet your physical needs!" Satan always tries to appeal to our base nature first—our physical needs. There's no doubt Jesus was extremely hungry after fasting for forty days. I've walked through this same wilderness and there is an abundance of stones of all shapes and sizes, and I can imagine that to a hungry man some of them would start looking like a freshly baked loaf of bread. Could Jesus have turned a stone into bread? Certainly. Later He turned water into wine and made five little biscuits feed 5,000 people. So what would have been wrong with doing that? He would have been doing it Himself, when He was obviously trusting His Father to provide for His needs.

This is still Satan's first line of attack. He still wants us to fulfill our physical needs in the wrong way. He whispers, "Hey, let's face it, you have physical needs. Go ahead and indulge them. You wanna eat? Don't just eat—overeat!" Or he'll say, "Feeling good is nice, and there are some substances that can heighten those feelings of euphoria, so go for it!" One of his great lies comes in the area of sexual temptation. We all are given a sex drive by God, and there's nothing wrong with it. But it is to be fulfilled within the boundaries of marriage. But Satan has fooled millions of people into thinking it's okay to fulfill that sexual desire outside of marriage. Jesus resisted Satan by saying, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." He was saying, "There is more to life than just meeting your physical needs. There is a higher, nobler aspect of life—knowing God and hearing from Him."

When we teach our kids in school that we are nothing more than a slightly improved version of dogs, cats, or monkeys, the logical conclusion is that we shouldn't be surprised when people devote all their energy in just doing what a dog does: Eat, sleep, and look for another dog in heat. I know that sounds harsh, but when are you going to wake up to the fact that God created you to be His child, not His pet? He made you only a little lower than the angels and Satan's plan for your life is to drive you lower and lower and lower until you are in the gutter with the other animals who live only to have meet their physical needs.

### **Jump Down: Do something sensational to get people to accept you!**

The second temptation was to invite Jesus to jump down from the pinnacle of the temple and let God's angels catch Him. What was the point of that? Satan was saying: Do something sensational to get people to accept you! Jesus came as the Messiah and He really wanted the Jewish people to accept Him. If Jesus had taken Satan's advice, it would have been a cheap trick to earn Him fame. Imagine you're a Jewish Pharisee in Jerusalem and you see a man standing on the southeast corner of the temple mount. It's a 400-foot drop straight down into the Kidron Valley. To your amazement the man leans over and jumps off the wall. You expect him to be battered to death on the rocks below, but suddenly several angels appear out of thin air and catch him and set Him down without a scratch. You would have shouted, "Hallelujah, the Messiah is here!" But Jesus wasn't interested in a sensational trick to get people to accept him.

Jesus responded to this temptation by saying, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test." True faith never requires a sensational sign to believe. On the surface, it may appear that jumping off a high wall and trusting angels to catch you would require faith, but Jesus said it was actually putting God to the test. You could get in your car and drive 100 mph around Loop 323 running every red light. If you made it without a wreck, you could claim it took faith and it was a

miracle of God, but I would call it stupidity, because you would be putting God to the test.

It's sad to say that there are multitudes of misguided Christians who have fallen into the trap of seeking the sensational and calling it faith. Every time you hear about the latest Elmer Gantry who appears on the scene claiming to do miracles, there are plenty of gullible people to fill the seats and the offering bags. Don't confuse spectacular tricks with spiritual truth. If tricks and special effects were a testimony for truth, then we should all be worshiping Penn and Teller. God is awesome, but He doesn't need to be noisy and dramatic. There is nothing dramatic about a beautiful sunset, but it has the signature of God stamped on it.

### **Bow Down to Greed: Do something sinful to get rich quick!**

Satan's third temptation was to bow down to greed. Satan was suggesting: Do something sinful to get rich quick! He transported Jesus to a high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world. Now that was a miraculous feat in itself. I imagine there was a huge display in front of Jesus like in an IMAX theater and Satan displayed the riches of Rome, Egypt, China, and the Incas. Remember, Satan is a liar, and he's the master of the half-truth. He said, "I'll give you all this if you will bow down and worship me." We know from archaeological evidence that many of these ancient cultures practiced occultist worship, so Satan probably had temporary control of some of the riches of the world. But he was lying because God really owns it all. The Bible says, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."

Jesus did come to lead a kingdom, and in the next message I'll introduce the parables of the Kingdom. But Jesus was a suffering servant who would establish His kingdom through a cross. Satan was simply saying, "Hey, you can have the crown without the cross. You can have the kingdom now, without the suffering." So Jesus rebuffed Satan by saying, "Get out of here! It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.'"

Every week we learn about people like Bernie Madoff, or the Stanford Bank scandal to remind us there are plenty of people who will lie, cheat, and steal to obtain riches. The love of things or money is called covetousness, and you often find that sin on the lists in the New Testament. When Paul wrote those lists of sins, he includes things like sexual immorality, lying, slander, gossip with covetousness. He simply lists those other sins, but he always adds this qualifier to covetousness. He says, "Covetousness which is idolatry." The true American idol is coveting more and more money to buy more and more stuff. Millions of Americans who would never bow down to a statue or a totem pole, have prostrated themselves before the almighty dollar. And as I read my Bible, one of the things God delights to do is to expose how powerless and foolish all the false gods really are. That's what He did to Baal through Elijah on Mount Carmel. Right now we're facing a time of economic recession where we've seen our retirement and investments accounts shrink to almost nothing. Maybe God is just showing us again the futility of worshiping the false god of money?

These three temptations are the same temptations Satan is employing today. Remember, Satan doesn't have a creative bone in his body. He can't think outside the box. Once you know he uses the same old temptations over and over again, you can be ready to resist them, too.

### **(3) WE MUST BE ALERT BECAUSE THE DEVIL IS PERSISTENT**

Do you think because Jesus overcame Satan that the devil gave up? Not a chance. In fact the Bible says, "When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time." (Luke 4:13). Satan only left Jesus for a season, but he was never far away. He later attacked Jesus through Judas Iscariot. The Bible says just before Judas betrayed Jesus, the devil literally entered Judas. That proves the old devil doesn't give up easily. He is a persistent cuss.

I remember hearing about an older, godly woman named Sister Emma, who was so sweet and positive she never said a bad word about anybody. Even if a person was a known scoundrel, Emma managed to find something nice to say about them. Her pastor noticed this and said, "Emma, I'll bet you could even find something nice to say about the devil." Emma thought for a moment and said, "Well, at least he's always on the job!" She's right. He is always on the job, so just because you've overcome trials and temptations in the past, don't become arrogant thinking that you're beyond reach. Peter warns us to "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8)

I've pointed out three general principles about Satan's temptation, but now I want to give you four practical "take-away truths" to help you overcome Satan's attack.

#### **(1) It's not a sin to be tempted**

I've had Christians tell me they are ashamed because of some of the terrible thoughts they've had. Temptation is not sin. Jesus was tempted, but He never sinned. The Bible says, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest... Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we possess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin." (Hebrews 4:14-15)

For every temptation you face, Jesus also faced it, and He is the sinless son of God. Temptations are the whispered suggestions of Satan to sin. But if you don't follow those terrible thoughts, then you haven't sinned. Billy Graham used to compare temptation and sin by saying, "You can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair." When Satan's sinful suggestions flutter through your mind, just don't give them a place to roost!

#### **(2) No temptation is irresistible**

Again, I've had people tell me they did something bad in their past because the temptation was just too strong. That's not true, because God's Word says, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. [That means your temptation isn't unique to you—others have faced it and resisted it.] 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 stand up under it." (1 Corinthians 10:13) Notice God always provides a "way out." That means when you face a temptation, if you look around you'll find an escape route, so RUN FROM IT! The best way to resist sin is to simply stay away from tempting situations, and if you find yourself in one, turn

and run away from it as fast as you can. Don't make a deal with the devil. Remember what Joseph did when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him? He ran away so forcefully that he left his robe in her hand. The Bible says to "Flee evil desires of youth." (2 Timothy 2:22)

You may think of temptation as having a tug-of-war with the devil. If you do, you'll lose every time because he is stronger. My advice is this: Drop the rope and run! Don't negotiate!

### **(3) Memorizing God's Word is the best weapon to resist the devil**

When Jesus was being tempted by the devil, do you think He could have disposed of the devil in a flash? Of course. Had Jesus so desired, He could have blinked His Divine eye and Satan would have been disintegrated in a "poof!" Or Jesus could have banished Satan to the coldest corner of the entire universe. Why, then, did Jesus allow Himself to undergo these three temptations? I believe He did it to teach us how to overcome Satan using the spiritual weapons that are available to us. Jesus dispatched the devil by quoting three verses from Deuteronomy. He was modeling to us that the best way for us to overcome the devil is by using the Word of God which is called "the sword of the Spirit" in Ephesians 6.

That's why the Bible says, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." (Psalm 119:11) There is a difference between holding God's Word in your hand and hiding it in your heart. At each temptation, Jesus didn't say, "Hold it, Satan, let me look here in my scroll and see if I can find a verse to read to you." Jesus had memorized God's Word and could quote it. If you memorize God's Word you can be prepared to quote scripture in response to every temptation you face. One reason you may be giving into temptation is because you don't have God's Word hidden in your heart. If you are struggling with a certain sin, ask a Christian friend to help you find a scripture that addresses that issue and then memorize it. Whenever Satan comes at you, quote that scripture out loud and "swish, swish, hack, hack" you'll send him running. If Jesus could resist the devil using three verses from Deuteronomy, just think what we can do with the book of Romans!

### **(4) Waiting on God's provision is always better than settling for the devil's substitutes**

Did you notice what the Bible says happened after Satan left? "The Devil left. And in his place, angels! Angels came and took care of Jesus' needs." (Matthew 4:11 *The Message*) The NIV says the angels "ministered unto him." That's a word that literally means they served food to Jesus. After fasting for 40 days, can you imagine what that angelic feast was like? I imagine the menu included heavenly hash, celestial nectar, and for dessert, angel food cake, of course!

Jesus could have turned stones to bread, but I don't imagine it wouldn't have tasted very good. That reminds me of my Aunt Gertrude. She was sweet, but she was a terrible cook. Whenever we would visit her, she would make home-made biscuits that could have been used for hockey pucks. My dad, her brother, used to kid her mercilessly. I remember one morning we were sitting at the table and she asked my dad, "How do you like my biscuits?" My dad took one and rapped on the table with it and said, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone!" I imagine bread made from stones would have been like that. But instead of settling for the devil's stones, Jesus waited for His Father's angel food cake. We get to make the same choice today—the devils

stones or God's best.

The great Puritan preacher Thomas Brooks wrote: "Satan promises the best, but pays with the worst; he promises honor and pays with disgrace; he promises pleasure and pays with pain; he promises profit and pays with loss; he promises life and pays with death."

## CONCLUSION

The best way to overcome Satan is not by trying not to think about temptation. I know that's a double negative, but if you're trying to lose weight and you're tempted to eat an ice cream sundae, the best way to avoid it is not by thinking about that creamy, delicious, sweet ice cream sundae you shouldn't have. You resist by thinking about how much better you'll feel by saying fit. The best way to overcome Satan's trials and temptations ISN'T by thinking about Satan; it's by filling your mind with Jesus-thoughts.

I once knew a man who had a highly-trained dog that could obey many commands. He demonstrated a trick to me once when he placed a morsel of meat on the floor only inches from the dog and said, "Don't eat." The dog didn't eat the meat until the master said, "Eat." I noticed that while the dog was waiting, he wasn't even looking at the meat—he had his eyes fixed on his master waiting for the command. Even though there was this tasty morsel in front of him, the dog only had eyes for his master.

I learned a great lesson that day about dealing with temptation. As long as the dog was looking diligently at his master, the temptation of the meat wasn't as great. Satan's temptations are like that. He enjoys placing the tasty, shiny bait in front of us to entice us. But if you will keep your eyes firmly locked on your Master, instead of looking at the temptation you can overcome Satan. Try it: "Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face; and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace!"

## OUTLINE

### (1) WE OFTEN FACE GREAT CHALLENGES IMMEDIATELY AFTER GREAT BLESSINGS

"These things [Old Testament]...were written down as warnings for us...So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" *1 Corinthians 10:11-12*

### (2) WE CAN RECOGNIZE SATAN'S TEMPTATION STRATEGY

"In order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes." *2 Corinthians 2:11*

- \* Stones into Bread: Do something selfish to meet your physical needs!
- \* Jump Down: Do something sensational to get people to accept you!
- \* Bow Down to Greed: Do something sinful to get rich quick!

### (3) WE MUST BE ALERT BECAUSE THE DEVIL IS PERSISTENT

"When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time." *Luke 4:13*

#### (1) It's not a sin to be tempted

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest...Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we possess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin."  
*Hebrews 4:14-15*

#### (2) No temptation is irresistible

"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. [That means your temptation isn't unique to you—others have faced it and resisted it.] 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 stand up under it." *1 Corinthians 10:13*

#### (3) Memorizing God's Word is the best weapon to resist the devil

"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." *Psalms 119:11*

#### (4) Waiting on God's provision is always better than settling for the devil's substitutes

"The Devil left. And in his place, angels! Angels came and took care of Jesus' needs." *Matthew 4:11 The Message*