

Matthew 4:1-11 (ESV) ¹ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴ But he answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" ⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶ and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you,' and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" ⁷ Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

Amen.

Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. At 30 years of age this was an all-time spiritual high. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, empowered for ministry. The Holy Spirit descended on Him in the form of a dove, ordaining the ministry that was about to take place. God, His Father literally spoke these words of blessing to His Son, Jesus. **Matthew 3:17 (ESV)** ¹⁷ *and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."* To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to be filled with the love of God which then motivates you to love others even as God loves you. Jesus completely felt the nearness of the Father's Holy Presence inside of Himself, the Holy Spirit. On top of that Jesus heard the voice of the Father speak words of blessing directly to Him. The Father found the greatest of pleasure in His Son Jesus. Jesus knew He was completely loved and accepted by the Father and was assured of this love by the power of the Holy Spirit filling Him.

I am not a psychologist, but I do listen to a lot of people. No matter how good or how bad one's earthly father is, the father impacts his children for the rest of their lives. I have spoken to men in their 70's whose fathers have been dead for decades and yet they are still trying to earn their father's acceptance. To feel the love and acceptance of one's father gives to you an

advantage in life that many do not have. Jesus knew He was backed fully by The Father. When you know your father is behind you, supporting you, it gives to you an inner confidence that helps you succeed in life. I have read biographies of men and women that worked their tails off, earning several degrees and doctorates thinking that by doing so their father would be proud of them and honor them. It never occurs and some are pained for life, unable to overcome the lack of love and acceptance they did not receive from their father.

Friends, God's love is absolutely perfect and lacks nothing. You may be well past 50 and still feel a lack of love from a parent or parents. Jimmy Carter's sister, Ruth Carter Stapleton, once spoke about the power of prayer dealing with the inner healing of damaged emotions. She spoke specially about the lack of love from a parent and how it impacts the lives of adults. This took place on television, "The Hour of Power" hosted by Robert Schuller. This is the prayer for inner healing, **"Dear Heavenly Father, please bridge the gap from the love that I did not receive from my father to the love that I should have received. In the name of Jesus. Amen." God's love heals the deepest of wounds.** Some of us to this day are scarred by that lack of love. The Good News is the Father can easily make up for that love and bring much needed inner healing. You no longer have to beat yourself up for not pleasing your dad in a way that made him honor you or at least felt honored and blessed by him. Having said that, since my own dad is in heaven, living in God's perfect love, my father is loving me right now with God's perfect love. Knowing that truth can build you up on the inside too. God's love can always make up now for the deficit of love we think we should be receiving from others including family members. Then we don't have to walk around wounded and feeling that deficit. God's Spirit can fill it and will. It is up to us to accept it and let it sink in.

Fully embraced by the Father's love Jesus walks into the place where He was tempted by Satan to rebel against the Father. The Father spoke love to Jesus from heaven and then Satan wanted Jesus to question that perfect love. The Bible tells us that Jesus was tempted in every

way and never sinned. Because of that, Jesus knows how to help you no matter what temptations you are facing. **Hebrews 2:18 (ESV)** *¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.* **Hebrews 4:15 (ESV)** *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.* None of us have been tempted to the point Jesus was. If anyone understands your temptations, Jesus does. Which leads me to me to this point. **It is not a sin to be tempted. It is unwise to put ourselves into places of temptation.**

The Bible tells us of how temptation operates in our lives. **James 1:13-15 (NLT2)** *¹³ And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. ¹⁴ Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. ¹⁵ These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.*

¹ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴ But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Having just experienced a super high experience Jesus begins a long fast, not eating for 40 days and 40 nights, only to be tempted by the devil. In the Old Testament God's people were in the wilderness for 40 years and having their faith tested in God. For more the most part they flunked every test. Most did not enter the promised land for they died in unbelief. Being tested is not the same as being tempted. God tempts no one to sin. God does put us to the test to see how strong our faith in Him is. God's tests and being tempted by the devil are two entirely different categories.

The first temptation is trying to fulfill one's own physical needs in a way that serves the devil by rebelling against the Father. It is being so hungry that you walk into the store and eat the food and never pay for it. When I am hungry to the max, please do not talk to me, don't even look at me. Don't even offer me coffee. At my hungriest I am the meanest. Leave me alone. All I can think about is my stomach. And at the end of a fast, when your body stops feeding off of itself, this is when you are most vulnerable to temptation because you are literally starving to death.

I have walked into homes where fresh bread just came out of the oven. That smell is one of the best smells ever. My Grandma Sophie baked the best rye bread ever and we would gobble up the loaf before she had time to tell us to stop.

God's plan was to provide food for Jesus at the right time. Jesus was to wait and be patient for God's timing. Satan wanted to circumvent God's way and provide Jesus an easy out or an easy fill so to speak. With his stomach gurgling, Jesus spoke truth back to the devil. ⁴ **But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."** In the Exodus God provided daily bread, daily food for the people and they called it manna because they did not know what to call it. The enemy wanted Jesus to succumb to the devil's way, and thus mock the Heavenly Father's way. To do so would be to put the enemy first and not the Father. To do so would have meant a lack of love for God which in itself is a sin. To do so would have been to put His own need ahead of the Father's plan and thus rebel against the Father. To please Satan and displease God would have been a complete disaster. Adam and Eve failed this temptation in the Garden. If Jesus were to eat one bite of the devil's bread, I believe the entire universe would have ceased to exist. For Jesus to sin only once meant eternal life in heaven is no longer available for the entire human race. The Father would bring an end to it all in the blink of an eye or the snap of a finger. **Your obedience today can bear fruit for all eternity.** We are still being blessed by the obedience of Abraham

that took place 4000 years ago. The obedience of Jesus will bear fruit for all eternity. He never caved into sin no matter how severe the temptation. **Parents, your obedience unto God today does impact future generations of your family.**

As important as food is to your physical body, taking God's word is equally, if not more important to take in for your sake for the health of your soul. During Lent we are asking you to read the entire book of Acts. Some of you might leave church thinking, "I never got anything out of this service." On the other hand, if you are consistently in the Word throughout the week, you will find yourself being fed during church for you are able to take in more truth because you are prepared to take it in. One meal a week and you are a starving Christian and what you take in here may not be tasted or digested all that well. You may leave feeling sick. On the other hand, as you feed on God's word, straight from God, your soul will always be willing to take in more and your enjoyment of worship will only increase. A verse I read this week deeply convicted me. **"Your kindness will reward you, but your cruelty will destroy you" (Proverbs 11:17).**

God's word can pierce our souls where surgery needs to take place. I printed that verse and taped it to my computer.

*⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶ and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you," and "On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone." ⁷ Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" The temptation here is wanting to do something spectacular for all to see, to experience some sort of public miracle that validates your personhood and makes you feel good about yourself. In so doing you have failed to rely on God, to do things God's way and have gone the way of Satan. You have failed to live by complete faith and trust in the Father. The Devil was tempting Jesus to do something sensational so the people would accept him as the Son of God, the true Messiah. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus we read, **Luke 16:31***

(NLT2) ³¹ *“But Abraham said, ‘If they won’t listen to Moses and the prophets, they won’t listen even if someone rises from the dead.’”* The spectacular does not lead people into the Christian faith. If God did a fantastic miracle in this church today, it would not increase your faith. By tomorrow you would be bored and want another one. **We live by faith in God and rely on God’s provision for everything. We do not put the Lord God to the test to prove His existence or power.** Who are we to put God to the test? He is Potter and we are the clay.

⁸ *Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.* ⁹ *And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”* ¹⁰ *Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ““You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.””* This was a severe temptation that if Jesus fell, it would mean hell for all of us. It was the temptation to be popular, to be liked by all, to rule the world immediately instead of being Lord of all by going to the cross and dying for our sins. The devil promised immediate gratification. Friends, Jesus saw right through this. You can gain the whole world and lose one’s soul. If Jesus were to bow down to Satan, all would be lost forever and ever. Jesus proved His great love for the Father, by bowing down to the Father and doing the Father’s will and no one else’s. Jesus did not need to question the Father’s love for him in the midst of these temptations. The Holy Spirit had Him filled with the Father’s love. Filled with the love of God it is so easy to recognize the counterfeit work of Satan. The difference is a matter of eternity and where you wish to spend it.

¹¹ *Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.* The obedience of Jesus, the perfect righteousness of Jesus, the fact that Jesus never sinned once applies to us this way. **His sinless record has been credited to every believer in Christ. It is why we are heaven bound and cared for by God here. Jesus is our righteousness. Thank God Jesus never sinned. Amen and Amen.**