

The Testing of King Jesus

Matt. 4:1-11

Intro. Tonight, the Seattle Seahawks will square off against the Denver Broncos in the biggest contest of the National Football League. But you know this...and it's not what we're here to talk about the AM. This AM the two cancelled services we had a few weeks ago seem almost providential. Why?...because they allow us to celebrate Christ's victory over Satan's temptations on Super Bowl Sunday! I'm not clever enough to plan it this good!

Matthew's purpose was to present Jesus Christ as the undisputed champion...the Messiah of Israel and savior-king of the world. The genealogy proves Jesus is the rightful heir to David's throne. The narrative of His birth proves He is God incarnate. From His earliest years, Jesus fulfilled OT prophecies and demonstrated He is truly a man who faced the challenges of a hostile world just as we do. With the emergence of John the Baptizer, ancient prophecies were once again fulfilled. Then last Sunday we considered the four witnesses that converged at the baptism of Jesus to declare that He is the sinless, holy, righteous, Spirit-filled servant who came to earth to do the will of God, His Father. He's the spotless Savior we need and the righteous King our hearts long for.

Even though the testimonies about Jesus are compelling, at this point they remain theoretical and Jesus remained untested. Like commentators before a big game, the prophets declared the righteousness of Messiah's character. But saying and doing are two different things. The declarations had to be tested and proven. Just as the first Adam was tested in the Garden, God arranged a test for Jesus, the Second Adam. His opponent was the same wily Adversary who deceived Adam and Eve. Yet where Adam fell and brought sin and death to the world, Jesus was victorious.

One day the wicked King Ahab surprised everybody by saying something with a hint of wisdom to it. It was directed at the King of Syria. Ben-Hadad bragged about how he was going to whip Israel and carry away the nation's wealth. Here's what Ahab said...**1 Kings 20:11 – The king of Israel answered, "Tell him: 'One who puts on his armor should not boast like one who takes it off.'"** Did you catch that? Ahab said, *"Its one thing to boast before the game when helmets and shoulder pads are put on. But it's another thing to brag after the game when helmets and shoulder pads are taken off."* Are you with me? Between the putting on and taking off is the contest itself. So between the baptism of Jesus and the start of His public ministry, God arranged a test...a contest between the Son of God and the Tempter. Now mark this down...It wasn't a test to find out if Jesus would pass or fail. It was a test to prove Jesus cannot fail! So let's begin our study this AM at **4:1, 2**.

1. The setting – vs. 1, 2 - 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.

Notice, this test came right after Jesus was baptized. **3:16, 17** say, **At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."** John tried to stop Jesus from being baptized because he knew Jesus was perfect and had no sin to confess. Then in **vs. 16, 17** we have the Father's declaration concerning His Son's obedience. But at this moment the declaration was hypothetical and had to be tested. Adam was tested / Job was tested / Abraham was tested / Moses was tested / Israel was tested / the disciples were tested / and we are tested. The test targets our faith. Whenever God makes a declaration about a person or nation, Satan enters stage left. His goal is to prove God is a liar and His people are unfaithful to Him. So the Lord declared, **"This is my Son whom I love; with Him I am well pleased"**...and Satan said, *"Let's see about that. Let's see how pleased you are when I get through with Him."*

v.1 says Jesus was led out to a wilderness place **by the Spirit**. This forty days of testing was no chance happening. It was God's will just as much as it was God's will for Jesus to be baptized. The same Holy Spirit who descended on Jesus now led Him out to be tested. Remember that when you encounter difficulty and everything seems to be coming unglued. God hasn't fallen asleep at the switch or forgotten you. The tests we endure are not outside God's will for us. Even though God allows us to be tested in a variety of ways...the tests are designed for our growth and His glory. In each test His grace is sufficient. So trust Him. And God never tempts or entices us to sin. There's a difference between the tests God allows and temptations that surface in the midst of those tests. **Jas. 1:13** says, **When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone...** So **v.1** says, **the Spirit of God led Jesus to the desert to be tempted by the devil**. At this critical moment between Christ's baptism and public ministry, God planned to demonstrate His Son's obedience through testing. Satan's plan was to trip Jesus up...to disqualify Him by enticing Jesus to act in a way that was displeasing to His Father.

Now mark this down somewhere. Temptation doesn't come because we're vile sinners. We shouldn't feel we're worse than everybody else because we're tempted in some area. Temptation comes because we're human! Jesus wasn't tempted because He was a sinner...He was tempted because He was a man. Whether you're a sinner or not adds nothing to the power of the temptation itself. Jesus felt the full force of Satan's temptations because He was a man. The difference between our temptations and those Jesus endured is the sinful nature in us...a nature predisposed to bad choices and sin. Jesus didn't have a sinful nature. He was tested in the realm of His humanity, but His humanity was perfect and inseparably united to His deity. As God, He could not sin and He proved it.

Many false avenues have been explored in pursuit of freedom from temptation. Hermits retreat to the wilderness. Monks seek seclusion in the solitude of a monastery. Ascetics practice mutilation and deprivation. In theory, freedom from temptation is best achieved when we're alone and isolated. Really? I think our worst failures happen when we're alone and no one is watching. **Jas. 1:14** says - **each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed**. Location and outward influence aren't the troublemakers. Flip Wilson was wrong, "The devil and outside influences can't make us do anything!" The true source of temptation is in us, not in the community. The truth doesn't show up when we're in a crowd...it's revealed when we're alone. So Christ was alone in the desert when tested. True victory comes as we gain control over the evil desires that are within us. **Gal. 5:16** - **...live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature**. By His victory, Jesus proved He was pure inwardly. His life was controlled by a higher principle. That's what we need...we need a Savior and King who proved He cannot fail!

Now **vs.2, 3** say the tempter came **after** Jesus fasted forty days and nights. Being fully human, **v.2** says, **He was hungry**. Do you think? After four hours, my stomach is growling! I've fasted a day or two, but I can't imagine forty days without food. Physical weakness results from a lack of nourishment. Physical weakness drags down our emotional, mental, and spiritual immunities as well. Do you get a little cranky when supper is delayed? Do you get a little testy when wait staff loses your order? The angst we feel is physiological and the physio is at war with the logical! The physical dimension of our being is inseparably linked to the emotional, mental and spiritual. So after forty days without food, Christ's flesh or humanity was weakened / compromised / and vulnerable. Like a predator, Satan's temptations are most effective when we're running on empty. So the devil showed up right on cue. He was there when Jesus was baptized. He heard the Father's declaration. He seized the opportunity to prove God wrong. But his plans were foiled by the faith and obedience of Jesus. Jesus proved He is the Savior we need and the King we can trust. His dependence on God and His obedience to God's Word is the example we must learn to follow when our faith is tested.

2. Testing at the physical level –vs. 3, 4 (What drives you?) 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.'"

To interpret this temptation, we need to understand something...the devil wasn't questioning whether Jesus was the Son of God. He knows who Jesus is...he knows better than anyone. When he said, "**If you are the Son of God**" the "if" is a first class condition which means "since" or "because." So the verse could read this way, **(Since) you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.** So the devil believes Jesus is the Son of God. But He also believes Jesus is the Creator. I mean, the temptation would have been meaningless if Jesus didn't have the power to pull it off. Now think about this...if evolutionists won't believe God record of creation, they could learn a great deal from the devil. Am I right? And notice this...the devil also believes in special creation! In other words, He believes the spoken word of Jesus has power to turn inorganic matter into bread. The bread Jesus had power to create was never grain in a field / never harvested / never ground in a mill / never mixed with other ingredients / or baked in an oven. The devil believes Jesus can bypass historical process and instantaneously create bread that is ready to eat. This sounds just like the **Gen. 1** account of creation, doesn't it? And it comes from the mouth of an antagonist who happened to be an eyewitness! So thank you Mr. Lucifer...in your craftiness, you helped make the case for special creation!

The connection between the phrase **He was hungry (v.2)** and **tell these stones to become bread (v.3)** is obvious. The thought of warm bread would be tantalizing to a man who hadn't eaten for forty days or nights. Can't you smell the aroma? Here's some rolls Nancy Bacon posted last week. But this is how Satan operates. He knows what we hunger for...he's aware of our appetites. Like a fisherman who knows what bait is most effective, He knows how we're wired and what stimuli can trip us up.

So why was it wrong for Jesus to perform a minor miracle right about now? He's the Son of God. Why should He go hungry when He has the power to **prepare a table...in the presence of (His) enemies. (Psa. 23:5)** What you're wondering is precisely the question Satan wanted Jesus to give thought to. He's a master at creating doubt and confusion. "*You are the Son of God. You have the power. You created the Universe. You're hungry...So why not?*" He used a similar rationale when tempting Adam and Eve. *God loves you. You're His children. He wants you to have every good thing. He didn't say, you'll surely die....you misunderstood what He said.*"

But we haven't answered the question. Why was it wrong for Jesus to turn a few stones into bread? The answer comes clear in the verse Jesus quoted. To each of Satan's three temptations Jesus responded by quoting verses from the book of Deuteronomy. Three times He said "**It is written.**" Here He quoted **Deut. 8:3. v. 4** says, **Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"** If we were to turn back to **Deut. 8** we'd find the context centers around the Israelites hunger in the wilderness. For forty years God tested them. His objective wasn't to trip them up, but to train them to obey and trust all of His words. The Lord gave them manna. But to have it and enjoy this daily provision, they had to follow the Lord's instructions carefully. Bottom line...it was more important to obey than have all the food they could ever want. The same principle was true for Adam and Eve but they weren't in a desert...they were surrounded by a smorgasbord. So the point is made again...it doesn't matter if you're in the city or in the desert...it doesn't matter if you're surrounded by plenty or nothing...our highest value must be to obey the Lord. When we obey His voice, He promises to meet our needs. Do you believe that?

I've reduced the first test to a simple question. "Jesus, *What drives you?*" If Jesus performed this minor miracle to satisfy His hunger, he would have obeyed the devil instead of His Father. He would have stooped to the level of sinful humanity, because that's what we've done so many times. The devil tantalizes us with images of things we wish we had.

He then entices us to satisfy those desires in ways that are not God's ways. His rationale seems logical. So at the end of the day the question is this... *What drives you?* Are you driven by your desires to have this or that, or are you driven by passion to obey God? Later Jesus said, **Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness.** Jesus won the first round...He gained the victory in a test we fail so often.

3. Testing at the soulish level – vs. 5-7 *Whose applause matters most to you?* 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.'"

Made in the likeness of the Triune God, human beings have three parts, body, soul and Spirit. Paul's benediction in **I Thess. 5:23b** seems to support this view. **May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.** We say the body is world conscious / the soul is self-conscious / and the spirit is God-conscious. However you slice it, the deepest dimension of who we are is spiritual. That being the case, the best health physically and psychologically is enjoyed by those who are properly aligned with God spiritually. Amen? In a natural childbirth class Peggy and I heard an unbelieving nurse affirm this. She said her best students were Christian young people who know how to relax because they trust God. All that training proved worth-less because Peggy required drugs and 3 c-sections! But our deepest need is to be aligned with God through obedience to His Word. It's living...**by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.**

Jesus demonstrated His obedience in a very extreme situation. The first test was aimed at the level of physical appetite. Jesus proved He valued obedience to God more than the need to satisfy His hunger. The second temptation followed on the heels of the first. Satan said, *"Ok, we see you trust God and value His Word above all else. Let's show the Jewish crowd how much you trust Him."* So having taken Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem, he said, **"If (or since) you are the Son of God...throw yourself down."** In other words, *"Do something really spectacular. Show them who you are. After all... You are the Son of God! You're invincible and indestructible. Why not make a name for yourself. Why not give the crowd reason to believe and something to cheer about? Can't you hear the applause? Think of the headlines in tomorrow's Jerusalem Times. Go for it."*

But that isn't all there was to Satan's temptation. He strengthened his temptation by adding a Bible verse. It's **Psa. 91:11, 12.** And the devil quoted God's Word perfectly! He distorted God's word when tempting Eve but he couldn't use this ploy with the One who is the Word. The devil said, **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."** The devil said, *"Listen Jesus, you're not only invincible because you're God's Son, but your Father has promised to send a squadron of angels to protect you. If you jump, they'll catch you...God said so! The impact won't even injure your feet! So go ahead...jump! Show the crowd who you are."*

If the first temptation was aimed at the physical, this second was aimed at the soul in Jesus...the self-conscious level. Engrained in human DNA, we want to be somebody. We want to achieve something / create an impression / make a name for ourselves / and in some way, leave our mark. It's human to crave significance. In earlier years I used to drive Peggy through neighborhoods showing off the roofs I'd put on. (That was my idea of an exciting date!) *"Look at that house, its three stories to the top. Look how cut up that roof is...see those valleys and dormers? That octagonal tower was a beast but I slayed the beast!* Peggy was patient and kind. She'd smile and say, "Wow...imagine that?" It's miracle she stayed with me! By nature I'm a show off who craves affirmation.

I don't mean to implicate you in my flawed psyche, but isn't it true...we all crave significance to some degree? We all hope to be somebody and do something others recognize and applaud. "So Jesus, Whose applause matters most to you?...the applause of people or the applause of God? The devil said, "Show them how much you trust God. Jump!" The answer came in His response. **v.7 - Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"**

Notice the word **also**. Jesus said, **It is also written...** All sorts of wild and weird teachings emerge from single verses usually taken out of context. The cults and isms are famous for this. To the church at Ephesus Paul said, "**I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.**" (**Acts 20:27**) Yet Satan loves to twist and distort Bible verses to his own deceitful advantage. Jesus didn't fall for it. He said in effect, "*You're right, God will protect Me.*" **Psa. 91** affirms that. But another verse applies here. It's **Deut. 6:16**. There the Law says, **Do not test the LORD your God as you did at Massah**. There the people murmured and complained. They said, **is God among us or not? (Ex. 17:7)** Instead of trusting God to meet their needs, they tested God by refusing to take Him at His word. The Jews were always looking for a sign...a dramatic intervention. Show us and we'll believe.

But it wasn't that way with Jesus. He didn't need applause or affirmation. He didn't need some sensational feat to prove how trustworthy God is or how much He trusted His Father. From time to time we hear about snake handlers who were bitten and died / poison-drinkers who didn't survive / children who died because their parents believed medical attention was contrary to faith / or Christians who made stupid decisions. All this junk happens in the name of Christ and under the guise of faith. Jesus modeled a faith that was perfect. He said in effect, "*I don't need applause or recognition... I don't need to do something dangerous or spectacular. The true test of my faith is my obedience to God's Word..*"

So in the arena of life, Whose applause matters most to you? As one well respected coach told his team..."Go out there and play for an audience of One"...that One, being God. Trust Him. Not because of external affirmation...not because He did something sensational or spectacular for you. Trust Him because He is the faithful God who has promised to never let you down. His Word is rock solid!

4. Testing at the spiritual level – vs. 8-10 (*Who or what receives your worship?*) **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.'"**

In the third and final test the devil went for broke. This temptation was amazing in its boldness. The devil held nothing back. The first test was aimed at the physical. The second was aimed at the soulish dimension. But this final test was aimed at the spiritual...the deepest and most profound dimension of who Christ is and who we are. Now remember, Lucifer refused to worship God. Instead of bowing to God, he wanted to be like the Most High. He craves the worship that belongs to God and God alone. For this reason, he was cast out of heaven. Right now, he is the **Prince of the power of the air** and **the god of this (cosmos) or world**. His power and influence is vast. But any authority Satan has is derived from God. He's like a pit bull on God's leash.

Since Israel has no mountain high enough to see much of anything, to view **all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor**, had to involve a vision...maybe something like a hologram. The devil showed Jesus all the glitter that has attracted human hearts...the bright lights of the city / the great skyscrapers / the cathedrals and palaces / the commerce / the wealth and political power. The devil said, "*Jesus, You can have all of this if you bow down and worship me. Give me just one moment of praise and I'll turn it all over to you.*" We know that God has promised to give everything to Jesus.

In **Psa. 2:8** God the Father is speaking to God the Son - **I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.** Revelation anticipates the day when Jesus who made it all and owns it all will take possession and control of it all. **"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and He will reign for ever and ever." (Rev. 11:15)**

So Satan was offering Jesus a short cut...a way to the crown that bypassed the cross. *"Just bow to Me and all the suffering will be eliminated. Just bow to me and it's yours."* Satan knew Jesus had come for this reason. He came to be crowned. He came to establish Heaven's rule on earth. Satan reasoned, *"Why not have it right now? Why endure the agony of betrayal / arrest / trials / abuse / and crucifixion when all this could be avoided? Why subject your family and followers to such grief? I'm offering you an out...a shortcut, an easy path to the same end you came to achieve. Just bow."*

Notice with me...all that Satan could offer Jesus was **kingdoms**, plural. History witnessed the rise and fall of many kingdoms. Each kingdom is stained by bloodshed and brutality. Each kingdom had seeds of greed and corruption within...seeds that eventually bloomed in self-destruction and collapse. What is archaeology?...but the study of ancient civilizations that fell? It's the study of bones / artifacts / and ruins. That's all Satan has to give...kingdoms that are temporary and perishable...things that can't last. The **kingdom** God has promised to give His Son is singular because it will never end. In the context of rising and falling empires, Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar, **His (God's) kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.** This is the kingdom God promised to give His Son. For Jesus to accept Satan's counterfeit would have been a colossal mistake. But this same offer is accepted millions of times every day. Like the bad deal Esau made, the eternal is routinely sacrificed on the altar of the temporary. Jesus didn't fall for it.

At the deepest core of our lives is this question...*Who or what receives your worship?* When tempted at this spiritual level, Jesus was resolute and indignant. He said, **"Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"** Jesus wouldn't allow any person or thing to usurp the place that belongs to God alone. We're confronted by this same test everyday. We need to ask, what do I trade for loyalty or service to God? For the third time, Jesus responded to Satan's temptation by quoting the Law of God. This verse is found in **Deut. 6:13** and **10:20**.

God allowed His Son to endure three temptations at a time when Jesus was weak, vulnerable and alone. Each temptation targeted a dimension of Christ's humanity...body, soul, and spirit. To each temptation, Jesus responded with a specific command of God. To the question, *What drives you?* Jesus said, **"My food...is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."** (Jn. 4:34) To the question, *Whose applause matters most to you?*...Jesus proved His confidence in God needed no affirmation or applause. Finally, to the question, *Who or what receives your worship?*...Jesus modeled a life where worship and service were devoted to His Father and no one else.

5. The aftermath – v. 11 – Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

The aftermath is short and sweet. **Jas. 4:7** says, **Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.** So how can we resist the devil when tempted? By submitting to God. But how do we submit to God? We submit to God when we obey His Word. That's what Jesus did. He resisted the devil by leaning on that solid rock that will never mislead us or let us down. When Jesus responded with trust and obedience to God's Word, Satan was powerless. The devil left Him. And that's not all...the angels showed up with a food cart. Watch this...Jas. 1:12 - **Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.** Blessing and life follows victory when tested and victory is achieved as we trust and obey God's Word. The Father's declaration was vindicated by the Son's obedience. Jesus proved He is the Savior and King who cannot fail!