

Eighteen Years Later: Part 2
The Temptations of Christ
Matthew 4:1-11

On a Tuesday morning in March of 1974, I was born again. And most of you know the rest of the story. It was amazing and wonderful, and my life was changed forever in that moment.

But I had no idea of what was about to happen in my life as a new disciple of Christ. As thankful as I was and as excited as I was and as joyful as I was over the next few days or a week or a month or so, I don't remember how much time had passed, before I experienced my first lesson in how powerful and alluring sin and temptation can be even in one who has been genuinely made alive in Christ. And the temptation the devil set in front of me was too much for a baby in Christ to handle. I jumped in head-first and completely and willingly. I wanted what I wanted in the moment and I didn't think about God or Jesus or my new Christian friends. If not for the grace and mercy and love and patience of God and the written word of God and the Holy Spirit living inside me, I would have thrown in the towel the next day and never looked back.

I went from being ecstatic one day to being totally despondent the next, almost to the point of wishing I were dead. I knew Jesus had forgiven me on that Tuesday morning, but I didn't know anything about sanctification or how the Holy Spirit can get us through our worst moments. But what baby does? What baby knows anything about the help available from the One who gave it life in those crucial first weeks and months after being born? I certainly didn't. And I wasn't supposed to know those things at this point in my walk with the Lord Jesus. Would you ask a second grader to explain Einstein's Theory of Relativity? Of course not. You wouldn't ask him that until he or she reached the seventh grade.

However, I found a lot of comfort and encouragement as a babe in Christ in the word of God even while I was on my roller coaster ride, spiritually speaking. And here is one that played a key role in my recovery. ¹³ *No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond*

what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. (1 Cor. 10:13 NAU). That one verse zeroed in on what had happened to me, my overtaking temptation, and how wonderfully faithful God is to His children. I did not exactly flee from my temptation, but I did walk.

Our text:

***Matthew 4:1** Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*

² And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry.

³ And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

⁴ But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'"

⁵ Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand 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, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'"

⁷ Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, 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 things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me."

¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'"

¹¹ Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him. (Matt. 4:1-11 NAU)

Immediately after Jesus was baptized in the waters of the Jordan River and immediately after He had been baptized by the Spirit, the

Spirit led Him into the wilderness for the specified purpose of being tempted by the devil. And the Spirit led Him for just that very thing. But why? Why did Jesus have to be tempted by the devil? Here's the multi-folded reason.

First, Jesus' victory over temptations enabled Him as our High Priest to identify with us when we are tempted.

¹⁵ *For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. (Heb. 4:15 NAU)*

But what does that mean? What do I mean by Jesus being able to identify with us? It means that by becoming a Man, as we are, and by calling us into the family of God and by giving us His name as His brethren, He unashamedly tells the world that He is the firstborn among many brethren, and we are that brethren. He identifies with us. Since He lived and suffered on our behalf and died such a horrible death in our place, and since we have trusted Him as our Lord and Savior and King, it only makes sense that He would stand on His own finished work on our behalf and tell the world we're next of kin.

Hebrews 2:11 *For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, (Heb. 2:11 NAU)*

Imagine that. The Creator of all things is not ashamed to call any of us His next of kin.

Have you ever had a family member you didn't want anyone to know was kin to you? Or, maybe you had kin who didn't want anyone to know about you being kin to them? I couldn't blame God at all if He had been ashamed to let anyone find out that I'm called by the name of His Son. But He isn't. And some day He will let the entire universe know who we are.

Second, the temptations of Jesus were as real and as genuine as those we experience.

"...but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."

And that brings up the question that almost always comes up when this verse is read, “How could it be said of Jesus that He *“has been tempted in all things as we are”* when He was God? I don’t see how that could be true. It doesn’t seem like an accurate statement. It doesn’t seem possible for Him to have been tempted in all things “as we are.” Didn’t He have an advantage that we don’t have? Were His temptations even real temptations?” I mean, we have succumbed to some pretty wicked temptations in our lifetimes, I just can’t see how His temptations are anything like ours. So I don’t know about this Jesus being tempted as we are stuff. What then, pray tell, does that mean?

I’m glad you asked those questions. Here is the response.

First, we must remember that the temptation is not sin. For us it often leads us to sin because the temptation finds a corresponding evil desire within us. But temptation is not sin.

Second, we need to ask the question now, “what is temptation?” And this is where we find “the” answer to “the” real question.

A temptation, any temptation, is simply our being afforded the opportunity to sin. Temptation is merely being presented with an opportunity to sin. Temptation is not sin. And again, for a temptation to be effective and produce sin in the one being tempted, there must be something within the one being tempted that desires to do the thing which he or she is being tempted to do. There was no such corresponding nature in Jesus. It was not in Jesus’ nature to give in to any temptation. So He was constantly presented with those opportunities while He was living among us as a genuine human being, yet He never sinned, He never succumbed to temptation. It simply wasn’t in Him.

Name it, He was tempted in one form or another to commit that sin. He was presented the opportunity to sin.

I hold to **the doctrine of impeccability.** That says that Jesus was absolutely perfect and could not sin. It was impossible being that He was and is God. “And in Him there is no darkness.” He is God! He was and is the God-Man, but He was not “that” kind of man. He was born without the sin nature. He was born without sin. He was immaculate, not

His mother Mary. And that phrase, “*yet without sin*” means precisely what I have been saying, He was without sin, He was born “apart from the sin nature.”

So, yes, Jesus was tempted “*in all things as we are.*”

There must be a corresponding fallen nature in order for the temptation to have it’s evil effect. That’s the difference between Jesus’ being tempted and our being tempted. Jesus did not have that corresponding fallen nature, we do.

Second, Jesus’ victory over temptations enabled Him as our High Priest to “sympathize” with us when we are tempted.

Not only did Jesus identify with us, He also sympathized with us. Jesus, God with us, the Son of Man, the Son of God, our Lord and High Priest, can and does sympathize with us because He became one of us and knows fallen humanity without ever having been a fallen human being. Jesus is not angry with us when we sin, and we sin every day, rather He knows us in an absolute sense and yet He can sympathize with us in our every moment because He was once one of us.

¹⁵ *For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.*

I have had a friend or two in my past that I found pretty hard to put up with because they were always doing stupid things and getting themselves into one jam after another. And one of them in particular was more than willing to drag me down with him. And I lost my patience with both of them after a while and just avoided them. I could not sympathize with them. And that’s a pretty good illustration of what the devil tries to do with us. He tries to entice us to believe that we can experience something good by doing something bad. And that’s exactly what the devil laid out before Jesus in the three temptations.

Another friend of mine back in the ‘70’s saw me when I had hit rock bottom in a relationship that had been really important to me and tempted me to try a particular drug. He succeeded. He made me believe

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that by getting high I would come out better off than I was before. I did it. I gave in and it set me on a several years long journey where I tried one drug after the other. With friends like that...

The Greek word translated “sympathize” means “*showing a disposition to help because of fellow feelings.*” Let me say that again, “*showing a disposition to help because of fellow feelings.*” Jesus never felt what it felt like to sin. But He most certainly did have fellow feelings with us sinners.

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

It has been 47 years (almost) since God gave me life and light and faith and hope and peace. And the word that I continuously stress to my folks in my congregation is this, “It’s all about Jesus.” He can sympathize and He can empathize.