

40-04-05-The Temptation of Self-Direction

Lent, temptation, self-will, guidance, identity, reason, testing, trial

Mat 4:3-4

We keep our own will under control by staying hungry for God's will.

INTRODUCTION:

–**Mat 4:3-4**, *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.’”*

–The 1st sermon in this series showed us God, as a human, learning to be “led” by God and to be *accompanied* by God in times of trial. The 2nd message again emphasized Christ's humanity—how *fasting* gave Him real *human hunger*. These next verses show how Satan used that hunger to try to get Jesus to act on His own, without His Father's guidance.

–Why do we fast at Lent? To identify with Jesus. BUT, He was *led into the desert to identify with us!* Jesus experienced this time of testing as a real human, so He could lead us through similar trials. *This test was not really about hunger, but about independent self-direction.* Jesus found and put into practice the key to victory over self-will. **HOM.idea.**

–Keep in mind that Jesus was “led by the Spirit” into this *time of testing.* As a man, He would benefit from it Himself. As our Savior, He would be able to say to us, “Follow Me.” So, what can we learn from this 1st test—this “round #1” of being “tempted by the devil”?

I. Satan Had a Predictable Method of Attack

A. “The tempter came to him” after 40 days of fasting, when Jesus was in a physically weakened condition from lack of bodily nourishment.

1. Satan often attacks during illness or fatigue, when our bodies are crying for attention and we're distracted from spiritual concerns.
2. **Remember**—we are body-spirit beings:
 - a. Our spirits may be involved in the flow of our thoughts, but our consciousness of that mental flow is dependent on a physical brain that needs nourishment and rest.
 - b. Satan often plans an attack when the brain is under stress from not eating right or from other more common stresses in life.

B. One target of Satan's attack is our identity in relation to God (for Jesus: “*If you are the Son of God...*” ; for us: “*if you are God's child...*”

1. At His baptism, Jesus heard His Father affirm that He was His

Son, and the Spirit had come upon Him to launch His ministry [*“But how can you be sure!” Satan taunts, “How do you really know?”*]

2. Satan does the same with us, when facing *harsh circumstances* or *physical challenges*: “*What makes you think you belong to God? How do you know God loves you? Prove it!*”
- C. And that Satan's goal—getting us to act on our own: “*tell these stones to become bread, if you are who you think you are!*”
1. The choice facing Jesus was this: in His deity, He could abandon His mission of identifying with the human condition and perform a miracle on His own, OR He could stay on track as a human.
 2. We also can be in difficult situations, facing *similar attacks*, as when skeptics challenge our faith: “*If you're God's child, how come He doesn't heal you, bless you, guide you, protect you?*”

TRANS: This is a strong temptation, because we all have our own human reasoning, our own clever ideas, our own skill level for making independent efforts to get healed, to navigate happiness, to chart our course, to defend our reputation. And to get the ball rolling, all we have to do is apply our will, trusting in our personal human resources. But even if we succeed, it makes no difference in our spiritual identity. Who we are in Christ doesn't depend on successes or failures. But what demonstrates the integrity of our identity as God's people is dependent, obedient submission of our will to the will of God.

II. Jesus Had an Effective Strategy of Rebuttal

A. *Jesus answered, “It is written...”* – Satan tempted Jesus to prove His relationship with God by doing something about His situation of being hungry and having nothing to eat...

1. But Jesus kept His human stance, *answering not with His own work* but with *the work of God*: “*It is written*” [**God's Word is His work**. God created everything with the words, “*Let there be,*” then rested.]
2. Jesus didn't answer Satan with His own ideas or rational power, but with God's authority: “*It is written...*” [**Skeptics** may confront us with strong arguments and sharp reasoning, but their words fall away before the Creator of logic, Who gave them their brains to think with, **but** Who has the power to extinguish the health of their minds in a single moment.]

B. Jesus began His rebuttal with a verse in Deuteronomy: “*Man does not live on bread alone*” (*Hunger* was the context of the temptation,

but while acknowledging human dependence on earthly needs, Jesus told Satan that humans are body-spirit beings. We require more than physical “*bread alone*” for *life and health*.)

1. The **true human condition** (that Satan wants us to ignore) is that we are an amalgam, a union of the material and spiritual worlds.
 2. This is the basis of our ultimate dominion over both the *cosmos* and the *angelic realm* (Satan tries to sabotage that human future).
 3. He temporarily succeeded in the Garden by tempting Adam; he tried again in the desert by tempting Jesus, the 2nd Adam; he now continues to tempt us, children of the new humanity in Christ.
- C. But Satan fails every time, if God’s people remember: “*Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*”
1. What is it within God’s Word that strikes at the target of Satan’s attack on humanity? The Word of God reveals the will of God.
 2. That Word drives like the point of a sharp sword deep into the heart of our enemy, for it was by self-will that Satan himself fell, and by urging us to “do our own thing,” he urges us to take the hellish pathway of his own depravity.
 3. Jesus, the *Lord of the new humanity*, gave us a tried and tested way to avoid the lure of doing our own will: it’s to maintain our hunger for “every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

CONCLUSION:

–“My food,” said Jesus (in **John 4:34**), “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.” God’s will is the food of all humans, whether they know it or not, but it’s especially the food that all believers should be eating.

–At Lent, some use their extra time, from giving up a meal or other activity, to devote to *Bible reading*. That’s great. But better yet is to stay hungry all year long for God’s Word, because it contains His will.

–Many voices, from “the world, the flesh, and the devil” call for us to walk the path of self-will. Jesus walked away from the spiritual pitfall of self-direction. Now, He calls, “Follow Me,” to lead us away from that pitfall as well. Let’s all follow Him, keeping our own will under control by staying hungry for God’s will.