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Sermon Title: The Temptations of Jesus

Bible Reference: Matthew 4:1-11

**A disclaimer from Pastor Stuart**

*My role in the church here is to feed and care for God’s people the best I can. Key to that, in my opinion is teaching and preaching from the Bible; but that is not all a pastor has to do! In fact after the emails, staff admin, hospital visits, community visits, leadership meetings, etc, etc, there sometimes seems to be little time for sermon prep! Years ago I used to agonise over trying to come up with two, often three, totally original sermons each week. But I’ve found that, for me at least, that is impossibility. I’ve learned to be grateful for and to use the gifts God gives to help me – not only the Holy Spirit, but other Bible teachers and preachers.*

*Over the years I’ve discovered that if something teaches, inspires and excites me it’s likely to do the same for those I speak to. So I admit that sometimes I find myself depending heavily on other people’s ideas, at least to ‘prime the pump’ and therefore I claim originality for very little in these sermons. If you look hard enough and wide enough you’ll probably find who I’ve been reading and learning from! I never knowingly plagiarise, but if you find I have, then I apologise. It must have been that what was said was just too good not to use!*

*I am particularly indebted to the likes of John Piper, Sam Storms, Wayne Grudem, John Ortberg & Rick Warren. The Lord regularly uses them to get my spiritual pulse racing. I’m also indebted to many who kindly make their sermons available on the likes of sermoncentral.com and preachingtoday.com. Others who help me include ‘The Doctor’ (Martyn Lloyd-Jones), C.H Spurgeon and any of the Puritans.*

*These sermons are not made available because I think they’re good but in the hope and with the prayer that they may be used by the Holy Spirit to bless others as they have blessed our own church here in Ipswich, UK.*

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**Lent 2016**

**Temptation of Jesus** (Matthew 4:1-11)

This week saw the start of Lent – Tuesday was pancake day, always a bit flat in our house!

Lent is meant to be a time of preparation of our hearts for the momentous events of Easter. So, God willing, on Sunday evenings we’ll be looking at passages that lead us to consider of Saviour.

We start with this wonderful passage right at the start of beginning of Jesus ministry. It is inextricably linked with his public baptism really – together these are the final preparatory events for his public ministry that leads all the way to the cross. We mustn’t look at it merely academically and first thing we should learn is

1. **Satan is real**

I probably don’t need to say this here to you – but it really is critical that we don’t forget this. His favourite ploy these days in western society is to keep a low profile and disguise himself. I fear that despite our best intentions we have a tendency to forget that we have a real enemy and that we are in a real spiritual fight. If we realised what we’re up against I’m sure we Christians would be wanting to use every spiritual weapon we can get our hands on. Remember, our fight, your fight, is not against flesh and blood, but principalities and powers and the prince of the air. (Satan, the accuser, liar and your sworn enemy). For forget this at our peril. Let us use every weapon and support at our disposal – one of which is to make sure we’re aware of his reality, power and intentions.

Which leads us to consider these temptations of Jesus and why God allows them in our life.

1. **‘Temptation’ came after a spiritual high**

Jesus was ‘*led by the Spirit’* into the wilderness *immediately* after the high of the baptism. This struggle came straight after one of the highpoints of Jesus life on earth.

This so often seems to be the case – remember Elijah after Mt Carmel? Perhaps his greatest victory - but within a few hours we read that ‘*Elijah was afraid and ran for his life!*’ Exhausted from running away from wicked Jezebel he sank under a bush and asked to die! So be warned and be ready, and whatever you do, don’t be surprised by it!

1. **Temptations have a good purpose**

But that this happens tells us another really important thing – that such times are not a sign of God’s displeasure or an absence of the H/S from us. We tend to assume that when things get tough - that we’ve done something wrong, that God is somehow displeased with us. It’s almost like we think that to be living under God’s blessing means that we should have unbroken cloudless skies. That just isn’t the case. Of course,we know this in principle – we just need to remember it in practice because in fact this was very much part of God’s plan for Jesus. It wasn’t that he was cross with Jesus, that he was disciplining him or anything. In fact it was just the opposite! It was because God was so pleased with him, and because He’d got a specific plan for him that he commanded the H/S to lead Jesus into the wilderness, where he knew full well what would happen!

**So what *was* going on?**

It helps if we understand the words here. The word translated ‘*tempted’* in **v1** actually is most often means ‘**tested’**, as in ‘proven’. You test something to demonstrate the strength of something. So it’s a good thing not a negative. It’s not about breaking, it’s about showing and demonstrating and proving strength.

And this is why it often comes after a spiritual high, where there can be a lot of froth and bubble of emotion and excitement. This testing is a means of consolidating what has been done; *it sorts out the wheat of reality from the chaff of emotion*; in other words, it reveals real growth – and therefore for our good.

We said last week that when the Spirit works his real work is in a person’s heart. The Spirit causes us to be stronger in our commitment to Jesus, causes us to hate sin, to trust God and to want to please and honour him more and more; to love his word and other people. How are we ever going to know if what we feel is real if it isn’t tested? Take the froth and bubble away and do we still feel the same? Do we still trust and love and regard God the same, do we still read and delight in his word, do we still trust him?

Of course – God knows all this – it’s doesn’t prove it to him. *The point is that it proves it to us, and to Satan*. Take Job for example!

So God’s testing is only ever meant for our good; it’s not to make us weaker but stronger and to demonstrate to us and to other and to Satan just what God has done for us.

From all this it should be clear that

1. **Temptation itself isn’t sin**

Again, something we probably all know but which I think it’s good to be reminded of lest we beat ourselves up unnecessarily, or even allow Satan to accuse us falsely. Temptation isn’t the sin – but yielding is! **James 1:14-15** - *Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away.**These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.* Satan accuses us as if we’re guilty – ‘*You a Christian thinking such things?’ ‘You should be past that by now; you’re useless, you don’t deserve anything’*. Oh yes, he’ll play on our weak spots and if we have a tendency to low esteem he’ll attack constantly. We can’t help what thoughts come into our head – we’re human after all; plus Satan will also put his oar in. *What we are responsible for is what we do with those thoughts!* Let them linger, play with them, give them space – that’s when sin starts! I love old Luther’s saying – *‘You can’t stop the birds flying over your head, but you can stop them nesting in your hair*!’

Now back to the tempts of Jesus – very reassuringly

1. **Jesus, as a tempted Saviour, is well able to sympathise with us!** *Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing, he is able to help us when we are being tested.* **Heb 2:18.**

He’s not thinking less of you – he knows what it’s like to face struggle with temptation – to have Satan lobbing in his thoughts and accusations and testing. ‘*Look Jesus, so you’re God. If so, why be hungry – just turn the stones into bread’ You’re God, why ever not do what you can do, why suffer like this?’ ‘You’re God’s son? Does he really love you? Why not prove it and jump of and let the angels catch you – surely you know what he says about that? Do you really think he’ll be good to his word? ‘Look Jesus – you don’t have to go to the cross; lets come to an agreement – just bow to me once and I’ll give the world to you; will be so much easier, less messy and much less painful for you. Just the once!’*

Yes, tempted to doubt God, tempted to take the easy path, tempted to compromise, tempted to avoid suffering.

He understands! He’s been here and done that, got the t shirt. And he knows how subtle Satan is. Oh how subtle he was with Jesus. Didn’t question his deity*! ‘Since you are the son of God’* is a better translation. He appeals to who Jesus is, and he uses the Bible. He’s crafty alright.

Note how Satan tempts the same as he did Adam! With the stones to bread – food! Test God, will he really save you? He puts in doubts – like with Adam ‘*Did God say’*. But Satan actually misquotes – or strategically shortens the quote about jumping from the temple. The promise actually to catch *‘those who walk in all God’s ways’.* the protection and promise is to those who obey! There is a proviso – it’s not a blank cheque.

So as we pray for God to help, to protect, to provide, to heal let us make sure that we’re doing all we can and walking close to the Lord. He won’t do what we can do ourselves, or heal if we continue to damage ourselves! Let us do all we can to ‘walk in all his ways’

One last thing – very important:

1. **Best weapon to resist with is the Bible.**

A clear, unambiguous knowledge of Gods commands, and promises will help us in temptations hour. Quote it against Satan, he MUST obey it. Resist and he will flee.

Here is one very good reason to read the Bible regularly, as often as you can. It arms you daily (if you read it!) for the fight! You’ll know what to do rather than wondering. Read every day you’ll have something to say, you’ll be armed for defence. So it’s not a matter of duty – it’s plain common sense to read and get to know it as much as possible.