
Temptation

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 22 February 2026

Romans 5:12-19 • Matthew 4:1-11



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

Today's Gospel shows a very human side to Jesus. It is just at the beginning of his ministry, the time when we might say he really makes the shift from living just a human life to following his mission as the Son of God. He has gone into the desert to pray for forty days, to pray and to fast, in order to prepare himself for the task his Father has set for him. It isn't easy, and after 40 days of not eating, he is reportedly famished, as would any of us be.

We might question our own ability to survive for forty days without eating, and Jesus was of course sustained by the Spirit. But it was still not easy. God wanted Jesus to experience life as a human, to feel hunger, pain, emotion — all the things we feel. We are not to think, "Oh well, he's the Son of God. Of course he doesn't need to eat." But he is also the son of Mary, and fully human, as well as fully divine. This is a bit difficult to understand, as $1 + 1$ does not usually equal 1. But it is important to know that after fasting all that time, Jesus felt a very human need to eat. He was famished.

And so when he was at his weakest from hunger, he is approached by Satan, and offered three temptations.

The first was related to his fasting. After forty days not eating anything, Satan reminds him that as the Son of God, he might very well create food out of nothing, or out of the very stones around him. He could make bread for himself. It must have been a great temptation to do so. Imagine how hungry he was. But he does not do as Satan suggest. He quotes from the book of Deuteronomy chapter 8, “Man does not live by bread alone,” and crucially, “but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” It is not Satan’s words which are important. They may fall to the ground. But God’s word does not fall to the ground; it is food for us, as well for us as for God’s Son. Jesus’ hunger is not important; God tells us to reject all of the devil’s words. And so Jesus rejects this first temptation.

Each of these three temptations is an example of the temptations we may face in this life. In the case of the bread, Satan speaks of food when Jesus has had no food, and so is at his weakest. So for us, we find it hard to resist temptation when we are weak or tired. We give in when we are weak to things we wouldn’t even consider when we are at our best. But Jesus teaches us to look past the thing which tempts us and to remember God’s word.

The second thing Satan tempts Jesus with is a bit more complicated. It is based in power. Satan tempts Jesus to take advantage of his status as the Son of God. He says, in effect, “If you are who you say you are, prove it to me.” This is a thing which Jesus refuses to do several times during his ministry. Often he is asked to provide a sign to prove to people that he is God’s Son, and often, too, he tells people not to reveal the miracles they have seen him perform. There are several reasons for this, but here, Jesus again takes the lesson from Deuteronomy: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” God is not to be ordered about, to perform for us. Faith does not need to be tested; else, it is not faith. Jesus knows that the angels will protect him, if it is God’s will. Creating a crisis artificially is an act of doubt, not of faith.

Again, we take the lesson to ourselves. Christ, as man, is tempted; we, as humans, may be also; but we are asked to believe in God’s love and mercy, not because God has proved it through actions, but because God has written his name in our hearts, and we are his. We have no need to test God.

Finally, Satan brings out perhaps the greatest temptation of all: power. He offers Jesus “all the kingdoms of the world.” Only one thing does he demand: that Jesus turn from God and worship him instead. Again, Deuteronomy comes to the rescue: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.” The First Commandment. Satan craves power over God, and is Jesus to worship him? It

is absurd. Yet how many of us humans do seek after power and wealth, no matter the cost? It is too obvious.

Why all this testing? and who is really testing Jesus? Coming as it does just as Jesus begins his ministry, it is a trial by fire for Jesus, as he goes out into the greater world. He has grown up for perhaps thirty years in a human family, and those years have been a preparation for him in living with his people, the people he created to be his people. He will be tempted to satisfy his own needs rather than those of others; he will be tempted to test his Father when things get difficult for him; he will be challenged to stay true to his Father's will. As we see in the rest of the Gospel, he does have further moments of testing.

Remember when he kneels in the garden and prays that the cup, that is, the task he is charged with, should be taken from him? But he acknowledges that it is his Father's will, not mine, which shall be done. Every time, Jesus is true.

And Jesus is true even as he is fully human. Because we see his faith, we too may have faith. We are not ourselves divine, but we may be imitators of the divine, and the Spirit gives us strength to live as God wishes us to.

Think about these things; think about the times you have been tempted. Was it power, material things, self-comfort? Jesus went through all of these long before any of us was born, and because he did so, and came through, we too may do so. Our faith will stand the test, for God is true, and God is with us. Amen.