

Not so long ago we were celebrating Christmas and proclaiming the wonderful Christian message of God become man, remembering the birth of Jesus. Jesus, a new life as he was born on earth, but 30 years later he was to begin his ministry to spread the gospel, revealing God's truth to everyone he met, explaining how man could experience a new start.

This morning I want us to read about the final preparations before he **began** this ministry, and we find these in Matthew's gospel chapter 4. [Read 4:1-11]

We all know about New Year's resolutions, don't we? We've probably broken some over the last month! It's a good way of focusing on things we want to **change**. But what happens is that it just focuses our minds on the temptations to **break** those resolutions! Funny that, isn't it? We know we want to do things **better**, or not do things we shouldn't, but the temptation's so strong isn't it? Oscar Wilde said famously 'I can resist **everything** except temptation.'

And we'll **all** experience temptation, yes, even Christians. Someone once said 'God promises a safe landing but not a calm crossing.' Christians **will** experience temptation. **Every** man, woman and child will be tempted.

So it should come as no surprise that Jesus was **also** tempted. He took on human form. He was born as a baby. He lived as a man, fully God, yet fully man, so that he could identify with us. He went through all the experiences and emotions all of **us** go through, as a man. He was tempted as a man. We shouldn't be surprised that Jesus was tempted here.

What **might** be surprising, though, is that it says in verse 1, '*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.*' '*Jesus was led **by the Spirit** into the desert to be tempted by the devil.*'

You'll remember, if you just look back to the end of chapter 3, that Jesus had reached the time for him to be baptised by John the Baptist, ready for his ministry on earth. And as he came up out of the water, God's Spirit had settled on him as a dove, and God's '*voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.*' This was surely the high point of Jesus' life so far – the presence of the Holy Spirit, God the Father pleased with him.

A bit like the high point of celebrating Jesus' coming at Christmas, the hope of a new year, things are going to be better, but then bang, resolutions broken, you're brought down low.

And after **Jesus'** high point, the same Spirit that settled on him leads him out into the desert to be tempted by the devil. Now that sounds a bit **cruel**, doesn't it? From high point, bang, to low point. What is God trying to **do** to Jesus? God allows Jesus to be tempted for a **purpose** – will he stand against the enemy of mankind and God? What will be the outcome of this testing?

As we study this passage for a few moments, we're going to remind ourselves that the tempter is **real**; we'll see that **temptations** are very real; but finally we'll find that Jesus' victory is gloriously real.

As we live our lives day to day, we have to see, and we have to be **so** aware that there is an **enemy** of God and all his purposes. **The tempter mentioned here is real.** And we have to be on our **guard** at all times because he'll stop at **nothing** to keep us from enjoying a relationship with God. And you might say, 'Give over. You're just trying to **scare** us. There's nothing trying to stop me from doing what I feel's right.'

If you're thinking like that, I suggest, the devil's **winning**. Adam and Eve did what they **felt** was right. They did what they **wanted** to do. They felt it was right to do the one thing that God had told them **not** to do – eat of the fruit of the tree of life. The **one thing**. And who'd planted that desire in their minds? The same tempter that came to Jesus in the desert.

When we do what **we** feel is right, **that's** when we're most at risk from the tempter. He is real. And he's **dangerous**. 'There you go again, Alan,' you say, 'I'm strong. The devil's not dangerous. How **could** he be? I'm master of my own life, I make my own decisions, I run my own home and finances, look after and provide for my family. The devil's not dangerous to **me**. Don't try to frighten me, Alan.'

There's no doubt in **God's** mind that the devil is real, no doubt in **Jesus'** mind, no doubt in **Matthew's** mind that the devil is **very** real. Verse 3 tells us that he **came** to Jesus; throughout the passage he **spoke** to Jesus; in verse 5 he **takes** Jesus to the holy city, and in verse 8 he takes him to a very high mountain; and in verse 11 he **left** Jesus. The devil is no figment of man's imagination. He's **real**. He's the tempter. He even dared to tempt the very Son of God, Jesus. He tempted **him**, he tempts **all** of us.

The disciple Peter who was by Jesus' side throughout the three years of his earthly ministry was so aware of the danger the devil poses. He wrote these words in his first letter, urging his readers to be alert: '*Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.*' 1 Peter 5:9

You'll have read of zoo-keepers who've thought that they can spend time in the lion's enclosure. **They** thought that getting to know the lions from birth, playing with them, running with them, interacting with them, would ensure their safety. How dangerous. We've read, haven't we, of times when keepers have unfortunately thought wrong and they've been mauled. Lions are wild **animals**.

Don't mess with the devil. Don't pussy-foot around with the devil. Don't underestimate the devil. He's not a cute and cuddly pussy cat, easily tamed. He's a **wild lion**. He's prowling around, **not** just to catch you out, **not** just to trick you. He's out to **devour** you. He's out to gobble you up. He's out to **destroy** you. He's **dangerous**, and we'd better believe it. This is the tempter, and he's oh so real.

And **the temptations we all face are real**. And the devil knows **exactly** where we are most vulnerable to temptation. Like an angler knows just the right type of fly or worm to put on the hook to catch a specific fish, the devil knows **exactly** where we're at risk and susceptible and so the things we're tempted with are very real. The temptations **themselves** aren't sin, but they may **cause** us to sin. It's not a sin for us to be tempted, but we may be led into sin through temptation. So we **pray** as Jesus taught us, '*lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*' Matthew 6:13.

The Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil, he **allowed** the temptations to happen. God wasn't the originator of the temptations, the **devil** was. But he allowed it to happen for a **purpose**, he allowed it to happen so that Jesus could be strengthened and gain the victory in it. Likewise, God allows temptations to come to **us**, for a **purpose**. To strengthen us and gain the victory in it, by **resisting** the tempter. Temptations will certainly come.

Someone once said, "Opportunity may knock only once, but temptation leans on the doorbell." It will be **persistent**. It will come **again**, and again. We must be aware, and resist. But we're reassured in the Bible. In his 1st letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes, '*No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*' 1 Corinthians 10:13. There are no exceptions, **all** of us are tempted. But God will always give us a way out so that we can **resist** temptation. God is faithful and he will do it.

Jesus used these temptations to show his understanding of God's purposes for him and mankind. **We** should use the temptations **we** experience to understand better God's purposes for **us**. John Bunyan said, *'Temptation provokes me to look upward to God.'* We need to see the inevitable temptations as opportunities of getting closer to God. The tempter means them for our **destruction**; **God** wants them to strengthen our relationship with him. How do **you** see temptation? What effect does it have on your life? Temptations are real – God wants to use them for **good**.

Let's look more closely, then, at the temptations the devil put before Jesus recorded here, and **how he resists and overcomes**. Let's look firstly at how they're common to all; but then let's look at the special significance they hold because of the way Jesus faced them.

On one level it's comforting to us to know that the temptations **we** face, Jesus has already faced as well. The temptations he's confronted with here are what we come up against as well. And because **he** was tempted, he's able to help **us** when we're tempted, as it says in Hebrews 2:18, *'Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.'* We have a Saviour who understands, sympathizes, and helps when we're faced with temptation – how comforting and strengthening.

We can. I think, identify with the three types of temptation that Jesus deals with here:

In verse 3: *'The tempter came to him [Jesus] and said, "If you **are** the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.'* This takes the words of God in chapter 3 – *'This is my Son, whom I love'* – and the devil issues a **challenge** to Jesus. 'If you **are** the Son of God, **prove** it – turn these stones to bread. Why go hungry? If you **are** the Son of God, that is.'

Jesus had been in the desert for 40 days – we'll see the significance of that a little later – but he will have been very tired and hungry. He needed food.

Physical needs. We all have physical needs – or are they physical **wants**? We get tired and hungry. This is a **tremendous** area of temptation for all of us. Physical needs. We have to really search our hearts to make sure that we're not pursuing physical **wants** instead of physical needs. Do we really **need** that extra special extra large helping of that extra filling food from that extra super restaurant? Do we **need** that extra hour of inactivity in bed?

You **can** resist temptation to distrust God's care. Depend on **God** to provide.

Second temptation, verse 5 onwards: [read verses 5 & 6]. The devil tempts Jesus to test God's **power** – he **could** send angels to protect him. And sometimes we're tempted to test God's power. Sometimes we ask for a sign of God's power, **just** so we can experience God's awesome power. **Sometimes** we test God's mercy by rushing into danger. **Resist** the temptation to test God – rest in the knowledge that he has a **plan**.

And the third, verses 8 & 9: [read]. Jesus is tempted to gain power by bowing to and worshiping the devil. Sometimes we're tempted to allow the devil to have his way a little with the hope we'll achieve greater things in the long term. We all need a feeling of **significance**, don't we, of **power** in some way, and there may be a temptation to compromise our relationship with **God** to get it. **Resist** the temptation – a relationship with **God** gives you all the significance you will **ever** need.

Jesus faced these temptations, so do **we**. **Jesus** resisted these temptations, so can **we**. It's comforting to know that Jesus, Lord and Saviour, sympathizes with us because he's been there **too**. Of course, if you don't **know** Jesus, you **won't** know this comfort, you won't **know** the strength and help it brings. You're in the tempter's hands. I've already said, he's dangerous, he'll wrap you around his finger, he'll lead you into temptation and away from God. Recognise that **now**. Call out to God **now**. Seek the life that only Jesus can give. Find the God of all comfort. Do it now.

But I want to suggest to you that we **miss** the main point of this passage, if we merely look at it as a pep-talk about the temptations we face day to day. There **has** to be so much more to this, because this is **Jesus** involved here. We've recently been celebrating the arrival of God in human form at Christmas. There's something much deeper about **every** story and event that involves Jesus, the Son of God. We have to look **deeper**. So now let's see the **greater** significance of this passage.

We come back to the reference to 40 days in verse 2 – '*After fasting for 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry.*' This length of time has greater significance because of the references to the same number used in the Old Testament:

You'll remember in Genesis 7:17, when God was angry with man for what they'd done to his creation, he flooded the earth for 40 days. **More** significantly, perhaps, you'll remember that when Moses went up Mount Sinai to meet God and receive the 10 commandments in Exodus 34:18, he stayed on the mountain 40 days and 40 nights. So straight away the first readers of this story would have had their minds taken back to the Old Testament times, and would be starting to make comparisons.

Here was Jesus, the Son of **God**, but in **human** form. How was he going to be **different** from all that had gone before? Would **he** succeed where all men in the past had failed? If he was the Son of God, how was he going to rule God's kingdom? If he was going to face the devil as a **man**, how was he going to be victorious?

Although he faced the tempter as a **man**, he was still fully **God**, and so the temptations are **appropriate** to God's Son – how would God's plan of salvation be worked out?

The first contrast here is obviously with **Adam**, the first man, who was tempted by the devil through his hunger and desire for more to eat of the fruit of the tree of life. He was **hungry**. He was **tempted**. He **failed**. And man has been tempted ever **since**, and has without exception been unable to resist the tempter. Here comes Jesus. He was hungry. He was tempted. He was the first man to **resist** the devil. Jesus **succeeded** where Adam failed.

And look **how** Jesus succeeds – he quotes Scripture to the devil. (Just as an aside – we have to know our Bible, we have to know Scripture; it's the word of God; it's the sword of the Spirit, Paul writes in Ephesians, and we must be able to use it in our spiritual battle if we're to fight against the devil and share in Jesus' victory; God will bring Scriptures to mind as we're tempted by the devil – we must know our way around the Bible).

Jesus quotes **Scripture** to resist the devil's temptations. But they're not just verses picked at random. They're from the book of Deuteronomy chapters 6 and 8. Let's read quickly from chapter 8, verses 1 to 3. [read].

So we find **another** contrast here: as well as being contrasted with **Adam** who failed, Jesus is here contrasted with the **whole** of the people of **Israel**, who failed. **They** wandered around the desert, not for 40 days and **nights**, but for 40 **years**! They failed to be obedient to God, were led astray by the tempter and had to stay in the desert while they learnt to trust their God that **he'd** provide. Even when God gave them food from **heaven**, they were still tempted to take more than they needed. Jesus **succeeded** where Adam failed. Jesus **succeeded** where the people of Israel failed.

We remind ourselves that the devil was throwing down a challenge to Jesus to prove that he **is** the Son of God – as **God** he has a **right** to have all he needs provided, including food; he has the right to claim **protection** from all dangers; he has the **right** to receive power over all nations, as King of kings.

As **God** he could have done **all** these things, he could have claimed **all** these things, he **could** have called upon angels to do his bidding at any stage. But, you see, Jesus didn't come down to earth in Godly form, he came in **human** form, he came down in human **likeness**, and there was great purpose in this.

Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He came to **reconcile** people to God. He came to bring **salvation**. Mark tells us, *'Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'* Mark 10:35. Jesus came as a man to give his life as a substitute for us. This was and **is** the plan of salvation, that Jesus should take **our** place, die **our** death, to make us right with God. And you see, he couldn't have **done** this if he'd fallen to temptation. If the devil had succeeded in tempting him to **disobey** God the Father and Jesus had been led into sin, the whole plan of salvation would have been **ruined**. Only Jesus the **sinless** Son of God, could take the punishment for the sinful. In Hebrews we read, *'we have one who has been tempted in every way – yet was without sin.'* (Hebrews 4:15b) and **that** is the only hope we have of a relationship with God.

So now, I hope we all see the significance of what we're seeing here as Jesus resists the devil as a man, he faces him as a **man**, and also that he has to resist **all** the temptations, **all** of them, he must not fail at **any** point. Praise and thank God that Jesus **succeeded**.

But there's even **greater** significance here. The 17th century poet John Milton, you may know, wrote a poem called 'Paradise Lost', telling of the fall of man through Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Four years later he wrote another poem called 'Paradise Regained'. Surprisingly, you may think, the subject matter was not the creation of a new heaven and a new earth, it was the content of our passage – the temptations of Jesus.

Milton saw even **greater** significance in this than we've said so **far**. Paradise regained. Jesus **here** wins a victory over the devil as he resists the temptations over the devil – the first man to totally resist him. This is where Jesus' victory over the devil **begins**. Because Jesus is victorious **here**, we know that he will have the **ultimate** victory over him.

This isn't the **crucial** victory - that will come three years later. In Luke's account of these temptations, we read, *'When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.'* There will come a time when the devil takes his **chance**, when he sees the Son of God dying on the cross, and he will think that this is his moment of **victory** over Jesus, **destroyed**, God's plan of salvation in tatters.

Little did he know that this would bring Jesus' **ultimate** and **total** victory over sin, over death and the devil. The tempter has **no** power to lead Jesus into sin; he has **no** power to foil God's plan of salvation; he has **no** power to stop the coming of God's kingdom. That Jesus resists his temptations **here** is the beginning of the **end** for the devil; the writing's on the wall. This is where the regaining of paradise – a right relationship with God – begins.

This is the significance of the passage we've read this morning, and we do well to take note.

There's a **warning** here – we should be aware of the tempter and his wicked and cunning temptations to lead us into sin. There's **comfort** and encouragement here in knowing that Jesus sympathizes with us and helps us because he has suffered the same temptations as us. But there is great **victory** here, because we know that Jesus resisted the devil, and he, the **sinless** one, was able to give his life as a ransom for us and he rose victorious from the dead, to make it possible to be right with God.

We're going to think more about this ultimate victory that Jesus won on the cross and in rising from the dead as we come around the Lord's table in a few moments.

Matthew 4:1 - 11 Facing it as a man

The tempter mentioned here is real

The temptations we all face are real

How Jesus resists and overcomes

The significance of Jesus facing it as a man

Jesus' victory here, ultimate victory later