

TWIN CHALLENGES TO CHRISTIAN FAITH

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By the Book™ A Chapter by
Chapter Bible Study Series
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Let's Begin

Some people get the wrong idea about the Christian life. Feeling since they offered themselves to Christ in full surrender and in good faith, in return, God perhaps has obligated Himself to protect them from pain and suffering on the one hand, as well as hard and difficult challenges on the other.

Today's lesson from Matthew 4 will correct these inadequate ideas by showing that the Christian life faces both brawny tests and bold challenges, and that only the presence of God in the Christian's life can promise victory.

One of the first lessons we learn is that the greatest triumphs are often followed by the greatest temptations. This was true of Jesus as we soon shall see. It is also true of us. As we study Matthew 4, let's examine:

- I. **Satan Confronts Us to Shatter Our Faith (vv. 1-11)**
- II. **Our Savior Calls Us to Share Our Faith (vv. 12-25)**

I. Satan Confronts Us to Shatter Our Faith (vv. 1-11)

We find in these opening verses of chapter 4 an encounter Jesus had with the Prince of Darkness. **Let's be very clear: the Devil is a real personality.** Jesus was not speaking to a principle of evil when he was in the desert. He was speaking to Satan. Note also that the Devil is very bold. If he is not afraid to confront Jesus, the Son of God, do you think for a moment he hesitates to confront us?

There is a striking contrast between Adam in the Garden of Eden and Jesus in the wilderness. The Garden was a beautiful paradise; the wilderness just barren property. In the Garden, **Adam collapsed but in the wilderness Jesus conquered.** The Garden saw rebellion against the Lord; the wilderness saw resistance against Lucifer. Adam lost and death reigned; Jesus won and life was restored.

Note that the Devil is very bold.

First, let's look closely at the *setting* (vv. 1-2). Matthew brings to the forefront the **role of the Holy Spirit** when Jesus is encountered by the tempter (v. 1). Note that Jesus was "led" by the Spirit to the wilderness. Mark's Gospel uses an even stronger term—the Spirit "driveth" Jesus into the wilderness (1:12). This was not a surprise to either Jesus or Heaven. God set the whole thing up! Why? There are several reasons. **First**, the temptation was to demonstrate Jesus' sinless nature. Would Jesus fold with such a direct challenge from Satan? Secondly, God showed us through the temptation of Jesus that He understands what we experience. **Also**, we were shown the sure way to victory when our own faith comes under attack (cp. Hebrews 2:18; 4:15).

We see then the intention of the Spirit (v. 1). Now notice our Savior was prepared (v. 2). Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights, the Bible says. Know that this was not a static time for Jesus. The Gospels make it clear there were a series of battles that took place during this period (Luke 4:2). Nor was this the last time Jesus would encounter the evil one (Luke 4:13).

If we learn nothing else from this encounter Jesus had with the enemy, we surely learn this: we need to stay close to the Lord in our own hour of temptation. The Apostle Paul reminds us that in order to "withstand in the evil day" we must be full of the Spirit, the Scriptures and the Savior (Ephesians 6:10-18).

Second, let's notice the *strategy* at work (vv. 3-10). Temptation should not be considered a strange thing to us. **If Jesus was tempted we should not be surprised we also are tempted.** We are not immune. But the tempter always has as his goal to shatter our faith. Thus, we must "take heed lest we fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).



Reflection Connection

What is the first thing you think about when you think about “temptation”? Do you think it is possible to live above temptation? Why or why not?

In Ephesians 6:11, Paul mentions the “wiles” of the devil. The term comes from a Greek word that gives us our English word “strategy”. ***Satan is evil but he is no fool. He employs the most scientific means to shatter our faith and ruin our witness.*** Matthew 4:3-10 clearly lays out for us his consistent strategies he uses against us.

First, Satan appeals to our physical needs (vv. 3-4). Commanding stone to become bread was no real challenge to Jesus’ power (v. 3). He could have easily done so. Later He would feed thousands through a miraculous increase of bread, not to mention turn water to fresh wine at a wedding celebration. The challenge to Jesus was to employ His miraculous powers to gratify His bodily appetites. Of course, there’s nothing wrong with fulfilling our basic hungers—especially if those hungers are legitimate as was the case with Jesus. Being weak from fasting, Jesus’ fatigue could have used such nourishment that bread could offer.

Satan had in mind for Jesus to fulfill a normal desire in an abnormal way.

Not for a moment can we believe Satan had the interests of Jesus in mind when he suggested Jesus perform such a miracle. ***Rather it was surely a trick to plant in Jesus a seed of doubt—“if thou be the Son of God”—similar, in fact, to his temptation to doubt he planted in Eve: “Yea, hath God said...” (Genesis 3:1).***

In addition, Satan had in mind for Jesus to fulfill normal desire in an abnormal way. How often are we confronted with the temptation to do the very same thing? Whether it’s fulfilling our bodily cravings with unhealthy food, drink, drugs or sex, ***Satan’s strategy has not changed in two***

thousand years! If the physical is all there is, we are, in the end, no more than brute beasts.

For the believer, the question is, do we, without hesitation, believe God to provide for us? ***It’s about God’s provision.*** Jesus knew His Heavenly Father would not allow Him to lack bread when the time came when He must eat. In addition, Jesus employed the word of God against the enemy to bolster His total trust in the Father: “it is written”, Jesus insisted, “Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (v. 4). It’s better to obey God’s Word than to satisfy physical desires; better to be hungry than to get out of God’s will.

Second, Satan appeals to our emotional needs (vv. 5-7). The devil takes Jesus up to the pinnacle of the Temple (v. 5). It was 450 feet straight down to the Kidron Valley. The challenge Satan offered to our Savior was to “cast thyself down” basing such challenge on the Bible (cp. Psalm 91:11-12). Satan spoke Scripture! But Jesus did not break at Satan’s bark. Instead, Jesus Himself quoted from Scripture.

We learn several things about the nature of temptation from Jesus’ encounter here. ***We first learn that Satan can persuade you to sin but he cannot push you to sin.*** If you jump, you jump on your own. Also we learn that Satan plays on

Reflection Connection

Why do you think Adam and Eve were tempted in the Garden of Eden? Remind the class that neither Adam nor Eve possessed a sin nature. Therefore, to suggest it was because of their “weakness” may not be a solid response.



Reflection Connection

Jesus was tempted in the desert by Satan. Do you think Satan tempts us directly or does he assign “demons” to do his dirty work? Explain. True or False: Satan is a personal being. Why or why not?

the human desire for acceptance. Jesus was about thirty years old and had even been proclaimed to be the Messiah by John the Baptist, but was relatively an unknown with no disciples. Acclamation can get us to do a lot of things. Satan thought Jesus might go for the overnight success He would have become if God rescued Him from falling to His death. All He had to do was jump. God would do the rest. He would have to rescue Jesus since He was the Messiah!

In addition, this was a sort of “in your face” temptation for God to prove His love for Jesus. This is another thing we learn here: **a fine line exists between trusting God and testing God.** Jesus knew the difference well, which is why He did not test the Father’s love for Him because He trusted the Father’s word to Him. In our time of weakness, Satan appeals to our emotional needs. Yet we should never listen to Satan, even if he quotes the Bible! We can be sure it’s always a half-truth taken out of context.

Third, Satan appeals to our spiritual needs (vv. 8-10). When Satan first tempts us, there is a good chance he comes to us in his best suit. With Jesus, he first came as the compassionate friend, concerned that Jesus was going hungry and needed nourishment. It did not work. Then he came as one offering to help Jesus gain public acceptance as the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. It did not work.

Frustrated, Satan then takes his mask off and his depraved ugliness is completely exposed. He escorts Jesus to the highest peak around, “and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them,” promising Jesus “these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.”

The Devil was offering Jesus his best deal. Some question whether it was the Devil’s to give. According to Scripture, the Devil is the “Prince of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Ephesians 2:2). Would the Devil have followed through had Jesus shook hands? Of course not! Satan promises to deliver anything we desire but he deceives us in every deal we make. And here was no different. The Devil had an insatiable appetite to be deity. He wanted to be enthroned as God. He would say yes to anything if he thought God’s Messiah would bow His knee to him.

Thus, he said “if thou wilt fall down and worship me” (v. 9). When the Devil delivered that request, Jesus had had enough: “Get thee behind me, Satan!” (v. 10) Jesus did not find sin attractive. Instead it was repulsive to Him. To the devil, Jesus again quoted Scripture (Deuteronomy 6:13). God is and must be supreme in all of life. Idolatry in any form is blasphemous to the core.

After the temptation, there was not only relief from the adversary but also refreshment from angels (v. 11; compare Luke 4:13; 1 Peter 5:8). Victory came to Jesus. It comes to us when we resist as did our Lord (1 Corinthians 10:13).

II. Our Savior Calls Us to Share Our Faith (vv. 12-25)

The remaining verses in Matthew 4 summarize the Lord’s ministry in Galilee. Matthew makes clear for us the places Jesus went, the people Jesus called, and the power Jesus displayed. The anointing of the Spirit was amazing. Since we learned how Satan confronts us to try to shatter our faith, let’s focus the remainder of this lesson on how the Lord Jesus strengthens us by calling on us to share our faith.

First, observe the call Jesus issued to His Disciples (v. 19). Christ was walking the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee. This was a busy place with people everywhere.

Reflection Connection

Is temptation sin? If not, when does it become sin? Why would Jesus have a conversation with the devil? Should we? What would be something we could say to him? What did Jesus speak to him?



Reflection Connection

If it is not wrong per se to fulfill our physical needs, how do we know when it would not be in God's will to do so? Suppose you could see Satan. Describe him in detail.

Fishermen were pursuing their work while local merchants set up booths to sell their goods. It was the equivalent of a modern-day mall. Jesus observed two brothers—Simon Peter and Andrew—casting nets (v. 18). Later He would observe another fishing partnership between two brothers and their father (v. 21).

Jesus calls to Simon and Andrew, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (v. 19). Note, that these men were weak men. Not weak in physical strength. Instead they were weak in character, emotional stability and intellectual shrewdness. **Weakness, however, does not disbar us from being considered for God's servants.** Paul mentioned that God “hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1 Corinthians 1:27). Know that God can use you if you will simply surrender yourself to Him.

Not only were the men Jesus called weak men, they were also working men, which called for extraordinary physical qualities. Jesus found Simon Peter and Andrew “casting a net” (v. 18) while the sons of Zebedee were “mending” theirs (v. 21). Since the Garden of Eden and before sin entered the human race, God has expected us to work (Genesis 2:8). Jesus calls those who are busy similar to the way he called these busy fishermen.

*The ones
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Reflection Connection

Where is the most likely place to find unchurched people in your neighborhood? Does your church have an outreach ministry to win people to Christ? Does your class? How could you start one? Describe it.

Note again, that the ones Jesus called to follow after Him were **weak** men, **working** men and finally, they were **willing** men. This is the most crucial of all. Why? Because you can be endowed by God with the greatest of gifts and abilities but not be willing to be used. You can be a very active person, a virtual workaholic, but working only for your own selfish gain. You must be willing to serve where He calls you to go. “Follow me,” we hear Jesus say. Are you willing? It's such an honor to serve Jesus. It's the greatest call that can come to any person—“Follow me,” says our Lord.

Second, let's observe the challenge Jesus offered His Disciples (v. 19). Christ promised the disciples that if they were willing to follow Him, “I will make you fishers of men”. Already they were fishers of fish. Now the challenge was to a higher level, a new dimension. How interesting that Jesus met these men where they were, speaking the language these men knew. But that's how Jesus works. He meets us not half-way or part of the way. **Jesus stoops down to where we are and calls us and challenges us to be who and what he wants.**

Being a fisherman is a beautiful picture of winning the unsaved to Jesus Christ. Several parallels present themselves. First, it takes patience to fish. My grandfather and I used to go fishing. He would swing by the house and pick me up. I can hear his horn blowing now—at 4:30 in the morning! We would go early and stay late. Similarly, it takes patience to be a soul winner—to fish for the souls of men and women. We must pray early and pray long. Even when a person does not seem interested, we must not assume he never will be, anymore than we would assume a fish would not sooner or later desire a juicy piece of bait.



Also, to fish it takes some skills; and, at times, developed skills. Granddaddy always knew where the right fishing hole was. I learned the good holes by watching him and learning from him. Too many times we associate only with Church people. Now that is a good thing—if you want to have a fish fry. But if you want to win people to Christ—fish for lost souls—you need to go where the fish are and that is not the Church. All of you have friends at work, at school, at the golf course, in your neighborhood, etc. that need the Gospel.

To fish well, it takes cooperation. When I first started going fishing with Granddaddy, I did not do much fishing. I did do a lot of baiting and other little tasks. I learned first by watching. Some of you may fear witnessing. Do not allow that to hinder you. Instead go with an experienced witness—a fisherman of souls—and learn how to present the Gospel smoothly and successfully.

Finally, you must keep yourself out of sight to be a good fisherman. If the fish see you or you get too close, off they go. Similarly, if you witness well, you must take special precautions to keep yourself completely out of the way. This may be the greatest hindrance to effective soul winning so please note this: **Ultimately, the Lord Jesus is the soul winner. It's up to Him through the Holy Spirit and the Gospel message** to catch the person to whom you speak. The more you can stay in the background out of sight, the better. This is particularly comforting to us; we do not have to succeed! Jesus does! We succeed when we give them the Good News. And, what a thrill when we see somebody won to the Kingdom of God. I can tell you, it is much better than catching a fish!

Third, let's observe the commitment Jesus demanded from His Disciples (v. 20). Once the Disciples heard the *call* of Jesus to them and the *challenge* Jesus issued for them, it was time to get down to real business. And, they wasted no time in doing so: "And they straightway left their nets, and followed Him" (v. 20) This was a chance of a lifetime and they were not about to pass it up.

It could not have been an easy thing to do though it surely looks like it because it happened without the least bit of hesitation. *Wouldn't it be great if, when people remember us, they recall never seeing us hesitate in following Jesus?*

These men had to leave their established work, their nets, their ship and so much more behind. Fishing was a lucrative business. Had they stayed with it, a nice, easy life would have been waiting. Is there a cost in following Jesus? Yes. But no one who ever followed Jesus regretted it. To the one who truly follows Christ, there are times when it appears Jesus comes before work and even family. The fact is, He does. Always.

Golden Greek Nugget

"Tempted" is a word translated from the Greek *peirazo* and it literally meant "to test" or "to try". Often it was employed in the sense of testing metals or even gold in the fire. It was used originally for either good purposes or bad ones. For example, testing one's physical strength would be considered a good usage. On the other hand, to test one so as to entrap them into performing an evil act would be a counter example. In the New Testament, the term is often, as in this chapter, employed in the bad sense: the devil tempts us to do an evil act.

Wrap Up

We have come a long way in this study. We began in the desert with the Devil. We ended up sharing our Savior. In the desert we learned how to cope with temptation, pain, suffering, spiritual fatigue and loneliness. Here, we have learned how to fish for the souls of men, women, boys and girls. Back there, we thought our desert experience would never end. Here, we hope our fishing trip never ends! God has a magnificent way of working just the right things in our life at just the right time. Commit yourself to Jesus Christ right now to be used in any way He desires. You will never regret it. I promise.

