

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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Strengthened in Temptation

Matthew 4:1-11

Key Verse: Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” (Matthew 4:10)

Immediately after the baptism of Jesus and the confirmation of His Sonship by God the Father, Matthew’s gospel gives this account of Jesus being tempted and tested. The fact that Jesus could be tempted is evidence of His humanity, for it is human to be tempted. The way that Jesus overcame temptation is an example for us, for in our humanness we will face temptation. But by depending on God and the strength He provides, we can overcome temptation—just as Jesus overcame!

The Bible says Jesus was “tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15, *New International Version*). So, to be tempted is not a sin. Yielding to the temptation is the sin. Even though none of us could truthfully say that we are “without sin,” the Bible teaches that we can—by the grace of God—overcome temptation. That is *good news*, and this passage teaches us some powerful truths about how we can overcome temptation.

For Jesus, *the first temptation was to turn stones into bread*. “The tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread’” (v. 3). Verse 2 tells us that Jesus had fasted for 40 days and nights and, by this point, “he was famished.” Satan attacked Jesus at a point of immediate vulnerability—the temptation to satisfy physical desires in ways that are not pleasing to God.

At another level this first test involved the temptation to wrongfully use His powers in order to gain a following by pandering to the people’s desires for physical satisfaction. No doubt, Jesus could have drawn a crowd if He had made material success and satisfaction the focus of His ministry. But Jesus realized that His mission involved far more than satisfying physical hungers. So He said to Satan, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (v. 4).

The second temptation was to gain a following by what would have been, in effect, a publicity stunt. “Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself

down; for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you,” and “On their hands they will bear you up” (verses 5-6).

Jesus resisted this shortcut to success, too, when he told Satan: “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test’” (v. 7).

The third and final test was the temptation for Jesus to choose a method for fulfilling His mission other than the way of the cross. “Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, ‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me’” (verses 8-9).

Helmut Thielicke said of this last temptation: “Jesus rose up from the place where the kingdoms of the world shimmered before him, where crowns flashed and banners rustled, and hosts of enthusiastic people were ready to acclaim him, and quietly walked the way of poverty and suffering to the cross” (*Leadership*, Vol. 1, no. 3).

Jesus overcame every temptation, and the way He overcame is an example for us. Especially important is the fact that Jesus overcame each temptation by *standing on the Word of God*. Jesus’ response to each of Satan’s temptations was “It is written.”

We too can overcome temptation if we will stand strong on the Word of God. The Bible says that God’s people overcome Satan “by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony” (Revelation 12:11).

In so many ways, it is God’s Word that gives us victory....

1. God’s Word guides us in the way we should go. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).

Kenton Anderson tells about touring the Royal Observatory at Greenwich, England. This is the location of the “prime meridian,” which divides the Western Hemisphere from the Eastern Hemisphere. As Anderson explains, the prime meridian is based on an astronomical relationship which allows us to find our place on the map and in the world.

“The power of the prime meridian,” adds Anderson, “is that it is a fixed position through which our knowledge of time and place can be understood. This is a metaphor for the effect of the Bible in human life. The Scripture is our meridian. It is the fixed position, given by God himself, through which we can understand who we are, where we are, and where we must go from here.” (from Anderson’s book, *Choosing to Preach*)

2. God’s Word nourishes and strengthens us spiritually. “As newborn babies, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2, *King James Version*). Reading, studying, and putting God’s Word into practice helps us to become mature believers, able to stand strong when Satan tempts us.

3. God's Word cleanses us and enables us to live Christlike lives. Ephesians 5:26 describes this process as "the washing with water through the word." Even when our Bible reading seems dry and uninspired, the Holy Spirit uses God's Word to cleanse our minds and hearts.

4. God's Word is our powerful weapon for fighting the temptations of Satan. "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword...." (Hebrews 4:12). Believers are to "put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11). The *offensive* part of our spiritual armor is described in this passage as "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17).

Jesus overcame temptation by standing strong on the Word of God. So can we! Thanks be to God.

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