

January 10, 2010/ Matt 4:1-17 (ESV¹)

Mat 4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Jesus was led by the Spirit and tempted by the devil... led by God's Spirit and tempted by "the slanderer" ... Jesus is at this place by the will of the Father ... it's no accident He's out in the desert, and what He faces isn't something that catches the Father unaware ... the word translated "tempted" means equally "tested" ... the devil means what happens to bring Jesus to do wrong, he wants to solicit Jesus to evil ... but that is never God's purpose in what comes the way of a person ... when it is met rightly, in humble dependence upon God, "testing" reveals and develops character and faith ... that's God's purpose in this, and in all testing of you and me as well ...

Mat 4:2 And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

the Israelites wandered 40 years in the wilderness and Jesus was 40 days in the desert ... where the nation will fail to keep faith with God, Messiah will remain perfectly obedient ... He was hungry... no kidding!? ... and without doubt, physically weak as well ...

Mat 4:3 And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

here's the first temptation/test ... the tempter came ... as Boice correctly points out, you and I are tempted from without *and* from within ... **James 1:14** points at the effects of our own evil desires ... but not so, Jesus ... His temptation could only come from without ... "If you are the Son of God" ... some commentators say that the Greek construction carries the meaning that the devil is granting that Jesus is the Son, and reasoning from that point ... it's "*Since* you are the Son" ... the devil says "you're hungry... use your powers and fix it" ... what's the crux of this temptation? ... after all, we say to ourselves, "He's got to be close to collapse from fasting ... what's wrong with taking some of those flat white stones that look like mid-east loaves of bread anyhow, and just turning them into bread?" ...

but it's also possible that it's "If" in the sense that calls into doubt whether Jesus is the Son ... now the Father has said at the baptism that Jesus *is* the Son, but Satan is surely not above calling the veracity of the Father into question ... in the garden he said "Did God say?" knowing full well that He DID say ... and flatly contradicting God's Word with the statement that Eve and Adam would not surely die ... here, it is just possible that the tempter is playing that very old game again, calling into question the truth of what God says ...

in either case, whether it's a temptation to misuse power and thereby abort what God has ordained or whether it is an invitation to flatly disbelieve what God has said about the identity of Jesus, listen to the reply of Jesus ...

Mat 4:4 But he answered, "It is written, " 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

the full quote is:

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Deu 8:3 And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

this says plainly that God protected and provided for His people, but that He also purposely sent them hard things ... why? ... so that they would learn that there is more to life than food, shelter, and clothing ... so that they would learn that the primary thing about life is the presence of God and relying upon, trusting in, and cleaving to Him... most human beings don't grasp that except through the experience of difficulty ... so the 40 years in the wilderness were redemptive, much to be preferred to eternity cut off from God ...

Jesus answers Satan essentially by saying "I am here by the will of the Father. His provision and protection are adequate. The hunger I'm experiencing is not unknown to Him. His presence and will are the important things, not the hunger. I'm not calling the shots here. I'll not make it my business to make things comfortable here." ... that is both a refusal to misuse power and an insistence on the truth of what God has said ... Boice's amplification on the simple quote is "It does not really matter much whether I have physical bread to eat, since God will preserve my life as long as he wants, so I can do what he wants. I trust him in that. What does matter is whether I believe God's word implicitly or not. If I should doubt his word, even for a moment, all is lost." ...

Satan wants to make physical circumstances primary and to call into doubt God's word and His care, and Jesus flatly refuses to go along ... Jesus has answered the temptation with Scripture ... but now we hear that Satan fancies himself a Biblical scholar ...

Mat 4:5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple

Mat 4:6 and said 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, lest you strike your foot against a stone.' "

Satan presents another test, again tries to induce Jesus to do wrong ... he's quoting from **Psalm 91** ... the gist of the Psalm is that the one who is quietly and consistently relying upon God, trusting Him in all that he does, will know by experience the constant care of the LORD in what comes his way... it does not say "do whatever foolish you like, counting on God to suspend the laws of nature to bail you out, and he will" ... the devil would like to argue in the style of High School debate ... take whatever license you want with the intended meaning, as long as you get what you want out of a quote... you and I both know people that want to play that game with the Bible... but Scripture is not a set of magic incantations that we may selfishly use as we please, to do whatever tricks we like ... Barclay: God's rescuing power is not something to be played and experimented with, it's something to be quietly relied upon in everyday life ...

the devil tempts Jesus to do something spectacular to get things moving in the ministry, but Jesus answers, not just with a phrase taken out of context, but with a quote true to the intent and message of the passage ... Jesus interprets Scripture with Scripture ... instead of playing fast and loose with a Scripture fragment, Jesus insists on a comprehensive view ...

Mat 4:7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.' "

this is again a verse from Deuteronomy 6, the full quote is

Deu 6:16 "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.

Massah means "testing" or "proving" ... at Massah (in **Exodus 17: 1-7**) the Israelites essentially said to God "OK, here's the miracle we demand that you perform in order to show us that you are to be trusted and are really among us" ... that kind of thing is gross impertinence ... it shows that a human has forgotten who is who ... it makes our Creator out to be a trained dog who does tricks ... it makes us out to be the ones calling the shots ... it purposely forgets all that has gone before, the gracious provision of God to this point, and demands a sign of our choosing ... it impugns the character of a loving Father who has repeatedly shown His care for His children ... it says like a spoiled child who is simply demanding his or her own way "if you really loved me, you'd XYZ ..." ...

much of what passes for "stepping out in faith" isn't that at all ... it's lack of faith looking for "proof" ... it's putting God to the test ... faith is simple trust, not doubt looking for proof ...

Mat 4:8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

Mat 4:9 And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

the first 2 temptations were overtly tied to the Father's statement that Jesus is the Son ... this one is as well, if we pay close attention to the OT ... there is

Psa 2:7 I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you.

Psa 2:8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.

the Son has been promised by the Father exactly these kingdoms of the world that the devil now proposes to cede to him for just a little respect ... there is much commentary on these verses that strikes me as completely silly, commentary about whether the devil does or doesn't really have anything to bargain with here ... what difference does it make whether he could deliver some version of what he claims to be bargaining with? ... if he could and would produce it, so what? ... would that change anything? ... the temptation here is to attempt to cut short, to try to find an easy route, to say that the end justifies the means ... the promise of the Father is sure, but the path leads through Golgotha ... the devil seems to be saying "for just a little cosmic respect, I'll throw in the towel" ... after all, Jesus is supposed to in the end rule all, why not get it the easy way? ... you know, plan "A" here is pretty unpleasant ... and in the mind of fallen man, a little practical compromise here can't be that big a deal ... but, truth is, that's high treason ... what does light have to do with darkness? ...

Mat 4:10 Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, " 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.' "

the truth is that to attempt to cut short, to compromise just a little bit with evil for a supposedly good end, is not cleverness, but rather out and out treason ... and Jesus identifies it for what it is ... he quotes again from Deuteronomy 6 ...

Deu 6:13 It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear.

it doesn't matter whether there really could be a short route ... to try to take it, to try to go some way other than what God has ordained is anathema ... it's rebellion and idolatry... and Jesus, the second Adam, stays

true where the first Adam and all of us have failed ... He did so insisting that what God has said is true, handling that precious Word carefully and with integrity ...

Mat 4:11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

after the test, in the Father's time and plan, Jesus was given the real ministry of angels in a right kind of way and context (consistent with **Psalm 91**) ... the temptation brought by the devil in verse 6 was the perversion of the real thing here ...

after the baptism and temptation, Matthew's gospel turns to the public ministry of Jesus ...

Mat 4:12 Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee.

Jesus headed back north ... Galilee wasn't big, only about 25 by 50 miles, but had a population of maybe 3 million and has the best agricultural land in Israel... in the Jewish mind, however, it was looked down because of its proximity to gentile nations (and its distance from Jerusalem and the temple worship) ...

Mat 4:13 And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali,

Mat 4:14 so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

Mat 4:15 "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles--

Mat 4:16 the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned."

Matthew quotes from **Isaiah 9: 1-2** ... Matthew's gospel is his clear desire to show Jesus as the fulfiller of the OT Messianic prophecies ... but a fulfiller of OT prophecies that is for all people ... it is Galilee of the gentiles where people living in darkness have seen a great light ...

Mat 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

and as Jesus begins to preach, the message is the same as we saw on the lips of John ... repent ... but coming from Jesus, the phrase "the kingdom of heaven is near" is a statement about it being presently realized, not simply that it was soon to come ...