

Sam Storms
Bridgeway Church
4-11-10

**Tempted, but Triumphant:
Learning from the Example of Jesus
Mark 1:12-13; Matthew 4:1-11**

Several significant features of Jesus' temptation:

- (1) The temptation occurred after his baptism by John in the Jordan, where his divine Sonship was proclaimed and attested by the voice of God. This becomes the grounds on which Satan launches his attack (Mt. 4:3,6).
- (2) The baptism of Jesus marked the inauguration of his public ministry. The temptation was Satan's attempt to thwart and undermine what Jesus had been called and empowered to accomplish.
- (3) Note that Luke inserts the genealogy of Jesus between the account of his baptism and his temptation. Why? To highlight the parallel between the first Adam and the last Adam (Jesus).
- (4) The primary parallel/contrast is between Jesus and the nation of Israel (Deut. 6-8).
- (5) The temptation narrative emphasizes once again the very literal reality of Satan.
- (6) Each temptation from Satan was an attempt to get Jesus to achieve a legitimate end by a sinful and illegitimate means.

The First Temptation (Mt. 4:1-4)

The Second Temptation (Mt. 4:5-7)

The Third Temptation (Mt. 4:8-10)

Let us consider the **nature** and **tactics** of temptation.

First, the focus of Satan's efforts is always the same: ***to deceive us into believing that the passing pleasures of sin are more satisfying than obedience.***

Second, ***temptation, in and of itself, is not sin.*** This is critically important, especially for those who suffer from an overly sensitive and tender conscience. Jesus was repeatedly tempted (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15; Mt. 4), but he was sinless. We must resist thinking that we are sub-Christian or sub-spiritual simply because we are frequently tempted. "You can't prevent the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair" (Martin Luther). A temptation only becomes a sin when you acquiesce to it, as it were "fondle" it and "enjoy" it.

Third, temptation is often strong because it comes in the form of ***an enticement to satisfy legitimate needs through illegitimate means.*** Bread is not evil. Neither is the desire to alleviate hunger by eating it, especially after you've fasted for forty days! Divine protection is a valid promise in Scripture (Ps. 91). Authority over the kingdoms of the world is something God promised the Son long ago (cf. Ps. 2). The temptation, therefore, was aimed at seducing Jesus into achieving divinely approved ends by sinful and illegitimate means. Temptation is often strongest when relief or satisfaction seems to dress itself in the very sin that Satan is suggesting.

Fourth, ***the strength of temptation also comes from a tendency to push virtues to such an extreme that they become vices.*** For example, it is all too easy for the joy of eating to become gluttony, or for the blessing of rest to become sloth, or for the peace of quietness to become non-communication, or for

industriousness to become greed, or for liberty to be turned into an excuse for licentiousness, or for pleasure to become sensuality, or for self-care to become selfishness, or for self-respect to become conceit, or for wise caution to become cynicism and unbelief, or for righteous anger to become unrighteous rage, or for the joy of sex to become immorality, or for conscientiousness to become perfectionism.

Seven Tactics of Temptation

1. ***Satan especially likes to tempt us when our faith is fresh***, i.e., when the Christian is only recently converted and thus less prepared to know how to resist his seductive suggestions (cf. 1 Tim. 3:6).

2. ***Satan especially likes to tempt us when our faith feels strongest, i.e., when we think we are invulnerable to sin***. If we are convinced that we have it under control, we become less diligent. "An unguarded strength," said Oswald Chambers, is a double weakness".

3. ***Satan especially likes to tempt us when we are in an alien environment***.

4. ***Satan also likes to tempt us when our faith is being tested in the fires of affliction***. When we are tired, burnt out, persecuted, feeling excluded and ignored, Satan makes his play. His most common tactic is to suggest that God isn't fair, that he is treating us unjustly, from which platform Satan then launches his seductive appeal that we need no longer obey. Physical pain, relational and financial loss, *when combined with the silence of heaven*, serve only to intensify the appeal of temptation.

5. ***Satan especially likes to tempt us immediately following both spiritual highs and spiritual lows***.

6. ***Perhaps Satan's most effective tactic in tempting us is to put his thoughts into our minds and then blame us for having them***.

7. ***A related tactic of temptation is for him to launch his accusations as if they were from the Holy Spirit***. In other words, he couches his terms and chooses his opportunities in such a way that we might easily mistake his voice for that of God. So how do we distinguish between satanic accusation and divine conviction? Among other things, the former comes in the shape of condemnation that breeds feelings of hopelessness. We are told that our sin has put us beyond the hope of grace and the power of forgiveness. Satan's accusations are devoid of any reference to the sufficiency of the cross. Divine conviction for sin, on the other hand, comes with a reminder of the sufficiency and finality of Christ's shed blood, together with a promise of hope and the joy of forgiveness.

Four Tactics for Resisting Temptation

1. The first and perhaps most important tactic for facing temptation is to embrace and pursue the simple truth that when our hearts beat with ***perpetual fascination with God*** and our thoughts are filled with the beauty and splendor and adequacy of God, little room is left for the devil to gain a foothold (see Phil. 4:8).

2. ***Know yourself***. Ask the question often: "If I were the devil, where would I attack me?" In other words, be quick to identify your weaknesses, your vulnerable spots, areas where you've failed before, and take extraordinary steps to protect yourself in the future. If you are susceptible to the effects of alcohol, don't toy with a casual drink. If your fantasies are easily fueled by visual images, stay away from R-rated movies.

3. ***Deal radically with sin***. In the words of Jesus, "if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell" (Matthew 5:29).

4. ***Confront and conquer temptation at the beginning, not at the end***. The best and most effective tactic against temptation is to deal with it from a position of *strength*, before it has an opportunity to weaken you. Better to take steps up front to eliminate temptation altogether (if possible), than to deal with it later when your defenses are down.