

One Succeeds for one who fails

Matthew 4:1-11

Pastor Jim Rademaker

Temptation. What is temptation? That which tries to lead us away from God and to another. Away from trusting God and trusting another instead. Away from goodness to evil. Away from life to death.

Have you ever been tempted away from God and His Word? Have you ever given in to temptation? What tempts you? That which looks good. Sounds pleasing. Is appealing. But you know that you shouldn't! You know it's not right. You know God wouldn't approve. But part of you wants to do it anyway. It's tempting.

Temptation is based on a lie. It promises one thing, but delivers another. Temptation is deception. It comes from the Father of lies, satan, the great tempter, who's always trying to lead us away from God and to himself, promising us life, but delivering death.

There are two great temptations recorded in the Bible - the temptation of Adam, and the temptation of Christ. The temptation of Adam resulted in the fall of all of humanity into sin and death. The temptation of Christ resulted in the fall of Satan and the rescue of humanity from sin and death. (Romans 5)

Temptation began in the Garden, in the lushness of Paradise. In the middle of the garden were two trees that defined the relationship of God and man - the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The middle is God's place. Man's life revolved around God, with God in the middle.

This is *our* temptation. We are tempted to *trespass* the boundary of God's Word, and exercise our freedom, without limits. Do whatever we want; whatever feels good. To trust ourselves instead of trusting God. To *push* God from the middle and to put *ourselves* there. To live as if God *didn't matter*, and as if we mattered most. As if everything revolved around *us*, *instead of God*.

How did temptation begin? Much the same way it happens today. Temptation began with an assault on God's Word. "Did God *really* say ... that you must not eat from any tree in the garden?" Perhaps Adam and Eve had misunderstood, or misheard. That didn't sound like God. How could God, who is good and love, impose *limits* on their freedom? It wasn't *fair*. *Why* would God have put a forbidden tree there in the first place? In the very *middle* of the garden, of all places.

"Did God *really* say?" It's a *religious* question, from a very *religious* serpent. Eve is invited to step back and become a *critic* of God's Word, instead of its recipient. She's invited to reach *beyond* God's Word, to *speculate* about God. To draw conclusions about God *apart* from His Word. To use her *own* experience of God *against* God's Word. And if her *experience* conflicted with God's Word, then perhaps God's *Word* is wrong. Eve's thinking is *rampant* in our culture and in our *churches* today.

"Did God *really* say?" This religious question is posed *to* us and *by* us all the time. Did God *really* say, "Honor your parents," "Do not murder," "Do not commit adultery," "Do not steal, lie, cheat, slander, covet?" Perhaps it *doesn't apply* to our modern, *enlightened* situation. Did God *really* say? Satan tempts us to *judge* God and His *Word*, to *transgress* His boundaries, to try to *push* Him from the *middle* of our lives. (the above description of the two great temptations is by Pastor William Cwirla)

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, to be *tempted* by the devil. Tempted away from trusting God and trusting another instead.

Food. Water. Shelter. Our basic needs. Nothing is more important than them. For Jesus, it was as basic as it gets. 40 days without food. And satan's temptation was what? Your physical needs (meeting them, satisfying them) are everything. Nothing is more important. They are top priority. You have to take care of them at all costs. You have to have them met no matter what. No matter what it takes. The ends justify the means. Whatever it takes.

If you have to steal, so be it. If you have to lie to get them, it's okay. If you have to walk over other people. If you have to withhold your firstfruits from God. If you have to cheat the system. Do whatever you have to. After all, you've got to take care of yourself above all things, right? Your physical needs (meeting the, satisfying them) are everything. What could possibly be more important than that? Do you recognize the voice of the tempter?

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

How does Jesus respond? *"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

Deuteronomy 8:2 *And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. 3 And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna ... 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.*

4 Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. ... 7 For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, 8 a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey ... 10 And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.

11 Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, 12 lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, 13 and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, 14 then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, 15 who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, 16 who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end.

17 Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' 18 You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

The first temptation of Jesus? The first attempt by satan to turn Jesus away from His Heavenly Father? You shall live on bread alone. Your physical needs (meeting the, satisfying them) are everything. Nothing is more important. They are top priority. You have to take care of them at all costs. And you can't necessarily trust God to care for you. You've got to take matters into your own hands. Whatever it takes. The ends justify the means. You can't trust God. You can only trust yourself.

Jesus was hungry.

Satan isn't going to ask you if this is a good time to be tempted. And though he'll strike at any time and seek to take advantage of any situation, he often strikes (like here, with Jesus) at the very worst times - when you're at your weakest, when you're most alone, when you're at your lowest and struggling, when it seems as if nothing is going right, when you're at that point where just one more thing is going to push you over the edge. Satan is interested in turning you against your Heavenly Father, and so devouring you and your faith in sin and fear and doubt. (James Douthwaite)

In the 1980s, during arms-control negotiations with the Soviet Union, President Ronald Reagan popularized a phrase. "Trust, but ... verify". Which really means what? Don't trust. Don't take the Soviets at their word. Don't take their word for it. Test, to see if what they say is true. It might not be. That's what satan was saying to Jesus.

Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple 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.'"

"Trust, but ... verify." That's, what satan was saying to Jesus. Which really means don't take your Heavenly Father at His word. Don't take His word for it. Test, to see if what He says is true. Satan's second temptation of Jesus was to test His Father, to see if He could be trusted. In reality, he was tempting Jesus to doubt His Father. To not trust Him.

Does satan ever tempt you to do the same? To doubt your Heavenly Father's love and care for you? To test God, and not take Him at His word? When things aren't going the way you'd like in your life, are you ever tempted to doubt God's care for you? Even doubt His existence?

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

Deut. 6:10 *And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, 11 and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, 12 then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 13 It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. 14 You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.*

Exodus 17 *All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin ... but there was no water for the people to drink. 2 Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you **test the Lord?**" 3 But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" ... 7 And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the Lord by saying, "**Is the Lord among us or not?**"*

Three temptations. Three attempts by satan to turn Jesus away from His Father.

1. Your **physical needs** (meeting them, satisfying them) are everything. Nothing is more important. They are top priority. You have to take care of them at all costs. You can't trust Your Father to take care of you.
2. Test, but verify. You have to **test God**. You can't just take Him at His word. Test God instead of trust God. Don't trust God (His Word, His care for you), test Him to prove Himself to you, if He really is who He says He is.
3. **Worship yourself** above all else. You are the most important thing in your life; in the world. Live to serve yourself.

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

Three temptations. Three attempts by satan to turn Jesus away from His Father. *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.""*

Deut. 6:13 *It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. 14 You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you - 15 for the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God—lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.*

Temptation. What is temptation? That which tries to lead us away from God and to another. Away from trusting God and trusting another instead. Away from goodness to evil. Away from life to death. Three temptations to turn away from God. *Our physical needs are more important than anything. Test God instead of trusting Him. Worship self above all else.* You and I have failed on every count.

WHY was Jesus tempted? Why did the Spirit of God lead Him out into the desert to be tempted? What was the point? YOU were the point. You, who have given in to temptation. You, who've placed your physical needs above everything else. Who've done whatever it takes to make sure you're needs and the needs of you and your family are taken care of.

Why did the Spirit of God lead Jesus out into the desert to be tempted? For YOU. You, who's doubted God's care for you. Doubted His goodness. Who doesn't really trust God. Who has trouble taking God at His Word. Trusting, yet wanting to verify that God really is who He says He is. Which really means what? Not trusting Him but testing Him. Doubting Him.

Why did the Spirit of God lead Jesus out into the desert to be tempted? For YOU. You, who worship the most important thing in your life, yourself, above God. You, who live to serve yourself, your true God. This is our

temptation. To trust ourselves instead of trusting God. To push God from the middle and to put ourselves there. To live as if God didn't matter and as if we mattered most. As if everything revolved around us instead of God.

Unlike you and me, unlike Adam and Eve, Jesus clings to *nothing*, but God's Word. He seeks no proof. He looks for no evidence. He clings to nothing, but the bare Word in faithful trust. *"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."* (Hebrews 1) *"Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."*

We've all been tempted, and we've all failed, miserably. More than once. We've all listened to the tempter's voice and followed it instead of God's voice. And so, Jesus was sent into the desert to be tempted for us. To succeed where we failed. To live on the Word of God instead of bread alone. To trust the Father instead of doubt Him. To worship and serve Him instead of himself. Jesus was sent to live the life we were supposed to, but never have.

To succeed on our behalf. To substitute His life for ours. In life – His trusting for our doubting. In death – His death in place of ours. In resurrection – we will rise because He has risen – conquering sin, death, and the tempter – for us.

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. (Rom 5:18-19)

Temptations *will* come, guaranteed. Our comfort and strength in every temptation is Christ, who has already triumphed over temptation in our place. *For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* (Hebrews 4:15-16)

The hymn has it correct. *"I need thee every hour, stay thou near by. Temptations lose their power when thou art nigh. I need Thee oh I need thee. Every hour I need Thee. Oh bless me now my Savior. I come to Thee."*