

The Outer Battle – Matt. 4:1-11

Temptation #4

On August 4, 1914, the magnificent British luxury liner named the Carmania was 3 days out of New York Harbor on her way to Liverpool with 800 passengers on board. Shortly before midnight, she received the shocking message: war declared. Stop. Darken ship. Stop. Radio silence.

These precautions taken, the Carmania hurried back to England arriving in Liverpool 3 days later. Immediately British admirals assumed command. The conversion process was swift and efficient. 4.7 caliber guns with a range of 9300 yards were installed. Within a week, the Carmania was in the service of the British Royal Navy and was back at sea on the hunt for German warships.

It took the Carmania 3 more days to approach Trinidad Island where it was determined that she would be of best use in the war effort. But as the Carmania began to sail into the main port of Trinidad it was as if she were sailing right into the twilight zone. There before her was the Carmania. It was as if she were looking into a mirror. Realizing that there couldn't be 2 Carmanias in the British Royal Navy, the real Carmania prepared for battle with the imposter Carmania. After a brief but brutal struggle, the real Carmania sunk the imposter Carmania. As some sailors from the imposter Carmania were rescued from a watery grave, a devious German plot was discovered. The enemy had disguised a German luxury liner to look just like the Carmania. Their plan was to sail right into a group of British ships unawares and catch them by surprise quickly sinking them. The only way to thwart this ingenious plan was in the 2 Carmanias accidentally met each other in the vast Atlantic Ocean. Against infinitesimal odds, this is exactly what happened – and the devious German plot was exposed.

One of the many names used of the devil in the Bible is an *angel of light*. God's enemy delights in disguising himself so that he can slip into the ranks of the elect undetected. He then is in a position to tempt and pervert truth and hinder the progress of Christ's church. He found this to be very effective means to thwart God's program very early in the church's history. Satan's first modus operandi was to aggressively attack the church with persecution. But he soon found that this only strengthened the church. Persecution only clarified who was a true believer and who was a false pretender. The true church shown so brightly that unbelievers were attracted to it. True believers demonstrated courage in the midst of adversity. They showed themselves to be an asset to Roman society rescuing helpless babies who were left out on garbage heaps to die, demonstrating at gladiatorial games showing the inhumanity of that sport, helping out the poor and needy with generosity. True believers also revealed an inner peace and contentment in the midst of

adversity that unbelievers knew they didn't have. The church exploded with growth under the enemy's persecution even as it continues to do today in Communist China and many Islamic countries where it is under intense persecution.

So the enemy moved to a different attack that he found to be much more effective. Christianity became the stylish way of life. The Roman Emperor was now a Christian. Laws were changed so that Christianity became the state religion. Now it was the *in thing* to be a Christian. And many were attracted to the church for ulterior motives. But many were not true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. And false teachings and worldly philosophies began to get mixed in with God's truth. In short order, the Roman Empire had disintegrated from within in the European world was plunged into the ignorance and superstition of the Middle Ages.

We have been looking at the subject of temptation these past Summer Sundays. We have already seen that temptation is any circumstance or thought or inner desire that brings us to a point of moral decision in life. A temptation can be situational. We can be tempted by some unwelcome circumstance that barges into our life. A temptation can be thoughtful. We can be tempted by a thought that springs into our minds. A temptation can be lustful. We can be tempted by an inner desire that we have. Whatever the source, temptation occurs when we are brought to a place of moral decision in our lives. We have already noted that temptation in itself is not sin. Even the sinless Lamb of God was tempted, but he never sinned. Temptation just brings us to the point of making a moral decision. If we accept the temptation into our lives and act upon it, then we sin. But if we reject the temptation and don't act upon it, our faith will grow and we will actually be stronger for having been tempted. In order to be ready for the inevitable temptation that we will all face, we must be prepared for it in advance.

Now there are 2 major sources of temptation that we all face. There is the inner temptation that we must deal with because of our sinful natures. Every single person is born with a sinful nature. The Bible declares with brilliant simplicity, *for all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23)*. So we all have inner desires that can tempt us to sin. We plan to look at this struggle and how we can have victory in our inner temptations next week, the Lord willing. But there is also an outer battle that we all face. There is an enemy of God who has authored a philosophy that is opposed to all that is righteous and holy. He is a brilliant protagonist. He is able to make evil appear to be good at times. He is able to make those who stand for God's standards look foolish and ignorant. He is able to tempt us to disobey God if we are not alert to his devious methods. And make no mistake about it – God's enemy has tried and proven methods. The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus,

¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Eph. 6:11,12)

The word that is translated *schemes* is *methodias* in the Greek language. It is the word from which we got our English word *method*. We are to be alert to the enemy's methods.

Now how better to observe the Devil's methods than to look at his temptation of the Lord Jesus Christ. We would assume that when he faced the Son of God himself, the devil brought his A game. He would have thrown everything he had at the Son of God. Yet Jesus Christ was able to defend himself against the Devil's temptations – and in his defense, he becomes an example, a model for us in facing temptations from without.

There were 3 temptations that the devil threw at Jesus. I want to look briefly at both the temptations themselves and the defense that the Lord Jesus Christ used in each case.

1. The temptations that Jesus suffered roughly followed the 3 categories that the Apostle John outlined in 1 John 2:15,16:

1JN 2:15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world.

The 3 general categories of temptation are:

*cravings of sinful man – lust of the flesh, natural, human desires that we have that we are tempted to fulfill outside of the will of God.

*lust of the eyes – that which we see that we covet and want. This is often expanded to include our emotional highs, that which we see and want that appeals to our emotions again outside of the will of God.

*the boasting of what he has and does – the pride of life, that which feeds our inner pride and exalted view of ourselves.

Now the enemy embodied in a serpent in the Garden of Eden appealed to these 3 categories in the first temptation of the human race. The Bible tells us in Genesis 3:6:

GE 3:6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.

There are those 3 categories – the cravings of the flesh (good for food), the lust of the eyes (pleasing to the eye) and the pride of life (desirable for gaining wisdom).

Again, there is nothing inherently wrong with our natural appetites, emotional experiences and gaining wisdom. But when any of these are sought outside of God's will, they become sinful. God had commanded Eve not to eat of the forbidden fruit.

Now we find the devil tempting the Lord Jesus Christ in each of these areas.

a. The first temptation to make the stones into bread would have appealed to the appetites of the flesh.

It is interesting that the Bible says that after Jesus fasted for 40 days and nights, he became hungry. There is an interesting phenomenon that occurs when a person fasts. Fasting simply means going without eating. A person who is fasting drinks water, but does not eat solid food. When the first meal or two is missed, the body complains about it. The stomach growls and there is a measure of discomfort. We often refer to this discomfort as having hunger pangs, but this is not really accurate. A person who fasts for a day or two is normally not in any physical danger unless there is a medical condition such as sugar diabetes. In fact, fasting is usually a good thing for us physically – it cleanses the body from wastes and impurities. About the 3rd day or so, the stomach quits calling for food. There is no more physical discomfort and the body begins to live off energy that has been stored. When that energy runs out, the real hunger pangs begin. Now the body is warning us that unless there is some nutritional nourishment, starvation and death are imminent. Jesus had come to this place after going 40 days without food. He was facing the danger of starvation.

Now we might wonder, what would be wrong with Jesus eating some bread? After all, he was starving to death. And the answer is that there would be nothing at all wrong with Jesus eating some bread. But it was the manner in which he would get that bread that Jesus knew would be wrong.

You see, Jesus had come to this earth with the commitment to rely upon God his Father and walk in his will. When the devil tempted Jesus to make the stones into bread, what the enemy was implying was God wasn't doing his job in taking care of his Son so Jesus need to quit relying upon him and take matters into his own hands. Even though he was in a weakened condition, Jesus recognized this and refused this temptation that appealed to his fleshly desires. Even though he had the power to do so, he refused to turn a stone into bread.

b. The second temptation would have appealed to Christ's emotional experience. Jesus had just quoted Scripture to the devil (and we are going to see the importance of this in just a moment) so the devil quotes Scripture right back. Throw yourself off this highest point on the temple mount for God has promised that he will protect you – he will send angels to catch you lest you hurt yourself. We must never forget that God's enemy can and does use Scripture to his advantage. Every cult member that I have ever talked to in my life used Scripture to try to prove their points. They were adapt at taking verses out of context, of twisting

meanings, of using obscure passages, of even quoting just parts of verses and leaving out the rest. This shouldn't surprise us because the Devil used the Scriptures to tempt Jesus.

And what a glorious sight and experience that would have been to float down from the highest point of the temple mount wall cushioned by angels below. But Jesus knew that his jumping from the pinnacle of the temple would be presuming upon God. Yes, if danger comes our way, God has promised to watch over us and protect us as his children. This doesn't mean that Christians never get in car wrecks or have accidents – sometimes God allows his children to go through a specific trial for their growth and maturity. But most of us have experienced God's miraculous hand of delivery at some point in our life. I could give several specific examples this morning of how God sent his angels to protect me if we had time. But it is a whole different matter if we willfully walk into danger presuming upon God to protect us. This is putting God into a corner. This is testing God. This is using God for our own ends. And Jesus recognized this to be wrong and he refused the enemy's temptation.

b. The devil then appealed to Christ's pride. Look at the splendor of all these kingdoms. Just bow down and worship me and I will give them all to you. You won't have to go through the agony of the cross. You won't have to go through the humiliation of being crucified by those whom you created. You can bypass all the discomfort and just have the worship. Just think of it. All the kingdoms of the world worshiping you. All you have to do is bow down and worship me.

3 temptations. Each one directed at one of the major categories that the devil has used since the first temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden.

2. Happily, unlike Eve and Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ was victorious over each of these temptations. And I want to focus with you on the method that Jesus Christ used to defend himself against the temptations of the enemy. And the method that Jesus used is somewhat surprising to us, isn't it?

After all, the human race had been waiting for this confrontation ever since sin entered the world. When Eve and Adam were tempted by the devil, we somehow felt that they were outmatched. Even though they were sinless and fully capable of obeying God, they were just human. Lucifer was the highest created being. He was so much more intelligent and powerful and clever than Adam and Eve. But now the confrontation that the human race had been waiting for had arrived. The devil against the Son of God. The devil against the unique being who was both God and man. So we wait in keen anticipation to see how Jesus Christ would humiliate and disgrace the devil. We could only imagine how he would twist those puny temptations and make the devil look like the fool that he really is. Just think of the logic that Jesus could have used. Just think of how he could have twisted the devil's words around and made him look like a bumbling

idiot. But that's not what happened, is it? Jesus didn't defend himself with logic or with eloquence or with tight knit arguments. No, Jesus simply quoted the Scriptures to the devil.

Aside from the words *it is written*, the only words Jesus spoke to the devil that were not direct quotes from the Bible were *away from me, Satan*.

But it was the way Jesus used the Scriptures that are most instructive to us. For Jesus used the Bible like a surgeon would use a scalpel. I want you to see this with me, because it is critically important. What Jesus did in each temptation is immediately size up the nature of what the devil was trying to do. Then he went back to a situation in the old testament that was analogous to his own temptation. He took the key phrase from the Scripture in that situation and threw it back in Satan's face. The devil could not stand against the Scripture. He didn't argue or debate, but rather just moved on to the next point in complete defeat.

Let me illustrate this briefly in each of the 3 temptations. In the first temptation, the devil was appealing to Christ's fleshly desires as we have already seen. He was trying to get Jesus to fulfill his fleshly desires outside of the will of God. Jesus immediately saw this with keen insight. He then went back to an analogous situation in the Old Testament. The children of Israel had just been delivered from their slavery in Egypt. God had humbled Pharaoh by executing 10 plagues upon the Egyptians. Then God had parted the Red Sea before the Israelites bringing them across on dry ground while he buried the Egyptian army who tried to follow them. The Israelites were free at last. They should have been glorying in their freedom and praising God for his power and goodness to them. But what happened? No sooner were they free from their oppressors than they began to complain because they didn't have enough food to eat. They valued their fleshly appetites over their relationship with their delivering God. God in his mercy provided manna for them to eat to meet their physical needs, but he also used that occasion to teach them some spiritual lessons as well. Jesus went back to that very situation and quoted a part of the verse that applied to the very temptation that he was suffering. Let me quote the whole verse from Deuteronomy so you see its context:

² Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. ³ He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. (Deut. 8:2,3)

Do you see what Jesus did here? He recognized that the devil was trying to get him to make bread out of those stones outside the will of God to satisfy his fleshly appetites. If Jesus did this he would have been like the Israelites in the Old Testament who valued their fleshly appetites over their relationship with their

delivering God. So Jesus goes right back to that situation and he quotes the Scriptures that applied to his situation. Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. The devil was speechless. He was completely defeated. He could not stand against the power of God's word. The sword of the spirit had stabbed him in the heart. So he quickly moves to the next temptation and this time he decides that he will quote the Scripture as well.

Jump from the highest point of the temple. What an exhilarating experience that would be. And God has promised that he will send his angels to protect you. Just think of how impressed everyone will be when they witness this miraculous spectacle.

Again, Jesus immediately sees what the devil is trying to do with keen insight. The devil was trying to get him to presume upon God. The devil was trying to get him to put God in a corner where he was forced to act to save his son. This was testing God. So Jesus again almost instantaneously went back to an analogous situation in the Old Testament. This time the Israelites were at Massah. They were thirsty. They wanted some water to drink. They were cranky and cantankerous. And they decided that they had had enough. *Listen, Moses. You tell God that he had better give us some water or we are through with him. If he doesn't give us water, we're not going to worship him anymore. We'll just go back to Egypt and worship those gods down there.*

Now God did give them water. He commanded Moses to strike the rock and water poured forth from it to satisfy the thirsty of the Israelites. But God was not happy with his people. He wasn't happy because they had presumed upon him. They had tested him. They had put him in a corner where he had to act in their behalf or else. They had jumped from the highest point of the temple and the angels had better catch them or else. Jesus recognized that this was the nature of his 2nd temptation. So he immediately went back to that situation in the Old Testament and quoted the key verse. Let me add the 5 words that complete the Old Testament verse that Jesus quoted from Deut. 6:16:

¹⁶ Do not test the LORD your God as you did at Massah.

Again, do you see what Jesus did here? He recognized that the devil was trying to get him to presume upon God outside of the will of God to make a glorious, emotional spectacle. If Jesus did this he would have been like the Israelites in the Old Testament who put God in a corner and forced his hand. So Jesus goes right back to that situation and he quotes the Scriptures that applied to his situation. Do not put the Lord your God to the test. The devil was speechless. He was completely defeated. He could not stand against the power of God's word. The sword of the spirit had stabbed him in the heart. So he quickly moves to the final temptation.

See all of these kingdoms. Just bow down and worship me and I will give them all to you. Just think of how proud you will be having every kingdom in your hand. You don't need to follow God's will to the cross. I can give you a short cut.

Again, Jesus immediately sees what the devil is trying to do with keen insight. The devil is trying to usurp God's position and receive the worship that is due to God alone. Jesus immediately goes back to an analogous situation in the Old Testament in his mind. When the Israelites were at the foot of Mt. Sinai and things became a bit inconvenient for them, they were quick to turn to other gods. Moses had been gone for some time. They wondered what had happened to him up on the top of that mountain that was clouded with smoke and flashing with lightening. So what did they do? They made another god. They lobbied Aaron to make a golden calf like the gods that they were familiar with back in Egypt. They began to worship the golden calf. But God was not pleased. Because he alone was worthy of worship. Jesus knew that God the Father would not be pleased if his Son worshiped the devil, so he quickly responded, *worship the Lord your God and serve him only.*

Now I trust that you are seeing the methodology that Jesus modeled in facing temptation from without, temptation from the enemy. Our defense against the temptations of the devil is the word of God. It is the word of God that is alive and powerful and sharper than any 2 edged sword. It is the word of God that is our only offensive weapon in the armor that God has provided for us. The sword of the spirit which is the word of God. But the Bible is not some superstitious amulet. It is not some good luck charm God has given to us to ward off evil spirits. Some people feel if they set a Bible on the coffee table in their living room it will be a good luck charm for the house. This is just like paganism.

No, the Bible is the living, powerful word of God. It is the sword of the spirit. But like a sword, it must be used properly as a weapon in order to be effective.

Just as we close, let me give you 5 steps that have helped me in using the Word of God as a defense against temptation.

1. Isolate the specific area of temptation. What is the real issue? Is it greed? Is it anger? Is it selfishness? Is it pride? Is it immoral thinking? What is the area you are being tempted in.
2. Do a search in the Scriptures and find what God's word has to say about the specific area of your temptation.
3. Memorize key portions of the Bible that relate specifically to the area of your conflict.
4. Prepare yourself for battle with the enemy. Be alert, pray, don't make provision for the flesh, don't give the enemy a place especially in this area where you are being tempted.

5. When temptation comes, quote these Scriptures against the enemy and watch the power of God work. That's what the Lord Jesus Christ did. It will work for you as well. I have found that it works in my life. I am confident God's word will be alive and powerful in your life as well.