

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil"
(Matthew 4:1).

Immediately after Jesus' baptism to fulfill all righteousness for us, Jesus faced the temptation of the devil – *just as we face being baptized into Christ*. It was for this purpose that Jesus had come into the world: to overcome Satan *for us*. And this was the first thing Jesus did at the start of His public ministry. Again, He confronted Satan *for us*.

Every temptation we face is a test. Each second of our lives, we are being tested. And this test is only a pass or fail. There is no "C" grade for passing. It's either A+ or F.

Temptation comes from every angle. As long as we live in this fallen world, we will be attacked, hunted, and harassed on all sides. From the flesh: *we want what we want now*, things like filling the belly and riches. From the world: *we want to be honored* as we are tempted by ambition and worldly glory for power and dominion. From Satan: *Did God really say?*

Temptations come in many different forms. Temptations come when we face unpleasant experiences, such as pain, suffering, illness, disappointment and bereavement. Such experiences may cause us to question God's wisdom and His love. But temptations can also come when life appears to be going well. Sometimes when we experience success or good health, we may think that we can handle temptations when they come.

The temptations Jesus faced were indeed serious efforts by the devil to rob the world of its Redeemer. And Satan had been very successful in the past as he led the first Adam into sin so that a Redeemer would be necessary. Now, Satan attacks the second Adam, Jesus Christ, in an effort to frustrate His work of redemption.

At one time, Satan had been created as one of God's holy angels, but now he was a fallen angel. He had rebelled against God and had been cast out of heaven together with many other fallen angels who followed him in his rebellion against God.

But as smart as Satan thinks he is, God is still much wiser and more powerful than Satan could ever be. And Satan cannot overpower us as long as we place our trust in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Greek word used for devil is *diabolos* (from which we get the English word *diabolical*). The meaning of this word is slanderer or liar. You see, the devil is not just a clever liar, or a habitual liar; he is a constant liar. He is the father of lies. Satan invented the very idea of lying and told the very first lie. Yes, he makes wonderful promises, as he did to Eve (“**You will not surely die**” [Genesis 3:4]), but he has never kept a single one of them, and he never will. And if Satan does occasionally speak a few words of truth – *as he does with Jesus*, he distorts them or misapplies them or takes them out of context or immediately proceeds to contradict them.

We know all of these things about the devil, yet, what do we so often do? We so often keep falling for his lies. He tells us that life will be so much more enjoyable if we only disobey God’s Commandments. So, he persuades us to lie, cheat, and steal as he says there is nothing wrong with that. He persuades us into taking the easy way out. His lies always lead to all kinds of trouble, sorrow, grief, and regret. Yet, each time, he convinces us that in this particular case, it will end up different. But in every single case, the devil’s promises are never intended for our good or for our benefit. His only goal is to keep us separated from God.

So, what are we to learn from Satan’s temptation of Jesus? Well, for one, it would be a mistake to read this text from Matthew 4 as a “do it yourself” strategy on how to resist temptation.

So often, we read this text that way. If we only followed Jesus’ example, then we can handle Satan’s temptations. But how well are we at doing just that? Not very good. I’d say, with pretty good certainty, that we would all receive a failing grade.

So, clearly this text isn’t a “do it yourself” guide on how to resist temptation.

So, why did the Holy Spirit bring Jesus into direct confrontation with Satan? Well, He’s there, because Jesus is Israel reduced to One. Jesus is the embodiment of Israel.

In the past, the nation of Israel had failed every time its people faced even the smallest of temptations. The people of God were weak. They always gave in. They murmured.

Jesus is out there because the nation of Israel needed someone to represent them. Jesus is out there because the nation of Israel needed someone to take their place. Jesus is out there, because, frankly, the nation of Israel blew their chance.

For the nation of Israel, it was often all too convenient for them to serve some other false “god.”

So, Jesus isn’t out there to serve as an example for Jews and Christians. Because that is too hard for us to follow. We are sinners and we all too often get persuaded by lies in hopes of an easier life. This battle is too hard. This conflict is too difficult.

Jesus is there doing battle with God’s great enemy, Satan, the accuser. And nobody can fight that battle except for Jesus.

And this is the battle: will you fall for Satan’s lies to make your life easier? Will you choose the bread that perishes?

You all know what you have chosen. So often, we choose the easier option, just as the nation of Israel did before us. But Jesus never chooses the path of least resistance. Not once. He depends upon *“every Word that comes from the mouth of God”* (Matthew 4:4).

The battle also consists of this: will you wonder whether God’s ways are right? Will you wonder whether God can be trusted? Will you put God to the test? You can’t win this battle. You have lost this battle many times before, but Jesus never doubts. Jesus never doubts the will of God the Father. Not once.

The battle also consists of this: who are you with? Whom do you serve? To whom do you belong? This is the greatest battle of all.

As Christians, we confess that Jesus is Lord. We confess that we worship the one true God. But how many times have you taken that first step, or second or third step toward repudiating the God to whom you belong? This battle is just too hard.

But Jesus never does anything or says anything or thinks anything apart from God the Father. So, there in the desert, He joins the battle against Satan and He wins. Jesus turns failure into faithfulness.

You see, those temptations and those sufferings that Jesus endured throughout His earthly ministry are actually greatly magnified versions of the trials that we endure daily. Yet, Jesus never faltered. All we do is keep falling into sin. So, what does Jesus do about *our* faltering?

Jesus willingly suffers the punishment that we all deserve because of our sin and failures, and on top of that, Jesus gives us all the credit for the blessings of all of His success simply by faith in Him. Jesus was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. With His stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53). Jesus died, so that we may live!

There in the desert, all we can do is watch. We are watching not that we can be like Jesus, but that so we can belong to Him, and to be with Him to this very day.

Jesus' temptation by Satan is not a "do it yourself" playbook on how to resist temptation, but this temptation is to show us the faithfulness of Jesus. And being baptized into Christ, we can say, "I am with Him."

But is there anything we can do? I guess there is something. Knowing that Jesus has overcome all temptation, we can say, no thanks, "I am with Jesus." When the temptation comes to run after something that you shouldn't have, some thing, someone, some feeling, some whatever, you face that temptation and say, "No thanks, I am with Jesus." When temptation comes, and it will come, fix your eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God – *for you!* Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +