

(The Life of Jesus) His Temptations

by Earle Maxwell

Jesus' temptations in the wilderness show us how to resist the devil's temptations and stay within the will of God.

Duration: 35:22

Scripture: Matthew 3:17 - 4:11, Mark 1:12, 1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Corinthians 4:18, Hebrews 2:18, Hebrews 4:15

Topics: "Temptation Of Christ", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal story of facing doubt and temptation in their journey to become a Salvation Army officer. They recount a moment when they felt discouraged and questioned their path, but were met with unexpected kindness from a stranger who reminded them of Jesus. The speaker also reflects on the importance of fixing our eyes on Jesus and not allowing anything or anyone to take His place in our lives. They conclude by emphasizing the need to recognize and resist the temptations that Satan presents to us, just as Jesus did in the wilderness.

Transcript

Is this person, the songwriter said, who is he in deep distress fasting in the wilderness? We're trying in each of our studies to come in with a further facet of truth that emerges about Christ so that we will see that he who overcame the world helps us to be overcomers. And I realise that before this temptation took place in the wilderness, John the Baptist knew who he was, because on the Jordan there, preparing for the baptism of Jesus, with stentorian voice, John cried out, Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. John knew who he was.

And in that marvellous spiritual sacramental moment that Jesus was experiencing, there was also a voice from heaven which said, This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. God knew that he was there in Christ. A beautiful J.B. Phillips expression which speaks of Jesus as being the visible expression of the invisible God.

So that those who gathered around Jordan, they knew, they'd heard John the Baptist say who he was and Jesus himself had had his divinity and acceptance with the Father confirmed. Again, this is my beloved son. And then Mark said in his gospel, immediately, immediately in Mark 1.12, Jesus was led of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

You know, when we're looking at this study, we need to keep in mind how that as a result of this experience, Jesus is able to help us when we are passing through similar experiences of temptation and

testing. And that's why within the spaces of two chapters in Hebrews, in Hebrews 2.18, it speaks of Jesus who is able to succor them that are tempted, because he understands the tensions, the testings that come through temptation. And so not only in Hebrews 2.18, but we also pick it up in Hebrews 4.15. But before we just go into it too far, I would like to just pause a moment and look with you at 1 Corinthians 10.13. And I want us to keep in mind that there is a little difference between temptation and testing.

Keep that in mind. The devil tempts us to bring out the worst in us. But God tests to strengthen us in order that we might continue to have victory in his name.

Now 1 Corinthians 10.13 is a very important verse. You've got it there. And I want to say three things about it so that you may write this down and you might think upon it yourself later.

First of all, temptation is not unique. It is common to man. See it there? There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man.

So temptation is not unique. You're not the only person in the world who's ever been tempted. We all are open to this frustration, this area of combat with the devil.

But also, temptation--now keep this in mind--it's not unfair. Now, why I put that there is because the next part of the verse says, but God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted above that which ye are able. So that when temptation comes to you, it is not so great that you can't beat it with the power of God.

That's why in 1 John 4, again, you get the truth emerging. Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. And God will not allow a temptation to come to you or to me that we cannot with God's help overcome that temptation.

That's why temptation is not unbeatable because it says here, but he will with every temptation make a way to escape. Hallelujah. God knows my name and my need.

And when I'm tempted and when you are tempted, God has that marvellous divine strategy that immediately comes into focus and he will make a way of escape. Hallelujah. Now, with these three temptations, I just want us to take some basic truths so that we know where we're moving from.

First of all, you will see that this temptation was, these three temptations were divinely sanctioned. That's interesting because it says, the spirit driveth him into the wilderness to be tested of the devil. In other words, God was allowing this process to proceed.

It was a real temptation. He was to be tempted of Satan. It was real.

And that's why, as I mentioned before in Hebrews 2.18, where it says here, he hath suffered being tempted. Jesus knew the depth of pain that comes with temptation. He knew what you and I are experiencing when sometimes we wonder whether we can survive the circumstances, the temptations that are coming our way.

But also, we must realise that the devil is a real and mighty enemy. Please keep that in mind. Keep that in mind.

He was unafraid to even attack the Lord himself. He attacked Adam and Eve in the garden and now he attacks the Lord Jesus Christ in the wilderness. We have it here.

He would not come disguised as a serpent, but he came with that direct confrontation with our Lord. And I believe that this challenge came so deeply to Christ that later he spoke of this experience to his disciples. And that's how we now have the record of the temptations in Scripture.

And don't forget that Peter learned a great lesson because when he took up his inspired pen and he wrote his contribution to the closing pages of Scripture, in 1 Peter 5, he said, I want to tell you the devil goes around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. And then if you look into Paul's writing to the church at Ephesus chapter 6, you'll find there that we learn three further things about the devil in verses 11 and 12. We learn that he is a subtle enemy, the wiles of the devil.

He is a strong enemy, and Paul says, the powers of darkness. And he's also a spiritual enemy. And before we now analyse these temptations and look to find out how they relate to your life and to mine, let's just have a look very quickly at John 8.44. John 8.44 please.

And here we pick up in this verse, John 8.44, we pick up two things about the devil, and this is teaching that Jesus gave his disciples. He said, first of all, the devil is a murderer from the beginning, a murderer. And what is a murderer involved in? The destruction of life.

And then further on that verse, he says that he is also a liar and the father of liars. And what is a liar? Someone who's involved in the distortion of the truth. So two things emerge here then, a murderer, destruction of life, and a liar, a distortion of the truth.

And then if we go across, just to close this little analysis, John 13.2, John 13.1 I'm sorry, yeah 2. John chapter 13 verse 2. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him. So the devil is also a betrayer. And a betrayer is involved in the violation of love.

So we see this is this enemy, the enemy of your soul and mine that Peter said goes around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. I want to tell you this morning that you and I must always remember that God has given to us a sevenfold armoury in which to face the devil. And you'll get it in Ephesians 6, but I want you to realise that in the sevenfold armoury that we have in Ephesians 6 there is no weapon to protect the back.

There's no weapon to protect the back. And so when you're reading through Ephesians 6 and you're looking at the shield of faith and the breastplate of righteousness and the sword of the Spirit and you go through this sevenfold armoury, we are facing forward and we go from a point of victory unto victory by the grace of God. Hallelujah.

Well now there are three temptations and I want to leave with you some seed thoughts that no doubt in your own time you will follow through and will help you in your own study. The first temptation, the devil challenged Jesus to prove his sonship, to prove his sonship by turning stones into bread. The second temptation, the devil challenged Jesus to presume on his sonship by doing a needless act and throwing himself off the temple.

And the third temptation was the devil challenged Jesus to betray his sonship, to pre-empt the gains of the cross by accepting the kingdoms of this world from the hands of the devil. Three temptations, to prove his sonship, to presume upon his sonship and to betray his sonship. Well now let's just take a very quick look then at these three temptations and I'd like to look at them in this way.

First of all to get the setting in which the temptation occurs, then to look at the suggestion that the devil puts to Jesus and then to discover how Jesus answers that temptation. You know the first temptation in the wilderness of course and how that after 40 days hungering and fasting in the wilderness, the first thing I wanted when we look at the setting of the first temptation is that Jesus came at a lonely moment. There was no one else around.

Jesus was alone fasting in the desert. And it seems to me that the centuries have not robbed the devil of something of the efficiency and the effectiveness of this method. In fact if you even go back to the Old Testament and you find out on that occasion when Moses decided he'd take matters into his own hand and he would kill the Egyptian.

It's interesting that in the scriptures it says he looked to the left hand and he looked to the right hand to see if anybody was looking and then he killed the Egyptian. It's interesting isn't it? How very often you and I in a lonely situation with no one else at hand, suddenly a suggestion, a temptation can come to us that reaches us with greater effectiveness than any other simply because we're by ourselves. But are we? Jesus said, I'm with you always.

And you and I have got to remember that whilst perhaps we might feel isolated in terms of human support, we must not overlook the fact that God is with us to provide us that victory which overcomes the world, even our faith. And so the temptation shows a lonely moment. Secondly the tempter chose a moment when Jesus was physically weak.

And sometimes temptations have an opportunity of a lingering experience for you and me when we are not physically as well as normal and suddenly we entertain a thought a second or a third time only because our physical resistance or ability is not at its peak level. You know the devil is a past master at synchronising his temptations to suit circumstances or experiences which are yours at this very moment. And thirdly I want to say that the tempter chose a moment which directly followed a high spiritual moment for Jesus.

He was on the eve of setting out on his redeeming ministry. He had heard John the Baptist say, the Lamb of God. He'd heard the voice from heaven saying, this is my beloved son.

And straight after the devil, in comes the devil with his temptation. And how often as a Corps officer perhaps I can recall that maybe on a Sunday night after a great day's meetings and we've enjoyed great blessings from God and then someone has something to say to me at the meeting afterwards and says, can I have a word with you? And bang! You say, oh God why did this happen to happen on Sunday night after such a lovely day? But that's the way the devil works. And that's the way he came to Jesus.

And in his suggestion to Jesus he said first of all he said, if you are the son of God. In other words he said, if you want to prove who you are, you show me who you are by demonstrating with a miracle. You see it seems to me that the years have taught me at least, and you may have learned otherwise, that one of the most powerful words in the vocabulary of the devil is the word, if.

In other words the devil is saying to him, I know what John the Baptist said and you may come to this moment with a confirmation of your divinity in your ministry, but you haven't proved it. I want you to prove who you are by showing a miracle. Now Jesus could have done this.

And isn't it interesting that the devil didn't ask Jesus to rebel against the Father. He simply says, show who you are. Demonstrate the powers that you have by offering this miracle.

But Jesus would not leave the life of self-denial to simply live a life of self-pleasing. He got his instructions from God the Father, not from the devil. And that's what you and I have to keep in mind constantly.

So that in this first temptation when he was given the opportunity not only to prove his sonship, but the devil says, you can exploit your sonship for your own benefit by turning the stones into bread. How did Jesus answer? He knew that his meat was to do the will of the Father who had sent him, John 4.34. But he turned around and he answered him from the word of God. It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

The word of God which is sharper than a two-edged sword. I can remember as a young lieutenant I had a little accident off my motorcycle going home. I just said goodnight to my wife-to-be and obviously that had disturbed my motorcycle riding ability.

And trying to steer a straight course on the way home I went, I got a little bit towards the middle. It was a reasonable hour, I was on the right side of midnight. And I went over what in Australia is called a silent cop, a sort of a dome in the centre of the road to mark that area that you'd stay on the right side of.

And I just happened to go over that silent cop and I broke my arm. And the field secretary of the day said Maxwell it's not good for man to be alone, you'll have a lieutenant, a lad lieutenant. And he said we'll send you a lad lieutenant who's on sick furlough.

And I thought well, I wasn't sure how this recovery pattern was going to work for this lieutenant. Well you've got to live in Australia to really appreciate that. But anyhow I went visiting with him.

I went visiting with him one day and I always carried my New Testament in my pocket. And when we got to this house I suddenly realised that I'd left my New Testament at home. And so I whispered across to him and I said lieutenant do you have your New Testament with you? And he said oh yes, of course I do.

Well I said would you read and I'll pray with these comrades because I've left my New Testament at home. And as he got his New Testament out he looked at me with those few extra years experience that he had on me. And he said Earl, a soldier should never be without his sword.

And I've never forgotten it. And do you know to this day when I go to office every day I carry a New Testament with me in my office bag. If I'm going on tour I make sure I've got the scriptures with me.

Because a soldier should never be without his sword. And that's where Jesus with this first temptation was able to answer and say I'm speaking to you from the Word of God. Now we don't know if there was a time lapse between these temptations.

But just as surely as there was temptation number one, there was temptation number two. And the second temptation you know of course that whereas in the first temptation the devil concentrated on the physical weakness of Jesus, now he changes his strategy and he concentrates on the area of his strength. And that of course was his trust in God.

Now I'm not sure how God, how this was able to happen that within such a short space of time all this could take place but it did occur. And in this second temptation we have it here that the devil took him up

into a pinnacle of the temple and said look if you want to win the world, if you want to do something to get people's attention, no one saw you in the wilderness. But if you do this everybody will see it.

And everybody will say what a marvellous messiah this is who can fall off the heights of the temple and God sends a response in to intervene and save him. Or we'll follow this man. Jesus said I'm not going to presume on my sonship because he knew the heart of man as only God knows it.

And he knew that there's no good in getting people to follow who haven't had their hearts changed from within. And there is a great danger in the church of God that sometimes we look for short term results instead of abiding our time and working in the long term will of God. Do you know I carry with me here a, I don't know what you'd call them, a dodger or a, what do you call these little pamphlets that are given out? A flyer.

And one day I was walking in the streets of Manila and someone handed this and said come to a Jesus miracle crusade and I looked at it and said if you want the power to become the sons of God, if you want to become young, vigorous, healthy and strong, if you want to have the power to heal and to be healed in the name of Jesus, if you want the power over Satan and Satanism, if you want power over typhoons, assassins, kidnappers, hold uppers, carnappers, rapists and sadists, if you want the power to tread on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy and nothing shall by any means hurt you, you've got 50% power with this pamphlet. Then it says, our loving God will answer your prayer and upon attending the crusade you will attain the 100% power of healing and powers over the forces of evil. It is no use getting people to enlist as followers of God who have not had that transforming power of God penetrate within them and change their lives.

And whilst Jesus would have to place throughout his ministry those clamouring appeals that he would demonstrate who he was by signs and wonders, Jesus said no, that's not the way, that's not the way. And so he turned aside again from Satan and once more he answered by the word of God, it is written. And so then we move to our third, our third temptation, this one which was to try and get Jesus to betray his sonship.

And I don't know how he could absorb all these details so quickly as it says here in the scripture. But Dr. Campbell Morgan makes an interesting comment if I can just find it here and I don't think I can, but it doesn't matter. But Dr. Campbell Morgan says, I don't know how this could happen that in the consciousness of a short space of time the devil could show him all the world and all that it meant.

But sufficient to say that Jesus knew the subtlety of what Satan was offering. And Satan was turning around to Jesus and saying, Jesus if you will, I want to give you a preview of what can be yours. And you know when temptations come to us, they often come to us first of all as a preview of what it could mean.

You remember even in the Garden of Eden when they saw that the fruit was good. Or if you go into the book of Joshua, there was Achan who said, I saw the gold, I covered it, I took, I hid. This preview that when Satan gives you and me a preview, it's a preview with a price.

And Satan said, I'll give you all this. And don't forget Jesus said, what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul. He said, I'll give you a preview of this, but this is the price.

Fall down and worship me. And so Jesus turned around and again, although this had been given to him that was promised as a price, Jesus recognised his enemy and in the third temptation he says, Satan, get

thee behind me, Satan, for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve. You know the devil learns by his mistakes.

And whereas in the first temptation Jesus was able to defeat him by quoting from scripture, what happens the next time the devil comes back and says, I'll quote scripture to you. And when the devil starts quoting scripture, you need to watch both the scripture and the devil, because a text taken out of context can so easily become a pretext. And so Jesus said, no, for me, life must be to stay within the will of God.

The beautiful thing is that after these three temptations, did you notice that angels came and ministered to him. So his hunger was satisfied without needing to turn stones into bread. Also the scripture was fulfilled, he shall give his angels charge over thee.

Or he achieved this without any need to leap from the pinnacle of the temple, but simply to remain true to God's word. Who is he who could come through those temptations triumphantly? Who is he who experiencing that experience that he went through, the writers of the Hebrews could say, he understands exactly the experiences that confront you and me and he covenants us to bring us through triumphantly as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2. It's Jesus. It's Jesus.

And that's why you know the little chorus which says, turn your eyes upon Jesus. When we were in New Zealand, we discovered that there's a second verse. And the second verse says, fix your eyes upon him, let nobody else take his place, so that hour by hour you may know his great power, till at last you have won the great race.

Let me conclude just very quickly on how God proved himself to me right from the days of the training college. Things were going well in 1953 as a member of the Herald Session. And all of a sudden, unexpectedly into my mind one day came a thought, there is no God.

I was stunned because not only did the statement come to my mind, but it stayed in my mind. It stayed in one day, two days, one week, two weeks and I thought, what's gone wrong with me? I went to the mercy seat. I went to have counsel from the side officer and still the devil persisted by saying to me, there is no God.

And I said, how on earth can I become a Salvation Army officer when this wretched thought is just taking all my time and diverting my concentration away from the things that really matter. God, can't you deliver me? Went on for about four months this experience. It was the most frustrating spiritual challenge I have ever experienced in my life.

And then it was time to go out and do some door to door correcting, a deputation ministry if you like. And I had to do two weeks knocking on people's doors and saying, would you like to help the work of the Salvation Army? First week things didn't go too bad. I was working with a corps officer who picked a very good area and people were responsive to the Army and it seemed to be a little easier, the tension in my mind.

But the second week I went to a corps that had just experienced dreadful floods and the corps officer said to me, oh I'm terribly sorry but you'll have to do the area that was flooded first and then if we've got any time left of the week you can go into the better area. But the flooded area has got to be done. And I went to house after house and the people would say, look we like the work of the Army but we can't help you, sorry, we've just been through a flood and you helped us but we can't help.

And the devil said to me, you see you're wasting your life, give it away, resign from cadetship, you shouldn't become a Salvation Army officer. And I went to another house and I said, Lord I don't know that I can keep going much longer. And I knocked on the door and a man came to, he listened to my story which I was trying to improve every time I uttered it.

Minimum of words, maximum of impact. And he listened to me and he said, oh go inside, I will get you something. And when he came out he gave me a little envelope and I could feel the envelope that there was something soft inside and I said, now may I write the receipt now for you please.

And he said, oh no, don't open it at the moment. And I thought I've got a little bit of a challenge here because there should always be two present when an offering is counted. And I'm by myself, I'll never be qualified to work in finance in the Salvation Army if I. And when I got around the corner and I looked back and I could see he wasn't, he wasn't looking, I was alone.

And I thought, I'm sure it'll be okay if I just open it and look inside. And I opened it and I found out that there was a little printed card inside, a soft paper card. And when I looked at it, you know what it said? Be gone unbelief, thy Saviour is near and for my relief will surely appear.

By prayer let me wrestle and he will perform with Christ at the vessel. And that was the moment of victory. Surely he will not suffer you or me to be tempted or tested even above that which we are able to bear.

And I thank God that this is my Jesus who having conquered offers to help me to be an overcomer as well. Just a prayer. Father, thank you for Jesus.

Thank you for the victory that he won over Satan. And thank you that the power that enables us also to be overcomers is available to us each in victorious measures this very day. Continue to sustain us as we pray that you will take the glory that we offer you as we move from victory unto victory.

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