

Matthew 4: 1-11 Lent 1 Jesus tempted in the Wilderness 22nd Feb 2026

Prayer: Lord, open our hearts and minds to hear you speak this morning. Amen

Last week we reflected on the glory and divinity of Jesus in his transfiguration. This week we see Jesus the man being tested in the wilderness. We see him as a man who is hungry, but who chooses not to use his power and declare his status. We see him as a man who trusts in his Father and teaches us how to live, how to resist temptations as we seek to follow and grow more like Jesus. We may wonder why Jesus was tempted, and why God allows us to be tempted. Jesus' testing prepared him for the tests to come as he journeyed to the cross, as we are tested, we build spiritual muscle, to endure whatever may come along our path as we journey through our lives.

How do you think you would fare after 40 days without food? Do you think you might be ready for something to eat? Would you be in your right mind, feeling strong and able to withstand temptation? I have fasted for a maximum of about 3 days, or 40 hrs (think World Vision 40hr famine), I can't imagine 40 days. We might be feeling rather weak, but it seems that after 40 days in the wilderness Jesus was steadfast and strong and able to resist the devil and his wily ways. He did not give in to temptation – even though he could easily have turned stones into bread or be carried away by Angels!

The devil may have been the one asking Jesus the questions out there in the desert, but this testing was all part of God's plan. The beginning of the passage says Jesus was *led by the spirit into the wilderness...* This happened after he had been baptized and was full of the Holy Spirit. And once he emerged victorious from this period of testing, he went on to begin his public ministry. He was ready to walk the road of obedience to the cross.

This passage shows us Jesus' humanity – for he did feel hunger, he did feel temptation and yet he did not sin. Remember that passage from Hebrews 4? *He was tempted in every way as we are...and so he is able to sympathize with our weaknesses.* He did not give in to sin, rather he went to the cross, to take on our sin, so that we could be reconciled to God.

Matthew begins his gospel with the genealogy of Jesus starting with Abraham. In the gospel of Luke, however, the genealogy comes between Jesus' baptism and this story of testing, and he traces the line all the way back to Adam, the Son of God...which is what God declares Jesus to be at his baptism.

Jesus is fully God and fully human. He comes as the second Adam to put things right. The first Adam was not obedient to God and listened to the deceptive whispers and lies of the devil in the garden causing a broken relationship between God and humankind. In

contrast, Jesus faces the tempter, stares him down and unwaveringly remains totally obedient and righteous, never losing relationship with his Father God.

As well as the echoes of Genesis in this passage are echoes of the Israelites in the desert where they wandered and were tested for 40 years. Again, where they failed Jesus did not. They too were hungry, and they grumbled and complained against God. They had to learn that God would provide for all their needs, and indeed he did by sending quail and manna. Jesus could easily have turned many a stone into bread, but he trusted in God to supply his needs. And so, when the devil tempts him to serve himself and fill his empty tummy, he responds with scripture from Deuteronomy 8:3 *man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*

Once Jesus began his public ministry, he did in fact use his supernatural powers to feed 5000 people, but he wasn't going to give in to the devil's temptation to feed himself. He was not led out to the desert for a feast; he was there to fast.

Secondly, we read that the devil led him to Jerusalem and tries to goad Jesus in to proving that he is the Son of God by throwing himself off the highest point of the temple. The devil even uses scripture himself quoting psalm 91 that God would command his angels to rescue him. This one seems such a pointless temptation...what would it achieve? But the temptation is there nonetheless...*prove yourself*...this temptation will come again and again to Jesus especially as he later hangs on the cross...

Jesus did not have to prove that he was the Son of God. He had heard his Father's voice at his baptism, he knew who he was. He knew he had divine powers, but they were not to be used for pointless spectacular side shows.

Jesus responds to the devil with scripture from Deuteronomy (6:16) again...*It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'*

Thirdly, the devil offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if only he would bow down and worship him. I often wondered what sort of a temptation this was given that Jesus is in fact the creator and ruler of all. But until he returns Satan continues to be the prince of the world...in fact that is what Jesus calls him in John's gospel...in John 14 he says this; *I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.*

Jesus could have chosen to be a different kind of Messiah, one that many of the Israelites wanted – a conquering King to overthrow the Romans. But that would have only been a temporary fix. God sent Jesus to defeat the greater enemy – the devil and death itself.

Jesus was not going to give in to a temptation of having worldly power, nor was he going to bow down to Satan. He tells Satan to leave him and again, responds with scripture from Deuteronomy 13; *it is written; “worship the Lord your God and serve him only.”* Jesus affirms his loyalty to God alone.

After this the devil left and angels came and attended him. He didn't call for them; they just came ready to provide for all his needs.

Jesus had won this round with the Devil, but the temptations will continue as he heads to the cross, some even coming from his closest disciples. *You can't die* says Peter, and Jesus tells Satan to get behind him.

We don't have a picture of an actual bodily devil here, not like the serpent in the garden of Eden. We don't know exactly what the devil looked like in the desert, possibly he came in the form of whispers of temptation in Jesus' mind. That is the way the devil likes to tempt us...just putting little thoughts in our minds. CS Lewis wrote a wonderful book illustrating this in *The Screwtape Letters*. The devil is cunning and subtle and will want us to interact...but like Jesus, we should tell him firmly to 'go away' and stand firm, speaking the powerful word of God.

But as we see in this passage the devil knows and will quote scripture also, so we need to not only know scripture, but we must read it in light of God's will for his people, not twisting it for our own purposes. We are to follow and seek God's will not our own. His calling may even be a difficult path, whereas the devil will tempt us to take the easy path.

I wonder, what are your temptations? What does the devil whisper in your ear? Is it self-indulgence, is it pride? I know pride often gets in my way, thinking I can do everything in my own strength. Do you give allegiance and put faith in idols instead of God? Wealth, material goods, health, social clubs, religious practices...could even be good things like family. God wants us to worship him alone and put him first.

Do we put God to the test? Do we trust God to keep his promises, do we believe that he is faithful, or do we try and manipulate situations ourselves? Again, I think of the Israelites, making the golden calf to worship as they ran out of patience for Moses to return from the mountain with God. Time and again they did not trust God.

The devil may be the one who tempts, but it is up to us to choose to resist. We will be able to do this as we keep our eyes on Jesus and love him above all else.

I think a major temptation for us is choosing to do things our way, to look after our own interests...after all that is what the world of advertising tells us to do, such as the Loreal skin care ad's telling you to buy their product because...after all 'you're worth it!'. Look after no. 1...you.

The Archbishop of Adelaide and Primate Geoff Smith, writes this on the first day of the Joy26 Lenten studies as he reflects on Genesis 1. *Humans tend to make themselves the centre of the Universe. We think the world revolves around us, and that we are in charge of our own lives and mostly in charge of the world. This is actually a fatal mistake both for us and the world. Ash Wednesday reminds us of the truth. We are not in charge of anything much. We are sinners and mortals. God is creator and we are creatures.*

But God does give us free will to choose how we live, how we respond to temptations, how we respond to God. We do have control over that.

Jesus did not give in to the devils' temptations; he remained totally obedient to God. His testing in the desert was all part of the preparation for what was to come. He kept his eye on the big picture, God's big plan so that we could be reconciled with God. Jesus went to the cross because God said we were 'worth it.' For God so loved us that he gave his one and only son. The Anglican lectionary paired today's reading with Romans 5 which speaks of Jesus' death as a gift of God's grace. The best gift ever.

Jesus defeated the devil in the wilderness, and he continued to defeat him as he was tempted again and again, he held firm. He kept his eyes on God and trusted him to know what was best. Sometimes we think we know better than God.

Jesus struggled in the garden of Gethsemane, please take this cup from me...*not my will but yours* he said. And on the cross...people jeered...*If you are the Son of God then get down from the cross.*

As Jesus was obedient to the Father, he calls us to follow him, and to be obedient to him. We won't be tempted in the same way he was...but we will be tempted to live the way of the world and put ourselves first instead of God. We need to learn to discern the devils' whispers and lies and listen only to the voice of God and rebut the lies with God's truth, his word and with the very name of Jesus.

Jesus is God's beloved son and through him we are now God's beloved children. He offers us true happiness, true fulfilment...which neither the world, the flesh or the devil can offer. When you are tempted, call upon the one who has been tempted, but did not sin...call on the one who knows our weaknesses, the one who can strengthen us with the power of the Holy Spirit to follow where he leads, which may even include a season of

testing in the wilderness! But let us not be like the grumbling Israelites in the desert, who I am appalled at as I read through Numbers again at present, they even flaunted their promiscuity with the Moabite women, worshipping their gods! Rather, let's keep our eyes on Jesus, listening to and following him, not others who may lead us astray.

This lent may we journey with Jesus to the cross- learning more about what it means to deny ourselves-not just chocolate and wine- but to deny our earthly passions and idols- to pick up our cross, soak ourselves in scripture and follow Jesus. He offers us the best gift of grace and he, who has been tempted like us, who has suffered greater than us, will journey with us and will send his angels to attend to all our needs.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, thank you for defeating the devil through your death and resurrection. May we keep our eyes fixed on you, strengthen us to resist the temptations of this world. As we read your word and pray, may we be filled with the Holy Spirit, following you day by day. Amen