

# The King is Tested

## Matthew 4:1-11

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Last week, we introduced our new series on the kingdom of God from the gospel of Matthew. Let's review a few highlights from our introduction to make sure we all have the same foundation.

The Gospel of Matthew is the first of four portraits of Jesus in the New Testament; Mark, Luke, and John being the other three. Matthew's portrait highlights the Jewishness of Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament Messianic prophecies of a coming royal heir to David's throne. A royal son of David. Matthew emphasizes Jesus as King of a kingdom, but what sort of kingdom? Not like anyone else was thinking. They wanted political power and revolution. Jesus came as the suffering servant but no less a King. A King who dies for his people. A King of a spiritual kingdom. "A king who dies on the cross must be the king of a rather strange kingdom." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *God is on the Cross: Reflections on Lent and Easter*, p. 69)

Matthew calls it the kingdom of heaven; most other New Testament writers call it the kingdom of God. What is it? The reign of God through Christ. Jesus inaugurated this kingdom by incarnation, atonement, and resurrection.

***The realm of God's rule is the human heart in submission to Jesus as King expressed by faith in him as Savior.***

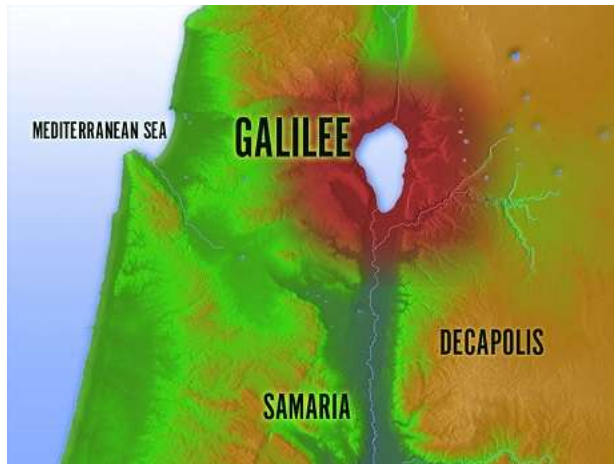
His realm is presently the human heart in submission to his kingship. Someday the kingdom of God will be extended into every inch of the universe and all will bow their knees and confess Jesus as Lord and King. Billions will gladly do so as happy citizens of God's kingdom. Billions more will do so belligerently as defeated enemies of God. But all will acknowledge Jesus as King and his rule and reign will encompass everything and everyone.

But for now, it is largely an invisible kingdom. The King is in heaven. The church is part of the kingdom but the kingdom is much more than the church. It is everywhere God's reign extends. This is not suggesting a dualism with God's kingdom trying desperately to establish power over Satan's kingdom. God is God and his power and authority are absolute. But God's will is to allow Satan and the demons and a fallen humanity to exercise a provisional authority in this world. The effect of the kingdom of Satan is the pain, suffering, and moral horror all around us. The effects of the kingdom of God are love, reconciliation, and restoration.

We are going to save Matthew's birth narrative for Christmas and pick up Matthew's portrayal of what's commonly known as the temptation of Christ in Matthew 4.

Before we get into chapter 4, it's important to see that it comes on the heels of a major moment in chapter 3, the baptism of Jesus. Jesus' baptism marks the beginning of his public ministry. The text says that the Spirit of God descended from heaven and God the Father shouted, "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*" (Matthew 3:17 ESV) The Father thunders delight in the Son. The Spirit affirms Jesus with his presence and anointing. Triune divine delight and affirmation of Jesus as Son of God.

We pick it up in 4:1, "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." (Matthew 4:1-2) The same Spirit that came upon him at his baptism now leads him into the Judean wilderness.



This area is very barren. NIV translates it as a desert. Food and water options are very limited. Jesus fasted for forty days. That alone is a herculean effort and takes him to the very edge of survival. The summary in verse 2 is, "He was hungry." I would say so.

Why would the Spirit lead him into the wilderness and why would Jesus fast? "To be tempted by the devil" (Verse 1) The word translated "tempted" at its root means *tested or examined*. It can be either positive or negative. It's similar to a trial. James tells us that trials develop good spiritual qualities in us so therefore, count it all joy when you are in them (James 1:2-3). That's easy to say, hard to do when you are in the wilderness.

We might think we are in the wilderness because we took a wrong turn. Yet it was the Spirit that led Jesus here. It's easy to question the love of God or the goodness of God when we are in a wilderness trial. Jesus was led into the wilderness for a testing, a trial, and yes, even an experience of temptation. All purposed by God. Might your current trial also be purposed by God? A testing? An opportunity to develop spiritual qualities and maturities that can't be uncovered except in the wilderness?

The wilderness wasn't the trial. The fasting wasn't the trial. For Jesus, it was who met him at his point of weakness that was the real test.

### **Who is the Devil/Satan?**

"...By the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." (Verse 1)

Satan is a created being; an angel to whom God gave authority and beauty above all other angels. Satan rebelled against God and led many other angels in this rebellion. The Bible calls them demons.

Satan is important in the story of God's kingdom because Satan's prideful heart was the first realm where God did not reign. It spread from Satan's heart to other demons, and through Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve, to all humanity and even throughout the cosmos itself. God has allowed Satan to temporarily rule over creation.

- *The prince of this world* (John 14:30 NIV)
- *The god of this world* (2 Corinthians 4:4 ESV)
- *Ruler of this world* (John 12:31)
- The dominion (kingdom) of Satan (Acts 26:18)
- *Domain of darkness* (Colossians 1:13)
- *Powers of this dark world* (Ephesians 6:12 NIV)

The world Jesus was born into was not a neutral kingdom or a non-kingdom. It was a hostile kingdom and after 40 days of weakness and hunger, the King of God's kingdom is at his weakest when he is confronted by Satan at his very best. It was King vs. king. Kingdom vs. kingdom. The stakes of this clash are infinitely high as Satan tries to do to Jesus what he successfully did to demons and Adam. What follows is a series of three direct attempts by Satan to destroy the kingdom of God by destroying the qualifications of the King of the kingdom.

### **Test #1 – Immediate Satisfaction Without Hunger**

*"And the tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.'" (Matthew 4:3 ESV)*

On the surface, this sounds like no big deal to us. We get hungry; we use money or provisions to buy food to satisfy our hunger. That's everyday stuff. As the dad of a one-year old, food to her is not just a need but a right. When she is hungry and not fed, she lets us know. I get the idea she feels entitled to being fed.

I'm a member at Costco. Going to Costco for me is only slightly different from a Sunday at Bethel Church because at any given moment, half our members are at Costco. One great thing about Costco is that they have tons of samples. I call it the Costco buffet. How many of you have had lunch at the Costco or Sam's Club buffet?

Have you ever gone to Costco hungry and ready to hit the sample buffet only to find that they don't have any samples out that day? What do you think? I can get a little indignant. *I'm a member here and I'm entitled to some free samples.* The need for food so easily becomes an entitlement to food. *I'm a member.* Can food and bodily appetites indicate what and who we worship?

*If you are the Son of God, turn these stones to bread and satisfy your hunger.* What was Satan doing with food? He was turning the need into an entitlement. Where's the sinful temptation here? Could Jesus turn stones to bread? Of course. But if he had, he would have acted independently of the will of the Father. He would have derived his sustenance from his own power and will instead of in dependence on the Father's will and provision.

We see this in Jesus' response. But he answered, *"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4)* Jesus responds to each temptation with Scripture. The repetition is, *"It is written."* This is a great guide for us with using Scripture to deal with temptation. What I want you to see is the reason Jesus picks this verse from Deuteronomy 8:3. It rebuffs Satan's strategy. The kingdom of God is one of absolute dependence and trust in God's ability to meet our needs. The kingdom of God derives its help and hope from God, not from me taking matters into my own hands. The kingdom of God is not one of title and entitlement, but of humble trust and dependence on God.

Jesus passed the test.

## **Test #2 – Immediate Glory Without Suffering**

*"Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple 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.'"* (Matthew 4:5-6)

The temple described here is known as Herod's temple in Jerusalem. It was a very large complex. It was very tall by the standards of the day. What better way to quickly unveil your true identity than to jump from where everyone could see you and as you hurtle to the ground suddenly be caught by angels and gently set down in the temple courtyard for all to see? Talk about a stunt! Do that without a parachute. Without wires. No tricks. Just gravity, speed, and angelic deliverance. What would the Pharisees say then? He would be crowned King of Israel on the spot. What better way to fast track the kingdom of God than a public miracle and immediate coronation? Satan accurately quotes the verse in Psalms. There's no problem with translation. Where's the problem? Application.

*"Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"* (Matthew 4:7) A stunt to force God's hand in delivering him would be arrogance. This is what Moses did when he decided to show himself a deliverer of Israel by killing the Egyptian. In a sense it is what Peter did when he tried to convince Jesus away from a path of crucifixion. Jesus said, *"Get behind me, Satan!"* (Matthew 16:23). Satan's goal isn't really a wrong goal but a right goal by a wrong path. A shortcut will do just fine. Jesus doesn't give in to the quick gratification and refuses to put his heavenly Father to the test.

Jesus passed the test.

## **Test #3 – Immediate Kingdom Without the Cross**

*"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.' 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.'"* (Matthew 4:8-10)

The high mountain gave a certain vantage point. There's no mountain high enough to see all the kingdoms so this is a supernatural vision of all the power and wealth and glory of the kingdoms of the world. What did Satan dangle in front of Jesus? The authority to rule the world. Satan is the ruler of this world and Jesus doesn't deny his ability to grant that reign to Jesus. Satan shows Jesus his most prized possession—authority over the cosmos—the worship of the kingdoms of the world. He dangled the Roman empire. The Egyptian empire. The Greek empire. The empire of Japan. The Turkish empire. The British empire. The Chinese emperors and empire. He dangled Russia. The Aztecs. The European empires of the French and Spaniards, Napoleon, USSR, and the United States of America. The combined glory and splendor of all the kingdoms of man he offers. IF he will simply bow and worship Satan.

*Satan is always trying to trade up.* Ever play that party game where you give everyone a paper clip or a dollar and groups go out to see what they can trade up to? Give up this and I'll give you this. It's amazing what people come back with having started with something insignificant. Satan always trades up. He traded Adam forbidden fruit for paradise. He gives the lesser to take the greater. Sin is always a really bad deal. He offers Jesus the glory of

the kingdoms of man in exchange for a moment of worship. A moment of not being the Most High God.

Jesus, still weakened from his 40-day fast, weakened in his humanity by overcoming a temptation of immediate satisfaction and a temptation of immediate glory, sees through Satan's charade and identifies what is really at stake. *"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.'"* (Matthew 4:10) This is a third Scripture rebuttal—again, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy (6:13).

There is only one that we are to worship and it's not Satan. It is God; even when that worship means a path of suffering; even when the shortcut seems so convenient. There is only one worthy of our worship and he alone shall we serve. And with that he commands Satan to depart. *"Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him."* (Matthew 4:11)

Jesus passed the test.

### **What Does This Mean?**

This is an incredibly helpful passage on dealing with temptation and understanding our enemy. But we are in a series on the kingdom of God and I want us to see this through that lens. In what way?

### **The Kingdom of God is more desirable than all the kingdoms of man**

We will see this more in the parables where Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a pearl of great price and a field with a buried treasure.

Satan offers Jesus the kingdoms of man in exchange for the kingdom of God. He offers him glory without a cross. Authority without suffering. He offers the whole world as a trade for a kingdom established with a cross of suffering. A kingdom requiring him to give his life for it. A kingdom requiring him to obey to the point of death on the cross. We easily make that trade every time we choose to live by the values of this world over the priorities of God. Every sin makes that trade.

But in Jesus' estimation, even with it requiring his death, the kingdom of God is worth it. The delayed gratification was worth it. So when he says, *"Seek first the kingdom of God,"* (Matthew 6:33) he isn't saying idle words. He models it by denying himself all the glory of all the kingdoms of the world for the one eternal kingdom of God.

Which kingdom do you value? Which one are you seeking? Would you trade the kingdom of God for anything else? In the words of the hymn, *"I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords today."*

### **Jesus' weakness is greater than Satan's strength**

Aren't you glad Jesus at his weakest is stronger than Satan at his best? We begin by admiring our King on the verge of weakness, even consciousness. Forty days of no food. Can you imagine?

Satan on the other hand, had never been better. He had prepared for this moment since God hinted at it in the curse in Genesis 3. For all those centuries he perceived God's plan of salvation. If the Magi knew something from the stars and Scripture, imagine what Satan

understood ever since the angels said, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!*" (Luke 2:14) Even at his best, doing what he does best, he could not persuade Jesus to leave the will of the Father; to take a shortcut to glory; to even use one stone or pebble in a way out of God's will.

The rest of us would be putty in Satan's hands and we are on a daily basis. But not Jesus. He is the King and our King at his weakest is stronger than Satan at his best. He won where others failed. Israel went into the desert and failed. Moses went into the desert and failed. Jesus went into the wilderness and took Satan's best shot and won. He is a King worthy of our allegiance. He rules a kingdom more valuable and more wonderful and more eternal than any kingdom in this world.

To which kingdom do you belong to? Which King has your allegiance? Which kingdom are you seeking?

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