

Temptation of Christ

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 January 2020

Preacher: Thomas Davis

[0 : 0 0] As we turn to God's word, let's pray. Father, as we've just sung, we pray that you would speak as your word is open before us. Help us to hear your voice.

Please lead us in your ways. Amen. This morning I'd like us to turn back to the chapter that we read in the Gospel of Matthew.

In these early months of 2020, we are working our way through this Gospel to see the great story of Jesus' life and how he changed his followers and how he changed the world.

Last week we looked at a really significant moment where Jesus was baptized and in many ways it was a hugely triumphant moment in his experience because there was this powerful voice from heaven saying, this is my beloved son with whom I was well pleased.

And you think it's kind of like almost like everything's just ready to go and Jesus is ready to burst onto the scene for everyone to listen to what he is going to say.

[1 : 0 6] But that's not what happened. Instead, Jesus was led away from everyone. He went out into the wilderness on his own.

Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. This is an immensely important passage.

One of the reasons it's important is because it is one of these sections of the Bible that deals with something that is incredibly practical for us all.

It's touching on something that we all experience every day. Temptation. That's something that we all battle with.

Temptation to be lazy. Many of you will maybe have gone back to your university courses in the past week or two and maybe some of you went back thinking, I am going to go and I'm going to work incredibly hard and I'm so delighted to be opening these books again and it's wonderful to have thousands of pages to read and these lectures are just like being on holiday.

[2 : 1 2] Maybe. Or most of you were probably like, oh man, this is a bit grim. And there's a strong temptation to be lazy. Same to be angry.

Those of you who maybe work in shops or with the public, I don't know if I'd like to say this, but there can be nothing more infuriating than people and sometimes people can be difficult and awkward and you can have that temptation to be angry, this temptation to be selfish, and to be greedy, to want more for ourselves than other people's expense.

There's the temptation to hide our faults, to be dishonest. There's the temptation to lift ourselves up so that we get the glory and the credit and come across us better than other people. There's the temptation to lust over others.

There's the temptation to speak about people behind their backs. We constantly face a battle against temptation. And when we talk about that, one thing we must never forget, which probably sounds almost silly, but it's incredibly true, temptation is tempting.

Now what I mean by that is the fact that it's appealing and attractive. It's something that we are drawn to. If something is not appealing, it's not temptation.

[3 : 26] It's the attractiveness of it that makes it hard. And so this passage is giving us some immensely important practical teaching about temptation.

And I want to just highlight two or three things very, very briefly. The passage that Callum read gives us an insight into the kind of tactics that the devil used against Jesus and what I want us to recognize is that he uses the same tactics against us.

We see first of all, if you look through this passage, that the devil tempts us when we are weak. So Jesus had gone into the wilderness. He hadn't eaten for 40 days. He was hungry.

And the first thing the devil does is try to exploit that weakness and says to him, see these stones? You could turn them to bread. You could eat. Now, I'm trying to lose a couple of pounds after Christmas and all that carry on.

And if I'm at the office, it's fine. There's no food nearby. And you feel okay. And you can ignore food and you can work away. But see when I get home and you get the amazing smell of food and you've got cupboards full of chocolates and this drawer that's got like just bursting with all the selection packs that have been emptied into it.

[4 : 40] It is so tempting. And imagine what it must have been like for Jesus. It's like you're starving. Turn these stones into bread and eat, eat, eat.

The devil's trying to exploit his weakness. The devil does exactly the same with us. The areas in life where we're weak, where we're vulnerable, these are the areas that the devil will often attack.

But the second thing we see is that the opposite is also true. Sometimes the devil will attack us where we're strong. And you see that in the second temptation that the devil that's recorded for us here.

The devil comes and says to Jesus, if you are the Son of God. Now Jesus' greatest strength is the fact that he's the Son of God. That's what makes him unique.

That's what makes him special. That's what makes him the King, the Lord, the ruler. That's why he is so strong. And the devil is saying if you are the Son of God, then come and turn these stones into bread.

[5 : 47] If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from the temple. And so the devil won't just try and exploit our weaknesses. The devil will also try and exploit our strengths.

That is often why successful people fail. So sometimes it's the smartest people who end up talking nonsense. Sometimes it's the best theologians who can lead people astray.

Sometimes it's the most charismatic leaders who seem so strong who end up with their lives in a mess. And I think that these two things are there for us to see very clearly that in our places of weakness and in our places of strength we will face temptation.

We also see that the devil tries to tempt us with half truths, sometimes even with three-quarter truths. You see that in verse 8.

The devil took Jesus and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and said, I'll give them to you if you just bow down and worship me. Now that's not a lie.

[6 : 54] That's a kind of half truth or a three-quarter truth or even a kind of 95% truth because Jesus has come to be king. That's exactly why he's here. And so the devil isn't trying to completely put Jesus in an alternative direction.

He's recognized, yeah, you are the king. I'll make you king if you just bow down and worship me. And these half truths, these three-quarter truths, these nine out of ten truths mean that it is very easy for the wrong thing to feel right.

And that's something we have to be immensely careful of in temptation. The devil won't ruin your relationship with God with ugly, revolting, harsh propaganda.

He will ruin your relationship with God with things that look and feel incredibly appealing. And that's why we have to be really careful.

How do we just defend ourselves in the face of this? Well, Jesus gives us a brilliant example. What does Jesus say after every temptation? You can see it there in the passage.

[8 : 08] Every time he responds, Jesus says the same thing. It is written. It's a brilliant reminder that the Bible is our great weapon to protect ourselves in the face of temptation.

Later on in the New Testament, Paul describes this magnificently, talking about the kind of pressure and attacks and temptations we face in all circumstances. Take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.

Take the helmet of salvation, the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God. It's a brilliant image of the Bible as a sword to defend ourselves and protect ourselves in the face of temptation.

If we are under attack, this is our defense. This is our weapon. We must listen to what God is saying in His word.

So if we look at this passage, we can see some very helpful, important and relevant practical lessons for us all. And I want you to remember these and to hold them with you.

[9 : 19] But that's not really what I want us to think about today. And I don't want to focus just on the practical lessons that we learn from the temptation because there's a much bigger and I think we can honestly say more important thing that we have to consider.

And that's to ask ourselves the question, why did this have to happen? Because it's kind of strange that as we said, Jesus is announced at His baptism as the Son of God.

It all seems to be that everything is set for Him to go and have a really influential ministry. But all of a sudden He disappears. And we have this very kind of isolated incident where He's tempted.

And we have to ask ourselves the question, why is this happening? It would be easy to think that it's just there to give us lessons on how to cope with temptation and it's valuable from that point of view.

But there is something much more important going on. The temptation of Jesus is pointing us to something much bigger.

[10 : 31] In fact, it's pointing us to something that lies at the very heart of Christianity. It's pointing us to something that we must make sure we understand.

And that's what I want us to look at today as we ask the question, why did this have to happen? And the first thing that we need to do to answer that question is take a big step back.

Because to answer that, we can't just look at Matthew chapter 4. We actually have to look at the whole Bible, which is part of the reason why I got Callum to read from the very beginning and from the passage that we're reading.

This section is not just about Jesus' personal experience. It's about God's great plan to save and restore humanity. And that's indicated for us in two ways.

First of all, you can see that in verse 1 of chapter 4, it says, Jesus was led up by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And that's a really important phrase.

[11 : 30] He was led up because it tells us this is God's plan and God wants this to happen.

It's not a kind of surprise to God that Jesus is being tempted by the devil. It's actually a key part of everything that he has intended. So clearly this isn't God's plan.

This is something that God wants to take place. The second thing that we have to recognize is that if we read through the rest of the New Testament, we'll see that a very important contrast is made between Jesus and someone else.

And the someone else is Adam, the first human to have ever lived. We see that in various places. There's an example of it here in 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

It says, thus it's written, the first Adam became a living being. That's just a simple biological fact. A first human must have existed at some point.

[12 : 38] The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it's not the spiritual that is first, but the natural, then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust. The second man is from heaven. Now in that passage and in other passages like this, it's making a comparison between Adam, who we read about in Genesis 1, 2 and 3, and Jesus.

The first Adam, the last Adam, or the first Adam and the second Adam. And this comparison is at the very heart of Christianity.

But what does it mean? Why is there this contrast between Adam number one and Adam number two, Jesus? Well, the Bible and all of history is ultimately the story of two humanities.

We often like to divide humanity into two. We'll divide humanity into the rich and the poor, the east, the west, the left, the right, the black, the white.

Whatever it may be, we often divide humanity into two. We're right to divide humanity into two, but we make the wrong divisions because the two division of humanity that the Bible teaches to us is that there's one humanity who is under the first Adam.

[13 : 52] And there's one humanity under the second Adam, Jesus. One of them is broken and heading to death.

The other is being fixed and is heading towards life. One is desperate to survive. The other is desperate to serve.

One is desperate to find meaning in life. One, the other is desperate to share the meaning of life. And the Bible sets us before these two great humanities, the one that's under Adam and the one that's under Jesus.

Adam was the first human, the first man, the head of humanity. In a sense, he was the Son of God, but he fell, he sinned, and he failed, which is what Colin read to us in Genesis chapter three.

Therefore, we have another man, the true eternal Son of God, who comes as the second Adam. He has come to put right everything that has gone wrong.

[15 : 02] And this great first Adam, second Adam comparison in the Bible is a key theme that runs throughout the whole of Scripture. They are similar in many ways.

And one of the clearest similarities we have is that both Adam and Jesus were tempted by the devil. The first Adam was tempted by the serpent and failed.

The second Adam would face a similar challenge. And this, this is the reason why Jesus was tempted.

And I want to look at this in a little bit more detail, asking two very simple questions. What are the similarities between the temptations of Adam and Jesus?

And what are the differences? So first of all, the similarities, there's several. If we compare the Garden of Eden with what happened at Jesus's temptation, there's some remarkable correspondence.

[15 : 59] I'm going to blast very quickly through eight. Number one, both Adam and Jesus are confronted by the devil. It's a time of testing. Sometimes we could use the word probation, the idea that they're being tested.

Both Adam and Jesus have been appointed by God for specific roles. So you think of God, he has appointed two people, first Adam, second Adam, and the devil is like, I'm going to test both of them.

The devil wants to prevent them fulfilling their God-given destinies. Number two, both temptations revolve around the devil speaking. So in Genesis 3, this serpent spoke to Eve and threw Eve to Adam.

And as we read in Matthew 4, the devil speaks to Jesus in the wilderness. Both temptations involve food. Adam and Eve were tempted by the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Jesus was tempted to turn stone into bread. Number four, both temptations bring the promise of status. So Adam and Eve were told, if they eat the fruit, it will make them equal with God.

[17 : 09] God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened. You'll be like God, a promise of amazing status. Jesus likewise was promised authority over the whole world.

Jesus showed them all the kingdoms and said, all of this I'll give to you. There's this promise of status. Number five, the devil tried to question the truth of what God had said.

So to Adam and Eve, he said, you'll not surely die. God had said, you will. The devil said, no, no, no, you won't. You won't surely die. What God said is not quite right.

And when the devil speaks to Jesus, he challenges him to prove that he's the Son of God. He says, if you are the Son of God. Now God has just said that he is the Son of God. And it's baptism, but the devil's trying to sow seeds of doubt, trying to get both Adams to question the truth of what God has said.

Number six, both temptations are based on half truths and are trying to disrupt and ruin the plans that God has. So God has made Adam and Eve in his image.

[18 : 16] Every human is made in the image of God. They were already like God, but the devil deceives Adam and Eve by saying, you'll only actually be like God if you eat the fruit that's on this tree.

And so he's trying to just give them a half truth of what God has already said. For Jesus, it's the same. He's come as King. He's come as the suffering servant in order to establish the kingdom of God and bring salvation.

But Jesus tries to, the devil tries to convince Jesus that he can have the kingdom now without the suffering. Just bow down to me and I'll make you king of everything.

You don't need to go to the cross. You don't need to have all the suffering that God has planned for you. Number seven, in both temptations, the devil tries to get Adam and Eve and Jesus to question God's care and purposes.

And so the devil is coming with his own crafty words to cast doubt on everything that God has said. Now isn't that what the devil always does? He tries to get us to doubt God.

[19 : 32] So he tries to get us to doubt God's existence. We've got a massive society today which just doubts God's existence. People think that that's a big question and the devil casts loads of doubt there.

The devil wants to cast doubt on God's promises, all the things that God's promised the devil say, no, that won't really happen. The devil wants to get us to cast doubt on God's wisdom.

So when God has established certain things as right and wrong, the devil says, no, no, no, don't listen to that. And perhaps most of all, the devil wants us to doubt God's love, to doubt the fact that he cares for us and that he's committed to us.

The devil constantly tries to get us to doubt these things. Why does the devil want us to doubt things like God's existence, God's promises, God's wisdom and God's love? Why does he want us to doubt all that?

Because they're all true. The devil doesn't care if you doubt something that's false. But he wants you to doubt things that are true.

[20 : 42] And in it all, number eight, well, I should recap because I went through them too quickly. Number one, they're both confronted by the devil. Number two, they involve the devil speaking. Number three, they involve food. Number four, there's a promise of status.

Number five, there's a question of the truth of what God has said. Number six, the temptations are based on half truths. Number seven, the devil wants them to question God's care. And number eight, and summing it all up, in both temptations, the devil has one great aim, disobedience.

That's what sin is, disobeying what God wants. The devil wanted Adam to disobey God, and he succeeded with his first attempt. Now the devil wants Jesus to do exactly the same thing.

The similarities are remarkable. Jesus is experiencing the same test that the first Adam was confronted with.

But what about the differences? And it's important that we notice there's some very significant differences between the temptations of the first Adam and the second Adam.

[21 : 55] What are these? Well, I'm going to say four. First of all, there's a difference in location. So Adam was tested in paradise in all the beauty and perfection of the Garden of Eden.

God had made the world for Adam to enjoy, and he was there in this beautiful environment. Imagine, it's probably hard to do at the moment, but imagine Scotland on a beautiful warm summer's day with everything in bloom, with provision, with the noise of birds singing, with water flowing.

Adam was tested in paradise. Jesus, in contrast, is tested in the wilderness. And the contrast couldn't be greater.

Adam's tested in beautiful conditions in all the comfort of Eden. Jesus is tested in a harsh, hostile environment. In fact, Jesus is right in the middle of all the chaos and curse that resulted from Adam's failure.

There's a massive difference in terms of their location. Secondly, there's a difference in terms of resources. So in Eden, Adam lacked nothing. God had said, you can eat of every tree of the Garden, apart from one.

[23 : 07] And so apart from that tree in the middle, Adam could have had as much as he needed. Abundant provision, never hungry, never lacking, never short of anything. Jesus, on the other hand, was starving.

He hadn't eaten for 40 days, and he was hungry when temptation came. In Eden, Adam had company.

God had given him a wife. They were there in harmony with one another, with nature and with God. Jesus was alone.

Adam was tested with a full stomach, a content heart, and a perfect home. He had no reason to lack satisfaction. Jesus was tested in weakness, hostility, and vulnerability.

Number three, there's a difference in the level of temptation. And it's important to notice that with Adam, the devil only had to tempt him once. And he didn't meet much resistance, even with that.

[24 : 12] But with Jesus, the devil has to bring things to a whole new level. He didn't try once, but three times, again and again and again, trying to catch Jesus. And the key point we have to recognize is that Jesus' temptations were far more severe than Adam's.

And there's a very important theological point to note here, because sometimes we can think to ourselves, well, if Jesus is the Son of God, and if Jesus is sinless, and if Jesus is all powerful, then it can't have been very hard for him to have been tempted.

And how can he know what it's like for us when we face temptation? But that's to get the truth completely the wrong way round, because the truth is, we are weak, and we succumb to temptation so easily.

And for that reason, we will never know just how severe Jesus' temptation was. We give into temptation long before the devil has had to reach his maximum attack.

But with Jesus, the devil threw everything at him. And that's why when Jesus begins his ministry after this, he's confronted again and again by evil spirits.

[25 : 28] It's as though all the powers of hell are let loose on Jesus. There's a great quote from Donald MacLeod who says, Against us a little temptation suffices. Against Jesus, Satan found himself forced to push himself to his limits.

Jesus knows what it's like to temptation. In fact, he knows it far better than we ever will. And that's of course why he's the perfect person to go to whenever we are tempted.

Never ever feel that you are beyond Jesus' understanding. Never be discouraged to talk to him if you are struggling. Even if you have the most embarrassing temptation in your life that you do not want anyone to know about, you can go to Jesus and talk to him about it.

He knows temptation far greater than any of us ever will. So there's a difference in location, a difference in resources, a difference in the level of temptation. But most importantly of all, there is a difference in the response to temptation.

The first Adam saw the fruit, listened to Satan, disobeyed God and fell. The second Adam was tested by everything that hell could muster against him and he resisted it and was obedient to God.

[26 : 54] And the key point is that Jesus, the second Adam, has come to put right everything that went wrong through the first Adam. The temptations are a clear statement that Jesus has come as Adam in reverse.

So where the first Adam failed, Jesus succeeded. Where Adam gave in, Jesus resists. Where Adam disobeyed, Jesus obeyed. And the contrast is so important and so clear and it's beautifully summarized for us by Paul, better than I ever could.

He says, have this mind amongst yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, being found in human form.

He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Do you see what Paul is saying there? He's telling us that Jesus has come to be one of us. He's taken human form. He's part of Adam's race.

And he did not think that equality with God was a thing to be grasped. Now that's really important language there because go back to the Garden of Eden. The devil says to Adam, if you grasp that fruit, you'll be equal with God.

[28 : 12] And I think the language here is very, very deliberate. That equality with God is not a thing to be grasped like you would just grab a fruit from a tree.

On the basis of a promise to be equal with God. Jesus is doing the very opposite of what Adam did. Adam reached out, grasped the fruit, and in doing so he tried to grab equality with God.

But Jesus is not like that. Instead, Jesus is obedient, obedient in the face of temptation, obedient to all that God required, obedient to all that God the Father wanted.

And as this passage tells us that obedience didn't just take him to the wilderness, it took him all the way to the point of death, even death on a cross.

And it's here that we see that the contrast between Adam and Jesus doesn't just come down to these two temptations. We can narrow it down even further than that because ultimately the destiny of the first Adam and of the second Adam came down to two trees.

[29 : 22] Now if you were to ask the question, what's the Bible all about? And I said to you, it's about two trees. Maybe you say that's a bit strange, but it's true.

Because the first Adam stood before the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He saw that the fruit was good to eat, it was desirable, and it was very, very tempting.

And he also knew that God did not want him to do it. But he chose to put himself first, he went to the tree, he tasted its fruit, and death came to us all.

The second Adam also stood before a tree, but it wasn't the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, it was the tree to which he was about to be nailed.

It was the cross. And it couldn't have been more different to the tree that the first Adam went to. This tree has the bitterest fruit imaginable, this tree is hideous to the eyes, this tree meant agony and death, this is a cursed tree, and everything in the human mind and the human heart would want to run away from that tree.

[30 : 37] And in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus himself saw that and begged that he wouldn't have to do it. But yet the great difference for the second Adam was that in taking the fruit of that hideous tree, he was doing exactly what the Father wanted him to.

Adam faced the appealing, tempting fruit of his tree, and he took it in disobedience to God.

Jesus faced the hideous, horrible, terrifying fruit of the cross, but he obeyed, and he tasted death itself.

And in doing so, Jesus reversed the disobedience of the first Adam, Jesus released the world from the curse of sin, Jesus destroyed the works of the devil and left him powerless, Jesus abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

The temptation of Jesus is telling us that he is on a great mission to restore the damage done by the first Adam and to destroy the devil and his kingdom. Romans chapter 5 summarizes that brilliantly, for if because of one man's test pass death, reign through that one man, that's talking about the first Adam, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

[32 : 11] Therefore, as one test pass, that was when Adam pulled the fruit from the tree and ate it, when one test pass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness, Jesus going to the cross, leads to justification in life for all men, for as by one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience, the many will be made righteous.

That's why Jesus had to face this temptation to undo what Adam had done wrong. And here is where I really hope you can see that the work of Jesus isn't just to give us good advice in the face of temptation or to give us a good example in any other part of our lives.

The work of Jesus is an amazing work to save the universe and restore humanity. I hope you can see that the whole Bible fits together perfectly, so you can go back to the very beginning and then come into Matthew and see that everything fits together so perfectly.

And I hope that you can see that in God's plan of salvation, everything has been implemented perfectly. So every detail of what Adam mocked up at the beginning, Jesus fixes.

Which is why we don't need anything more than Jesus. He is everything that we need for salvation. It's incredible to see how the Bible fits together so perfectly that God is piecing all of these stages together across history, across people, across generations in order to work out his plan of salvation.

- [33 : 47] I hope you can see how it all fits together. I hope you can see that Jesus is coming to reverse the failings of the first Adam, but there's something else I want you to see as well. I want you to see that ultimately all of this was for you.

Jesus has come to undo the failures of the first Adam so that he could save all the children of Adam. In other words, so that he could save all of us.

That's why he became one of us in order to rescue us. Since the children, us, since we share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

That's what Adam's first sin has done for us. It's left us slaves and it's left us in fear of death. That's why humanity pours so much energy into trying to survive because we're scared of death and we want to avoid it.

- [35 : 16] That is what Jesus has come to save you from, to save you from that fear of death. That's why when I think of Eric, a 40-year-old man who has died suddenly and left two beautiful daughters and a wife, one thing that was true of Eric was that he would not have feared death.

And one thing that his widow, Mary Catherine, knows is that she'll see him again.

And that's the difference Jesus makes. He delivers us from the power of death, from the fear of death and from the slavery of death.

That's the whole reason Jesus has come to save us, to give us life.

That's why he was tempted because he wants to save you. And all of that leaves us with a question.

- [36 : 37] We've done this comparison between the first Adam and the last Adam, between Adam and Jesus, between one humanity that's dying, one humanity that's being saved.

Just have to ask yourself, which humanity do you want to be part of? We want to align ourselves with different things and we want to make it clear that we identify with certain groups, certain humanities, whether it's sport or football or politics or whatever.

One thing that's absolutely sure that on the day of judgment when Jesus is returned, you're not going to be asked who did you vote for. You're not going to be asked who did you support.

You're not going to be asked which political system did you align with. You're not going to be asked what your race is. You're going to be asked which humanity you're part of, the first Adams or the last Adams.

And the amazing thing about Jesus is that in order to be part of his humanity, what do you have to do? What do you have to give him? What do you have to pay? What do you have to achieve? What do you have to work for?

- [37 : 58] What do you have to do to be part of Jesus's humanity? What do you have to give him? Nothing.

Just hold out your hands and say, Lord Jesus, please save me. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, thank you that you resisted the temptation that you faced and that you came to rescue us from all our brokenness and weakness and from the power that death has over us.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you obeyed in the wilderness when you were tempted. Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you obeyed in the garden when you were overwhelmed.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you obeyed on the cross when you were battered. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for coming to be our Savior and help us all just to see what you have done for us and help us all just to come to you with open hands, asking for salvation.

[39 : 21] Please save us. Please have mercy on us. Thank you for everything you've done for us. Amen.