

Learn From Jesus

Overcoming Temptation

I googled the word temptation. In .14 seconds there were 23 million results. Apart from sites that you definitely don't want visit, this is the sort of stuff that came up: The Temptations (vocal group 60s & 70s), Temptation Sailing, Temptation Bakeries, Temptation Jewellery, & Chocolate Temptation Hamper. Except for Christian websites, temptation mostly has a positive spin. It's seen as intriguing, naughtily delicious.

But really, temptation is an attempt by the enemy to establish a foothold in your life and gain control.

In this first message in the series *Learn From Jesus*, we're looking at the topic of Overcoming Temptation.

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But He answered and said, "It is written, '*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*'" Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, 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 shall give His angels charge over you,*' and, '*In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.*'" Jesus said to him, "It is written again, '*You shall not tempt the LORD your God.*'" Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, '*You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.*'" Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

There are some powerful truths that we learn from this passage of Scripture.

1. Satan tried to work with Jesus' natural desires

He said, "If You are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread."

Why did he attack in the area of food?

Because Jesus had been fasting for an extended period of time and would have been very hungry.

So his attack was an attempt to use Jesus' natural desires against Him.

This fits in with what James says:

James 1:14-15

But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

We see this illustrated in what I call the Jujitsu Principle. There are many different types of martial arts. For many of them – like karate, boxing, or kung fu – they are very confrontational in their style. For instance, if you throw a punch at a karate expert, it will be blocked. It's force against force. But jujitsu has been called 'the gentle art of self-defence.' This is because there's a different approach. If you throw a punch at a jujitsu expert, they will aim to step aside, step under your arm and throw you over their shoulder. It's called a shoulder throw and you might have seen it used in TV shows. This method of dealing with an attack uses a lot less energy. Since your arm is already travelling in a particular direction, why not just use the person's own momentum against them and keep them travelling in the same direction?

This is also how Satan operates.

He uses against us what we're already interested in.

Physical desires for things such as food, sex, or alcohol, can be used against us to become gluttony, immorality, or alcoholism.

Because it's easier to fan a desire that's already there and divert it than it is to create something from nothing.

Let's face it: some things don't tempt us.

I had an ad come up on my laptop saying, "Try another game! 1.8 million free coins."

To which I reply, "Yabba-dabba-doo!"

I'm really not in the least bit interested.

So Satan looks for things which naturally interest us, our natural desires.

Normal desires such as the desire for respect, success, or money, even though they are not wrong in themselves, the enemy seeks to use them against us and divert them towards evil.

2. Satan probed for Jesus' weakness

He looks for your weak spot and tries there first.

It might be a particular moment of time – as with Jesus – where you might be tired or hungry or busy.

It might be an area of weakness in your life such as a tendency to be critical, angry, envious, lustful, tongue, or dishonest.

Take the case of Judas Iscariot as an example.

John 12:4-6

Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.

Judas had a weakness for money.

And the enemy strikes at your point of weakness, so is it any surprise what we read in Mark?

Mark 14:10-11

Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them. And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him.

Satan used his natural desire for money to bring him down.

Jesus' weak spot was hunger.

After almost six weeks without food, He must really have been hungry, and so Satan tempted Him there.

Compare Jesus with another man who had the same weak spot.

Genesis 25:28-33 is the story of two brothers: Jacob & Esau. Esau been out in the field. Jacob was at home cooking a stew. When Esau returned home, he smelled the stew and it smelled good. He said to Jacob, "Yum! What I wouldn't give for some of that stew!" Jacob said, "Really?" Esau said, "Yes, really. I'm starved." Jacob said, "If you're that hungry, you won't mind paying a good price." Esau said, "Name your price and it's yours." Jacob said, "How about your birthright?" "Done!" said Esau.

That easy. And he hadn't even been without food for six weeks!

A moment of weakness can have major consequences.

And the New Testament doesn't look very favourably on Esau's foolish decision:

Hebrews 12:15-16

looking carefully ... lest there be any fornicator or profane (irreverent) person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.

3. Satan attempted to sow seeds of doubt

He did it with the woman: he said, "Has God said...?"

Now with Jesus, he says, "If You are the Son of God..."

Have you ever wondered why he said that?

Let me give you two reasons why it was the obvious place to start:

First, Jesus had never yet done a miracle, healed anyone, or cast out a demon.

Even though when Jesus was as young as twelve, He had an inner sense that He was God's Son, there was nothing yet to confirm this.

Second, in the original Greek of the New Testament, there were no chapters, no verses, not even any punctuation or spaces between the words.

So it's easy to miss the connection between what's going on here and what went before.

You might read Matthew 3 one day and read chapter four the next day, and so it's very easy to forget that they just carry on straight after each other with no break.

Matthew 3:16,17-4:1

When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Jesus hears the voice of the Father confirming His Sonship and the devil moves in to try and undermine that.

There's no record in Scripture that Jesus ever heard God tell Him till now that He was the Son of God.

Nothing to indicate He was special, the Son, not just a son.

Then at His baptism, the word is planted in His heart through an audible voice.

What does Satan do when the word is planted in a person's heart?

He sows seeds of doubt as Jesus explained in Matthew 13:19.

When Jesus told the Parable of the Sower, He was speaking from experience.

The lesson here is that we must hear God's Word, respond to it, and also guard it.

1 Timothy 6:20

O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust...

When God's Word is committed to our trust and planted in our hearts, it's our responsibility to guard it.

Otherwise the enemy will seek to snatch it back out.

So how do we guard it?

Sunday morning's word needs to become our Monday morning prayer and meditation.

4. Satan knows Scriptures & uses to his own end

Matthew 4:6

and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"

Satan was quoting God's Word to Jesus in the hope that he would trap Him into sinning.

This is why we must know God's Word and know it well enough to use it right.

2 Timothy 2:15

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

That phrase that Paul uses – ‘rightly dividing’ – is one word in Greek. It means to cut straight. The Greeks used this word to describe how a farmer ploughed the field and cut the furrows straight. They used it to describe how a stonemason would cut a block of stone accurately to fit into a particular spot.

When we apply this to God's Word, it means that we need to handle it accurately.

This is important because the devil will use the Word of God, but it never means exactly what he makes it to mean; it never fits precisely where he's trying to fit it.

5. Every time Jesus was tempted, He used God's Word as a weapon

Three times He responded to the devil's temptations with, “It is written, it is written, it is written.”

Ephesians 6:17

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

God's Word is a powerful weapon.

But how many Christians go to war, are confronted by the enemy, and say, “Oh, yeah? Well you can just ...” and when they reach for their sword, there's nothing there.

And the enemy just smirks.

If you don't want to be caught unarmed and unprepared, you need to read God's Word regularly, meditate on God's Word regularly, and memorise God's Word.

Get it into your mind and heart.

His word is our strength; His word is our protection; His word is our weapon against the attacks of the devil.