

War Zone

Part 4 – The Devil’s Tactics (Part 3)

ILLUS – Just do a Google search on Temptation and in .14 seconds 23 million results turn up. Apart from the sites you definitely don’t want to see, there’s also The Temptations (vocal group), Temptation Sailing, Temptation Bakeries, Temptation Jewellery, and a Chocolate Temptation Hamper.

And except for Christian websites, temptation mostly has a positive spin.

Temptation is intriguing, naughtily delicious.

But we need to remember what temptation really is: An attempted incursion by enemy troops into God’s territory with a view to gaining control and establishing a stronghold.

Eve’s a good example of someone who didn’t handle temptation very well at all.

So in this message we’re going to take a look at someone who did.

Matt 4:1-11 – I want you to notice some important things about this passage.

How Satan Works

1. Satan works with natural desires

His first temptation centred about food.

Why? It’s very simple; Jesus was hungry.

He’d been fasting 40 days and nights.

So what does Satan do? He first attacks in a way where he can use Jesus’ natural desires against Him.

“If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”

James 1:14-15 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. (15) Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

ILLUS – Here’s one of the basic principles of Jujitsu. If someone throws a punch at you, you don’t try to block it. You don’t try to pit force against force. Instead, far better to take advantage of the fact that your opponent is already moving in a particular direction, grab their hand and turn it into a throw. It expends a lot less energy.

It’s much easier to fan a desire that’s already there, and divert it down the wrong track, than it is to try and create that desire in the first place.

Think of the basic physical desires that people have for food, sex, liquids, and how Satan has used those very desires to steal, kill, and destroy.

Think of how gluttony, immorality, and alcoholism, have destroyed lives based on just those desires.

Now consider how most people have a desire for respect, success, and money, none of which are wrong in themselves.

But the enemy so easily turns them into temptations that divert people from God’s perfect plan.

2. Satan probes for weakness

Satan will always look for your weak spot and try there first.

It may be an **area** of weakness where you’re more likely to sin – like criticism, anger, envy, lust, lying.

It may be a **moment** of weakness like when you’re tired or hungry or busy.

But the enemy looks for that and that's where he strikes.

The problem is not that you have an area of weakness, it's what you do with it.

Do you resist, or do you give in?

Jesus' weak spot was His hunger.

Compare how Jesus handled His moment of weakness with how another man handled the same weakness.

ILLUS – In Gen 25:28-33, there's a story of two brothers – Jacob and Esau. And Esau had been out in the field, and Jacob had cooked a stew. And Esau smelled the stew and it smelled good. And 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, then you won't mind paying a good price." Esau said, "Just name your price, and it's yours." Jacob said, "How about your birthright?" "Done!" said Esau.

That moment of weakness was to have major consequences in Esau's life.

Heb 12:16 says, "lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright."

God was not impressed.

We've got to guard ourselves in our moments of weakness.

3. Satan sows seeds of doubt

Matt 4:5-6 Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, (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 began two of the three temptations with this phrase: "If you are the Son of God".

I wonder why.

It was no accident, but to understand this properly, we need to read the verses immediately before our passage.

Mat 3:16-17 When He had been baptised, 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. (17) And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Let's note some things.

First, remember there were no verse or chapter divisions in the original Greek, so this passage runs right into the passage about the temptation of Jesus.

Second, at this point, Jesus had never done a miracle, never healed anyone, never cast out a demon – and there is no record that He had ever heard God tell Him up to now that He was the Son of God.

He just had an understanding in His heart of who He was: God's Son.

And now, at His baptism, God speaks to Him directly and says, "You are My Son."

God's Word is planted in Jesus' heart that He is the Son of God.

What is Satan's strategy? What does Satan do when the Word is planted in your heart?

He moves in to steal that Word, sowing seeds of doubt.

Mat 13:19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.

Jesus was speaking from experience; the wicked one had attempted to snatch the word from His heart.

Here's an important lesson for us.

We hear the Word of God, either through the preaching or our own Bible reading.

We respond to that Word, but then we have to guard it in our hearts, or Satan moves in to pluck it out.

He tries to make us forget about it, or to doubt it.

No wonder Paul says to Timothy: O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust... (1 Tim 6:20)

We have to guard God's Word that's been planted in our hearts, entrusted to us, and let it take root, water it, nurture it, so that it can produce abundant fruit in our lives.

How can you do that?

Sunday morning's word should become Monday morning's prayer and meditation.

If you don't give time to pray about it and meditate on it, the enemy will snatch it away.

4. Satan knows the Scriptures

And he uses them for his own purposes.

Mat 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.'"

He was quoting Psalm 91:11-12.

The world abounds with so-called Christian cults, where God's Word is used in such a way that instead of liberating people, it enslaves them.

Guess who's behind that?

There's a right way and a wrong way to use God's Word.

2 Tim 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 "rightly dividing" literally means to cut straight; it was used to describe a stonemason as he cuts the stone to the right size and fits it where it's supposed to fit.

The devil will use the Word of God, but it never means what he makes it out to mean; it never fits exactly where he's trying to fit it.

How Did Jesus Fight?

Jesus used God's Word as a weapon.

Every time Jesus was tempted, the Word was a weapon on His lips.

I cannot emphasise enough, if you want to be a strong Christian, get to know the Scriptures.

Get God's Word into your mind and heart.

We'll be looking at the armour of God on another day, but listen to this.

Eph 6:17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

What's the sword of the Spirit? The Word of God.

ILLUS – I wonder how many Christians go out to war, are confronted by the enemy, and say, "Oh, yeah? Well you can just ..." and reach for their sword, saying, "Hey, where's my sword?" And the enemy smirks because their scabbard is empty.

Let me close with a few quotes about the importance of getting the Word of God into your heart and mind.

Trevor Chandler: If our people don't have the Word of God in their hearts, they're leaving the Holy Spirit without a weapon.

Jesus: But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. (John 14:26)

Kong Hee: In order for Him to bring the Word of God to your remembrance, you must first have it in your remembrance.

Charles Simpson: It's one thing to say, "I believe the Bible from cover to cover." It's another thing to *know* what's between the covers.

"We must stand for the Word of God or we will fall for anything."

D.L. Moody: Sin will keep you from this book. This book will keep you from sin.

Why are there so many weak and wimpy Christians around?

They don't give God's Word the attention it deserves.

Temptations lead to strongholds.

But every time Jesus was tempted by the devil, He replied, "It is written, it is written, it is written."

This is where our strength lies: Knowing God's Word, and using it as a weapon against the enemy.