

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 29 January 2023. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.*

## **When the King Passed the Test**

### **Matthew 4:1-11**

All of us know what it is like to take a big test, whose results have big consequences. Every young person who has ever finished school knows the anxiety of taking a leaving cert. People in the medical profession must take strenuous medical exams; and lawyers must take strenuous bar exams. Of course, there are some professions whose tests require nothing less than absolute perfection. A senior airline pilot, for example, or an astronaut, must test perfectly in his knowledge and operation of every instrument in the cockpit or shuttle. (I'm sure there are no "multiple choice" questions, either!) Many lives depend upon their flawless knowledge and skill; and anything less than perfection would be disastrous.

However, there is no greater exam than the exam that the Son of God took 2,000 years ago. For thirty-three years, the Son of God experienced the moral test of being a Man. Unlike all of us, Jesus was born without sin, because He had no human father to pass down the sin nature to Him. (In fact, He *could not* sin, because He is also God!) Yet, the *temptation* to sin was placed in front of Him constantly. God the Father sent His Son into this world to be the Sacrifice for our sins; but in order to be that perfect Sacrifice, He had to be absolutely holy. He had to be the perfect Man, so that He could meet God's qualification for mankind to enter Heaven. *The first* man, Adam, failed the test of obedience to God, and became a sinner, and brought death and condemnation upon all his descendants. Thus, in order for man to regain Paradise, a *second* Adam—a sinless, perfect Adam—had to meet the standard of God's perfect righteousness, and stand in the place of every one of us, as our Sin-Bearer and Substitute. This was the *only way* that the Father could accept us; and the Father didn't lower the standard for His own Son. He *couldn't* lower the standard, because He is a just and holy God. The eternal fate of all mankind was hanging in the balance; and if any of us were to be saved from eternity in the Lake of Fire, Jesus *had to pass the test*.

Now, from the time Jesus entered this world until the hour when He cried "It is finished," the test was ongoing. However, there was one particularly severe phase of Jesus' testing; and that was during the first forty days of Jesus' ministry. Jesus had just been presented as the King of Israel at His baptism, by John the Baptist; but now, the King had to go into the wilderness for forty days to fast and pray, and to prepare for the immense spiritual struggle that He would endure for the next 3 ½ years. This morning, we will be learning about the King's test; and we will see how *His* test is extremely relevant to each one of our lives. The title of this message is ***When the King Passed the Test***.

#### **Read Matthew 4:1-11.**

##### **I. Jesus' first temptation (vv. 1-4)**

During the first forty days of Jesus' ministry, Jesus had to deprive Himself of normal, daily comforts, so that He could focus on *praying* to His Heavenly Father. He didn't make this decision rashly, in a moment of enthusiasm; He was acting in obedience to His Father. Matthew says that Jesus was "*led up of the Spirit into the wilderness.*"

Think of that! Jesus, the Son of God, was "*led up of the Spirit*" into the Judaeian wilderness! It wasn't merely by a random set of circumstances that Jesus ended up in the wilderness; nor

was it of His own will that He made this decision. Jesus was “*led*” by the Holy Spirit of God to go to the wilderness, and to fast for forty days, just as Moses and Elijah did.

Although Jesus is God, He is always subject to His Father’s will. As a Man, Christ prayed to His Father, and relied upon Him, just as every other man is required to do. Every step that Jesus took here on earth was taken in express obedience to the Father; and the third Person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, was sent forth to “lead” Him! The Father had a divine purpose for Jesus during those 40 days. It was a time of testing, to prove His holy character. Jesus did not have the prerogative to retract from His Father’s will. The Father did not “lower the bar” of conduct for His own Son. The standard was perfection; and Jesus passed the test perfectly.

What, then, can *we* learn from Jesus’ temptation? Plenty! If God didn’t lower the standard for His only begotten Son, He will not lower it for us, either. Of course, we are not *saved* by trying to keep God’s standard, because none of us can keep it. That’s the whole reason Jesus kept the law perfectly *for us*, and died in our place! That’s why we need *His* righteousness to be applied to *our* own bankrupt accounts. When you repent, and place your faith in *Jesus*, and in *His* righteousness, God accepts you as though you had the perfect righteousness of His Son. We also need Christ’s *practical* righteousness. The whole reason Jesus saves us is that He might empower us to do good works; and after you *are* saved, He expects you to strive to be holy, just as He is. God commands us to follow His Son’s steps; and part of the example that Jesus set was that He allowed Himself to be “*led of the Spirit.*” If Jesus was “*led of the Spirit,*” how much more do *we* need to be “*led of the Spirit*”?

#### **Read Romans 8:14.**

Now, let’s take a closer look at Jesus’ first temptation. (**Read Matthew 4:2-4 again.**) What we see in these verses is Satan’s *personal attack* upon the Messiah. Satan loves to hit us with temptations when we are tired, or sick, or vulnerable in some other way; and so it was with the Son of God. Satan hit Jesus right when He was at His weakest point. And what, exactly, was Satan trying to accomplish? Was He trying to get Jesus to *doubt* the fact that He is the Son of God? Is that why he said, “***If thou be the Son of God?***”? Not necessarily. Jesus knew very well that He is the Son of God; and Satan knew that *Jesus* knew who He is. What Satan *was* trying to do was to get Jesus to act independently of God the Father. He was trying to get Jesus to assert His “right” as the Son of God to have food. By saying, “***If thou be the Son of God,***” Satan was trying to get Jesus to forget that He had *waived His rights* as the Son of God when He came into this world, and that He had submitted Himself to His Father’s will.

Brethren, we need to remember that Jesus did not always exercise His divine omniscience when He was on earth. Much of the time He operated on human knowledge, and not on His divine knowledge. That is why Jesus actually had to *live by faith*, just as we must do. He actually had to trust His Father, and submit to Him, even when it outwardly appeared that the Father didn’t know what He was doing. Can you imagine if the Lord commanded *you* to fast for forty days? I have trouble fasting for a couple days! Obviously, to survive forty days without food would take a miracle; and God *did* perform a miracle. The Father supernaturally enabled His Son to survive in the intense desert heat, without food, for nearly a month and a half, without becoming lunch for wild animals. (The book of **Mark** specifically says that Jesus was “*with the wild beasts.*”) However, the fact that the Father was supernaturally enabling His Son to survive forty days with no food didn’t change the fact that Jesus still felt those awful hunger pains. The fact that the Father was sustaining Him didn’t take away the very *human* feeling that He would die soon if He didn’t get food! Every day, Jesus had to rely upon His Father, even though what He was doing didn’t seem to make sense. Christian, is

there something that God wants *you* to do, yet you are refusing to obey Him, because it doesn't seem "rational" to you, or because the consequences look too great? Are you afraid to obey God because of the "fallout" that you might experience from unsaved people in your life, or even from other believers who don't understand your conviction, or who even oppose you? Do you feel as though you're between a "rock and a hard place"? Jesus knew what that felt like; yet, He obeyed. Christian, you *must* obey God, and not man. Stop resisting your Lord! Follow Jesus' example, and submit yourself to God.

Now, how did Jesus *counter* Satan? With the Word of God! Jesus' reply to Satan was, "***It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.***" How amazing is that? Christ Himself is the living "Word of God." Every word that comes out of His mouth *is* God's Word! He could have spoken *anything* to Satan, and it would have been God's Word. Yet, He chose to reply with the *written* Scriptures. He quoted from **Deuteronomy 8:3**.

### **Read Deuteronomy 8:3.**

The Greek word that Jesus used in His reply to Satan was *gegraptai*, which means, "***It is written.***" This is a perfect tense verb, which means that it is a past action *with continuing results*. *Gegraptai* means, "It was written in the past; and it is still written." What Jesus was saying is that every word that God gave to Moses has been *kept and preserved* perfectly. It isn't just the "basic idea" that has been preserved. It isn't merely 92% of God's words that has been preserved. No, 100% have been preserved! Jesus said, "***Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.***" (The "jot" is the smallest Hebrew consonant, and the "tittle" is the smallest vowel, which consists of a single dot!) God has promised to preserve every single one of His words, uncorrupted, throughout all generations; and He has used otherwise *fallible men* to do it! This doesn't sound rational to an unbelieving world; but with God, all things are possible! Christian, you can hold that Bible in your hands with *confidence*. There is power in this Book! Read it daily. Read it voluminously. Memorise it. Meditate on it. Wield it like a sword. It is your offensive *and* defensive weapon against the enemy, when he throws temptations at you!

Though Jesus is God in human flesh, He is also fully Man; and He fully *identified* as a Man during this trial. When He said, "***Man shall not live by bread alone,***" He applied this truth to Himself. *He* was a Man; and as a Man, He had to walk in dependence upon God. Physical bread alone was not sufficient; He needed God's words, and God's promises. This reminds me of a bookmark that Katie happened to find in one of my books this past week. The bookmark had **Romans 8:28** printed on it ("***And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose***"); but on the back side of the bookmark was my mom's writing, from way back in 1996, when she and my Dad were visiting me at Pensacola Christian College. I had recently been diagnosed with Crohn's Disease, and had just been released from the hospital, after weeks of absence from my college classes; and in that short time, I had lost more than 50 lb. (22 kg). I was extremely weak, and was often in such pain, that I couldn't stand up straight. My parents encouraged me, though, with **Romans 8:28**; and on the back of the book mark they wrote: "This is to remind you of one of God's wonderful promises in His Word. He will see you through this illness, and soon your strength will be renewed. Love & Prayers, Dad & Mom, 4-18-96."

Temptations are unpleasant; but they are *God's* doing! Though *Satan* was doing the tempting, the Father was *using* the devil to *test* His Son. *Satan's* intent is to entice us to sin, and destroy us; but the Father's intent is to *test and prove* us, and *strengthen* us. The Father used the devil

to test His own Son; and you may be sure that He will test you. The Apostle Peter said, ***“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad with exceeding joy.”***

## II. Jesus’ second temptation (vv. 5-7)

**(Read verses 5-7 again.)** In these verses, we find, once again, that Satan is trying to tempt Jesus to step outside of His Father’s will, and to make His own self-willed decision. However, this time, the *focus* of the temptation was different. In the first temptation, Satan was attacking Jesus on a *personal* level, with the desire for food. Now, Satan was presenting Jesus with a temptation that had implications for the entire *nation of Israel*. You see, according to the tradition of the rabbis, the Messiah, when He showed Himself to Israel, would appear *on the roof of the Temple*. Thus, many Jews were waiting to see a miraculous scenario like the one that Satan was proposing—a scenario in which the Messiah suddenly appears on the roof of the Temple, and does some amazing miracle. A Jewish believer named Alfred Edersheim, in his book *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, wrote, “Our Rabbis give this tradition: In the hour when King Messiah cometh, He standeth upon the roof of the Sanctuary.” Do you see how Satan was using this tradition in order to ensnare Jesus? Satan was telling Jesus, “The people of Israel will believe that you are the Son of God if you jump off the Temple, Jesus. This is just the kind of thing that they are expecting. Just give the people what *they* want, and they will follow you! You don’t have to go through all this suffering, and praying, and fasting; just take this easy short-cut, and you’ll be sitting on the throne of Israel in no time. You don’t need to pray about this: the Father will understand, and He’ll get your back. He won’t let you die.” Satan was very accommodating in his offer, too. He apparently lifted Jesus up, and gave Him a free ride from the Judaeen wilderness to the top of the Temple in Jerusalem. (Wasn’t that nice of him?)

By the way, you’ll notice that this time around, *Satan quoted Scripture!* Satan can quote every word of Scripture perfectly! However, as Satan always does, he *drew a false application* from Scripture. Let’s take a look at the Scripture he was quoting.

### **Read Psalm 91:11-12.**

In this second temptation, Satan quoted from **Psalm 91**, in which God promises protection to those who fear and trust in Him. However, Satan drew a totally false application from this scriptural promise. He concluded that since God has promised to protect His people from harm, and since Jesus is, after all, the sinless Son of God, He could therefore go jumping off the Temple in order to prove His identity to Israel; and He could expect that His Father would protect Him. Of course, it was *not* the Father’s will for Jesus to daredevil stunts; and Satan knew this. Satan was trying to get Jesus to step outside of His Father’s will.

Well, once again, Jesus countered Satan with *Scripture*. Every word that comes out of Jesus’ mouth is the Word of God, because He is the living Word; yet, Jesus constantly referred to the *written* Word of God as His authority.

### **Read Deuteronomy 6:16.**

Folks, what can we learn from Jesus’ second temptation? For one thing, this temptation shows how important it is to apply Scripture correctly. It is not enough merely to *quote* Scripture, because Satan himself can expertly quote (and *misapply*) Scripture back at you. Every day,

you must diligently study and compare Scripture with Scripture, and ask the Lord to help you to **“rightly divide the word of truth,”** so that you will not be drawn into a foolish trap.

Secondly, this second temptation shows the danger of “tempting” the LORD. To “tempt” God means to “act presumptuously, and thus put God’s faithfulness to the test.” It means to step outside the bounds of God’s revealed will, yet expect God either to rescue you from the consequences of your foolish action, or to turn a blind eye to your sin. To jump off the Temple would not have been faith: it would have been *lack* of faith, and presumption—which means that it would have been sin. Christian, God commands you to seek *His* will at all times. Do not “tempt” Him by making your own decisions, and then expect God to rubber-stamp your decisions, and protect you from harm. He won’t do it! *Always* obey God!

### III. Jesus’ third temptation (vv. 8-11)

**(Read verses 8-11 again.)** Thus far, we’ve seen that Satan tempted Jesus on a *personal* level, and then in a *national* level. Now, Satan was tempting Jesus on a *universal* level. He was offering Jesus *all* the Kingdoms of the world. After all, was not this the Messiah’s destiny? Did not the Father say to His Messiah in **Psalm 2**, **“Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession”**?

By the way, you’ll notice that a *real, physical Kingdom* was being offered to Jesus, and not an invisible, spiritual one. The fact that the Father of lies was offering Jesus this Kingdom doesn’t change the fact that there *will be* a literal, physical, visible Kingdom on earth. The reason this offer was tempting is that it was grounded in reality. Satan tempted Jesus with *real* food (which Jesus *did* have the power to make from the rocks), and with the *real* prospect of being shielded from death if He jumped off a *real* building; and now, he was tempting Him with a real, physical, earthly Kingdom. The Father had already promised to give this Kingdom to His Son in the future Day of the LORD; but Satan was tempting Jesus with the offer of having it all *now*—with the condition, of course, that He bow down and worship him.

Now, if Satan were offering Jesus the kingdoms of the world, what does it imply? It implies that the kingdoms of the world belong to *Satan*, and that he can give them to whomever he wishes! Surely this is a brazen, bold-faced lie, right? The Bible says that **“The earth is the LORD’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.”** Was Satan really telling Jesus that the kingdoms of the world belong to *him*? Was he really daring to make such an audacious claim? Yes: and it wasn’t entirely false, either.

You see, it is important to remember that when Adam sinned, he forfeited mankind’s dominion of the earth to *Satan*! That is the whole reason why Jesus became the “Son of man”—that He might *reclaim* dominion of the earth for man! When Satan boasted that all the kingdoms of the world had been *delivered unto him*, and that he could give them to whom he wished, he was actually speaking a half-truth. The reality is that the earth has always belonged to the LORD by right of creation. However, there is also a real sense in which *Adam* forfeited his dominion over the earth when he sinned, and handed it over to Satan. Satan knew very well that he had stolen man’s dominion over the earth. Thus, while Jesus was weak and hungry, Satan tried to fool Jesus into thinking that the only way that He, the “Son of man,” could ever have dominion over the earth, was to come crawling to Satan and ask him to give it back to Him (on the condition that Jesus worship him)!

Of course, Jesus couldn’t be fooled by Satan’s tricks. He knew that very soon, He would crush Satan’s works through His work on the cross. At the cross, Satan’s dominion over

mankind was wrested from him, and delivered into the hands of the “last Adam,” the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus knew all this; and, once more, He repelled Satan with God’s Word.

**Read Deuteronomy 10:20.**

Now, what can we “take home” from all this? First, never forget that Jesus Christ, through His death and resurrection, has already defeated Satan. Satan’s doom is sure. Christ is now waiting for the hour when He will come to this earth to reign as King of Kings, and Lord of Lords! On that glorious day, Satan will be bruised under Jesus’ feet.

Secondly, never forget Satan’s tactics. He mixes truth with lies, and then draws wrong *conclusions* from his corrupted truth. Is it true that the kingdoms of the world were delivered unto Satan. Scripture tells us that Satan is the spiritual father of all mankind; that **“the whole world lieth in wickedness”**; and that before the cross, Satan, in a real sense, had **“power over death.”** However, Scripture also says that the earth has always been the LORD’s by right of creation. Furthermore, the Scripture says that from the beginning, God had promised to send the “Seed of the woman” to crush Satan’s head. Satan left out that important scriptural truth, and thus mixed truth with lies. Satan also drew a *false conclusion* from his corrupted truth—the conclusion that Jesus would have to bow and worship him in order to reclaim the earth.

If Satan was bold enough to try to fool Christ Himself with a mixture of truth and lies, he certainly will use the same tactics on you and me! Don’t be ignorant of Satan’s devices, brethren! Like your Lord, claim the promises of Scripture!

**IV. Jesus’ victory (v. 11)**

**(Read verse 11 again.)** Here in **verse 11**, we read about Jesus’ victory. After the third temptation, Satan finally left Him; and the angels came to minister to Him. However, Satan certainly did not go away permanently! In **Luke 4:13**, we are told that **“when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.”** If Satan left the Son of God only for a **“season,”** you may be sure that He will tempt *you* again, and again, and again! Just because you won a victory today doesn’t mean that the enemy won’t be back around tomorrow—or even before the end of the day! We’d better know how to have the victory, brethren. The Bible says, **“And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”** We’d also better know what Satan’s tactics are.

**Read 1 John 2:15-17.**

Satan’s tactic is threefold. It is **“the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.”** These are the same three tactics that Satan used on Eve. **Genesis 3:6** says that Eve **“saw that the tree was good for food** (that’s the lust of the flesh); **“that it was pleasant to the eyes** (that’s the lust of the eyes); and that it was a **“tree to be desired to make one wise** (that’s the pride of life).” Satan used the same tactic on the Lord Jesus. He tempted Him with **food** (the lust of the flesh); with **the kingdoms of this world** (the lust of the eyes); and with the prospect of **“showing off”** His Messiahship by doing a death-defying stunt (the pride of life).

Sadly, many Christians are so enamoured with the lights, the music, the movies, the entertainment, the conversation, and the fleshly attitude of the world, that they practically deny this verse. However, the Lord isn’t playing games. When the Lord says, **“Love not the world,”** He means it. The world cannot be mixed with a pursuit of holiness. If you are trying to blend the world’s culture and values into your family life, your worship, or your relationship

with God, you are going down the same road that Lot did. Lot was truly saved: but he was so in love with the world, that he didn't even want to leave Sodom when he knew that destruction was imminent. As for his family, he lost them all. His wife died when she looked back at Sodom; two of his daughters died in Sodom, because they didn't believe that destruction was coming; and his two surviving daughters were corrupted with the immoral spirit of Sodom.

The world's music and pop-culture cannot be mixed with our music, our church worship, or our personal lives, without causing destructive compromise. Rock music has *always* been Satan's music, from its very inception. Not only its lyrics, but its whole attitude, and the style of music itself, are satanic. (Rock musicians themselves readily admit that their music style is not "amoral," but has some kind of real spiritual magic in it. They should know!) The "**do as thou wilt**" motto has *always* been behind rock music. In fact, the very statement "do as thou wilt" was coined by one of the most wicked Satanists of the 20th century--Aleister Crowley. Rock music is unquestionably Satan's music. How can we possibly listen to any of it, or attempt to mix its style with our Christian music, and not be spiritually damaged by it?

Of course, rock music is not the only thing that constitutes "the world." Hollywood movies and television shows are a huge part of it. Past generations of Christians didn't call it "Hollywood" for nothing. The Hollywood crowd has been at war with God ever since the beginning of the industry. Practices such as yoga, mantras, and "contemplative prayers" are all the craze today, even in the professing Christian world; but they are wide open doors to demonic influence. Drinking alcohol is a part of the world that must be avoided at all costs. The Bible clearly warns, "***Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.***" Love of material things is a part of the world that must be avoided, as well. Whatever we *need*, God has promised to supply, as we faithfully follow Him; but *loving things* is a form of idolatry, which makes our hearts cold toward God. Christian, stay far away from the world's system and philosophies, and keep your eyes on Jesus!

Now, before we close, let's see what Jesus' obedience ultimately accomplished.

### **Read Hebrews 5:7-9.**

In what sense did Christ, the sinless Son of God, "learn" obedience by the things that He suffered? Does this verse imply that Jesus was a *disobedient*, and that He needed to be chastised in order to learn to obey? Absolutely not! Christ never had any sin in His heart! *We* certainly *are* sinners; and as sinners, *we* must often "learn" obedience by suffering the unpleasant consequences of our own disobedience. But not so with the Jesus. As the God-Man, He was "***holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.***"

What does Paul mean, then, when he says that Jesus "***learned obedience by the things which he suffered***"? He means that Jesus became *acquainted* with the *human experience* of obedience. As the second Person of the Godhead, He had always been obedient to His Father; but now that He had taken on human flesh, He had to be obedient to the Father in His humanity. As a Man, He was put to the test through a lifetime of suffering; and because He passed every test perfectly, He was able to be our sinless Substitute for sin, on the cross. He was "***made perfect***" ("complete," or "fully equipped") to be the "***author of eternal salvation.***"

**Conclusion:** The salvation that Jesus provides is not a half-baked salvation. It's not a "maybe" salvation, depending on whether you do "your part" to earn it or keep it. It is a perfect, eternal salvation, which Jesus already purchased for you on the cross; and He offers it as a free gift, if you will only repent in your

heart, and receive it by faith. As we close this morning, I would ask, “Have *you* received that gift of salvation?” If not, please do so today! To Christians I would ask, “Are you aware of Satan’s devices?” Are you prepared for the battle? Are you reading God’s Word, and rightly dividing it, and using it to fight the enemy when he tries to storm your mind with lying thoughts? Faith in God’s Word will give you victory; but you must hide it in your heart, and claim its promises every hour of every day!