



## The Proving of the King

*Series: Matthew: The King and His Kingdom*

Matthew 4:1–11 (ESV)

January 23, 2011

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We started last week looking at the first of two intimately connected events that begin the earthly ministry of Christ – the first, His baptism by John in the Jordan River and today we look at the second, Jesus’ temptation by Satan in the wilderness of Judea. The baptism of Christ, in the terms of His kingship, amounted to His coronation, His commissioning, His presentation as the Messiah of God by John the Baptist and by Father God Himself. His testing and temptation in the wilderness would be the proving of His Kingship.

Just as we looked at the baptism of Jesus last week, so now we turn to His testing in the wilderness which proves that He is worthy to receive and to reign over the kingdom His Father would give Him. As we do there are:

1) Some important considerations in looking at the temptation/testing of Christ. As we look at these temptations we need to consider a few things at the outset. First, we need to consider

1. The double-sided nature of this event. We need to understand that the testing and temptation of Jesus in this text, while it provides to us an example of how we are to face temptation, is about far more than simply providing an example to us. This testing, this temptation is messianic in nature uniquely designed for the Son of God, a double sided test, crucial to understanding Jesus and His character and His mission.

From the perspective of Satan, his purpose in the temptation of Jesus is to fracture the relationship of Father and Son, and to destroy the purpose of His coming. These temptations with which he would assail Jesus were specially designed to nullify the reason for Christ’s coming, to destroy His ability to be the Redeemer and Savior. Satan’s whole purpose was to

turn Jesus from the path of submission, trust, and obedience to God the Father that He was walking on and to derail the plan of redemption.

From the perspective of God, however, this testing was meant to prove that Jesus was exactly whom the Father declared Him to be – His beloved Son with whom He is well pleased. When the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan, the act was a divine test designed through Christ's certain victory, to show beyond the shadow of a doubt that Jesus really is God's Son and the anointed and chosen Messiah of God, that He is the holy, sinless Redeemer and Savior of sinners. So what we need to remember is that what Satan intended to lead the Son into sin and disobedience and thus fracture the Trinity, the Father used to demonstrate the Son's holiness and worthiness to receive and to reign over the kingdom His Father would give Him. This testing is ordained by the Father to prove Christ to be invincible and the Godhead invincible against all enemies. That's the first thing we need to consider. The second thing we need to consider in looking at this text is a question:

2. Could Jesus sin? In answering this question we need to learn an important word – impeccable. Now, in common usage, the word "impeccable" means to be perfect or to be flawless and beyond criticism. But the word impeccable, when used in reference to Jesus means something far more. When theologians refer to Jesus as being impeccable, what that means is that Jesus is so perfect in character as to be incapable of sinning. The inability of the Lord Jesus Christ to sin is guaranteed by the union of the divine and human natures in one, gloriously divine person. What does that mean?

Christ's innate righteousness is one of the attributes of His deity. His absolute hatred for sin is part of His eternal nature. He did not divest Himself of the attributes of God in order to become man. He is God in the flesh and God cannot sin. (James 1:13) Furthermore, Christ is immutable—unchanged and unchanging in His character, (Hebrews 13:8). There was nothing in Him that held any attraction whatsoever for sin. He hated sin as God the Father hates it. He had none of the evil desires we have inherited as part of our fallen nature, but he could be tempted but all of the temptations that he suffered came from outside of Him, came from Satan himself because there was no sin nature in Christ. So then, the great question here is this: If Jesus could not sin, could he really be tempted? Well, think of it like this. If you put pure gold in a crucible and heat it to a white-hot temperature, there is no possibility that it will be burned up, or that it will produce any impurities. But the purity of the gold doesn't make the heat of the flame any less hot.

If anything, Christ's temptations were more intense, not less intense than ours, because He never sought relief from any temptation by giving into it. He was tempted by Satan who thought he could entice Jesus to sin and though he was assaulted with enticements and arguments by Satan, the nature of Christ is to battle temptation until He is absolutely victorious. He endured the fullness of temptation and emerged victorious. He felt all the normal, non-sinful human weaknesses desires that you and I struggle with. Satan played upon all of them. He was surely tempted, but he did not sin. That is exactly what the writer of Hebrews was speaking of when he wrote: (Hebrews 4:15, ESV) To say that there was ever any possibility of sin in Christ is to misunderstand the sheer moral perfection of His character. Christ was not able to sin, and that is true because He was God incarnate, unchanging, perfectly righteous in and of Himself, with an eternal, immutable, and holy hatred of all that is unholy. Jesus engaged and endured temptation for one purpose – to utterly crush its power and to thoroughly prove His love for the Father and submission to His plan. The third thing that we need to consider as we look at this text is

3. The redemptive- historical setting for Christ's testing/temptation. In Romans 5 and again in 1 Corinthians 15 Jesus is seen and portrayed as the "second Adam". The first Adam through the fall in the Garden of Eden brought sin into the race. Jesus Christ, the Second Adam, through His righteousness and faithfulness brings the hope of redemption. The first Adam brought judgment and death by His rebellion, but Christ brings justification and life through His obedience. As Paul wrote (1 Corinthians 15:21–24, ESV)

And here is what we see in this text before us. Just as the first Adam was tested, so the Second Adam would undergo a test in the form of a temptation. The first Adam fell; the Second Adam stood firm and true as the invincible champion. And the circumstances of the two temptations are markedly different. The first Adam was tempted in perfect conditions and in a perfect environment in the fullness of his strength, and he fell. The Second Adam was tried in a hostile environment in a wilderness in a physically weakened condition after forty days of fasting, but He stood firm as the conquering victor. In Genesis the temptation was to be like God by disobeying God; in Matthew the appeal to Jesus was to show Himself to be the Son of God, by disobeying Father God. But the underlying theme of the temptation of Christ in the wilderness, the chief, fundamental theme is very specific. Satan's temptation will revolve around one specific theme...the declaration of the Father – this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Satan will call into question His Sonship and he will call into question the love

and delight of the Father in Him. At the heart of this temptation will be an assault on the Father's declaration of His pleasure in Jesus a His beloved Son.

1Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. Jesus is in a place called the wilderness and it is a fitting name. It stretches over an area of thirty-five by fifteen miles and is filled with yellow sand, crumbling limestone, and jagged rocks. Again, it is vastly different from the original place of temptation, the Garden of Eden. It almost seems that God the Father is allowing the Son to be put at every disadvantage for this struggle, removing everything circumstantially possible as the reason for Jesus' victory and Satan's defeat. This confrontation is not coincidence or accident. This is a divinely appointed confrontation in which it would be clearly revealed that Jesus Christ and His mission to redeem sinners are unstoppable – the first demonstration of His obedient resolve and glorious might as our Redeemer and Deliverer. Let's look at:

2) The First Temptation (v. 3-4) Can you see what Satan is doing here? He is appealing to the basic human desire for self-preservation and his argument seems logical. He takes what is a legitimate need – hunger – and tempts Jesus to satisfy that need by acting in a way that would indicate a lack of trust in His Father. He began "If you are the Son of God. . . ." He's calling into question the declaration that we have just read about, the declaration made at his baptism. He's basically intimating "Jesus, if you are the Son of God, as you heard your Father say at the time of your baptism and God loves You, then you know that you have the power and authority of God himself. Aren't you hungry? And isn't eating a legitimate activity? If you are the Son of God and He loves you and have power to command the stones to become bread, you should do it. God would not want you to go hungry." Doesn't that seem to make perfect sense? Satan could not conceive of Jesus having a vital need, having the power to satisfy that need and not using His power independent of the Father to meet that need. But Jesus saw through the smokescreen. He saw through to the heart of the temptation. What was Satan trying to get Jesus to do? He was trying to get Him to question the Father's Word, the Father's heart for Him, to question the Father's care for Him, to question His provision. He was trying to make Him doubt His Father's love for Him.

This temptation involves a lot more than simply Jesus satisfying His hunger. The most obvious part of the temptation was for Jesus to fulfill His legitimate physical needs by miraculous means. But the deeper temptation was Satan's appeal to Jesus' rights as the Son of God. Why

should He starve, why should He be hungry, why should He want for anything for that matter? He had every right, Satan suggested, to use His own divine powers to supply what His Father had not. More than anything, Satan wanted Jesus to rebel against the Father by acting apart from His will. He wanted to shatter Christ's absolute trust and submission to the Father and in so doing to cause an irreparable breach in the unity between the Father and the Son and so fracture the very Trinity. But that isn't what He got. Instead Satan got rebuked.

"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (from Deut. 8:13) What was He saying? God is trustworthy. He remembered that the Father had called Him His beloved Son in whom He was well pleased, and Jesus believed that statement. He trusted that statement...nothing had changed. Regardless of appearances, regardless of physical circumstances, regardless of His feelings, Jesus was committed to trusting and obeying His Father. He was committed to believing and blessing His Father regardless of appearances. I can imagine His reasoning: "God led me into the wilderness. There is no food here, but he knows that I need food, so I know that he will sustain me in his own way. Thus, I will trust God and wait for him to direct me by his word. I will not act independently of my Father. I came to obey him fully and my food is to do the will of God and finish it."

I do want for us to notice something here, a theme that is repeated throughout this temptation narrative. Notice that the answer of Christ to every temptation of Satan is to go to the Word of God. He deliberately goes to Scripture. He depends upon the Word of God and asserts Scripture over everything else. It is the only sufficient standard of truth, period – not feelings, not circumstances, not human wisdom or rationalization. Confronting and defeating temptation is not rocket science. There is no secret technique. Learn from Christ the heart of resisting temptation – a firm trust in God, submission to His Holy Word, and a superior affection for God. That is the heart of Christ here. Satan believes that he is dealing with someone who is chiefly concerned with satisfying himself, but Jesus is chiefly concerned with trusting and pleasing His Father above all else, submitting to His word, motivated by a superior affection for the Father. He will not question the Father's heart for Him but will hold fast to His written word and the words that He spoke over Him at the Jordan. Then we see

3) The Second Temptation (v. 5-7) Satan shifts gears. In this temptation, Satan's line of reasoning is something like this--if you live only by the Word of God, then demonstrate that you are God's beloved Son by putting Him to a Scriptural test. You can almost hear Him speaking to Jesus. "You know the 91st Psalm. "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.’ ” Prove it by this little Scriptural test. Won't God command angels to bear you up and prevent any harm from coming to you? There's a rabbinical tradition that says that when the King Messiah reveals himself, he will come and stand on the roof of the Holy Place? Do one better, jump from the pinnacle and His angels will hold you up and you will receive the acclamation from people. Be hailed as king.”

Notice that Satan quotes from verses 11 and 12, but he does so leaving out a very important phrase. Psalm 91:11-12 read: “For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.” (Psalm 91:11–12, ESV) That phrase, to guard you in all your ways, as well as the larger context of the whole Psalm, tells us that this Psalm is not an invitation to live foolishly or presumptuously.

Why would Satan tempt Jesus in this way? I think there are a couple of reasons. One, I believe that he is vainly attempting to appeal to Jesus' pride. Certainly, Satan believes, Jesus craves to be worshipped right now. Satan cannot conceive of the Son of God setting aside His rights as God, one of them to be worshipped, especially when that is the one thing that Satan wants more than anything else. A miraculous display of power as Jesus leapt from the top of the Temple would lead to the Jews worshipping Him. Second, they would certainly make Him king, there would be no cross, there would be no crushing of His head by Christ's death on the cross, and there would be no redemption. Do you see it, Christ would be honored as He should be, no more humiliation and suffering, and we would be lost forever.

But Jesus refuses. 7Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ” (from Deut 6:16) Jesus did not need to prove to Himself that His Father cared for Him and protected Him. He knew that to announce Himself with great miracles would not accomplish His mission. Furthermore, for Jesus to test God was to doubt God. And to doubt God is not to trust God. And not to trust God is sin. Obviously, that is what Satan wanted Jesus to do. To induce Jesus to sin, no matter how “scriptural” the test may be, would shatter His divinity, rend the Godhead and destroy our hope of salvation. Jesus refused to act independently of his Father to gain instant publicity as a popular, wonder-working Messiah. Instead, he chose the path of humiliation for our salvation.

Finally Satan comes with His last temptation. And it seems that all the bows and bells and whistles are gone. It seems totally straightforward. It seems ham-fisted and clumsy and inept. In this temptation we see the insane jealousy of Satan toward the Father. It is the most stunning of all of the temptations and it is Satan's masterstroke against Christ.

4) The Third Temptation (v. 8-10) This at last is what Satan wants. Worship. It is what he has always wanted since before he was cast out of heaven for his desire: (Isaiah 14:13–15, ESV) It is always what Satan has craved. Finally, it seems, Satan drops all of the pretense and lays it out there. He tries to induce Jesus to throw His lot in with Him. This is the only one of the temptations that does not refer directly to Jesus' sonship, but the thought certainly lies in the background. In it you can hear the echo of Psalm 2:7-8. So you can see the underlying nature of this temptation, it is to receive the inheritance without the cross, to gain universal dominion but to do it by striking a bargain with the prince of this world rather than striking him through the heart with the wood of the cross.

Matthew tells us that the devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in all of their glory. "All sovereignty, all glory, all splendor, all authority, all power," Satan was telling Jesus, "is mine. And I have the privilege to give all of these kingdoms to whomever I want." He is a total liar.

And the price? "All this I will give you if you will bow down and worship me," Satan told Jesus. What Satan was saying is this: "Jesus, I will keep you from this messianic mission of having to go to the cross. I will keep you from having to suffer and die for the sins of the world. I will give you a shortcut to glory. I'll give you better than your Father is giving you. You can have all this and you won't have to die." Could Satan give it to Him? No. He couldn't. It is not his to give. Satan is the "ruler of this world" in the sense that he dominates fallen men through the power of sin and death as well as through his direct intervention, but he is not in ultimate control over kings and kingdoms. Our Lord is the One who is in sovereign control of history, and of the nations. This is our Father's world, it is not Satan's to give. This seems like the weakest of all of the temptations.

Jesus responds by saying, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, " 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.' " It's a no brainer. It almost seems too easy. Of course Jesus is not going to worship Satan. The Creator is not going to worship the creature. That's not going to happen. It almost seems that Satan has lost it a little bit. But beloved, I believe that

there is more to this temptation than meets the eye. And that is why I called it Satan's masterstroke. When Satan throws out this whole worship me thing, if Jesus goes for it, that's a socking surprise, but I don't think He is expecting Him to. I believe that what He is really doing is attacking Christ's virtue and trying to provoke Him to righteous anger, to get him to act in such a way that would derail the plan of salvation.

Follow with me. With us, Satan always appeals, it seems, to our baser instincts, lust, self-preservation, self-exaltation, pride. He's already done that with Jesus gaining no foothold. There is not foothold to gain, no sin nature to which he can appeal.

But Satan is clever and so I believe that what He is doing here is trying to use Jesus' virtue against Him. He tries to use Jesus' righteousness against Him. He knows that Jesus loves the Father and wants to serve Him with everything that is in Him. He also knows that Jesus hates Satan with a pure hatred. That sounds foreign to us because we cannot conceive of God hating anything, right? (Psalm 5:5-6; 11:5-6, ESV) Do you see?

So he comes up with the most vile, most reprehensible thing that he could possibly say to Jesus. "Worship me." And what He is hoping for is that Jesus will be filled with righteous anger. Satan is hoping to provoke Jesus to defend God the Father's honor by immediately snatching from Satan his influence in this world, by striking him down and banishing Him immediately to hell, by setting up His throne and His rule immediately, by establishing God's kingdom right then. If He had, Jesus would have a kingdom with no subjects and hell would have been full. Don't you see? Satan would have lost nothing...he knows his future is hell, he knows he is judged. He would have lost nothing, but he would have gained everything, a full hell. There would have been no redeemed humanity over which to reign. God's honor would have been upheld but the glory of His redeeming cross would have never come to pass and we would have been lost forever. Jesus had to die to fill His kingdom. He had to go to the cross. He had to redeem His people. He had to die to reign. He had to die for you and me and for the glory of God to be fully revealed through the cross, the glory of the God who redeems. And more, get this now, for Christ to do that, for Him to judge Satan instantly, would have been for Christ to destroy the plan of salvation and in essence to submit His will to Satan's will – the very essence of worship.

That is the ultimate issue here. To give in to temptation, to succumb to temptation to sin is to offer your worship and our allegiance to Satan. I know that sounds shocking. It is a shocking way to say these things. But that is exactly the point behind these temptations. It is at the very

core of what Paul is getting at when he says: (Romans 6:15–19, ESV) To give into temptation is to submit your will to sin and Satan – that is why the battle is so important.

The humble self-denial of Jesus Christ, His holy restraint, should amaze you. What humility to suffer temptation at the hands of Satan, to refuse to take up His rights as God which He willingly laid aside in the incarnation. He refused to take up what was rightfully His and so leave us in our sins. Jesus never once used His divinity, His rights, His power as God to bless Himself...only to bless His Father and to bless us. He refused taking up His rights as God and instead endured suffering and humiliation for us, for our salvation, for our benefit and for God's everlasting glory. Jesus emerged victorious.

11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

Satan left Jesus for a more opportune time. He left because he had no choice. He left because he had no power over Jesus. Satan's temptations failed but God's testing succeeded. Jesus responses to Satan were in essence: "I will trust the Father and submit to His rule. I will not presume upon His Word. I will not circumvent His will. I will trust in Him." In all of this, may we

5) Behold the King and behold your heart. So often we find ourselves complaining about our rights, wants, and needs. We so often desire prominence and acclaim. We are unwilling to trust in God. We can so easily justify the things that we do that are outside of God's will, that are in opposition to His Word. We can be so selfish, so self-oriented, so self-focused. We can struggle so easily with following God when it is difficult or it hurts or doesn't go the way that we think it should. It is so easy for us to choose sin over loving God, and then justify it. God offers us something so much better...to obey God and to trust in His gracious sustenance than to impatiently and selfishly provide for ourselves in ways that disobey, or in any way compromise His word. The truth is that the temptation of Christ should make us see that each one of us really has only one ultimate need – God.

What kind of Savior submits Himself to the humiliation of temptation by a creature as unworthy and reprehensible as Satan? What kind of Savior ignores His rights as God's Son, and uses His divinity only to bless humanity like us? What kind of Savior sets aside His rights as the Son of God to have abundance of food and drink, to display His glorious power, to be worshipped, and

to rule over all Creation, so that He can offer Himself as a sacrifice for the undeserving? The same Savior who does all of this not for His own benefit, but for yours and mine and for the glory of God. Be thankful that is the heart of Christ. If it were not, the way of salvation and of abundant life in Him would never have been opened. But because of His faithfulness to His Father to humble Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:8–11, ESV)

Christ didn't use His own life as a platform for exalting and satisfying Himself. He gave it up as an instrument for exalting His Father and for saving us. What about your life? Can you say the same?

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