

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 4: The Temptation and the Start of Ministry -- Matthew 4:1-25

The voice from heaven has barely faded. "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," the Father had said over Jesus at the Jordan (3:17). And then, immediately, the Spirit leads Him not to a platform or a crowd but into the wilderness, "to be tempted by the devil" (4:1). The mountaintop of affirmation gives way to the valley of testing. If you have ever wondered why a fresh spiritual high is so often followed by a hard trial, watch Jesus walk into the desert.

For forty days He fasts, and when He is at His weakest, the tempter comes. Notice how the devil opens: "If you are the Son of God" (4:3, 6). He aims straight at the identity the Father had just declared, trying to get Jesus to prove, to grasp, to take a shortcut. Turn these stones to bread. Throw yourself down and let the angels catch you. Bow to me and I will give you all the kingdoms of the world. Every temptation offers Jesus something good by a route that bypasses the Father's will.

And every time, Jesus answers the same way: "It is written." He does not argue with the devil, debate philosophy, or rely on His own cleverness. He reaches for the Scripture, quoting Deuteronomy three times, and stands on the word of God. Where Israel failed in the wilderness for forty years, the true Son succeeds in forty days. The sword that defeats the tempter is not lightning from heaven but the written word of God wielded by a trusting heart.

When the devil leaves, Jesus comes out of the desert and begins to preach. His message is a single, electric sentence: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (4:17). The reign of God that John announced is now breaking into the world in the person of the King Himself. Jesus calls fishermen to leave their nets and follow Him, and He begins teaching, preaching, and healing through all Galilee. The campaign has begun. The kingdom has come near, and nothing will ever be the same.

Group Discussion: Right after the Father declared His love at the Jordan, Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted (4:1). Why do you think seasons of testing so often follow seasons of blessing, and what does it mean that the Spirit Himself led Jesus into that wilderness?

Personal Reflection: Jesus met every temptation with "It is written," reaching for Scripture rather than His own strength (4:4, 7, 10). When temptation comes at you, what do you actually reach for first, and what would it take to have God's word ready in your heart the way Jesus did?

Read Matthew 4:1-25

Study Questions

1. Each temptation begins with “If you are the Son of God” (4:3, 6), and each offers Jesus something good through a shortcut around the Father’s will. What do the three temptations teach us about how the devil works and what he is really after?
2. When tempted, Jesus did not rely on feelings or willpower but answered each time, “It is written” (4:4, 7, 10). What do you actually turn to first when temptation comes, and what would it take to fill your heart with Scripture the way Jesus had?
3. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy three times, standing on the authority of God’s written word against the devil himself (4:4, 7, 10). What does this reveal about the authority and sufficiency of Scripture for the Christian’s life and warfare?
4. The devil even quoted Scripture to Jesus, twisting Psalm 91 to serve his purpose (4:6). Where are you tempted to bend or selectively use God’s word to justify what you already want to do, and how can you guard against handling Scripture that way?
5. Jesus began His public ministry with the same message as John: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (4:17). What does Jesus mean by the kingdom of heaven, and what does it mean that it was, even then, drawing near in His person?
6. Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John, and “immediately they left their nets” and their father to follow Him (4:20, 22). What is Jesus asking you to leave behind in order to follow Him more fully, and what makes it hard to let go?
7. After the testing, Jesus went throughout Galilee “teaching, preaching, and healing” (4:23), and great crowds followed. What does the pattern of Jesus’ ministry teach us about the heart of God toward broken and hurting people?

8. The first disciples were ordinary working men, not scholars or religious leaders, yet Jesus called them to “follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (4:19). Where do you sell short what God could do through an ordinary life surrendered to Christ, including your own?
9. Jesus refused the devil’s offer of “all the kingdoms of the world and their glory” in exchange for worship (4:8–10), choosing the Father’s path to a very different kind of kingdom. What does this teach us about the nature of Christ’s kingdom, how it is established, and the kind of King Jesus chose to be?
10. Look back across the whole chapter: the wilderness testing, the sword of Scripture, the call to follow. Name one specific way Jesus is calling you to resist temptation, lean on His word, or follow Him more wholeheartedly this week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Deuteronomy 8:3, man living by every word from the mouth of God; Deuteronomy 6:13, 16, the commands Jesus quotes against the devil; Hebrews 4:15, Jesus tempted in every way yet without sin; 1 Corinthians 10:13, God providing a way of escape from every temptation; Daniel 2:44, the kingdom God would set up that shall never be destroyed.