

Matthew 4: 1-11 – Jesus Tempted

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted^[a] by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.³ The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

⁴ Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’^[b]”

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

“He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’^[c]”

⁷ Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’^[d]”

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. ⁹ “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’^[e]”

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him”

Introduction – Admin

Hello, for those of you who do not know me, my name is Jack, I am married to Olive and I have a 7-month-old son, Reuben, who keeps us both busy.

We are starting a series looking at Jesus’s teachings from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. In the next two weeks we will look at passages prior to the sermon on the Mount to help provide some context.

This week we are looking at Matthew 4:1-11. There is quite a lot going on in this passage, so it will be a great help if you keep it open in front of you,

and you can make notes and follow the points on the handout...

Introduction - Prayer

Before we start, let’s pray:

Dear Father, thank you for your son Jesus. Thank you, for this passage in Matthew 4. Please help us learn from Your word, and help us marvel at your Son, Jesus. In his name we pray, AMEN.

Introduction – Hook

I am sure most of us here, at some stage in our lives have taken a test or an exam. And I am sure that same number of us have asked:

Why do we take tests?

[Don't worry I am not going to ask what our results have been in past tests... I am sure a number of you are or were straight A students!]

Well, I researched some of the main exam boards and other teaching bodies to find out... why do we take tests?

A few of reasons came out:

1. To determine the **strengths and weaknesses** of a student through their education
2. To **measure effectiveness** at a particular discipline
3. To **judge the merits** of a student, for the next stage of their education / career or life...

Now in today's passage, we have a very different test taking place. We have Jesus, being tested or tempted in the desert.

However, the reasons for this test are not too dissimilar to the justification given by exam boards and governing bodies.

You see, my hope this morning is that from Matthew 4; through a compare and contrast exercise, we will be able to:

1. **Determine some of Jesus's strengths**, as the son of God
2. **See his effectiveness** as an all-sufficient substitute for us
3. And **judge the merits of his success**, in standing against these temptations

We will finish by seeing why all of these reasons are also great news for us!

More than a Moral Message: Where we fail, Jesus Succeeds...

To begin with however, there is common pitfall in how to read and interpret this passage.

I first assumed the passage is about us, resisting temptation, like Jesus does. So let's be like Jesus.

But if that is all we get from it, I think we miss the main point of the passage for a number of reasons...

First, it is quite a demoralising application, when we break it down.

In reality, we will never resist temptation fully... in our lives, we can all look back at some point where we have failed to resist.

As a result, in response to this passage we could say: 'Well Jesus was the Son of God, I am not, so it is no surprise that he handled temptation better than I did. He always will. What is the big deal.'

We would go on living our lives, with this passage having a minimal impact on our lives.

Second reason that interpretation misses the point... because I do not think the direct temptations Jesus faces, are necessarily, common ones we face!

I do not know the last time you were tempted to turn stones into bread, I certainly never remember that happening to me.

Of course, each of the temptations can be allegorised, but we miss the underlying reason why Jesus is tempted in these specific ways.

And most importantly, that interpretation, misses the context of the passage, and Matthew's aim within it.

Context of Matthew

Matthew is writing to a predominantly Jewish readership. He quotes the Old Testament the most out of all the gospel writers.

Matthew is concerned with showing us (as readers), that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God. "Look! You must be able to see this! He is the Son of God, the promised Messiah!"

Context of Preceding Passages

On top of that broader context, the passages leading up to Matthew 4 show how Matthew uses the Old Testament to set us up for a compare and contrast exercise...

I do not know if you remember these comprehension exercises at school... where you would compare to see the similarities and contrast to see the differences.

Now, I did not see this at first, so we have to look closely...
Matthew wants us to draw a link between Israel and Jesus.

Leading up to Matthew 4 he draws multiple parallels. Look with me at some examples:

- A) Matthew 2:14-15 (back a page) ... Jesus and his family had to flee their hometown to Egypt, then later on they return to Israel '**out of Egypt**'. Likewise, Israel escape slavery, **from Egypt**
- B) In their escape from Egypt, Israel pass through the Red Sea, **through water**, Jesus is baptised at the end of chapter 3 in Matthew, in the river Jordan, **through water**
- C) Staying in Matthew 3:17: Jesus is baptised and God says: "This is **my Son**, whom I love" ... likewise, in Exodus 4:22 (no need to turn there); God says: "Israel is **my firstborn Son**"

Context of Matthew 4:1-2

And then we come to our passage today... and if alarm bells were not ringing by now among the Jewish readership, they will have been by v1-2 in our passage today!

Look down at 4:1 with me:

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted^[a] by the devil. ²After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry."

Alarm bells would now be going *DING DING DING*

1. Led into the desert / wilderness v1,
2. to be tempted v1,
3. for forty days and forty nights v2

All those things sound a lot like Israel... But what is the point of these parallels?

Well, if we think back through Israelite history... in the desert is where it all started to go wrong. They started to disobey God when they were in the desert.

There was a tension at this point. Israel were meant to show how amazing a relationship with God should be... a light to the nations.

But the relationship ended in divorce.

Israelite disobedience and constant rebellion against God, showed a broken relationship.

Israel was scattered and obliterated off the map. Israel wandering in the desert was a critical moment in their history.

Now Matthew is setting this up to show this is a critical moment in Jesus' life. The testing of Jesus, before he sets out on his ministry, [that we will hear more of next week...]

Application to us?

However, we have got this far, and we may now be thinking... “ok, this is all well and good – and an interesting parallel between Jesus and Israel, but how does this apply to us here at St John’s Downshire Hill?”

Well, if we are honest with ourselves, we are not too dissimilar to Israel.

As we go through each temptation we will see our disobedience towards God is just like Israel’s.

Ultimately, I hope as we focus on the rest of the passage we will see:

where Israel fails, Jesus succeeds

Likewise, **where we fail, Jesus succeeds.**

And this is great news for us!

And so, to the temptations themselves... it is worth noting, that with each, Jesus could have said to the Devil, ‘No, go away!’

But he doesn’t, he refers to Deuteronomy in each temptation to give us a framework to help contrast what happened to Israel in the wilderness.

Note from the passage, v4, “it is written...”, v7 “it is written”, v10, “it is written”

Jesus quotes scripture to make a point by going back to Israel in the desert.

Temptation 1: Where we do not rely on God, Jesus depends on God (v3-4)

This takes us to our first point: Where we do not rely on God, Jesus is dependent on God.

Let's take a look at v3 and v4:

“The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

What's going on here? The devil seems to be going for Jesus' more immediate need... after all, Jesus is hungry. But there is more to it than that.

Firstly, there are no crowds, so this is not about performing a miracle to reveal Jesus' identity.

Jesus is hungry! Satan wants him to use his powers to feed himself, what is the harm?

I don't know about you, but I don't think Jesus' response is an obvious one. Turn with me, if you will, Deuteronomy 8 and we will read from v2, on page (____):

“Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, (*Why?*) to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. 3 He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you (*this is the bit Jesus quotes*) that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”

God wants the Israelites to learn to be reliant on him through the Manna. He wants them to be hungry and understand:

“We cannot live by our own efforts – by bread alone”.

Now we know from Israel's history, they failed miserably at this... you can look up Exodus 16 to see the start of their disobedience.

If we now flick back to Jesus and his response in Matthew 4. The Devil is asking – what is the harm in having some bread. Jesus is saying:

“No, God wants me to be hungry. He is teaching me to depend on him!”
Jesus is not after things for his own gain, he depends on God.

Nor did he do what Israel did, and grumble and complain. He lives off whatever the Father gives him. He is different to the Israelites.

So we see here, that where the Israelites failed, Jesus succeeds.

Likewise, don't we fail to depend on God, we fail to rely on what he provides us.

We strive for more when we have plenty,

we grumble when we think we have little.

We fail to depend on God in all situations.

Where we fail, Jesus succeeds, depending wholeheartedly on his Father.

Temptation 2: Where we test God, Jesus is Faithful (v5-7)

Let's take a look at our next point: Where we test God, Jesus is Faithful. Please look down with me at verse 5:

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'^[c]"

⁷ Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'^[d]"

This is a new challenge – the Devil is now quoting scripture at Jesus. What is the temptation from the Devil?

Some might say the Devil is asking Jesus to show his divinity through a PR stunt at the top of the temple... you can imagine, all the news crews collecting round the temple waiting to see these angels stop Jesus falling to his death and show that Jesus is divine.

But that is not quite right – there are no watching crowds. So, it cannot be a temptation to show others Jesus' divinity.

If we look closely at Jesus' response we can get to the heart of the temptation.

Don't worry about turning back again, but Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6:16:

“Do not put the Lord your God to the test as you did at Massah”

This is referring to another point in Israelite history at Massah (in Exodus 17), where the Israelites were in the desert, but had no water!

They were grumbling, saying they were better off back in Egypt, and after Moses intercedes, God gives them water!

But the real issue comes from a question they ask, verse 7: “Is the Lord among us or not?”

It is an absurd question... God has given them water,
an abundance of food,
and he has rescued them out of Egypt!

But they are still not ready to trust God after all that...

They wanted visible proof, to give them a reason to trust God, not in the past but now, in the present...

Does this sound familiar?

Back to Matthew 4 – what is the temptation? “Throw yourself down. God will protect you. Then you will really know God is with you”

The temptation is trying to get Jesus to prove God’s presence with him, so that *Jesus knows*, not for the crowd, but *for himself that God is really with him*, as he goes forward into his ministry and ultimately to the cross.

But Jesus says “no – I am not going to be like Israel, I am not going to force my Father to prove his presence. I will trust His promises”. Jesus is faithful.

It is a complete contrast to Israel, isn’t it?

But different to us as well. How often do we put God to the test and not trust his promises? We so often demand things from God, we make divine deals and say...

“if you give me this promotion, then I know you are with me... if you give me this girlfriend or boyfriend, then I will see you love me”...

We are just like Israel. We test God and doubt his promises.

Whereas Jesus is faithful.

Temptation 3: Where we have idols, Jesus is Loyal (v8-11)

And our 3rd point: Where we have idols, Jesus is Loyal. Again, look down with me at Matthew 4:8:

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 9 “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

10 Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’[e]”

Where did you last go on an amazing holiday? Can you still picture it? Maybe it was a beach, perhaps in the mountains, in a grand City, in a remote forest, a beautiful sunset.

Imagine that all rolled into one. The Devil is saying to Jesus – you can have the whole lot!

With his temptation, the Devil is offering Jesus a shortcut to the cross: “You can have it all, if you bow down and worship me”

We had Matthew 28:19-20 read at the start of the service – it is on our service sheets. The devil is asking Jesus to worship him.

If Jesus succumbs to the temptation, he would be saying: “All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me, therefore, go and bow down to the devil”

But let's look at his response, and he quotes Deuteronomy 6 again.

Where God commands Israel to serve Him only, do not turn to the foreign gods of the nations around them.

We know Israel made a mess of this command, God chucked them out of their land, and they were unable to show others how brilliant it is to know him.

Devil is asking Jesus to be like all other Israelites before him... disloyal.

Jesus says: "Away!" He is here to serve God only. He is loyal to God's plan and God's will for him. So that he can go to the cross, rise again, and give the great commission in Matthew 28:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
Therefore, go...

Again, we can see ourselves in Israel's place. We so often serve and worship other idols. They can seem so much more attractive than following Jesus. We are just like Israel. Where we have idols, Jesus is Loyal to his Father.

Wrap Up: Jesus vs. Israel

On the home straight now... what does this passage teach us about comparing God's son Jesus to God's son Israel?

God's son Israel were meant to be a blessing to the nations, the one place on earth you had to go to receive and experience God's blessing.

But as we have heard, God's son, Israel disobeyed Him. God's son Israel, in the end, came to nothing.

This testing of Jesus shows us: God's son Jesus has come to take over Israel's role... where Israel failed to be the worldwide centre for God's blessing, God's son Jesus is the one place where we can go to receive that blessing!

If we want to know God and experience him, it is *through Jesus*.

Marvel at Jesus

So, for us at St John's Downshire Hill, we should **marvel at Jesus**. He has been tempted and tested. Jesus has proved he is the New Israel.

He is what Israel should have been – access to, and blessing from God.

What is amazing is he has done this for us!

As we marvel it should also move us to trust him as our perfect substitute who has done what we have not done.

This is great news! He is the sinless one

He proved he is the new Israel and then died for us.

So even though we have and do fail, Jesus has succeeded for us,
both here when being tested, and on the cross, dying in our place.

[Look to Jesus](#)

On top of this, when we are faced with temptation, we must look to Him. We had Hebrews 4: 15-16 read to us. Please turn with me to Hebrews 4:15 – it is a great encouragement in light of Matthew 4:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. 16 Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

I am not sure what each of us are tempted by...

perhaps it is to fit in with the culture of the office

perhaps it is pornography

perhaps it is the fuelling the latest gossip...

Whatever it is, **we must look to Jesus.**

We can approach God's throne of grace, the cross, with confidence. It is there that we will find help in our time of need.

Dwell and celebrate on the fact where we fail, Jesus succeeds.

Let's pray:

"Father, thank you that Jesus is the New Israel, thank you that he has succeeded where we fail. Help us to marvel at him and look to him in our time of need. In his name we pray, AMEN"