

## **What is Temptation All About?**

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Rich Nathan  
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God At War  
Matthew 4.1-11

I've been doing a series on spiritual warfare which basically is the notion that when we play the game of life there is another team on the field. Every square inch of this universe is being fought over. It doesn't matter if you are a follower of Christ, or not yet a follower of Christ, you will face spiritual opposition and harassment by spiritual forces of wickedness as you do life.

We can't discuss spiritual warfare without discussing the issue of temptation - the battle that takes place in which your allegiance both claimed by God and also counter-claimed by Satan and evil.

Advertising and modern marketing tends to make temptation a really minor issue, certainly not a moral issue. So contemporary advertising that uses the word "temptation" does it with respect to two things: chocolate and perfume, with brand names like "Sweet Temptation" and "Chocolate Seduction."

Of course, TV shows try to titillate us with reality offerings such as "Temptation Island", which fortunately bombed in the ratings.

Contrary to P.T. Barnum, you actually can under-estimate the taste of the American public. Most famous of all, of course, is the great Motown group – The Temptations.

By the way, how many of you have never heard of The Temptations?

Temptation is a major theme in the Bible; this battle between good and evil and how we human beings are going to choose, whether we choose to resist, or whether we give in. Whether we will stay faithful to God, or whether we will go along with the devil. Temptation is a major theme in the Bible. Of course, we have the most famous temptation story in the Old Testament, one that I preached on a few weeks ago, that involved Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. And it had all the classic temptation elements – the tempter's subtlety, his asking of the wrong question, rather than the right question, the opening of the door for conversation with the tempter, the seduction of living life without limits. It is all there in the original temptation in the Garden.

But there are so many other stories of temptation in the Bible. In the Joseph story we have Potiphar's wife attempting to seduce Joseph to engage in sexual

sin. We have the story of Samson and Delilah in which Samson is eventually seduced to give up his secret. Job's wife tempts him to curse God and die. King David is tempted to commit adultery with Bathsheba and then tempted to commit murder to cover up his adultery. Lot is tempted to choose material prosperity in the city of Sodom. The rich young ruler is tempted to walk away from Jesus because of his greed. Judas is tempted by 30 pieces of silver.

Other Bible characters are tempted by ambition. Some are tempted by false worship. Some are tempted by the desire for self-preservation.

We cannot talk about spiritual warfare without, at least at some point, talking about temptation. I've called today's talk, "What is Temptation All About?" Let's pray.

SLIDE – Matt. 4:1-11

1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted 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: 'People do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" 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.'" 7 Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 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.'" 11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Now, it says in v. 1,

SLIDE – Matt. 4:1

1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

We need to, just as a preliminary matter, distinguish between testing and tempting. The Bible is very clear that God never tempts us to sin. James 1:13-15,

SLIDE – James 1:13-15

13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each of you is tempted when you are dragged away by your own evil desire and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

The same word for tempting can also be used of testing. And we do know that God does test people. Testing by God is like boot camp, or like spring training drills. God allows life's circumstances to push us beyond what we thought our limits were to mature our characters, and demonstrate the reality of our Christian claims. So the Bible teaches that God may allow persecution or sickness, or loss, to come into our lives to push us to greater and greater maturity and greater and greater trust in God and his provision. Something happens inside of us when we are tested and we pass the test. When we don't give in to unbelief, when we don't give in to self-pity, when we don't throw in the towel, something happens to the follower of Jesus when they are tested. Here is what we read in Romans 5:2,

SLIDE – Romans 5:2-4

2 ...And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope.

See, here is the way it works. You begin the Christian life hoping that you will be saved; hoping that you will one day stand and see the glory of God. But you wonder inside about the reality of your Christian profession. You say to yourself, "You know, I am so weak; I am so unreliable; I am the kind of person who turns tail and runs at the least threat to myself; I'm a compromiser; I lack self-control; how do I know that I really will make it all the way to God?"

When we are tested. And we find ourselves persevering in our tests. We don't give up on God. We keep hanging in there. Oh, we fall, but we get up again. So we find ourselves persevering and in our perseverance, our character is refined. We discover that we can control ourselves. That we do have the ability to resist temptation. And this results in hope, a more solid hope, and a firmer hope that one day we will be with God that we will never fall out of the hands of our loving, strong Savior.

We begin with hope, but it is an uncertain hope. But through testing we end with a sure hope, a confident hope.

Temptation is totally different than testing. Satan's motive in tempting us is not to strengthen us, but to weaken us; not to cause us to be more dependent upon God, but to cause us to be more independent; not to build up our faith, but to tear down our faith in God; not to give us a certain hope, but to make us wonder if we are Christians at all. God tests us to draw us near to himself; to make us more dependent upon him. Satan tempts us, using the very same circumstances, to entice us away from God, to draw us away from fellowship with him, to cause us to violate God's commandments, and to seduce us to sin in a way that grieves and dishonors God.

We also need to remember that there is a difference between temptation and sinning. The book of Hebrews tells us regarding Jesus in Hebrews 4.15, “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.”

So often a thought comes into a believer’s mind, a thought of doubt regarding God’s goodness, or his existence, a lustful thought, an anxious thought. And Satan whispers in the believer’s ear: “Well, you might as well indulge, since you’ve already sinned because of this thought.” So many Christians are plunged into spiritual discouragement because they do not accurately distinguish between temptation and sin. The enemy can intrude a thought into your mind. He can tempt you to doubt, or to lust, or to be anxious, or self-pitying. As we are going to see today, Jesus was tempted in every way as we are. The issue of sin has to do with what we do with the thoughts once Satan whispers it in our ears. Do we indulge it? Do we get on the train and ride for a while? Or do we reject it? Do we shut the door and say, “no! I’m not going there. This will not produce in my life the life of the Kingdom Jesus promised. This line of thinking will not produce in my life a sense of joy. It will not produce closer intimacy with Christ. It will not cause me to be Christ-honoring. It will not make me the kind of person I want to be. I slam the door on it.”

We have to distinguish between testing which comes from God and tempting from the evil one. But we also must distinguish between sin and temptation. We read in v. 1 these words:

SLIDE – Matt. 4:1

1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Much to our surprise, the Spirit’s first command to Jesus is to lead him into the desert to be tempted by the devil. Jesus has to go through an inner struggle of faithfulness to the call of God, a struggle against all the ways that his Messianic calling can be twisted and distorted. But Jesus also has to descend into all the pitfalls and perils that face the human race because there is no other way for him to lift us up other than to go down to the very depths of our brokenness and fallenness. To be truly incarnate, to really take on human flesh and not remain above us, Jesus has to enter our total existence as human beings. He identifies with us in baptism; but, he also has to experience all of our temptations to become truly one of us.

Now, this story of Jesus’ three temptations fits into the gospel of Luke and the gospel of Matthew in two very different and interesting ways. Luke’s gospel presents Jesus to us as the Savior of the world. Luke traces Jesus’ lineage all the way back to Adam. And if you look with me at Luke 3:38, we read regarding Jesus’ lineage,

SLIDE – Luke 3:38

38 [that Jesus] is...the son of Adam, the son of God.

Then Luke says in the very next verse in Luke 4.1-2 these words:

SLIDE – Luke 4:1-2

1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.

What Luke is trying to say to us is that Jesus who is the Savior of the world is going to succeed where Adam failed. Jesus is the Second Adam; he is the last Adam. Jesus is going to head up a new humanity. He is building a new human race of people who will follow him in his faithfulness rather than following Adam in Adam's unfaithfulness.

You see, when Jesus was in the wilderness, he was with the wild beasts. Mark 1:13,

SLIDE – Mk 1:13

13 and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

Luke is contrasting the circumstances of Adam's temptation with the circumstances of Jesus' temptation. Adam was in the Garden and he was with animals who are completely subjected to him, obeying his every command. In contrast, Jesus is in the wilderness, the desert, the opposite of the Garden, and he is with wild beasts who are outside of human control. If the Garden is ever going to be restored, if the wolf is ever going to lie down with the lamb, and the leopard lying down with the goats, as the prophet Isaiah declared, then it is necessary that Jesus conquer every temptation that defeated Adam and that he pay the price for our yielding to temptation.

Right off the bat, Luke is signaling to us the restoration of all of creation that is going to take place through the work of the Savior of the world.

But Matthew has a different purpose. Matthew presents Jesus not so much as the Savior of the world, but as the fulfiller of the promises to Israel. So Matthew, writing to the Jewish people, in contrast to Luke who wrote to a Gentile audience, Matthew begins his gospel with Matthew 1:1, saying: "This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham"

And so in Matthew's account, Jesus recaps in his own life the story of Israel. Only Jesus was faithful where Israel was unfaithful. So when the Magi come, they go to King Herod and they ask the question:

SLIDE – Matt. 2:2

2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

And as a baby, he is freed from Egypt and we read in Mt 2.15 these words:

SLIDE – Matt. 2:15

15 where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Not only is Jesus taken out of Egypt like Israel, but he passes through the River Jordan, just like the Israelites did when they entered the Promised Land. We read in Matt. 3:13,

SLIDE – Matt 3:13

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.

And finally, just as the Israelites were led by the Spirit into the wilderness, they were led by the cloud and the pillar of fire, so also Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested and matured. Matt. 4:1,

SLIDE – Matt. 4:1

1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Jesus succeeded where Adam failed. Jesus succeeded where Israel failed. Jesus succeeds where we fail. That's why he can be the Savior of the world.

So what are the temptations all about?

Let me just share with you two general observations regarding all temptation. First of all, we note here that Satan comes to Jesus personally. Vv. 1-3,

SLIDE – Matt. 4:1-3

1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted 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."

Those of us involved in Christian ministry, those of us involved in Christian leadership are tempted to think that so long as everything in ministry is doing well, so long as our small group is succeeding, so long as we continue to play on the worship team, so long as we still are seeing people come to know Christ, then everything is OK between us and God. We need to understand that most temptations do not occur in the public sphere of life. Most temptation is personal.

SLIDE

Temptation is personal

The battle with Satan is almost always a personal battle. The fight is not primarily about your public self, what other people can see of you, the fight almost always has to do with the faithfulness of your private choices to God at the level that only you and God alone can see. Temptation virtually always concerns the very personal battle of your wrestling with your own anxieties, the fight to subdue your own sexuality, your heart attitudes towards people of other races, the choices you make regarding your private spending, or to be self-pitying or instead be thankful. It is not your public self that forms the battle ground of most of our fights regarding temptation, it is our private selves. The battle with temptation is as close to you as your own heart.

And it is not in the big things, the great and the grand, that most of our wrestling with Satan takes place. It is not that often that we are faced with mammoth decisions. Most of the time we are faced with little choices, little forks in the road, toward or away from God. Which leads to the second general observation: virtually all temptation, at core, is temptation towards dependence or independence from God. Almost all temptation boils down to whether you are going to trust God or whether you are going to doubt God. Or another way to put it is "temptation is about trust in God or drawing you away from God."

#### SLIDE

Temptation is about trust in God.

Let me share with you the most fundamental issue that is behind all of Satan's temptations. It is to get you to doubt the trustworthiness and goodness of God. Throughout this text in Matthew 4 with question after question and probing after probing, Satan is attempting to sow into Jesus' mind doubts regarding God, doubts about what God says, doubts about God's provision, doubts about the call that is on Jesus' life.

There was a psychoanalyst who lived in the last century named Erik Erikson. He was famous for describing 8 developmental stages through which healthy human beings pass from infancy to late adulthood. And any of you who were psychology majors, or studied child development, or were in social work or education, I'm sure you've come upon the name Erik Erikson and his 8 developmental stages.

Erikson said that from birth to age one the central issues in an infant's life is

#### SLIDE

Is my environment trustworthy or not?

Erikson taught that at the foundation of a person's life is this fundamental issue of trust. If a child receives care and lives in a predictable safe environment, a child learns to trust. But if this issue of trust is violated, if a child is abused, if care is inconsistent, or mostly absent, then they may find themselves unable to form

healthy and long-lasting relationships with others. They may grow up hopeless, hiding from the outside world.

I would say the most fundamental question is not: Can I trust my environment. I would say the most fundamental question a person can ask or answer is:

SLIDE

Can I trust God?

That question is at the foundation of all spiritual and mental health. Can I trust God in this situation even when I can't see the outcome? Can I trust God as I go through this grief? Can I trust God even as I experience this loss? Can I trust God even when the future looks uncertain? Can I trust God even when a door to a new job is slammed in my face? Can I trust God in disappointment? Can I trust God in suffering? Can I trust God in my finances? Can I trust God with my marriage? Can I trust God in my singleness? Can I trust God with my kids or grandchildren?

If you want to know the strategy of the enemy, the issue always revolves around an attack on your capacity to trust God. Because the enemy knows that if you begin to believe that God is not trustworthy, that God will not provide, that God does not hear your prayers, he will have driven a wedge between you and God. You may go through religious motions, but you will not give yourself to God. You will lose your intimacy with God. You will lose your spiritual vitality. Satan's attacks are subtle. They are designed to attack your trust in God.

So, let's look at the first temptation, then. Matthew 4.1-4

SLIDE – Mt 4:1-4

1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted 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: 'People do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

I would call this the temptation to make God irrelevant.

SLIDE

The Temptation to make God irrelevant

Tell these stones to become bread. Now, this – and I say this with all affection because my wife was a social worker, but this is the temptation of social work.

SLIDE

The temptation of social work



This is the temptation facing our community center. This is the temptation facing our homeless ministry. This is the temptation facing our free medical clinic. This is the temptation facing all Christians who are involved in work of justice and charity. The temptation boils down to this: believing that the most important thing is meeting people's physical needs – their need for food; their need for shelter; their need for classes to learn English; their need for medical attention. The temptation is to believe that these things are really the most important thing.

We say to God, "isn't the great objection that stops people from believing in God the existence of so much human suffering? What is a greater objection to belief in the goodness of God, a benevolent God who oversees this world, than the magnitude of world hunger. If you are the Redeemer, if you are the Savior, if you really cared to meet the world's needs, then turn these stones into bread and feed people."

"How are we going to determine if you are the Redeemer at all except that you solve social problems. Aren't those the most fundamental, the most primary issues facing humanity? Isn't our basic crisis the crisis of poverty? In fact, Jesus, doesn't your own God-inspired Bible tell you to love your neighbor? Isn't that what politicians tell us religion is all about? It is by loving our neighbor – that we feed our neighbor, we clothe our neighbor, we give our neighbor medical attention – isn't that what Christianity is all about?" The first temptation is transforming Christianity into a kind of social work.

And Jesus responds in a way that challenges every secular system, whether it is American capitalism, or classical Marxism, or Swedish social democracies. He says in v. 4 these words:

SLIDE – Mt 4:4

4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'People do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

In other words, it is important to love our neighbor. It is important to meet our neighbor's physical needs. But loving our neighbor and meeting his or her physical needs comes second. You see, there are two great commandments that Jesus talks about in Matthew 22:37-39,

SLIDE – Matt. 22:37-39

37 Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment.

39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

And we've got to get the order straight. First and most essentially we need to love God. But the great temptation facing us is the temptation to push God aside.

## SLIDE

### The temptation to push God aside

Because we perceive God as secondary to what is really important. Understand this, friend. At least for the follower of Christ, indeed, but for most people, Satan doesn't come along tempting us to be evil. Let me show you how you can be an evil person. That's not the temptation. The temptation is "Let me show you how you can be a more productive person. How you can do life in a way that makes way more sense and produces way better results than spending time with God. See, this business about your relationship with God and developing intimacy with God, that's peripheral to the real business of life. The real business of life, is a life which is making a difference in this world. The real business of life is feeding people; it is making money; it is taking care of your kids; it's politics; it's raising a family; it's turning stones into bread. And if you've got time left over for spirituality, that's great. But that's a luxury. That's not at the core of a person's heart. Spirituality, that kind of stuff is a luxury for those kind of people who are into that kind of thing – the mystics, the monks."

So the temptation that is facing us is squarely this: is God really at the center of our existence or not. Or can we push him to the side?

I'm really busy. There are so many more important things to do for God, must we first of all develop our relationship with God? What makes for real life? Does real life spring from our feeding off of a relationship with our Lord? Or does real life spring from a feeding off of our productivity? Our doing good for others? Our working justice in this world?

Don't misunderstand me, friends. I want to spend much of my life building a church that does justice. We talk about being the best friend our city ever had, but God forbid we put Jesus on the periphery. God forbid that our own life in God begins to seem irrelevant to the big issues of our day.

But you know, friend, when we neglect humanity's spiritual needs, we find it impossible to produce justice anyway. The whole enterprise collapses. Philip Yancey, a great Christian writer, wrote some years ago about a visit that he had to Russia right after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He was talking with a Russian official who said, "You know, we communists share so much of the same vision for humanity that you Christians do. We want to see a more just world. We want to see a world in which people are fed and clothed and well educated. But the one thing our communist system could never produce was a compassionate heart. We could never motivate our people to be compassionate. Instead, we found that our people would rather get drunk. Our people were lazy. How is it that you Christians produce compassion?"

Do you understand that if we don't keep first things first, if we don't make our first priority our own relationship with God, our own personal intimacy with Christ, if

we don't keep first things first, then the second thing, our ability to do justice collapses. We won't care about justice, because we won't have transformed hearts. The temptation to make God irrelevant. That is the first great temptation.

Here is the second great temptation – the temptation to test God.

SLIDE

The Temptation to test God

Matthew 4.5-7,

SLIDE – Mt 4:5-7

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

Well in this temptation the devil presents himself to Jesus as a Bible scholar. And oh how the devil often speaks to Bible scholars and theologians making the Bible say what we have decided it ought to say, allowing God to speak in some areas, but not in others, twisting scripture to make it fit our particular worldview, or our political perspective, or our nation's goals. This is what God must say; this is what I'm going to allow God to say. Satan presents himself to Jesus; Satan presents himself to us as a Bible scholar subjecting scripture to our worldview and not allowing scripture to speak for itself.

So what is the temptation regarding testing God? Well, there is the temptation first of all to Jesus.

SLIDE

The temptation to Jesus

Jesus, climb up here on the pinnacle of the temple and jump down. Angels will carry you. Jesus, do the spectacular. In other words, make faith in God absolutely irrefutable. If you are the Son of God, then act the way God should act, if God existed. Overwhelm our doubts. Don't hide yourself. Jump off the pinnacle of the temple and then let us watch angels swoop down and carry you. There won't be any atheists left in the world, if you do that.

Haven't you ever tested God and said to God, “God, give me something that is irrefutable, that isn't subject to another way of looking at it.”

I remember shortly after I gave my life to Christ, I went through a crisis of faith. One night I was outside at a camp. I looked up at the sky. It was black and filled with stars. I said to God, “God, give me some sign in the sky of your existence.

Let me see a shooting star. Let me see something, some small thing right now that communicates to me that you exist. I need to know that my conversion wasn't just a psychological thing; that all the joy I felt wasn't just some emotional release. I need to know irrefutably that you are real. Give me something physical, something solid upon which I can build my faith."

I stared at that sky for what seemed to me to be hours. And I saw nothing. Because God doesn't play those games. God will not pony up, generally, to overwhelm our doubts. He always leaves us with the freedom of choosing for him or against him. Some people call it divine self-restraint. Some people are upset because they say God gives us human beings way too much liberty, way too much freedom. Why don't you compel belief? But God doesn't. He is trying to produce a race of people who choose to freely love him.

See, Satan is always interested in dazzling, in coercing, in herding people like cattle, making people do something, forcing obedience. God is always non-coercive. Until we stand before him in judgment, God says you have the liberty to choose for me or against me. The world system, like the Taliban, will beat you into submission, will make you comply. The world system is like the communist, the thought police. Thomas Merton, the great Catholic mystic, said, "God is not a Nazi."

Temptation to Jesus, overwhelm our doubts, dazzle us. The temptation to us is our testing of God: God prove yourself to me by backing up my insane, non-spirit led activity.

SLIDE

The temptation to us

I am going to jump off the pinnacle of the temple, and God you have to catch me and protect me from my own stupidity. God, I am going to take out a huge loan, build this enormous business, and make myself millions of dollars. Of course, I can tithe and support so many different missions. And God, if you don't make that business succeed, I'm going to be mad at you. If you don't back up my acts, I don't know if I can even follow you. I'm sure going to be bitter at you for not backing my business up; for not making me successful.

Back up my grandiose schemes in ministry. How many churches test God? Oh, we're going to build a Christian school. It is going to cost x-million of dollars and we are going to need a thousand students. It will put our name on the map – for God's glory, of course. And then we can't pay for it. And people in the church start doubting God's goodness. Why is God not coming through for us. Reveal yourself to us, God. Back up our insane acts.

Friends, virtually every day when we pray we are being tempted to test God. When you pray for a loved one, do you say: Lord, here is what I would really like.

But you are God. Or do you say: Lord, here is what you must do if you are God. Here is the precise way you must answer my prayer, if you are good. Lord, let me define for you what love is because you clearly don't understand love. Let me define for you goodness. Let me define for you trustworthiness. Let me explain to you what your work in my life ought to look like. I'm going to try to force your hand in prayer. The temptation to test God.

And finally, the last temptation, the temptation to compromise, Matt. 4:8-11.

SLIDE – Mt 4:8-11

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 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.’” 11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Jesus is shown all the kingdoms of the world and offered them by Satan. All he needed to do was to fall down and worship the devil.

I have no idea whether the devil could actually offer the kingdoms to Jesus. He is called the Prince of the Power of the Air, the ruler that is at work in the sons of disobedience. He does have a measure of authority. But Satan is always a liar about everything. Certainly any authority that he has is a delegated authority from God. What is he actually tempting Jesus to do?

He is tempting Jesus to avoid the cross.

SLIDE

The temptation to avoid the cross

Notice, it says:

SLIDE – Mt 4:8-11

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain...

There is a second mountain that Jesus had to face and that was the hill called Golgotha, the hill upon which he was crucified. Maybe there is another way to bring peace to the world. Maybe there is a short-cut, a pain free way, a way that doesn't require humiliation and beating and suffering and crucifixion to save this world. This was the temptation that Satan threw in Jesus' face all the time. This was the temptation that came to Jesus' closest friend, Peter, when Peter tried to dissuade Jesus from going to the cross. This was the temptation Jesus faced as he was taking his dying breath. Satan was speaking through the bystanders who yelled at him: Come down from the cross. Establish your kingdom. But don't do it God's way, the way of pain, the ransom for our sin, the way of propitiating the wrath of God, the way of blood sacrifice. Do it some other way.

## SLIDE

### A Temptation to compromise

Friend, how many times does Satan come along to you and to me and say: Look, you can have what you really want. Just cut corners a little bit. God will understand. You don't need to be so legalistic. Just turn your conscience off in this area and you will get ahead.

You know, Jesus was offered all the kingdoms of the world, if he would just worship Satan. Just bow the knee. Jesus, just bow the knee. Friend, you and I bow the knee to Satan for so much less than all the kingdoms of the world. We bow the knee just to have the acceptance of a stranger on a plane. "I'll put my light under a bushel; put a book over my Bible; watch my words so that this stranger approves of me." Satan is saying: Just bow the knee and you will get that approval. Just bow the knee to me and maybe your dad or mother will say: I respect you. Just bow the knee a little bit and you will get the love you want.

Bow the knee and I will give you sexual pleasure. Bow the knee and I will give you the corner office. Bow the knee and I will get you the job. Just massage your resume a little bit, make yourself look a little bit better than you are. That's the way the game is played. Bow the knee.

Temptation. You know, with every choice we make the issue is not small according to God. The issue facing our souls is monumental. The Bible constantly says that we are one road or the other. We are on the road that leads to life, or we are on the road that leads to death.

## **What is Temptation All About?**

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**Rich Nathan  
June 16-17, 2007  
God At War  
Matthew 4.1-11**

- I. Two Key Distinctions**
  - a. Testing v. Tempting (Romans 5.3-5)**
  - b. Tempting v. Sinning**
  
- II. Two Key Storylines**
  - a. Jesus Succeeds where Adam Failed (Luke)**
  - b. Jesus Succeeds where Israel Failed (Matthew)**
  
- III. Two Key Generalizations About Temptation**
  - a. Temptation is Personal**
  - b. Temptation is About Trust In God**
  
- IV. The Temptation To Make God Irrelevant (Mt. 4.1-4)**
  - a. The Temptation of Social Justice**
  - b. The Temptation to Push God Aside**
  
- V. The Temptation To Test God (Mt. 4.5-7)**
  - a. The Temptation to Jesus**
  - b. The Temptation to Us**
  
- VI. The Temptation to Compromise (Mt. 4.8-11)**
  - a. The Temptation to Avoid the Cross**
  - b. The Temptation to Short-Cuts**