

Matthew 4:1-11 - Godoy

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Preacher: Dan Godoy

[0:00] Good morning, church family, visitors, welcome. It's good to be together today on this first Sunday in Lent. Tad mentioned that at the start of the service.

Today is the first Sunday in Lent. Lent is a season of preparation for the church, preparation for Easter, the same way that Advent is a season of preparation for Christmas.

And during Lent, Christians devote themselves to prayer and repentance and habits of self-discipline and self-examination.

So we might say Lent is a season of testing before the celebration of Easter. And today we begin a six-week preaching series on the topic of testing.

So over the next six weeks, including today, we'll look at six passages in the Bible where God's people are tested, beginning with Matthew chapter 4, which you heard read.

[1:01] So a sermon series about testing for a season of testing. That's the plan for Lent here at Holy Covenant Church this year.

So we come to this text. Let me ask you to pray with me once more for God's help. Father, we are humbled and awestruck by this moment that even now your kingdom is offered to all who hear.

And you have ordained to use jars of clay like me, a sinner, a doubter, to proclaim your word. So I need your help. We all need your help.

We pray that you would give us eyes to see and ears to hear this morning. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. The Christian life is a dangerous journey.

The writers of the Heidelberg Catechism say this about temptation that come in the Christian life. By ourselves, we are too weak to hold our own, even for a moment.

[2:12] And our sworn enemies, the devil, the world, and our own flesh, never stop attacking us. A dangerous journey. Jesus teaches us to pray, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

We prayed it this morning. But what does that mean? How are we delivered from the evil one? Our gospel reading this morning, and our sermon text, shows us that when we pray that way, it's not wishful thinking.

It's not a prayer tossed up to heaven, and then we're left on our own devices to resist the temptations of the evil one. But Christ has gone ahead.

Our captain has defeated the powers of hell in his suffering and in his temptation. And he shows us the way to resist the evil one.

I want to encourage you this morning, Holy Covenant Church, as we read this passage, to look to Jesus, who has overcome the devil, and follow his lead.

[3:24] This gospel reading, this passage about Jesus tempted in the wilderness, is the threshold to the season of Lent. Every year, seven Sundays before Easter, churches that follow the calendar read this story from Matthew, Mark, or Luke's gospel.

And the church has been doing this for a long time, since at least the 4th century, probably earlier. Christians have entered this season leading up to Easter for 40 days, beginning with reading this passage and then entering a season of testing, usually by fasting, following the example of Christ, fasting in the wilderness.

This passage is like a trailhead marker that indicates the start of a challenging journey. And so this morning, as we read and study this passage, we stand in one of the oldest traditions of the Christian church.

What I want to do with this passage this morning is just to follow the outline of the narrative, which you hopefully heard as Tad was reading it. There's a prologue in the first two verses, and then three scenes where Jesus overcomes the temptations of the devil.

So it's like a stage play in four parts, and we'll just walk through each of those four parts. Let's dig right into it. The prologue begins verse 1 and 2.

[4:46] I'll read it. Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry.

As Matthew often does, he begins a scene of epic drama with just a few short verses of narrative. And so we need to settle in and unpack what Matthew is saying.

There are three characters that we see. Jesus, who moments ago was baptized in the Jordan by John the Baptist. And as he came up out of the water, the voice from heaven said, this is my beloved son with whom I'm well pleased.

We see Jesus. And we see the Spirit, who was present at Jesus' baptism, in visible form as a dove. And now he's compelling or leading Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

And we see the devil, man's ancient enemy, the tempter, the accuser, the deceiver, doing what he has always done.

[5:53] And we know that this scene is not set up for a polite conversation, but this is a cosmic conflict here at the center of history.

And so the scene is set. Now, there's a lot more in these first two verses. Let's keep unpacking. I'm going to give you four points of biblical theological reflection from these first two verses.

Okay? Four points. We'll walk through these quickly. Number one, this temptation was a test to prove Jesus the true Son of God. When I start studying a passage for preaching, I often jot down some questions that I have to come back to later.

And so as I read verse one, this is the question I jotted down. Was Jesus tempted or was he tested? And what's the difference? There's another major English translation of the Bible published not by Crossway.

So I don't know if there are microphones in here. It's published by a company that starts with a Z and rhymes with Yondervan. Anyways, in the NIV, there is a footnote to verse one at the word tempted and it says, the Greek for tempted can also mean tested.

[7:10] So ambiguous, maybe. I'll suggest purposely ambiguous. Tempting implies hostility. A tempter seeks to cause someone's downfall.

And that's what the devil is going to do in this passage. We see that plainly in the plot. Jesus was tempted. Testing is more neutral. You take a test to prove what you know.

A new wing design is tested by the engineers by putting it in a wind tunnel to see if it will fly. And Jesus indeed is tested in that way for the ministry that he is about to begin in verse 12 of chapter 4. Jesus is tested as Abraham was tested when God asked for his son Isaac. As Daniel and his friends were tested in the king's court, tested with vegetables. We'll hear those stories in the next few weeks.

Jesus is tested like that. So was he tempted or was he tested? The answer is yes. He was tempted and he was tested. St. Ambrose put it well.

[8:17] He said, The devil tempts that he may ruin. God tests that he may crown. Both are at play. This temptation is a test.

That's number one. Number two, Jesus' testing relives the history of Old Testament Israel. We're going to keep coming back to this throughout the passage.

But Matthew wants to plant his flag right here at the start to help us see what's going on in salvation history at this moment. Back in Matthew chapter 2, we heard this during Advent, if you were with us then.

Jesus goes down to Egypt just as Israel went down to Egypt and then Jesus comes back up out of Egypt and Matthew says, this was to fulfill what the prophet Hosea spoke when he said, Out of Egypt I called my son.

Jesus is reliving the history of Israel. In chapter 3, Jesus is baptized in the Jordan just as Israel was baptized in the sea and in the cloud in the wilderness.

[9:17] In Matthew chapter 4, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness just as Israel was led by the pillar of cloud and fire into the wilderness. And there, Moses fasted on a mountain for 40 days.

Israel was hungry for 40 years. And so also, Jesus fasts for 40 days and 40 nights. Matthew's saying, Jesus is reliving, recreating the history of Israel.

Now, what was the purpose of all of that for Israel? Well, Moses tells them in Deuteronomy 8, he says, Remember the whole way that the Lord your God led you these 40 years in the wilderness

that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.

Now, last year, we preached through the book of Numbers here at Holy Covenant Church, so we know how that test went. Israel failed and failed and failed. Christ is reliving their history, only he will not fail.

This testing relives the history of Old Testament Israel. Point number three from these first two verses, this testing is within God's will. This is a little bit tricky because James writes that God is not tempted and he does not tempt anyone.

[10:39] So we don't want to say, and Matthew's not saying, that the Father is tempting the Son. But we also don't want to say that God did not will for this temptation to take place.

We see in verse one, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

There's an intentionality to that. We see in verse 11, the angels come and minister to Jesus after the temptation.

They could have come before. I think Jesus could not have summoned a legion of angels to come to his aid at the temptation. No, but the whole framing of this narrative, this recreation of Israel's history, is that it's a divinely appointed moment where the Father, through the Spirit, in the Son, will encounter the devil and overcome this temptation.

I think of the book of Genesis, Joseph and his brothers. His brothers sell him into slavery, and Joseph says later, you meant to do me evil, but God meant it for good. So also here, the devil means to do evil, but God means it for good.

He means it for our good, as we will see. Okay, and point number four, Christ's temptation was real temptation. When it says in verse two, he was hungry, Matthew means he was hungry.

[12:05] Real, stomach groaning, mind-altering hunger. I forgot to eat breakfast this morning, and I kind of have the shakes. Jesus didn't eat for 40 days and 40 nights.

You think he had the shakes or maybe more? Absolutely. He was hungry. Early Christians rejected any idea that Jesus only appeared to be human, but was not truly human, the heresy of docetism.

Because if Jesus was not truly human, then he didn't really hunger, and this wasn't really a temptation and a test, and he can't help us. If Jesus wasn't truly human, he didn't really die.

He didn't really rise from the dead, and if there's no resurrection from the dead, our faith is futile.

We're still in our sins. But Jesus was truly human. The author of Hebrews puts it this way, since therefore the children, that's us humans, share in flesh and blood, he himself, that's Jesus, likewise partook of the same things, flesh and blood.

And so, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Jesus' temptation was real temptation, and that is good news for us.

[13:20] So, the stage is set. We've unpacked these verses a bit. Jesus is to be tested according to the will of God through real temptation by the devil, and so the attack begins.

I'll read verses 3 and 4. The tempter came and said to him, if you are the son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.

But he answered, it is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. The tempter would tempt Jesus to satisfy his own cravings.

And this is the devil's oldest trick in the book. In the Garden of Eden, Satan said to Eve, we heard it this morning, eat the fruit, you will not surely die.

Did God really say that you could not eat from any tree in the garden? We know the story, Eve took the fruit and she ate it and gave some to Adam and he ate it, and so fell the father and mother of all humanity.

[14:30] That old trick worked in the garden, why not here? Later on, Israel complained about the wilderness menu. We wish we had meat to eat, they said. We miss the onions and the leeks that we had in Egypt.

We can't even look at this manna stuff anymore, we're so sick of it. And so they were tested with meat, with quail, enough quail to satisfy their stomachs, and then some.

Piles and piles of quail, if you remember the story from Numbers 11. So much quail that it would come out at their nostrils. The text says, while the meat was yet between their teeth, a plague broke out against them.

Destruction. That old trick worked in the wilderness, why not here? And it's not just food that the devil finds useful to bring down God's people.

Sex works too. David arose from his couch, he was walking on the roof of the king's house, and he saw from the roof a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful.

[15 : 36] And we know the rest of the story. David used his position as king, his position of power, to satisfy his own cravings, and from that moment the kingdom began to slip from his hands.

That old trick worked in the king's palace, why not here? And so to Christ the devil says, go ahead, use your divine powers, satisfy your belly. Brothers and sisters, how well do we know this old trick? And yet, how quickly do we forget its power? The snack brand Cheez-It recently released a new marketing campaign for their salty snack squares.

Maybe you've seen these commercials or social media ads. The campaign is titled Cravings Can Happen Anywhere. And in the commercials, if you've seen them, they were probably on at the Super Bowl. I wasn't watching at that point.

But in these commercials, the characters humorously succumb to the sudden and urgent need to eat a Cheez-It. And it totally derails these important moments in their life, like meeting the girlfriend's parents, or delivering a eulogy at a funeral.

[16 : 54] They're overcome by the need to eat a Cheez-It. It's hilarious. And we laugh. It's funny. Sociologists say that comedy is one of the most effective ways that a culture shifts the window of what's acceptable and what's not.

Is it really funny for a Christian to be ruled by the sudden and urgent need to eat a Cheez-It? Or is it a small, culturally approved step toward resisting the rule of God's word over our lives?

The devil knows he can conquer a person through their belly. The 4th century Archbishop John Chrysostom preaching on the first Sunday of Lent many centuries ago said this, Mark well the craft of that wicked demon.

Note at what precise point he begins his attack and how well he remembers what he does best. For it was by the same means that he cast down the first man Adam.

Now by the same means here again he weaves his deceit the temptation to indulge the belly. Go ahead the devil says to Jesus you need this.

[18 : 11] Do this for yourself. Be satisfied. That old trick worked in the garden and in the wilderness. Why shouldn't it work now? Well Jesus replies at verse 4 and we get the sense that this time will be different.

He answered it is written man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Stunning reply.

Not by bread alone but by every word from the mouth of God. Notice what Jesus doesn't say. He doesn't say man will not live by food at all. Jesus never teaches us to be ashamed about the food that we eat.

True Christian teaching never denies the goodness of the things that satisfy the body like food, drink, sex when they're used in their proper order and place. What Jesus is saying is that satisfying the body is not the ultimate thing.

It's when we take those good things and place them over us as the ultimate things and let them rule over us. That's when we fail. That was the failure of Adam and Eve in the garden.

[19 : 24] That was the failure of David with his multiple wives and that was the failure of Israel with their wilderness cravings. And so Moses would rebuke them in Deuteronomy 8 and say God humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Moses said that to Israel because they failed the test. Jesus says this to Satan as if to say I know Israel failed here but I am the true son I will obey and then he says to the disciples now follow me and then he shows us the way throughout his life and ministry in Matthew's gospel of being ruled by God's word not by stones turned into bread but ruled by a prayer of dependence give us this day our daily bread what we need today not by piles of meat feasted with friends but by a feast of words given from a mountain blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be what satisfied the point is this Israel was ruled by their bellies but Christ is ruled by God's word and he shows us the way to follow him and before moving on I just want to say this is of great help to us Christ is our forerunner he has gone before he's overcome the ways of the devil he shows us the way Paul says we are not outwitted by Satan for we are not ignorant of his designs Jesus wants us not to be ignorant of the designs of the devil and so he shows us the way we don't need more diets filled with shame we don't need more health obsessed food fads we need to feast on the good

things that God has given us feast on his word read and preached feast on the sacrament spread before us bread and wine every week feast on good food shared with friends around tables in our homes at the dining hall and sometimes fast from the good things that would threaten to rule over us if we put them in the wrong place all of this to learn that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God so the first attack finishes and the second attack immediately begins the temptation to test God verses 5 through 7 then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him 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 and Jesus said to him again it is written you shall not put the Lord your God to the test the devil is suggesting to Satan that he performed this insane stunt from somewhere in Jerusalem and the question is will Jesus force the father through the spirit to save his life on his own terms the thought the phrase that comes to mind is trinitarian bungee jumping and the Holy

Spirit is the rubber band the devil's making a mockery of the trinity one commentator said it this way I think he's right Satan tempts Jesus to impel God to spare his life rather than trust him to the point of death now you notice Satan is quoting scripture and you're wondering what he's quoting and why if you were here at HCC last year on the first Sunday of Lent the sermon text was Psalm 91 the very text that the devil is quoting in this passage and I remember that sermon very well because I was the one preaching it so I might be the only one who remembers it but here's what I said Psalm 91 I said teaches us to trust with all our heart the God who overcomes evil Psalm 91 is filled with these massive promises starting with the opening line he who dwells in the shelter of the most high will abide in the shadow of the almighty beautiful promises for God's people Satan is doing what he's been doing since that original temptation in the garden he is taking God's words and twisting them did God really say he would command his angels did God really say he would deliver his faithful ones from evil

Jesus let's find out throw yourself down and let's see what happens this is what Israel did in the wilderness God had promised to Abraham Isaac and Jacob and the descendants that he would bring them into the land that he swore to give them an amazing promise sheer grace on God's people but they wanted more than promises they wanted proof and they wanted it their way and so they came to a place called Massa in Exodus 17 and they started to complain that there wasn't water and they said to Moses why did you bring us out of Egypt to kill us and Moses responded why do you test the Lord and Israel said is the Lord among us or not in their doubting in their struggles with their faith they challenge God they demand to have it their way and so Moses would rebuke them or really their children in

[25:15] Deuteronomy 6 saying you shall not put the Lord your God to the test as you tested him at Massa Jesus uses those exact same words of Moses to rebuke the devil saying I know Israel failed here too but I am the true son and I will obey and now he says to us now follow my lead if you are part of one of our home groups and I hope you are our home groups meet on Thursday night and we study the Bible together and we have been studying 1 Corinthians and this past week we were in 1 Corinthians 10 and I hope you have begun to notice if you were there and you are hearing this this morning how Paul's imagination as he writes that letter is soaked in these stories of Old Testament Israel and in the way that they are fulfilled in the life and work of Christ and Paul says to the church there in 1 Corinthians 10 we must not put Christ to the test as some of them did in the wilderness now there he's talking about not participating in sacrifices to idols and that's maybe not our temptation but what is it that tempts us to put Christ to the test a lot of answers could be given

I'll just provide two for you to think about number one we test God when we demand proof of his gospel promises this is hard because if you are like me you know that the Christian life is full of struggles and seasons of doubt Paul says we hope for what we do not see we remember the story of Thomas in the gospels who was not there when Jesus appeared to the others and they told him about the risen Lord and he didn't believe it he said I need to see it I need to touch it I know my own Thomas like heart doubting the promises of God but friends there is a right way to go through these seasons of doubt these seasons of testing and it's not raging against God raising our fist against him demanding to have proof our way but the right way is with a prayer given to us in Mark's gospel Lord I believe help my unbelief friends I want to say if you are struggling through a season of doubting of questioning you're not alone there are lots of others in this church myself included who know those seasons so I would invite you to talk to me let's grab a cup of coffee lunch and you can

hear my story and I can hear yours but let us not put God to the test by demanding proof let us go through those seasons of doubt humbly and in prayerfully number two we test God when we presume on his goodness this is what I call the Jesus take the wheel relationship with God if you know the old Carrie Underwood song you know what I'm talking about by the way if you are like me thinking that song came out last year it's 2005 okay like half the room wasn't alive we're getting old people alright this is when the car of your life the metaphorical car is headed toward a ditch and you refuse to take responsibility but just throw up your hands and say

God's got it he's got me God's in control okay God's got you and he is in control but he still wants you to drive the car the metaphorical one and the actual one if you're driving at that moment what I'm talking about here is refusing to walk in the ways of wisdom that we heard all that stuff about from the book of Proverbs over these last several weeks and yet wanting the blessings that come to the wise there's an old preacher Thomas Manton who said this he said God can rain manna out of heaven he can do it but when the soil will produce corn we must plow the soil to refuse ordinary means and expect extraordinary is as if a man should put off his clothes and expect God to keep him from cold we put God to the test when we presume on his goodness so let's not put God to the test Jesus shows us the way to resist the temptation to do it attack number two comes to an end and attack number three begins verse 8 through 10 the temptation of glory without suffering verse 8 again the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory and he said to him all these I will give you if you will fall down and worship me Jesus said to him be gone Satan for it is written you shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve I've been watching a little bit of hockey this last week with the Olympics on and in some of the games maybe you've seen them this happens in NHL hockey too the players kind of they kind of dispense with the illusion that they're playing with sticks and pucks and things and they just throw down their gloves and start boxing okay have you seen this happen it's kind of entertaining the gloves come off I imagine that's what's happening with Satan at this point the subtlety is gone this is what he really wants he wants to be worshipped throws down the gloves Jesus worship me and I'll give you all this now of course there's an irony to this temptation because Jesus knows and the devil knows the devil knows that Jesus knows that all the kingdoms of the earth already belong to Christ Paul says in Colossians 1 by him

[31 : 25] Jesus all things were created in heaven and on earth visible and invisible whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities all things were created through him and for him all this is the inheritance of the son of God but Jesus knows and the devil knows that Jesus knows that the path to that inheritance for Christ runs through the cross Paul says in Philippians 2 that Jesus would be obedient to the point of death even death on a cross and then only then God highly exalted him and gave him the name above every name and we sang it this morning that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord and that's the point of this temptation Satan is saying to Jesus your kingdom can come without being betrayed into the hands of sinners just fall down and worship me yours can be the kingdom and the power and the glory without the agony of crucifixion just fall down and worship me in this final temptation

Satan would tempt Jesus to seize the crown of glory without enduring the cross of suffering now how many of you would purposely choose a path of suffering if there was an easier way out we admire the martyrs from the early church all the way to today in modern places where Christians are persecuted and we admire them because they stand the test even when the stakes couldn't be higher life and death but the stakes for Jesus are not merely life and death the stakes are the entire mission for which he came to earth the stakes are the forgiveness of sins that we read about in Psalm 32 this morning the offer of the kingdom of heaven that is on offer even this morning as God's word is being proclaimed to all who would believe the offer and the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church the hope of the resurrection a plan

Paul says for the fullness of time to unite all things in Christ all of that is at stake in this moment as Jesus has the path of suffering that he must choose instead of the crown and so he casts the devil away be gone Satan and then he quotes for the third time from Moses Deuteronomy 6 you shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve see Israel worshipped a golden calf at Sinai but Jesus is the true son he will obey even if it costs him his life and throughout the gospel of Matthew this temptation will continue to come it would be Jesus close disciple Peter who would challenge him and say far be it from you Lord that you should suffer and be killed in Jerusalem

Peter wants Jesus to take the crown without being the suffering servant and do you remember what Jesus says to Peter in that moment get behind me

Satan a rebuke to the devil for the same temptation on the lips of Peter and then in chapter 27 as Jesus hangs on the cross the passersby deride him wagging their heads saying save yourself if you are the son of God do you hear the echoes of the temptation if you are the son of God come down from that cross save yourself but Jesus was obedient to the point of death and so a centurion would declare his victory over the devil saying truly this was the son of God well back in our passage in Matthew 4 Jesus has overcome every test and verse 11 angels come and are ministering to him messengers of God confirming his victory like trainers of a prize fighter holding up his arms after victory in battle I want to take the last five minutes friends to ask a closing question how do we follow Jesus lead

I've been saying that Jesus shows us the way so how do we follow his lead in overcoming the evils of this life and I've offered some suggestions throughout the way but I want to tie this together with two words that Jesus says to his disciples in the garden of Gethsemane he says watch and pray that you may not fall into temptation so let us watch and pray number one let's watch the devil is real first Peter five says that the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour and so he says be sober minded be watchful we must be watchful Jesus in this passage exposes the devil's battle plan so we know what his attacks look like and we can be watchful how our cravings would seek to rule over us how we might put God to the test even in our doubtings how we might prefer glory over suffering can I give you some homework it's the first week of Lent a season of self examination and testing make an appointment with yourself this week and with a pen and paper find 15 30 minutes to be quiet and examine yourself and the ways and places and times that you fall into temptation and into sin write them down the ways that you follow your cravings and testing

[37 : 23] God and preferring glory write it down and then keep watch and resist the devil and he will flee so number one watch and number two pray Jesus teaches us to pray in the Lord's prayer and have you ever noticed the way that the Lord's prayer fits like a puzzle piece with the temptation of Jesus in Matthew 4 I don't have time to map it all out right now but there's a prayer for daily bread a prayer for deliverance from evil a prayer for God's kingdom not ours Jesus gives us this prayer in part to help us fight temptation so when you are tempted pray that way and meditate on our captain Christ and how he has gone before us to help us overcome the evil one so watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation I'll say one last thing which is an invitation to you

Holy Covenant Church the pastors of HCC would like to invite you to join us in the Christian discipline of fasting during these 40 days leading up to Lent so the five of us pastors have committed ourselves to take turns each of the five days of the work week fasting for 24 hours so my day is Friday so from dinner Thursday after dinner until before dinner on Friday I will only drink water and coffee and I'm not into tea but I would do that if I were probably not kale smoothies the medieval monks drink beer during their fasts but I have to work on Fridays so that's not going to work we're doing this to follow the example of Christ and to learn from him not to be ruled by our bellies but by the word of God so an invitation to join us now let me quickly say this is an area I believe of Christian liberty last week

I had a friend tell me that he grew up in a tradition where fasting was so filled with spiritual baggage and emotional angst even mental anguish and if that's you we need to be discerning about how we apply this Christian discipline and children a word for you this invitation is not for you you need to eat your food and your bodies need to grow and parents you can talk about that in your homes but an invitation to fasting friends Jesus has gone before us this morning he teaches us to overcome temptation so let us learn from him and I'm going to close with the sixth petition of the Lord's prayer and you can recite with me if you want lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit Amen