

4. Attacked by the Devil

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[0 : 0 0] Now, if you could turn, please, to page 859 in the Bibles. We're doing this short series on what I've called preparing the way of the Lord.

Luke's account of how Jesus prepared himself and was prepared for his public ministry. We're continuing that into chapter 4, which will take us actually into the very early stages of that ministry.

And today we're reading chapter 4, verses 1 to 13. Jesus has been baptized by John in Jordan.

And Jesus, verse 1, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for 40 days, being tempted by the devil.

And when they were ended, he was hungry. And the devil said to him, If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.

[1 : 0 2] And Jesus answered him, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone. And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, To you I will give all this authority and their glory.

For it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you then will worship me, it will all be yours. Jesus answered him, It is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.

The devil took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, You are the Son of God. Throw yourself down from here. For it is written, He will command his angels concerning you to guard you, and on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against the stone.

And Jesus answered him, It is said, You shall not put the Lord your God to the test. And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Some of you, at least, not all of you by any means, are too young to remember 1981.

[2 : 3 1] One of the great films of that year was The Clash of the Titans, where the hero Perseus rescued the heroine by using the head of Medusa the Gorgon to turn the kraken, the monster, into stone.

Some of you, of course, may have seen the remake of it in 2010, which was much less exciting, I thought. But this phrase, The Clash of the Titans, has become almost proverbial for a contest between two individuals or two groups of people who are larger than life.

Perhaps two teams at the top of the league who are battling it out in a very important game, which will spell joy or sorrow to one team or other.

Perhaps two runners in a marathon or something like that, straining to reach the finishing post, two so-called elite men or elite women that you get in the London Marathon and so on.

And I was going to say two great orators in Parliament. Sadly, oratory has all but vanished. But in the 1970s, when people like Enoch Powell and Michael Foote were to draw the political stage, you did actually see The Clash of the Titans.

- [3 : 54] And, of course, we will not mention the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Anyway, this story that we've read here in many ways is The Clash of the Titans.
- The King of Heaven and the Prince of Darkness are meeting in mortal combat here. John the Baptist has said back in chapter 3, verse 16, One who is mightier, one who is stronger than I, is coming.
- And later on, Jesus says, The stronger one will bind the strong man. This is what's happening here. The Son of God meets the Prince of Darkness in mortal combat.
- And I think it's very important, though, that we realize that while this looks like the clash of the Titans, it's not the clash of equals. C.S. Lewis pointed out long ago, the opposite of Satan, the devil, in the Bible, is not God, but Michael, the archangel.
- This is not a contest of equals. Nevertheless, the important thing to remember is that Jesus is meeting the devil as a man in the power of the Spirit.
- [5 : 11] I think that's very important. That fits in with our study last week. Glancing back at this list of names, Jesus is the son of Adam, who is the son of God.
- And last week, we looked at the Adam Christ pattern, the last Adam who undid the damage done by the first Adam. As we know, the first Adam met this opponent as well, met him in the Garden of Eden and was hopelessly defeated.
- So, you see, this is the reversal of Eden. And this time, however, the odds are all in the devil's favor. Jesus has been fasting for 40 days.
- Adam had not fasted at all. Jesus is meeting him at a time when his strength is low. Verse 1, he ate nothing.
- Verse 2, he ate nothing during these days. When they were ended, he was hungry. This is the reversal of that great battle. Eden raised in the waste wilderness, as the poet Milton says, and paradise regained.
- [6 : 19] The great battle where Jesus meets his great adversary, the clash with the kingdom of darkness. That's the first thing. The second thing is, this is part of the authenticating of who Jesus is.
- Those of you who have been here the last few weeks will remember that as Jesus comes onto the stage, onto the public stage, he is instantly identified by John the Baptist as the coming Messiah.
- This is the one, this is the one of whom the prophet spoke. He's identified by the Baptist. He fulfills the scriptures. The spirit descends on him.
- And notice here the spirit is mentioned here. Verse 1, full of the Holy Spirit, led by the spirit. That's what I mean. He is the last Adam. This is the Jesus, the human, as well as Jesus the divine, meeting and defeating the enemy.
- So what he does is done in the power of the spirit. And indeed, the very fact he's attacked by the devil is another way of authenticating his ministry.
- [7 : 27] The devil recognizes only too well who this is, and he knows he must defeat him. As he defeated Adam, he knows he must defeat the last Adam. So let's look at these three temptations then for a few moments.
- What's the devil actually saying? Verses 3 and 4, the first temptation. If you are the son of God, command this stone to become bread. You're hungry, you haven't eaten for weeks.
- If you're the son of God, if you are who you say you are, if you are who all these others say you are, then show it, prove it. And this is the devil is saying, don't trust God to provide for your needs.
- That's the temptation here. Don't trust God. He hasn't provided for you the last week, so why trust him now? You see, he's saying act independently of your father.

Act independently. And this, of course, is an echo of the first temptation. Did God say, says the devil, you cannot eat of any tree in the garden?

[8 : 35] And here again, the apparently ordinary act of eating becomes the very nerve center of trusting in God. Of course, food is necessary.

But it's the excessive concentration on it here, saying, look, the most important thing is whether you have bread or not. But Jesus, of course, is not deceived by this.

It is, Jesus answered, it is written, man shall not live by bread alone. Jesus quoting from Deuteronomy chapter 8. Reminder to the people about to enter the land that God had been faithful in the desert.

He's not going to let them down now. They're about to move into a land where food is plentiful. And it is written means that it can be trusted.

After all, what the Bible says is what God says. And Jesus is saying, just as God provided in the desert, just as he was faithful all the way through providing manna and so on, then bringing him to the promised land, I'm not going to exercise supernatural power and turn these stones into bread.

[9 : 46] God does not lie, says Jesus, and he will provide. So the first temptation is don't trust God to provide. The second temptation is verses 5 to 8.

The devil took him out and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. The devil is always one for the spectacular. He showed him all the kingdoms of the world. Now, of course, you may say you cannot see all the kingdoms of the world, even from the top of Mount Everest.

That's not the point. This was a vision of all the kingdoms. The panorama of the eastern Mediterranean, the lens, and so on, spread out there.

And basically, the devil is saying, don't trust God to bring in the kingdom. Trust me. If you want to be king of the earth, I'll give it to you.

Now, the devil, of course, is a very accomplished liar. And part of what he says is true. He does have great power. Jesus calls him the prince of this world in John.

[10 : 50] Paul calls him the prince of the power of the air. You read the book of Revelation. You discover that the devil, the dragon, gives the beast, which is the power of the state, his throne and his great authority.

So the devil really has power. But he doesn't have absolute power. We're going to see that, actually. This is an introduction to the places, the many places.

And we'll look at one of them in a couple of weeks' time. Where Jesus casts out demons. You see, what's happening there is the kingdom of darkness recognizes that the prince of life has come.

That's why there's this explosion of demonic activity. You don't really get anywhere else in the Bible. Because the kingdom of darkness is confronting the kingdom of light.

So there's some truth in what he says. But you'll notice he says, if you will worship me. Now what's he asking Jesus to do? The devil says to Jesus, you will worship me.

[11 : 54] He's obviously not asking Jesus to sing a chorus. He's asking Jesus to give him total allegiance. Absolute allegiance.

That's what worship means. Worship, that is why worship can only be given to God. Worship, you can respect people. We can love people. But the only one to be worshipped is God.

You shall worship the Lord your God. And him only shall you serve. And once again, this takes us back to the very, very early days of the Bible.

What was it Satan says to Adam and Eve? You will be like God. Knowing good and evil. Basically saying, do you want to be gods in your own right? Well, you can be.

If you listen to me. This is what he's saying to Jesus. And that, of course, was the cause even before the world of his own fall when he wanted to be God himself.

[12 : 54] Once again, Jesus' use of scripture. Deuteronomy 6. This is in a passage, actually, about teaching children, bringing up children. A passage where it says, where Moses says, when you bring up your children, bring them up to worship the Lord only by teaching them the word of God.

Fascinating, actually, the word that's used. Teach your children. The word in Deuteronomy literally sharpen their teeth. Well, they're very, you know, as they're growing their teeth, as they're small, from these very earliest moments, surround them with the word of God and teach them to worship God.

You see, you cannot half worship. You can't have, you can't worship God and worship someone else. But, actually, what the devil is saying is, I can give you the kingdom the easy way.

You won't have to go to the cross. You won't have to suffer. You won't have to die. I'll give you the kingdom the easy way. And, of course, if he had succeeded, the kingdom would never have come at all, would it?

None of us could have been converted because it's only because Jesus died for our sins and rose again. That we can ever come into the kingdom. So, first of all, don't trust in God to provide.

[14 : 15] Secondly, don't, don't bring in, sorry, don't trust God to bring in the kingdom. There's an easier way. And, thirdly, verses 9 to 12, don't have confidence in God's word.

That's the very heart of it. He, once again, takes Jesus and sets him on the pinnacle of the temple. This is probably the pinnacle of the temple which overlooked the Kidron Valley, possibly a drop of 450 feet.

And, he says, throw yourself over if you're the son of God. And, anyway, it is written, he says, he will commend his angels concerning you.

Very, very subtle. See what he's saying. You say you believe in the Bible. You say the Bible is authority. Well, prove it then. Now, as Portia says, in the Merchant of Venice, the devil can cite scripture for his purpose.

And, that's exactly what's happening here. And, later on, Jesus, in his gospel, people are going to say, if you are the son of God, come down from the cross.

[15 : 28] Now, you'll notice what's happening here. The devil is being very, very subtle. As I say, he's taking scripture. And, actually, the devil loves to quote scripture.

He loves, particularly, he loves to take parts of the Bible and use them to contradict other parts. That's the way the devil works, and that's the way the devil works now. So, you see, the devil will take those parts of scripture, talking about love, and cause people to sentimentalize and say everything has to be judged by love, and totally reject those parts that deal with judgment.

You see, what's happening? If we do that, if we take one part of the Bible and say, this must set aside other parts of the Bible, what I'm really saying if I do that is, I am above the Bible, because I know which parts are valid and which aren't.

Jesus loves me. This I know. How do I know it? Because the Bible tells me so. The same Bible that tells me that, if I don't repent, I'll be judged.

The same Bible that tells me that only repentance and faith lead to eternal life. So, that's what the devil is doing.

[16 : 50] He's trying to outplay Jesus, so to speak. So, you quoted the Bible? I know the Bible as well as you. And, by the way, there is no doubt the devil does know the Bible. The letter of James tells us the theology of hell is totally orthodox.

The devils believe and tremble. Now, what's actually happening here? First of all, he's creating an artificial situation.

He's saying, look, do something spectacular. Throw yourself from the temple and we'll know, beyond any doubt, whether you're the Son of God. This is going to happen later in the Gospel as well.

When Pilate, trying to evade responsibility, sends Jesus to Herod, Herod was pleased because he wanted to see a miracle. And that's the problem as the story develops.

Many people are attracted to Jesus because of his powers, because of his miracles. But they're not genuinely convinced of his message. Essentially, the devil is saying, let go and let God create an artificial situation where God will have to intervene.

[17 : 55] But you see, this is artificial. This would in no way further the work of God. It would in no way enhance the claims of Jesus. It would in no way prove the Scriptures.

You see, God has already promised he's faithful. He has already said that his promises are sure. That's why Jesus says, shall not put the Lord your God to the test.

Now, the context there again in Deuteronomy is God's faithfulness and the people complaining. You see, if God promises something, we ought not to try experiments to find out if it's true.

We ought not to, as Jesus says, put him to the test. The only motive here could be sensationalism. The only motive here could be to try and gain huge crowds, flattering crowds.

So, artificially created situation. You see, the situation in Psalm 91, which he quotes, he'll command his angels concerning to guard you.

[19 : 00] On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against the stone. This is about the attacks on the faithful and God's promised protection. It's very different, you see, if you're in a situation of great difficulty to call to God to help.

Quite another thing to throw yourself into that situation and then call for help. You see, the devil knew who this was.

The devil, if we can be certain, saw the Spirit's descent. He'd heard the words of John, the acclamation of heaven. The devil knew the story well from the first Adam to the last Adam.

So, he wants to destroy confidence in God's word. So, should we see what he's doing? He's trying, first of all, to destroy confidence in God's provision.

The Lord will provide. No, says the devil, the Lord will not provide. You'll have to go and do your own providing. God has said of Jesus that he will reign over the whole earth.

[20 : 08] No, says the devil, that's in my gift. And unless you worship me, you won't get it. And then, finally, he attacks confidence in the word of God itself.

And in particular, he wants to encourage in Jesus this attitude of saying, it's not enough for God to promise. It's not enough for God to speak.

We have to try experiments to find out if it's true. And Jesus said, you don't try experiments with the Lord. If the Lord has said something, his word is his bond.

And indeed, the way that Jesus reacted to these temptations, the way that he, the way that he shows he understood perfectly who the devil was and what he was up to, is yet another authentication of Jesus.

Here is the true Son of God. This is no charlatan. Fake messiahs kept on popping up all over the place, claiming to, claiming miracle working and so on.

[21 : 12] Now, I just want to make one other point. This story is a unique story. Jesus meeting with Satan is unique.

But, as we sang in our hymn, this is a powerful lesson to us as well, exposing the devil's tactics.

Now, we're not going to beat him in our own strength. We're only going to win victories against him as we take our stand in Christ and as we become more deeply understanding of God's word.

I was told when I was a boy, throw texts at the devil and he'll run away. Well, I did and he didn't. The devil is not afraid of texts.

He knows the texts and he's great at pulling them out of context. What the devil fears is the full-orbed truth of God. That's the weapon that destroys him.

[22 : 18] The written word of God which so fully and faithfully points to the living word. That's the weapon against which he cannot stand. The most important thing about the devil is that Jesus Christ has defeated him.

As Paul says, thanks be to God who gives us the victory in our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Let's pray. Father, we know that we are weak.

We so easily succumb to temptation. and we praise you for the one who conquered the devil for our Lord Jesus Christ whose power is greater.

Greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world and we pray that when we face the temptations of Satan and his minions that we may indeed trust in the Lord, believe in his word and thus know the victory over him promised to all those who trust in him.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.