

“Being Tempted by Satan”

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Read Mark 1:12-13

Calvin: Do you believe in the devil? You know, a supreme evil being dedicated to the temptation, corruption, and destruction of man?
Hobbes: I'm not sure that man needs the help"

With tongue in cheek, Bill Watterson captures the dilemma faced by all. Temptation is an undeniable experience of anyone living. In the narrative of Mark, four thoughts come to the forefront concerning temptation, with two more offered by Matthew and Luke. I would like us to consider this for our personal edification.

First, there is a **purpose** behind every temptation (“the Spirit sent Him out”). Regardless as to how we might understand this thought, it was the Holy Spirit who drove Jesus into the wilderness in order to be tempted of the devil. The temptation of Jesus and His willingness to resist the devil and obey His Father was directly tied to the death He was to die. If He would have failed in His temptation, then the sacrifice He offered would be blemished and would not have the power to forgive sin. Whenever we are tempted, we must understand that the temptation is neither random nor arbitrary. There is a purpose behind it even if we cannot see it or understand it.

Second, there is a **place** of temptation (“in the desert”). Our temptations often come when we are in the dry place. It is often when we are left to ourselves that we find ourselves struggling against the appetites of the flesh.

Third, there is a **period** for temptation (“forty days”). Temptation has a life-cycle. There are seasons to temptation when it appears the greatest. Regardless as to our personal struggles, there are those occasions when its voice is softer and less threatening, and there are those occasions when its voice is taunting and menacing.

Fourth, there is a **power** behind temptation (“being tempted by Satan”). It is often noted how our temptation to sin comes from three sources: the world, our flesh, and the devil. In our passage, our Lord’s temptation came directly from the devil. Sometimes we give the devil too much credit for our struggles, but often we dismiss him altogether, as if he has no impact or influence on our struggle. There is a real devil who oversees thousands of demons and whose desire is to destroy the redemptive work of God in the redeemed people of God. The New Testament calls us to resist the devil in order that he might flee from us (James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8, 9). This is exactly what Jesus did and what we must do.

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In addition, Matthew and Luke offer two other thoughts concerning temptation.

Fifth, there is a **pattern** to temptation (Both Matthew and Luke). Paul tells us that we are not oblivious to his methods (2 Cor. 2:11). Although the devil is not limited by the following categories, they are suggestive of where the devil attacks. In temptation there is typically an attack against **God's provision** ("Bread"), **God's protection** ("Throw yourself down"), and **God's priority/person** ("Worship me"). This same idea was present with Eve (Gen. 3:6) and with Achan (Josh. 7:21) and is no less true for us. If you are in combat, knowing how and where your enemy will attack does not prevent him from attacking, but it does enable you to prepare and withstand the attack.

Finally, there is a **persistency** in temptation ("he departed from him until an opportune time" Luke 4:13). Although there are seasons to temptation, we are never completely safe from temptation. The battle with temptation is cyclical. All of us have questioned God as it relates to His provision and protection, and I would venture to guess that we have questioned whether or not He is actually in control of everything. Paul assures his audience that God does provide a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13) and how we are more than conquerors in Christ (Rom. 8:37). John equally notes how "greater is the one in us than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Understanding the nature of temptation is a first step in fighting temptation. Ultimately, it is only as we rest in the simplicity and sufficiency of Jesus Christ that we can triumph over daily temptation. It is because He has that we can.