

St. Matthew

Chapter 4

Immediately after coming up out of the water Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness where He fasted for forty days and forty nights. He is there tempted by the devil, but overcomes him and wins the victory. It is the same with us; we emerge from the waters of baptism with the devil as our enemy and we enter a life-long battle against him. “Every Christian as soon as he's baptized, is marshaled into an army in confrontation with the devil, and from his baptism onward is saddled with the devil who harasses him as long as he lives.” [Martin Luther, *Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, 5.313] On this earth being invaded by the kingdom of heaven there is no neutral ground; to be with God is to be against the devil.

Chapter four also includes the beginning of Jesus' preaching in Galilee, the calling of Peter, Andrew, James and John, and ends with a summary of the Lord Jesus' teaching and healing.



Jesus' Temptation in the Wilderness (4:1-11)

The voice of the heavenly Father boomed from heaven at Jesus' baptism, “This is My beloved Son.” It is this voice that the devil questions in the wilderness, “If you are the Son of God.” [Matthew 4:3,6] This is the devil's chief temptation, that we would doubt the word of God. In these temptations we hear the echoes of the Garden of Eden, “Did God really say?” [Genesis 3:1]

John Milton was an English playwright whose most famous poem is titled *Paradise Lost*. In this epic he recounts the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve, their disobedience to God and their being ousted from the Garden of Eden. Less known is Milton's minor epic *Paradise R'Gained* (1671), a poem about Jesus' temptation and victory in the wilderness. The first lines are:

I Who erewhile the happy Garden sung,
By one man's disobedience lost, now sing
Recovered Paradise to all mankind,
By one man's firm obedience fully tried
Through all temptation, and the Tempter foiled
In all his wiles, defeated and repulsed,
And Eden raised in the waste Wilderness.



The comparison between Adam and Christ is not new. St Paul does the same in Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:20-26,45-49. Jesus is the new and greater Adam, the One who does what the perfect man and woman could not do: overcome the devil. This is, in fact, what God had promised in the “first Gospel”, Genesis 3:15.

(It will be noted later in our study, but it is fitting now also to mention that the forty days in the wilderness are to be contrasted with the forty days that the Lord spends on earth between His resurrection and Ascension.)

The Three Temptations. From the Gospels of Mark and Luke we learn that the devil's tempting lasted the duration of the forty days. The last three temptations (as recorded in Matthew and Luke) show the climax of the devil's evil working and, therefore, the highlight of Jesus' victory over the devil.

The first temptation has to do with physical weakness and apatite. The text (almost casually) remarks that Jesus “was hungry.” It is to His hunger that the devil aims his first dart. “If you are the Son of God, provide food for yourself, there is no need to be hungry.” Jesus rebuffs the devil by quoting the Scriptures, especially Deuteronomy 8:3, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

The second temptation is that Jesus would tempt God. Seeing Jesus take up the Scriptures, the devil does so as well, quoting (or better: misquoting) Psalm 91. “If you are the Son of God, jump, God will take care of you.” The devil leaves out a few very important words from the text.

The devil's quotation:

*He shall give His angels charge concerning you,
and,
In their hands they shall bear you up,
Lest you dash your foot against a stone.*

The Psalm [91:11-12]

*For He shall give His angels charge over you,
To keep you in all your ways.
They shall bear you up in their hands,
Lest you dash your foot against a stone.*

Notice what is missing? The phrase, “To keep you in all your ways.” Here the Commentators note that what is indicated in “all your ways” is the Lord's will. In other words, as long as our confession and life reflects the calling which the Lord has given us, He will take care of all of our needs. This promise, like all of the promises in the Scriptures, is firmly grounded in God's will, not our own.



Let this text serve as a warning, the devil can quote Scripture to serve his own wicked purpose, and more skillfully than any pastor or theologian. The devil knows how to almost perfectly divide the Law and the Gospel, and he does it perfectly wrong. When he is tempting us to sin he gives us the Gospel (when we rather need the law and the stern judgment of God), and after we have sinned he crushes us with the Gospel when the Lord intends that we should have the comfort of the forgiveness of our sins.

Jesus refutes the second temptation as the first, by quoting Deuteronomy, 6:16. We, too, should beware that we do not tempt God, that is, that we try to rope Him into serving us, make His will subservient to our own; this would be idolatry.

The third temptation is to straight forward idolatry. “Worship me,” the devil says, and this breaking of the first commandment is not without reward. “All these things I will give you.” The devil likes to give rewards to his worshipers, but these rewards are nothing. The world and everything in it is useless without Jesus. “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and yet loose his own soul?” Jesus will ask later [Matthew 16:26]. Jesus clings to the Lord's words and promises and commands and does not worship the devil. In fact, it is this temptation that is the last, and after Jesus rebuffs the temptation with Deuteronomy 6:13 He sends the devil away. “Away with you, Satan.” Jesus says a similar thing to St Peter in Matthew 16:23, where Jesus is tempting Jesus as the devil did: to avoid the cross.



“Satan” is a Hebrew word that is literally translated

“the accuser.” The devil loves to accuse before God, but His accusations do not, for the Christian, reach the ears of the Father. (See Revelation 12, Romans 8)

Theology of Glory, Theology of the Cross. In all of Jesus' temptations He is tempted to forgo the weakness of the cross and to choose, instead, power. But this is not Jesus' way. His way (and the way of all who would follow Him) is the way of the cross. There God's glory and power are seen. Jesus' temptation shows us how the Lord comes to us: in weakness. He comes in weakness because He comes for the cross. This is what is called the Theology of the Cross. The devil has the opposite theology, a Theology of Glory.

This distinction is first made by Dr Luther in the *Heidelberg Theses* (1518). Here are a few of the theses:



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| <p>3. Although the works of man always appear attractive and good, they are nevertheless likely to be mortal sins.</p> <p>4. Although the works of God always seem unattractive and appear evil, they are nevertheless really eternal merits.</p> | |
| <p>18. It is certain that man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ.</p> <p>19. That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened [Rom. 1.20].</p> <p>20. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.</p> <p>21. A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.</p> <p>22. That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened.</p> <p>23. The law brings the wrath of God, kills, reviles, accuses, judges, and condemns everything that is not in Christ [Rom. 4.15].</p> <p>24. Yet that wisdom is not of itself evil, nor is the law to be evaded; but without the theology of the cross man misuses the best in the worst manner.</p> <p>25. He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ.</p> <p>26. The law says, "Do this," and it is never done. Grace says, "believe in this," and everything is already done.</p> <p>27. Actually one should call the work of Christ an acting work and our work an accomplished work, and thus an accomplished work pleasing to God by the grace of the acting work.</p> <p>28. The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through that which is pleasing to it.</p> | |

Jesus' Temptation: Example and Comfort. First, Jesus in the wilderness is our example; He shows us how to resist the devil. We see how the Lord Jesus beats back the temptations of the devil: with God's word. “Your Word I have hidden in my heart,” prays King David, “that I might not sin against You.” [Psalm 119:11] And Luther urges us, “Therefore you must always have God's Word in your heart, upon your lips, and in your ears. But where the heart is idle, and the Word does not sound, [the devil] breaks in and has done the damage before we are even aware of it. On the other hand, such is the efficacy of the Word, whenever it is seriously contemplated, heard and used, that it is bound never to be without fruit, but always awakens new understanding, pleasure, and devoutness, and produces a pure heart and pure thoughts. For these words are not inoperative or dead, but creative, living words.” [Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism* (3rd Commandment)] Thus the Lord's example in the wilderness teaches us to take up the Lord's Word with all diligence, to hear it, read it, contemplate and inwardly digest it, and use it to fight off the

devil's temptation.

But as with everything that Jesus is and does, there is more to His temptation than just a good example, Jesus is being tempted for our salvation. He is there in the wilderness doing what we could not and cannot do. In this way Jesus' temptation and victory serves us the Gospel. These two texts from Hebrews make this point:

- **“Therefore in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.”** [Hebrews 2:17,18]
- **“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”** [Hebrews 4:14-16]

Jesus' temptation in the wilderness is our joy and comfort, for there He is doing what He came to do for us: overcome our enemies, sin, death and the devil. In this way He brings to us the kingdom of heaven, “Eden raised in the waste Wilderness.” Throughout the Gospel of Matthew Jesus will be distributing the spoils of the victory won in the wilderness.

Jesus Begins His Galilean Ministry (4:12-17)



Matthew presents Jesus' birth, childhood and early ministry as the fulfillment of seven prophetic promises. Jesus' move to Galilee and His preaching there is the seventh promise fulfilled.

John the Baptist in Jail. Matthew reports that Jesus' move to the north was precipitated by the jailing of John the Baptist. Matthew recounts the history of John's arrest and martyrdom in 14:1-12. There is a gap in the history here; about a year passes between the Temptation and John's imprisonment.

All of the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) begin with Jesus' Galilean ministry. We would know nothing of this year except for John 1:35-4:43. John's Gospel tells us that Jesus' first year is in Judea and Jerusalem, that after His temptation Jesus returned to John the Baptist and called His first disciples, Andrew and another disciple of John, and then Peter, Philip and Nathanael. Apparently these disciples returned to their work to await another call which Matthew recounts. Jesus travels with these disciples to Cana, attending a wedding there [John 2:1-11], and then after a short stay with Jesus' earthly family in Capernaum [John 2:12], the company returns to Jerusalem where Jesus cleanses the temple [John 2:13-25]. After the late-night

discourse with Nicodemus [*John 3:1-21*] Jesus returns with His disciples to the Jordan where they are baptizing along with John and his disciples [*John 3:22-36*]. This all happens before John was thrown in prison [*See John 3:24*], for he is able to preach about Jesus [*John 3:26-36*]. Jesus travel to Nazareth by way of Samaria, and there has the conversation with the woman at the well [*John 4:1-42*].

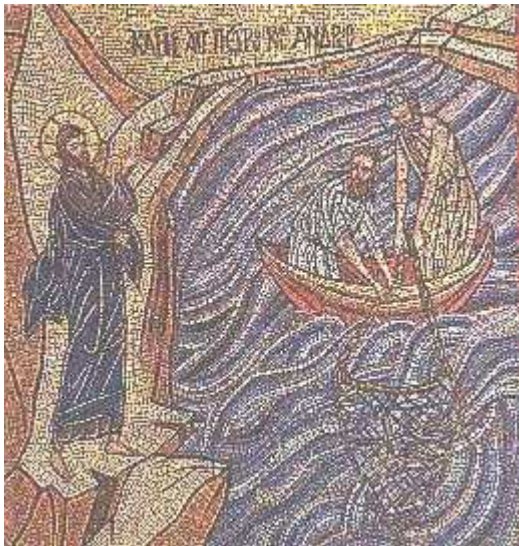
Capernaum. This small city on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee would serve as Jesus' base of operations until He “sets His face to go to Jerusalem.” [*Luke 9:53*] Capernaum had a synagogue in which Jesus often taught, and is the location of Matthew's customs office. Matthew reports Jesus move to Capernaum as the fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1-2: “The people who sat in darkness saw a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.” This is the traditional Epistle reading for Christmas Day. (Concerning the lectionary, the ancient Old Testament readings were lost for the Sundays at some point in the Middle Ages. But the non-Sunday feasts and festivals oftentimes kept their Old Testament lesson and lost their Epistle. So the Epistle for Epiphany is Isaiah 60:1-6; the Epistle for Ash Wednesday is Joel 2:12-19; the Epistle for Good Friday is Isaiah 53, etc.)



Light and Dark. Darkness and light are major themes in the Scriptures. Jesus is the “Light of the World.” [*John 8:12*] “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” [*John 1:5*] “The Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” [*Luke 1:78-79*] He is the “Light of Light.” [*Nicene Creed*] Into the darkness of our sin and death, Jesus shines as a bright beacon of heavenly light and truth. In the new heaven and new earth Jesus is the only light. “And the city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it, and the Lamb is its light.” [*Revelation 21:23*]

Repent. Jesus' preaching is summarized in the phrase “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” [*Matthew 4:17*] This is the same sermon that John preached, and a summary of the Gospel of Matthew and the whole prophetic message.

Jesus Calls Peter, Andrew, James and John (4:18-22)



Jesus had already made the acquaintance of Peter, Andrew, James and John [*See John 1:35-51*] and traveled with them from Judea to Galilee and attended the marriage at Cana with them. It is here in Matthew 4 that these four men are called to break from their livelihood and follow Jesus as His disciples. “Follow Me,” says Jesus, and after this word there is no going back. “They immediately left their nets and followed Him.” [*Matthew 4:20*] There is no questioning, hesitating, wondering, only following.

Dr. Franzmann highlights the great importance of Jesus' call of the disciples. (He has even titled his commentary on Matthew *Follow Me: Discipleship According to St Matthew*, p 31-33.)

We have no way of reconstructing with any precision what was in the mind of Matthew at his calling or in the minds of the four men of Galilee when they were

called. But the record of Matthew makes on thing clear: when they heard the words “Follow Me,” they had no choice. Whatever degree of knowledge they had then attained, their wills were already claimed... The disciples knew, or surely sensed, that in Jesus' “Follow Me” the great light of God's new creation, the light which brought the life of God to men, was falling across their paths; and they knew too: “We must walk in this light or die.” ... When Jesus said, “Follow Me,” He was confiscating man for Himself. For that word applied to man with personal and

inescapable urgency His call to repentance and His annunciation of the Kingdom come. It brought the gift and the claim of the Kingdom to bear on man. The whole Gospel of Matthew is simply the record of the process of progressive Messianic confiscation, the record of how Jesus shaped men in the mold of repentance, of how the Christ created men in His image, Christian men.

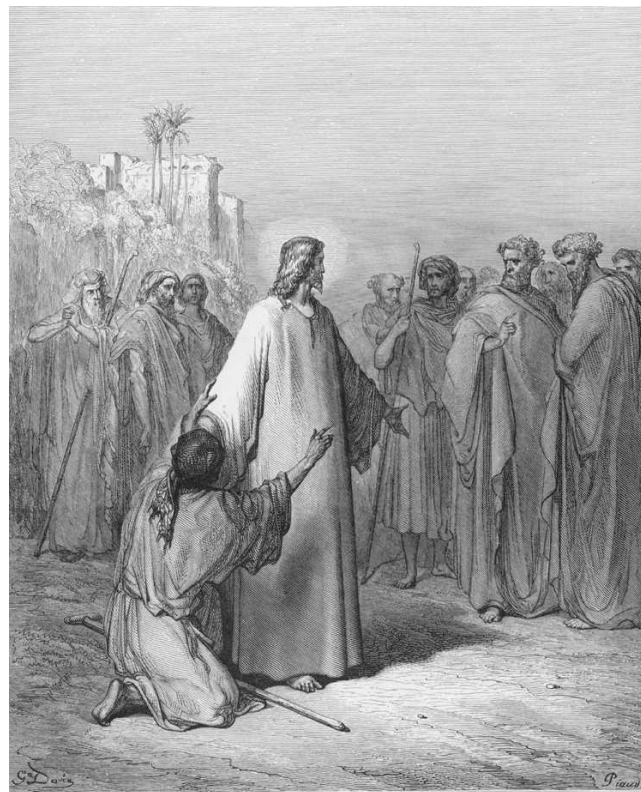
By His call, Jesus is pulling to Himself hearers who would later be preachers. To these four disciples Jesus would add eight more. The list is in Matthew 10:1-5: “And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him. These twelve Jesus sent forth.” [See also *Mark 3:14-19*; *Luke 6:13-16*]

Apostle means “sent,” but as of yet these are not “sent,” rather called and gathered by Jesus to hear and see His Messianic words and deeds. Just as they lay down their nets on the shores of Galilee, these disciples will be called to lay down their lives for preaching the promise of the forgiveness of all sins.

A Summary of Jesus' Ministry (4:23-25)

Matthew now concludes this section with a summary of Jesus' Galilean ministry, Jesus was teaching, preaching the Gospel, healing the sick and casting out demons. An example of this preaching is Luke 4:18-21. Jesus' preaching is about Himself, the Kingdom that is present when He is there. He preaching the Gospel, so He preaches of Himself.

All of Jesus' healing and casting out demons are always in service of the Word preached, for it is through this word of promise that the kingdom comes and faith is given. In these healings Jesus is delivering the treasure which He won in the wilderness in which He overcame the devil and began the toppling of his kingdom.



JESUS HEALING THE MAN POSSESSED WITH A DEVIL
And they were all amazed...saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out.... (Luke 4: 36)