

Part 4: The Temptation and Vision of Glory

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We are four weeks into the book of Matthew looking at the Kingdom Ethic. Matthew is writing this book wanting people to see Jesus as the ethic which sorts all of our life. I remember taking a basic ethics class at the University and it was intriguing to me, and then I took an ethics class in seminary and it began to make more sense to me.

I remember my professor always using the word, "ought." The point he was making is that our system of ethics is our system of what we ought to do in any given situation. It provides for us a burden and a process which helps us decide which decisions we make, why we make them, and to which end we make them.

This past week we went from celebrating gratitude from 8am-6pm, and then we went to gratifying wants as soon as the Black Friday doorbusters opened that evening. If you were on social media you probably saw people praising these deals and other people shaming those deal getters. Both were operating out of an ethic of what they perceived to be right at any given time. They were compelled by something to act or not act, even if they are unable to articulate what that factor is.

In our politics today we are confronted with an even bigger issue of ethics. The last election was billed as the election which must choose between the "lesser of two evils." This mantra is an ethical position. Almost everybody agrees that the horrific sexual abuse conducted by men like Harvey Weinstein and the other Hollywood power brokers are unequivocally worthy of condemnation and a removal from his position. But what if the accusations are against your starting quarterback in the NFL? Do we justify the possibility of evil for the promise of potential good? What if it is the Democratic senator Al Franken? What if it is a Republican justice like Roy Moore who has fought to preserve conservative values and yet faces a sickening and perverted past record of sexual misconduct?

Let me be clear first and foremost: As believers, as the church of Jesus Christ we should not be afraid to condemn sin in order to prevent future harm to anyone. This is a non-negotiable. What Al Franken is accused of, what Roy Moore is accused of, what even our President is on record affirming, should not be justified. It should not be explained away. It should be spoken of as evil. This should be simple. But why isn't it?

Because temptation is that sin is justified if it produces the "greater good." If the greater good, in any of our minds, is seen as our god we will be tempted to sin so long as our perceived end is protected. What are discussions of ethics, if not a realistic conversation of how our values preserve what we think ought to be? And what is temptation if not sin disguised as a short-cut to what we perceive to be a greater experience of glory?

God's people always wrestle with the short cut of temptation. This was true with Israel who was tempted after their deliverance from Egypt to long for the meat they once had in slavery. This was true with Adam and Eve who were offered a short-cut to divinity through the rejection of God's law. And look at the beginning of today's text: **Matt. 4:1.**

We are going to look at the temptation of Jesus. If you remember last week we saw the Spirit descending upon Jesus like a dove, and now the dove is going to lead him to the snake to be tempted? Why? Why did God want Jesus to be tempted? If we want to understand our own temptations we must first understand what Jesus' temptation means for us. No one was around for this story. It was Jesus on his own in the desert, and yet God

has given it to us because he wanted us to know something about Jesus' ethic. He wanted us to see something unique that we can hold on to in the face of what it is that we "ought" to do. And what we are going to see this morning is this: **The temptation of Jesus shows us an unwavering vision in the midst of life's choices.**

In this passage we will learn a lot about temptation, but we learn more about Jesus. The significance and centrality of Jesus in this text was not lost on the Jews who were originally reading Matthew's gospel, and it should be lost on us either. In the past few weeks we have seen Jesus proclaimed as the new King from the line of David, the heir to the promise of Abraham, we have seen him come out of Egypt like the new Israel, pass through the waters of baptism, as the people of God passed through the Red Sea, and now we see Jesus being identified with the temptations of Israel post-Exodus in the desert.

You see Matthew is going out of his way to show that Jesus is the new Israel (**Jesus as the New Israel**). Where the Kings, prophets, and priests of Israel failed, Jesus is reliving and succeeding because he is more than a man, he is fully God and fully man. After Israel was brought out of Egypt, God brought them into the desert where they wandered for 40 years. God promised to bring them out of Egypt, into the Promised Land, but they were first let loose in the desert for 40 years. Why? God tells us why in **Deut. 8:2**. God wanted to test Israel to see if they would be faithful to him in the midst of trial, and now Jesus is going to enter into his own testing in the desert as the new Israel.

You could imagine the anticipation the Jews had as they began to piece together their own history, and the history of Jesus they were now hearing from Matthew. In this story we are going to look at today, we are going to see three temptations which Satan brings towards Jesus. And in each of those temptations we are going to see something that Jesus valued as greater than temptation. We are going to see how Jesus prioritized his "ought's." What was it that made sense to Jesus in the face of offers with real value? Let's begin by reading the first temptation here: **Matthew 4:1-3.**

In the one of the greatest understatement of history, we find that Jesus after fasting for forty days and forty nights, was hungry. It was in this state that Satan came to him to tempt him. And yet, we know that though Satan came, he came at because God allowed it. He was not the one in control. It's also important to note that during Jesus' fasting he was probably exercising great devotion towards God, he was spiritually at a peak and yet even when we are spiritually strong, Satan does not miss an opportunity to pit the desires of the flesh against the hope of our heart.

This is what he does here. "Are you hungry?" says the devil. "If you are the son of God, if you are who you say you are, if you are the heir to Abraham, the king from Judah, the messiah of God, then certainly you can turn these stones into bread?" Would it be wrong for Jesus to turn these stones into bread? Is bread sinful? Is it sinful for Jesus to make food out of something else? We see Jesus doing just that in the multiplication of the loaves and the turning of water into wine. So certainly it is not the act which is the problem. But that is why temptation is difficult. Often we are unsure of what it is actually demanding of us.

It is not the action of the request which would be wrong, but the heart of the deceiver which makes the action wrong. Why would Satan ask this? Why would Satan want Jesus to prove that he is indeed God, the son of God? Satan knew this. He existed in heaven and bore witness to the Triune God. Satan didn't need proof. Satan asked this of Jesus because he wanted to establish himself as a greater authority than God himself.

Remember what just happened immediately before Jesus was led into the desert: **Matt. 3:16-17**. God affirmed Jesus. God the Father audibly spoke into the human world with words saying, "This is the son of God." This is important because look how Jesus responds to the tempter: **Matt. 4:4.**

Remember what we just looked at in Deuteronomy? Well look at what is said right after that: **Deut. 8:2-3**. In Deuteronomy Moses is calling the people of Israel not to trust in God's miracles for life, but in God himself, and Jesus here is exercising the same hope. If Jesus were to answer Satan's request by proving himself through his miracle he would in essence be saying that the verbal affirmation of God was not good enough for him. That he needed more proof than God himself.

This is the first motivation of Christ's ethic: **Bound by the approval of God**. So often our requests to God sound just like that of Satan's, "prove yourself and I will believe." "Perform this task and I will admit you to be God." But in this request what we are actually doing is de-godding God. If God were to validate himself based off of our requests we would be in authority over God, we would be requiring him to satisfy us. We would be attempting to be Lord over God himself.

But if we cannot take God at his word we can take no one at their word. For who is there with greater authority than God? Who is greater than God? Who knows more than God? Who is to be pleased other than God? This is not circular reasoning, it's certain reasoning: God is the authority. No other opinion matters. No other truth is binding.

There is a difference between logically defending the faith, and logically believing the faith. We do not test the validity of God's word through laboratory experiments so as to prove it logically and then we are saved. Instead we are struck by the weight of God's word spoken into this world and we either believe unto life, or are hardened unto death. God's word determined Jesus' truth. When God expressed that he was pleased with Jesus he needed not to tie his performance to any other critic.

The barb of temptation is to think that we must prove ourselves, satisfy, or satiate the opinion, wants or desires of someone who is not God. But Jesus sees through this deception, and says: "In my need, if I have the approval of God, I need nothing else." The actions of Jesus in the face of subtle but dangerous temptation were bound by the weight of God's approval of himself. The story continues:

Matt. 4:5-7. I think it's very interesting to note that Matthew says here Jesus responded with, "Again it was written." Jesus continues to speak into his temptation. The same Jesus who was silent before the court seeking to murder him, was repeatedly audible against the temptation which sought to deceive him. If this doesn't show the perceived weight of the threat of sin, I don't know what does. When physical death was on the line, Jesus was silent. When sin was on the line, Jesus was vocal.

We too must remember that when temptation comes we must speak to our hearts the truth of God. Not only once. But so long as temptation continues. Never does Jesus stop speaking until the Devil leaves his presence. Yet so often we speak softly, once, and give way to sin. Or worse yet, we speak not at all. Perhaps this is because we have nothing to say. You see for Jesus Christ, the son of God, God in the flesh his greatest comfort against the rails of the devil were the truths of scripture stored in his own heart. The power was not in the act of memorization, but in the promise the scriptures brought to his memory. We are almost to the end of the year and resolutions are around the corner, perhaps we should resolve ourselves to face temptation with the arsenal Jesus employed here, which we see so clearly in **Ps. 119:11**.

However the main point of this text is not ourselves, but Jesus. We must ask again why it is that Jesus was tempted this way? Satan brings him to the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem and asks the same initial question, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down and God will save you." He even goes on to quote scripture proving this point. And Jesus responds again by quoting another Deuteronomy passage remembering where the desert Israelites attempted to test God.

What is the temptation here though? Again, why would it be wrong for Jesus to do this? Why did Satan bring him here: to the busiest place, in the busiest city, to the tallest point? Because this was the place where Jesus would have the greatest attention of his Jewish audience. If Jesus went to the temple and threw himself off only to fly away to safety the Jews would have to believe in him.

You can imagine the temptation this would have been. Jesus knew what was ahead of him. Look at what John says would happen to Jesus: **John 1:10-11**. Let me say this briefly. No one has been tempted more than Jesus. This is true for two reasons. The first is that God allowed Satan to physically, with all of his power, stand before Jesus and tempt him as the sole object of his work. You are not important enough to warrant such attention from the Devil. Even Job was tempted by Satan, but never by Satan directly. We would all certainly fail by the sheer weight of the Devil's promise and power.

The second reason is that no one gave up more than Jesus gave up. If temptation is a sinful short-cut to what we perceive to be the best experience of glory, then Jesus knew glory more than anyone else. Temptation allures us by saying, indulging in this sexual delight is the greatest way to certain delight. Finding affirmation in your job is the short-cut to certain affirmation and meaning. But Jesus was not only familiar with the desires of humanity, he came from perfect eternal intimacy. In heaven no one doubted Jesus, in heaven no one rejected Jesus, in heaven no one tried to murder Jesus, in heaven no one mocked Jesus, in heaven no one spat on Jesus. He was seen perfectly, clearly and wonderfully by all who were around him, but when he took on flesh he surrendered that experience.

You could imagine the feeling of vindication he would have to showcase before all the Jews the fact that he was indeed the son of God. To throw himself down and perform a parlor trick to sequester the praise of men. But this is not the way God wanted it. The second principle of Jesus' ethic is that it was **Bound to the Plan of God**.

Jesus knew what God wanted to do. He knew the task which he was sent for. He might have been able to do what the Devil wanted, but what the devil wanted was not what we needed. It may have been true that Jesus would not strike his foot against a stone. But what if it was the plan of God to bring about faith by striking Jesus. What if the moment of greatest belief and vindication came not at the prevention of suffering but in the passion of suffering? Satan tempted Jesus with the promise of faith apart from death, but Jesus knew that without his death there would be no faith of the people regardless of how public the display. The actions of Jesus in the face of temptation were bound by the plan of God for the cross, where Jesus would deal with the sins of his people by dying in their place. **Hebrews 4:14-15**. Because Jesus was tempted more than we ever could imagine or endure, he is a resource for us in the face of temptation which seems so overwhelming.

Satan then ups the ante. Let's read on **Matt. 4:8-9**. There is this natural ascent to Jesus' temptation. From his baptism he went up to the wilderness. From the wilderness he went up to the temple. From the temple he went up to the mountain and so with the geography also goes the weight of temptation.

Fall down and worship me. The same words used to describe the worship of the wise men in chapter 2, Satan now calls Jesus to exercise towards himself. Worship me, and I will give you the world, its kingdoms and all its glory. Can you imagine? Jesus knew God's plan. He knew the cross was before him. God promised Jesus a kingdom, and here is the Devil promising Jesus a kingdom. One plan involved great suffering, the other a mere falling down before Satan.

The King would get his crown. We would get our good and loving king. He would rule us, Satan would release us. Restoration would come. Harm would be avoided. If Jesus sacrificed in this one way it would seemingly be better for him and for us. To think that this temptation is not strong in our own hearts is to be ignorant of the weight of such an appeal. The blind swagger of American's is that we beat our chest in our fidelity to not

negotiate with terrorists, and yet we barter with the devil laying holiness and morality as a sacrifice on the altar of "the greater good" in hopes to protect what we perceive to be god.

But God doesn't need our help, he demands our worship. To barter with the devil is to assume that the devil has the power to pay what he promises, but the promise and the glory belong not to cultural counterfeits or political prodigies, it belongs to the God of all creation who called to us through Christ not only to bring about salvation and kingdoms, but to bring to us the thing that we so desperately need but fail to understand that is: the glory of God.

Look at how Jesus responds to this: **Matt. 4:10-11**. In the face of temptation Jesus' actions were **Bound by the Glory of God**. What we need is not mere salvation. What we need is not merely a good king. What we need is what was fundamentally removed from us at our beginning, we need God. Salvation saves us to God, our King rules us as God, our sin is forgiven so that we might be right before God, our life is restored so that it might be lived for God.

What we need above all our wants and all our needs, the desire of all desires is to see and experience the radiant all satisfying glory of God. A glory so profoundly satisfying that it refuses to be shut-cut even though it means great suffering and loss. A glory that when all is said and done leaves temptation as a trifle to be dealt with instead of a prison in which to be enslaved. To think of salvation and satisfaction without thinking of God is to already show the hook of temptation embedded in our mouth. The problem is that we are not Jesus.

We cannot see this glory. Our sin has cut us off. Our eyes have been blinded, our ears have been plugged, our legs have been cut out from under us. We cannot endure any temptation because we do not possess the vision of glory needed to displace the call of the devil.

We have talked little in this text about how to resist sin because this text is not a "how to" sermon, it is a "here he is" sermon. Jesus is more than the new Israel passing the test in the desert. **Jesus is the new Adam** redefining the standing of humanity. Look at what Paul says in **Romans 5:12,14**. In Adam all died. Adam was our first father who failed to endure temptation. In his sin, we all sinned. We all endured the loss of God's life, salvation and glory.

But Adam was a type of the one to come. He was a shadow of the greater Adam who would pass where the first Adam failed. This new Adam is Jesus. Adam was tempted in the garden and failed, Jesus was tempted in the desert and passed. Adam was tempted with every food available to him, Jesus was tempted in great want. Adam was tempted and remained silent incurring harm not only on himself, but on his bride. Jesus was tempted and spoke not only for himself, but for the purity and benefit of his church. Adam was tempted and failed resulting in an angel guarding us from the presence of God with a flaming sword. Jesus was tempted and succeeding earning the aid and comfort of the angels who once kept men away from God.

To leave this building today thinking that you must resist sin by thinking hard on God's affirmation, God's plan and God's glory, but to not think of Jesus is to set yourself up for eternal failure. The ethic of our life, the decision center of our soul in the face of life's noise and color is first and foremost who we stand in. Do we stand in Adam, or do we stand in Jesus. Paul goes on: **Rom. 5:15-19**.

Jesus passed the test of sin, and then died for our sin, so that we might be found in him rather than in Adam. Before we are bound to anything about God, we must be bound in heart, mind and deed to the Christ of God. If we do not see what Jesus has already done for us to defeat sin, we have no access to God's affirmation for we stand condemned by God in our own sin. We do not see the plan of God for God's plan was to unite all thing in

heaven and on earth in the cross of Jesus. We do not see the glory of God, because God's glory cannot be seen anywhere except the face of Jesus Christ.

Without this we are destined to fail. But with this, our "ought's" have new power because we are compelled by something greater.

When we have Jesus he becomes our ethic in all things. When we encounter temptation we think not first "What can I do?", for we can do nothing. We think first and foremost, "what has Jesus done?" He has defeated sin. He has rendered it harmless, he has refused to short circuit glory, and since I am found in him I labor in the shadow of his unwavering vision and invaluable sacrifice. For in the face of Jesus we see with greatest clarity the compelling glory of God.

So for those in here burdened by sin, I call you to examine Jesus. He has beaten sin, and if you stand in him, he has provided you a way out of yours as well. He is not only a model of hope, but he is the power for holiness.

To resist sin, and to make sense of our life, to refuse the dilemma of having to choose between two evils, we must wholeheartedly choose Christ so that we can see the glory of God in all things. Let us repent of our sin, and choose to see what Jesus saw, by seeing Jesus as who he is.