26 February – 4 March 2023 Take temptation seriously

Matthew 4: 1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. 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,

“One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”’

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying 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, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”’ Jesus said to him, ‘Again it is written, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”’

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; and he said to him, ‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! for it is written, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”’ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

**Bible notes**

Three times Jesus speaks, saying ‘it is written’ and quoting Deuteronomy, which is presented as Moses’ words to Israel ‘in the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month’ of Israel’s journey through the wilderness (Deuteronomy 1.3). In Matthew, Jesus is tested at the end of his 40 days, suggesting that in drawing on Deuteronomy he is sharing the wisdom gained by Israel from 40 years in the desert. And the devil’s ‘If you are the Son of God’ reminds us of Hosea 11.1, ‘out of Egypt I called my son’, explicitly related to Jesus in Matthew 2.15. After complaining, Israel was sustained with manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16), but by fasting Jesus has learned for himself that he is fed by the word of God (Deuteronomy 8.3). Israel demanded water, fearing they were abandoned by God, and Moses was commanded to strike the rock, but ‘He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the Lord’ (Exodus 17.1-7). But Jesus will not jump from the Temple and put his God to the test (Deuteronomy 6.12) because he is confident in his Father’s love. Anxious because Moses, their spokesman for God, was slow to come down from God’s mountain, and grumbling that ‘we do not know what has become of him’, Israel made a golden calf to worship (Exodus 32). But, transported to ‘a very high mountain’, Jesus remembers the God who had called him ‘my beloved Son’ at his baptism, and he affirms with Moses, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him’ (Deuteronomy 6.13).

**Reflection**

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

In her BBC Radio 4 series, [Consumed by Desire](https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/series/m0012qyb), the psychotherapist Philippa Perry pointed out that nowadays we get what we want, easily and instantly, whether strawberries in January, an Uber car, or constant connection via the digital world. Of course, this is not true for the many, here and throughout the world, who struggle even to subsist. But for those for whom the gap between urge and fulfilment can be very short, it may be difficult to acknowledge our real needs or to understand our deepest desires. Taking time to face his temptations, Jesus was able to separate what he did not really want from what he most deeply desired.

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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**Questions**

* What temptations can you see here?
* How can self-knowledge help in testing times

## Who or what do you put your trust in?

## **Prayer**

Adapt to your local context.

**A prayer of thanksgiving**

Thank you, Lord, that it is never too late to turn around, never too late to start again.
Thank you that you have pulled us out of darkness into your marvellous light.
Thank you that though we are tempted, though we get things wrong, by your grace we are healed and restored.
Thank you that we are precious to you, that we know whose we are – we belong to you.
Thank you that your love for us is unconditional, we don’t have to prove anything.
And thank you that when we are tempted by the offerings of this world,
you are there to pick us up, wipe off the dust and set us back on the right path.
Thank you for the amazing love that you offer to each one of us.
**Amen.**

## **A prayer to end the Bible study**

Let us go forth with the love of God surrounding us.
Let us go forth with the wisdom of God guiding us.
Let us go forth with our trust in God protecting us.
**Amen.**

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