

Week Thirty-nine: A Tested King - Matthew 3:1-2,11-17; 4:1-11



Overview

God's story begins when Adam and Eve disobey the LORD and He promises them good news of One who will come to defeat the wicked one and cover man's nakedness (Gen. 3:15). Threads appear throughout each era, tracking the fulfillment of His promises in spite of the wickedness of the human heart and the political events of Israel and world powers. One of those threads appears in Daniel 2:44: "And

in the

days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." The angel's announcement to Mary and the birth of her son, Jesus, break the four hundred years of prophetic silence and usher in the dawn of that day spoken by Daniel.

Jesus—conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin—lives in an imperfect world, wins His battle with the enemy, and succeeds in every area in which Adam and Eve failed. This lesson focuses on Jesus' encounter with the tempter and the similarities between His and the first couple's encounter.

Lesson Objective:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will understand the similarities between Christ's conversation with the devil in the wilderness and Adam and Eve's conversation with the serpent in the Garden and be able to recognize the enemy's deception in their own lives.

Key Truths

Knowing and appropriating God's Word enables God's people to defeat the enemy.

Believers must both know and appropriate the truths of God's Word to overcome the snares of the wicked one.

Satan employs the same strategy with Jesus that he used with Adam and Eve and that he uses with believers today.

Lesson Outline

1. Kingdom Introduction and Divine Affirmation - Matthew 3:1-2, 11-17 Jesus begins his reign with a public baptism. Most kings commence their reign with a public coronation announced in great palace halls with celebrated guests. The King of the Ages, however, enters this world quietly, lives His first thirty years as a carpenter's son, and is introduced by a rough-appearing prophet: "In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (3:1-2). John refers to the King of the kingdom of heaven: "He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (3:11). He describes the scope of His kingdom —"His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (3:12).

When this King appears at the Jordan (where John is baptizing), John immediately seeks to be baptized by Him. Jesus insists, however, that John baptize Him "to fulfill all righteousness" (3:15). Divine endorsement follows Jesus' baptism, "When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'" (3:16-17).

2. Kingdom Engagement - Matthew 4:1-11

Kings exist to lead and protect their people. Jesus, however, came to do much more. He came to redeem the souls of men by defeating the serpent of old and atoning for man's sin with His own death and resurrection. His conversation with the devil mirrors the battle that Adam and Eve fought unawares in the Garden.

Adam and Eve made their decision to disregard what God had stated regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil by following appetites, appearances, and an offer of wisdom that didn't originate from God (Jas. 3:15). This is apparent in Eve's actions: "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food [appetite], that it was pleasant to the eyes [appearance], and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate" (Gen. 3:6).

After Jesus' baptism, the Spirit thrusts Him into the wilderness for a period of fasting. At the conclusion of His time there, Satan seeks to tempt Jesus to succumb to His appetites, to appearances, and to worldly wisdom (which is really independence from God). Each temptation is engineered to prove that Jesus is no better than Adam and Eve and to prolong Satan's dominion on earth.

• *The temptation of appetite - Matthew 4:1-4*

Jesus is hungry after fasting for forty days when the tempter appears on the scene. He appeals to Jesus' physical appetites: "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread" (3). The obvious temptation masks a deeper challenge; if

You are *really* God's Son, show Your power, and satisfy Your appetite by Your own power.

In the garden, neither Adam nor Eve refuted the tempter's words by quoting and standing on the Word of God, who had said, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Jesus prevails where they failed, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Mt. 4:4).

Jesus refuses to live by physical appetites alone. He believes in the goodness of God and the veracity of His Word; therefore He trusts His Father. He would rather remain hungry than distrust God.

- *The temptation of appearances - Matthew 4:5-7*

Imagine the accolades Jesus would have received from an adoring crowd after surviving (without a scratch or a bruise) a leap from the pinnacle of the temple. The devil suggests that He should do something before the people to appear "messianic" and gain their following. If Jesus takes this opportunity to flaunt His power, He could have the adoration of the people and avoid shameful crucifixion as a criminal.

Adam and Eve based their decision to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil on appearance—it looked good. Evil often appears in the disguise of good, and that was what the tempter offered Christ on the temple mount. Jesus, however, refers again to Deuteronomy, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God'" (Dt. 6:16; Mt. 4:7).

Jesus refuses to live by appearances. He believes in the goodness of God and the veracity of His Word, therefore He trusts God to meet His needs. He would rather face man's rejection than distrust God.

- *The temptation of autonomy - Matthew 4:8-11*

In essence, the tempter offers Jesus the ability to obtain a physical, in-the-now, kingdom. He shows Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory and offers them to Jesus: "And he said to Him, 'All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship Me'" (4:9). These kingdoms were Satan's to give and Jesus' to have. All Jesus had to do was act independently of God and take it for Himself.

Jesus, repulsed by the devil's suggestion that He act independently of God, rebukes the devil, "Away with you, Satan For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve'" (Mt. 4:10, quoting Dt. 6:13; 10:20). No room for selfservice. The redemption of humanity requires total surrender to the Father. Through this third temptation, Jesus teaches that *autonomy* or *independence is absolute insubordination* and that *service is worship*.

Jesus refuses to live an autonomous life—independent of God. He believes in the goodness of God and the veracity of His Word; therefore, He denies self and invites God's kingdom to come on earth as it already is in heaven. Jesus only and always does what pleases the Father. He never acts independently of God.

Whereas Adam disregarded the instructions God had given in the Garden and forfeited his dominion, Jesus upholds the Word of God and reclaims the dominion that man had lost. His trust in God enables Him to wait on God, embrace the cross, and establish God's kingdom.

On all three occasions Jesus quotes from the book of Deuteronomy, again showing that Bible literacy prepares God's people to recognize the dangers hiding behind appetite, appearances, and autonomous, independent living.

Rebuffed by the Scripture-quoting Son of God, the devil leaves Him, and "angels came and ministered to Him" (4:11). Spiritual consolation always comes to those who recognize and resist (by using the Word of God) the devil's temptations.

Application - What does this lesson teach us about God? Man? Sin? Redemption? *Jesus succeeds in every area where Adam and Eve failed so that He can "crush the head of the serpent" (Gen. 3:15).*

God is good and His Word is reliable; therefore, believers must know and appropriate His Word.

Defeat is certain for those who do not recognize the battle over their souls and spiritual health, who neither know nor appropriate the truths of God's Word.

Summary

God speaks through the stories of old to alert His people to the coming kingdom and spiritual battles they face.

God acts on behalf of those who appropriate His Word in the midst of temptation.

God reveals the power His Word has over the devil and the need for Bible literacy in the lives of His people.

Discussion Questions

Why do few believers recognize fleshly indulgences (food, sex, alcohol, drugs, retail therapy, etc.) as spiritual battles to win or to lose?

How does Proverbs 27:7, "A satisfied soul loathes the honeycomb, but to a hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet," apply to dealing with fleshly indulgences?

What steps can believers take today to know and apply God's Word to the specific battles/temptations that they face?