

Matthew 4.1-11 'The King's Probation' Transcript

Date: 10/11/2024

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Series: Matthew's Gospel

Sermon Title: The King's Probation

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Well, in case you live under a rock, you now know that the United States is undergoing a transition of power since Donald Trump's latest presidential campaign success. Trump will now take office as the nation's 47th president in January of next year when he's formally sworn in. A president, among many things, is most fundamentally a representative. Trump now represents over 300 million people, whether they're pleased about that or not.

Representatives are an ordinary part of our lives. We have lawyers to represent us in legal proceedings. We have a mayor to represent us as a city in Invercargill. A homebuyer may require a broker. An athlete may have an agent as their representative. A school will have a board of trustees or a chairman and so on. We all have and need representatives in our lives.

And the world, and many Christians, don't realize we all have and need a spiritual representative too. When we are born, our first representative is Adam. In Adam, we stand in a state of sin. It's not good. Adam is the head of the human race, passed his sin down in the judicial sense to all his progeny. So all the human race stand condemned in Adam. Romans 5:12 states this: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin, so death spread to all men because all sinned," meaning all sinned in Adam.

You see, God deals with humanity corporately as he does individually. That's why we are either considered dead in sin and in Adam or raised to new life alive in Christ. So in Adam or in Christ. And so the story of the Bible from Adam forward has its focus on the arrival of the Messiah to serve as a new representative head for those whom he came to save. This is why we call Jesus the second or better Adam. Because he is God's gift to us of a new covenantal head. Christ, in the place of the first Adam, brings believers to God.

So salvation from sin is not about our performance, but it's in fact about Christ's performance as our representative head. Jesus' performance is what matters. We all need Christ as our representative if we are to have any hope. Someone to grant us everlasting rest and peace

with God, someone to alleviate our condition, someone to bring us to God, and we have all this and more in Jesus.

But Jesus did not just show up, as you know, of course, he did not just show up and snap his fingers and all is done. Now there was work to be done. He had a life to live and duties to perform. Beginning with his incarnation, he plunged into a state of humiliation, descended into a rank below the angels, he made himself into a man of sorrows, he humbled himself, he endured unimaginable suffering even, of course, to the point of death on a cross.

In this morning's passage, we see Jesus as our representative at work for us. Hence we have my title, "The King's Probation." That is his testing through temptation. Now if Jesus' baptism, as we saw earlier at the end of chapter three, if Jesus' baptism at the hands of John the Baptist was part one, then I submit to you Jesus' testing in the wilderness is part two of this same essential theme. Both scenes are really about Jesus fulfilling all righteousness. That is showing his desire to live in accordance with the expressed will of God and full submission to the Father and on behalf of his people.

We considered this idea last time in the doctrine of what we call Jesus' active obedience. Remember that? That is the perfect life that Jesus lived in all respects to the legal requirements of the law of God in our place. That is Christ's active obedience. His passive obedience describes what occurred when he died for our sins in our place. So through Christ's life, he merited righteousness as our new head, and Christ is able to impute and credit to his people his righteousness that we require for heaven.

In this way, not only Christ's death on the cross is essential for our salvation but also his life. So the two go together. You're saved by that twofold accomplishment of his death and his life. And so Christ could never once fail. All must be accomplished perfectly through him. His life must entirely measure up like that tape measure I used earlier in the kids' illustration. His life had to entirely measure up to the law perfectly and completely or else we would be without hope and remain lost in Adam because our new head Christ wouldn't have been up to the task. And never once does Christ fall. He perfectly completes his task.

You should also be aware of this passage that strong theological threads tie the temptation of Jesus to the Old Testament scriptures. We've seen this already in Matthew, this idea of recapitulation, the story of Israel. We see that again here. We actually find points of contrast and continuity between Jesus in the wilderness undergoing temptation by Satan and, of course, the first deception of Satan in the Garden of Eden. We find links there.

Secondly, there is also likeness with Christ here to the experience of Moses fasting for 40 days and 40 nights in the presence of the Lord while interceding on behalf of Israel. Thirdly, there's the parallel with the nation itself. Of course, the nation of Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. Christ too will wander in the wilderness for 40 days showing himself as the faithful servant, the faithful son, because unlike the people, never once does Christ here fall into disobedience.

Now before we set out this passage, we have a question to ask. The question is this, and perhaps it's already come naturally into your mind, was the Lord Jesus Christ able to undergo true temptation? Was the Lord truly able to be tempted to sin? Have a think about that. Did Jesus possess the ability to sin? That's the real question because this passage is all about Jesus' temptations in the wilderness. And so one question we're going to need to account for is were these temptations real?

We understand temptations themselves, don't we? In fact, our entire lived experience as fallen human beings is in one sense moving from one temptation to the next. We have this constant internal dialogue that never seems to end. Some of these things we're tempted by aren't necessarily sinful in and of themselves, but there is always this inner dialogue of temptation. And so what was it like for Christ and his humanity?

It was Adam and Eve succumbing to the temptation of Satan that brought sin and the curse of death into the world in the first place. Satan, in the form of a serpent, came to Eve with his twisted temptations. The scripture reads in Genesis 3:6, "When the woman saw that the tree was useful for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate, and she gave it also to her husband with her, and he ate." This sums up how temptation operates. First we see the temptation is presented, then we desire that which is being put before us, and then we act upon it.

Every politician who has unjustly sought to increase his power faces that same sequence of temptation. Every man or woman that has committed an adulterous affair has entered into that same sequence of temptation to see, to desire, to act. Every teenager rebelling against their parents enters into that same sequence of temptation. Every employee stealing from their employer, the same. Every murderer, every liar, it's all the same, to see, to desire, to take. As the Lord God said to Cain before he rose up and killed his brother, "Sin is crouching at the door and its desire is for you, but you must master it."

And so the question is, in the temptations of Christ and his life on earth, did he have the ability to be tempted so as to fall? Listen to what Hebrews 4:15 says: "For we do not have a high priest," referring to the resurrected Christ, "who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." So plainly stating the answer, yes, Jesus' temptations were real and it follows therefore the possibility for him to sin. Obviously in the eternal perspective, no, but in the temporal perspective, Jesus really did have the ability to sin because these temptations, the scripture says, were real.

The 19th century reformed Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge put it this way: "If from the constitution of his person it was impossible for Christ to sin, then his temptations were unreal, rather, then his temptation was unreal and without effect and he cannot sympathize with his people." In other words, it was possible for Christ to sin and therefore his temptations were real, which makes it even more remarkable.

Now to be sure, in and of Jesus' divine nature, he was obviously unable to sin; God is light and in him is no darkness. But Jesus also possessed a human nature and in and of his

humanity he was able to sweat, to hunger, to feel pain like you, to weep like you, to feel joy, to suffer, to grieve, and in this passage also he was able to experience temptation. The only difference between Christ's temptations and yours is that yours and mine temptations come from our hearts, which are fallen. Our sinful desires, sinful temptations come from ourselves, from within. Christ, on the other hand, his temptations came externally from him. That's why we find the devil tempting him here, because Christ in and of himself was without sin; he did not have sinful temptations in himself, those temptations came externally.

And the good news is that Christ overwhelmingly conquered. As R.C. Sproul said, "Both atoms were subjected to a probationary test to see if they would achieve obedience and righteousness, and as we know the first atom failed and God's plan to so glorify his name, the second atom would not fail, and so we have Christ here in his temptations for us. What a glorious truth."

So let's just work briefly through the biblical text and the first heading I put before you is this: Temptation of Trust. We find in verses two to four, Satan's tempting the Lord concerning his hunger. Interestingly, as I was studying for the sermon, I came across an article concerning the story of a man named Angus Barbieri. Angus was an incredibly overweight man and to solve his immense weight issue, he began a fast that lasted just over a year. Can you believe that? No food for just over a year. Such was his size and he ended up losing around two hundred and seventy-six pounds of body weight.

However, in that same article, it mentioned that for ordinary people, medically speaking, forty days of fasting is considered the very upper limit before medical intervention is required, even death. For an ordinary person, forty days puts you at absolute breaking point. So we find Christ alone in the wilderness, finding himself even near death. When then Satan, the fallen angel, chief adversary of God, comes to tempt him. So may we not underestimate the deceptions and cunning of Satan. He comes to Christ at his very weakest.

J.C. Ryle wrote this of Satan: "It was the devil who brought sin into the world at the beginning. This is he who vexed Job, deceived David, gave Peter a heavy fall. This is he whom the Bible calls a murderer, a liar, a roaring lion. This is he whose enmity to our souls never slumbers, never sleeps. This is he who for nearly six thousand years has been working at one work to ruin men and women, to draw them to hell. This is he whose cunning and subtlety passes man's understanding and who often appears as an angel of light."

And what better temptation that Satan has at his disposal to start with than to use the very real hunger that Christ is now feeling. Don't let this be an overstatement to you, where it says in verse two that after he had fasted for 40 days and 40 nights, he then became hungry. He was truly hungry to the point of desperation at this point. So Satan tempts Christ to use his divine power to end the fast and turn the stones before him into bread to eat.

Now what's the reality to this temptation? Just think about it for a minute. What's the reality here? Well, the reality is we have a repeat of the first temptation that Satan put to Eve in the garden. Recall from Genesis chapter three, verse one, the serpent speaking said, "Indeed

has God said you shall not eat from any tree of the garden?" The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat, but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said you shall not eat from it or touch it or you will die." The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die."

Satan's goal was to make Eve and consequently Adam believe that obedience to God's word was not trustworthy or worth their concern. He tried to make them think that God's word was not trustworthy. Adam and Eve failed, but Christ will not. It was the Father's will that he underwent this fast. All Christ needed at this moment was to trust the Father and depend on his word and reject Satan's call to exercise his divine power in order to satisfy his hunger.

If Christ had gone through with this and used his divine power to turn these stones into bread, it would have been as if he was expressing to the Father, "I don't trust you to provide what I need to survive my hunger." This was the same test that Israel underwent when God provided manna and meat in the wilderness. Look it up in Exodus 16. God was saying to his people in the wilderness, when he provided bread for them in heaven, he was saying, "Trust me to provide, trust in me, my word is sufficient for you." If God said he's going to do something, if he asks you to do something, he's going to give you all that you need to carry it through, my word is sufficient for you.

And we see this much in Jesus' response. He responds by quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3 in verse 4 of chapter 4 of Matthew. So Jesus passes his first probation. Though he hungered to the point of death, it was the Father's will for him that Christ denying himself bread at this time, or later, and so rightly say in John 6:33, "For the bread of God is that which comes out of heaven and gives life to the world." Then they said to him, "Lord, always give us this bread." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me will not hunger, and he who believes in me will never thirst."

So Christ passed his first probation test. The second one is this: Temptation of Presumption, Temptation of Presumption, verses 5 to 7 of Matthew 4. For this next temptation, it seems Jesus is led by Satan, and what form Satan takes we cannot know, but leads Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple. Now according to the ancient historian Josephus, this would have placed Christ looking down on the southeast corner of the temple where there was a retaining wall, and it was a sheer drop down into a ravine. This retaining wall was estimated to be a 450-foot drop, and so Christ is there on the top of the pinnacle of this temple looking down over a 450-foot drop into a ravine, and this is where his second temptation comes.

In the first temptation, Jesus responded with scripture, so Satan in this next one uses some scripture himself, but he twists it. He cites from Psalm 91:11-12 calling for Jesus to jump. In Psalm 91 it says, "For he will give his angels charge concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will bear you up in their hands that you do not strike your foot against a stone." So just as Satan said to Eve, "You shall not die," Satan says the same to Christ, "You shall not die; the Lord will lift you up."

Jesus' response again from Deuteronomy 6:16 demonstrates that Satan has twisted the application of this text. Jesus responds, "God is not to be tested." In other words, God forbids man to do things like throw himself off buildings to see if God will spare their lives and give the angels charge concerning them. Psalm 91 is all about trusting God; Satan makes it about testing God. It's almost as if in this scene Satan takes Jesus' dependence on the word of God from that first temptation of the bread, turning stones into bread, so Satan takes Jesus' dependence on the word of God and says, "Oh, you want to depend on God's word, do you? How about this, throw yourself off this building then see if you depend upon God." That's what he's doing here.

Throw yourself off the building and we'll really see if you trust in God's word, but Jesus understands that testing God would be a violation of the scripture; he refuses. Man is not to test God in this way. Satan has twisted the meaning of the scripture.

A third temptation comes in verses 8 to 10, verses 8 to 10, concerning a temptation to power, temptation of power. For this temptation of Christ, it would seem we have a kind of supernatural vision that Christ might be able to see the world's kingdoms before him. Satan already knows that the kingdoms of man, the world belongs to God, that he reigns over all the affairs of men. What Satan tempts Christ with is the right to rule apart from the way of the cross. Satan says, "You can have all these kingdoms," he says, "just fall down and worship me. Forget about the cross, forget about the true purpose that you're here, rule without the cross. All this can be yours, just bow the knee to me as well."

When Adolf Hitler set out to create a thousand-year empire for Germany, he said this: "To attain our aim we should stop at nothing even if we must join forces with the devil." Seeking glory for self is one of man's great vices. I say men in particular actually as well; men seek to build empires where they can using whomever they can over top of whomever they can, and they'll do whatever they can to accomplish it. But Jesus has come to seek and to save, to adopt the posture of a servant and a slave, to be a representative for a people unworthy of him.

Jesus said to his disciples in Luke 22, "The kings of the Gentiles lorded over them, and those who have authority over them are called benefactors, but it is not this way with you. But the one who is the greatest among you should become like the youngest and the leader like the servant, for who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves."

It was Satan's lust for power that saw him cast out of heaven in the beginning, and now he tempts the Son of God to join him in his rebellion. And again, Jesus responds from Deuteronomy in Deuteronomy 6:13, "You shall fear the Lord your God only; you shall worship him and swear by his name."

So Christ's probation test is finished for now. Perhaps James was reflecting on Jesus' temptations when he wrote this in his epistles, James 4:7, "Submit therefore to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you; draw near to God and he will draw near to you." We find a

parallel there, don't we, as Jesus in verse 10 of chapter 4 says, "Go, Satan, for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" So he resists Satan's temptations.

Let's make a couple of applications before we close. The first application is this: Jesus' obedience, his perfect life, the righteousness we see in him, especially here, that is our righteousness. Christians need to understand this. Satan loves to accuse and persecute Christ's church, and one of the ways he does this is making us doubt our salvation, to make us doubt that God really loves us and is for us.

Now we all sin as Christians. If you want to put your hand up and say that you don't, well the scripture says this to you, 1 John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." We all sin. We all at times do things which we hate and we sin against God, and because this is so, Satan will often have opportune time to try to leave us wallowing in our shame, and he'll sell this lie: "God doesn't love you; you can't be restored to God; look at what you've done for you and you've gone and sinned again," and he leaves us wallowing in our grief, poisoning our minds to think that God could never love us despite our disobedience.

But we ought to remind ourselves that our righteousness and our standing before God is not of our own but of Christ. It's not about our performance, remember; it's about the performance of our representative. We have a righteousness which comes through faith, and the righteousness received to our credit was that real obedience of Christ, his real fight against temptation in which he overcame the devil's temptations which none of us could ever. If we were in the garden there with Adam and Eve, we would have been the first to fall; that's the idea. That's why we're all condemned in Adam; he is a representative of the human race.

So every time, Christian, every time that you sin, every time that this wave of guilt and shame comes over, we should again come to the Father immediately in repentance, ask him to help us to fight our sin, to have victory over it, but most of all thank him that he sent Jesus to be our righteousness and that when Jesus was tempted to sin as we are, Christ was victorious for us, and he has given us his righteousness because it's all about his performance and not ours because he's our representative.

The second application is this: Jesus gives us a model to fight temptation. When we go through temptations, we should use the model of the Lord Jesus here to resist. What does he do? He uses scripture; he uses the word of God. Now some of these temptations that we have may not be sinful in and of themselves, but we should use God's word. There's a reason, after all, the psalmist writes in Psalm 119:11, "Your word I have treasured in my heart, why? That I might not sin against you."

So whatever it might be, temptation to hatred, temptation to lie, temptation to lust, temptation to covet, temptation to cheat, temptation to conceal, we might even say temptation to fear, temptation to have anxiety, temptation to have doubts, in those moments we need to recite or read God's word so that it is flowing into our hearts and driving out those temptations.

As we await the return of Christ, Jesus' victory over temptation is an example to the church to walk in. We will never be able to do it perfectly like Christ because of our fallen natures, but every Christian that is born again of the Spirit is called to go to war against sin, to resist and flee from it and turn to Christ in our trials. And we remind ourselves as we close again of that scripture in Hebrews 4:15, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses but one who has been tempted in all things as we are yet without sin."

When the scripture says he is our high priest, it's another way of saying he is our representative, and he is one who can sympathize with us, and in fact, he goes before us because he too was tempted yet he was without sin. So we look to him and we say thank you, Lord, for giving us one like him. Let's pray.