

The Devil, You Say

From the Series, “The King and I: Matthew Tells us About the King of the Universe”

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Introduction

If you’ve ever watched an old British movie, you’ve probably seen something like the following scene: Some terrible event has taken place, like a murder. Someone announces it. They yell out, “Oh no - Mr. Jones was murdered.” And then, someone, usually an older man responds, “The Devil you say – do they know who did it?”

“The Devil, you say.” It’s one of those emotional phrases we hear every now and then. We get the general meaning: Something really bad has happened. But you know something? *No one is certain exactly what it means, or where it came from.*

I did some digging around, and the phrase may come from before the days of Shakespeare. It’s pulled out when people run into something that’s very difficult, treacherous, or dangerous. It invokes an image of the Devil, the most frightening individual known to mankind.

As an interesting side note, it’s easy to trivialize. The reason I mention Shakespeare is because a character in one of his plays says something to the order of “I can’t remember that person’s name – What the devil was it?”

An image that invokes danger and treachery - But also, an image that’s somehow easy to trivialize.

We’re in our series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe”. Today’s message is entitled, “The Devil, You Say”. We’ve been studying Matthew’s book about the great King. Let’s remind ourselves about some of the things we’ve learned so far.

Matthew is writing to his Jewish friends, and he wants them to know that Jesus is qualified to be the king of the universe.

- He’s qualified by his lineage.
 - He’s a descendant of the great King David.
- He’s qualified by the testimony of angels.
- He’s qualified by the testimony of miraculous events surrounding his birth.
- He’s qualified because he’s fulfilled prophecy.
- He’s qualified by the testimony of foreign dignitaries, the wise men.

In our last session, we learned that God the Father personally appeared to give testimony that Jesus was his Son. The Holy Spirit appeared as a dove and landed on Jesus. In today’s session,



we're going to learn about something else that qualifies Jesus to be the great King. ***The best Kings can do battle with the enemies of their people. The best kings can decisively win.***

The Human Race has a great enemy. He is powerful, treacherous, and dangerous. He is known as the Devil. He is serious and not to be trivialized. Today, we will learn that Jesus is qualified to be the great king because he can do battle with our greatest enemy - and he can win decisively. If we can learn the principles in today's message, we will have the tools we need to win over our greatest enemy - and win decisively.

Before we can dig into today's passage, we need to review a few more things that we learned about Jesus last time. When Jesus was baptized, we're told that all the members of the Trinity were present. The Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove. Then the Father spoke. He said: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17)

We learned something about Jesus in that statement. The members of the Trinity have been around long before the creation of our universe. They always pleased each other. They always loved each other. But, this statement pointed out something more. We learned that the business of being "pleasing" to God often involved the action of sacrifice. When an animal was offered as a sacrifice to God, and if the sacrifice was correctly done with all the right elements, this was pleasing. So, when God said he was "well pleased" with his Son, he was including in this statement the fact that his Son would be the perfect sacrifice for sins. Recall that John the Baptist identified Jesus as "... the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29)

What would it take for Jesus to be the ultimate, perfect sacrifice for our sin?

- He would need to be sinless - Jesus would have to live a perfect life.
- He would have to be obedient to every command that is given to all of us.
- He would have to be associated with us.
- In order for that to happen, he would need to use the resources that are available to us when we face temptations.
 - This was done symbolically through baptism, but Jesus then went on to live this out in the real world.

Let's pick up where we left off last week. Picture this:

- Jesus has just been baptized by John.
- He comes up out of the water and sees this amazing vision of the Trinity coming together.
- The Father and the Holy Spirit testify officially that Jesus is the Son of God – the great King.

With all of this, we're ready to dig into today's passage.

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.
(Matthew 4:1)

Right after Jesus is baptized, right after the heavens are opened and the Trinity appears, Jesus is led by the spirit into the wilderness. There are three important things about this statement.

- 1) Jesus was led by the spirit.
- 2) He was led into the wilderness
- 3) The purpose of this episode it to be tempted by the devil.

Let's look at those three things individually.

1) Jesus was led by the Spirit.

We mentioned that when Jesus went through life, he would use all the resources that are available to us. One of those resources is the Holy Spirit. We're told a lot about the Holy Spirit in Scripture, but there are two things that we need at the moment:

- We can ask him to lead us.
- If we don't know how, we can ask him to teach us.

Here's what the Apostle Paul said to the Romans: "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God." (Romans 8:14) Jesus was led by the holy Spirit. You can be, too. And then the Apostle John tells us: "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (John 14:26) You say, "I don't know how to be led by the spirit". ***If you don't know how to be led by the spirit, ask him to teach you.***

Next, Jesus was led up into the wilderness.

There's that word **wilderness** again. We spent some time with this a few sessions back. For now, let's be reminded that a disciple of Christ knows the place of wilderness in the Christian life. We need times when we can be away from the noise and distractions of life. That can be a prayer closet where we go often. Or, it can be a longer period of time further away at a park or retreat center.

In this instance, Jesus is led to a very isolated wilderness. The Jordan was wilderness, but at least there was water. There was likely at least some vegetation; a tree here and there. Also, there were other seekers looking for a deeper understanding of faith by listening to John the Baptist.

Here, we're told Jesus is led **up** from that wilderness. If you go up from the Jordan, you're in the mountains near the Dead Sea. The mountains near the dead sea are dry, desolate, inhospitable, and lonely. We'll learn in a moment that Jesus spent 40 days and nights there. During that time, he had only the Holy Spirit and his Father. In this episode, we are reminded that, ***the tougher the trial, the more we need time alone with God***. Jesus needed to prepare for an intense trial, followed by three years of public ministry. For that, he needed a lot of time alone with God.



Finally, the purpose of this episode is for Jesus to be tempted by the devil.

The Greek word that we translate here as “tempt” can have two meanings.

1) One is “test”. Students know all about this. You study a subject, or you learn a skill, and you find out if you’re proficient in what you’ve learned. This happens all the time. We’ll note that this is only appropriate for teachers as a form of helping prepare students for the disciplines of life. At its best, testing is for the benefit of the student more than anyone else. Through testing, we find out:

- Have you learned what you need?
- Do you need to go back and try again?

It’s much better to find out on a paper test than in real life, where you might hurt someone or get fired from your job.

2) The word can also mean “tempt”. Here, the goal is more devious. Tempt is what the Devil does. The idea is that the tempter **wants** the person who is tempted to fail. The tempter wants to hurt and cause pain. It’s interesting that both perspectives are at play here. The Devil certainly wants to hurt. But the Father, who allows Jesus to go through this, is confident that his Son will pass.

Sometimes, this comes into play for a disciple of Christ.

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4)

It's very important to understand this distinction. Sometimes, God allows us to go through **tests**. He allows us to be placed in situations designed to stretch us. He does so because he has something good to give us at the end of the test. However, God never **tempts us**. Sadly, the

Devil is all too happy to subject us to tough and painful situations that he believes will cause us to fail in such a way that we'll be hurt. God allowed his Son to be placed in a very tough situation.

Let's summarize this:

Jesus was led there by the Spirit.

- We too need to be led and taught by the Spirit.

God prepared his son with extensive time in the wilderness.

- We too, need to understand the importance of wilderness.

Finally, the purpose of this episode was to allow Jesus to be tempted.

God did this because there was something good at the end of the test.

- This is sometimes true for us, too.
- That's why we need to learn the principles we're studying today.

Having learned all of this, let's look at the nature of the temptation that Jesus endured. Let's start by reviewing how the Devil works. Since we've been together, we've looked at this topic a few times. We've looked at it from two different perspectives.

Perspective 1

We saw the first perspective in the Garden of Eden. Let's go back to that story in Genesis 3.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1)

The Devil, here in the form of the serpent, was crafty; He was clever and deceptive. Here's an important point: If you learned about the Devil only through Hollywood films, you would think that the Devil's appearance is the worst thing about him. That's not the case. What makes the Devil dangerous is his **words**. He's crafty. God told Adam and Eve they shouldn't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The Devil asks, "Did God **really** say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" In other words, **the Devil wanted Adam and Eve to doubt God's Word**. He did this here by misquoting God. God didn't say that all the other fruit was bad. Just the fruit of the one tree.

Let's read on the Genesis.

2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" 4 "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. (Genesis 3:2-4)

So, God warned Adam and Eve. He said that, if they ate from the one tree, they would die. The Devil says, “Not going to happen”. In other words, **the Devil wanted Adam and Eve to doubt God’s power**. According to the Devil, God says things that will never come to pass.

Let’s read on.

“For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:5)

Here the Devil is suggesting there are good things that God is withholding from Adam and Eve. “Why, if you eat that fruit, Adam and Eve, you could have all the things God has – he must be holding back! If you eat, you can be like God”, or so the Devil says. So, **the Devil wants Adam and Eve to doubt God’s character**. He wants them to doubt that god is God, and to doubt that he loves them.

To summarize, the Devil wanted Adam and Eve to doubt:

- God’s Word
- God’s power
- God’s Character (his goodness and his love)

Here’s what’s most tragic about this episode: **This was all a pile of lies**. God has just created a whole world and given it to Adam and Eve. He spoke with them all the time. He displayed fantastic shows of power. He clearly loved Adam and Eve and wanted to give them the most wonderful things in his creation. He just wanted to give them those things at the right time. When they were ready.

Here they were, Adam and Eve, in the middle of a beautiful garden. It was filled with every evidence of God’s Word, his power, and His character. It was filled with evidence of God’s, goodness and love. But the Devil destroyed all that with just 3 lies.

So, that was the first perspective on the way the Devil works.

Perspective 2

Here’s the second one. It involves the things that many humans desire. It’s what we all long for. I call them the five “Ps”. They are:

- Prosperity
- Protection
- Pleasure
- Popularity
- Power.

We all want to be prosperous. We want money and success. Once we get those things, we want to hang on to them. We don't want anyone to take them, so we need protection. If we have those things, we can purchase pleasure on all levels. We can also be popular. We all want to be liked and even loved. And finally, we all like power.

If that's too many "Ps", you can summarize with the words ***Provision and Protection***.

- Who will give me what I want (Who will Provide)?
- Who will protect me so that I can hang onto those things?

Often times, people want these things, and they think it's God's job to provide them. If God doesn't give them to us, then we start to listen to the other voices, the idols of the world. We listen to the voice of the Devil, who is happy to tempt us.

So, that was a quick summary of the way the Devil works. Here are two important notes:

- First, these temptations often come in packages, just as they did for Adam and Eve.
 - It wasn't just one temptation that made them fall.
- The Devil has been working this way since the Garden of Eden.

Now that we've covered the way the Devil works, let's see how he applied the tactics to Jesus, the Great King.

Temptation 1: Bread

2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:2-4)

As part of the preparation for the temptation, Jesus fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. That's a long time. There are other times when the topic of fasting will come up as we work our way through the book of Matthew. We'll hit the topic in more detail then. Sadly, we don't have time right now - we're constrained by time to look at the big picture. For now, we will say that fasting can be a tool used to help of grow spiritually. Obviously, Jesus did it here. However, long fasts should be approached with great care. Please talk to me and/or do careful research if you're thinking about it.

Getting back to the story, we're told Jesus was hungry. That's being very concise. Jesus was no doubt **very** hungry. Hunger and other kinds of pain cause us to be vulnerable. So, when Jesus was at a very low point physically, that's when the Devil decides to strike. And, he strikes with a temptation related to the pain that Jesus was feeling.

As we said, the Devil often combines different types of temptations. He does that here. Recall that the last time we were reading about Jesus, he's surrounded by the other members of the

Trinity. God the Father says, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” So, Satan starts off with “Well, if you are the Son of God...”

What kinds of things go with being the Son of God? Or, what might we think looking in from the outside? It seems like being the Son of God should mean great **privilege**. If you’re the Son of God, you should be sitting on a throne enjoying the worship of Angels.

- You shouldn’t be in need.
- You shouldn’t be in want.
- You shouldn’t feel any pain.

Or, so it would seem looking in from the outside. But here is Jesus, in pain – he’s hungry.

It also would seem like being the Son of God would involve great power. You can call worlds into existence with a word. Forget bread – you could turn the stones into filet mignon. You could make it rain Hershey bars!

But recall, Jesus has a mission. His Father has asked him to do something as part of that mission. For whatever reason, he is commanded to be in a lonely, desolate place. And he’s commanded to do something that makes him hungry. Jesus is to live a life of perfect obedience. **He is to live that life using the same resources that are available to any mortal.** This is important: If Jesus acts on his own, if he uses power that we humans can’t use, he is no longer the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

Jesus is empowered and led by the same Holy spirit who is given to us. But he has another tool, available to you and me: He has the Word of God. And so, he answers: “**It is written**, Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Understand, Jesus could have said anything, and it would have become the Word of God. **Instead, he has memorized the words available to him at the time.** He said, “It is written...” This comes from Deuteronomy 8:3. Remember, Adam and Eve fell because they doubted God’s Word. **Jesus not only believes God’s word; he relies on it.** He calls upon it for help when he is tempted. We need to trust in God’s Word and rely on it when we face temptation.

As a side note, we could also look at this from the “Five Ps”. One of the temptations the Devil uses against us is the question, “Can God provide for you?” Today, that might be: “If you’re a child of God, why are you concerned about paying the rent?” Maybe we need to memorize a verse like, “Man shall not live on bread alone, (or rent alone) but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Always remember this: **If we’re following the leadings of God’s Holy spirit, God will provide.**

The Devil moves on to the second temptation.

Temptation 2: Falling

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6 “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”
(Matthew 4:5-6)

Recall the second temptation in the garden. God said something would happen. Adam and Eve would die if they ate from the tree. The Devil says it would not. So, the devil wanted Adam and Eve to doubt God’s **power**. And recall the five “Ps”. We all want **protection**.

Once again, we get a complex temptation. The Devil takes Jesus to a familiar site, the temple of Jerusalem. However, Jesus is taken to a viewpoint rarely seen by an average person. Historians say that great temple of Jerusalem was 150 feet high. If you were to fall off the highest point, that would hurt. One side of the temple was built over a neighboring valley. Falling off that point would be even further.

The Devil starts with the same taunt, “If you are the Son of God...” Here he’s saying, “If you’re so important to your father, surely what I’m about to say applies to you.” He then says, “Throw yourself off - Let’s see if the Father has the power to protect you.” “Doubt God’s Power” is combined with “Doubt God’s Protection”.

Then the Devil does something really scary. To support what he’s doing, he misquotes Scripture. Again recall, he gets Adam and Eve to sin by misquoting Scripture in the garden. However, in the garden the Devil deliberately changed the wording of what God said. Here, he quotes directly. These words are a quote from Psalm 91:11-12. The words are all correct. However, the Devil twists the **intention** of the words. He’s essentially saying: “OK Jesus. I can see that you trust God’s Word. Good for you! I like this business of saying ‘It is written’. I can do that, too. Let’s give it a shot...”

So, he quotes a Scripture that gives a promise. The promise is this: God protects those who obey him.

Fortunately, Jesus sees through what the Devil is trying to do. Jesus is already trusting God to protect him. He wouldn’t have followed the Spirit’s leading into the wilderness if he didn’t trust. Jesus spent the last 40 days in a place where he could fall off a high place at any moment. There would be no one to rescue him. Because he was following the commands of his Father, he already knew he was safe.

The Devil was asking for a show of power. He was asking for a test. Remember, it is only appropriate for teachers to test students - Never vice-versa. Over the next 3 years, these kinds of requests would be repeated numerous times by onlookers. Unbelievers would regularly say, “show us a sign” - Then we will believe you. Jesus never complied.

Let's move on to the final temptation.

Temptation 3: Worship

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." 10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" 11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.
(Matthew 4:8-11)

We no longer hear the taunt, "If you are God's Son". Now, we see the Devil come out in the open. He wants Jesus to stop serving his father and serve him. If Jesus is willing to do this, supposedly, the Devil will give him all the kingdoms of this world.

Jesus turns him down. Jesus could have merely said, "no". But, one more time, Jesus quotes Scripture: ***For it is written:*** 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" Jesus recognizes that serving his father is worth more than anything in creation. Pleasing his father is more important than anything. What would please his father most? The Father would be most pleased by Jesus presenting himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world.

Having passed all three tests, Jesus can do what is pleasing for his Father. Jesus can now dismiss Satan. He can now say, "Hit the road".

And you know what? Now, all of his needs are met.

- He is safe.
- He is fed what he needs to continue his mission.
- He is honored by angels.

Jesus passed these tests, and many more over the following three years. He eventually passes the test of the Cross. At the close of his earthly ministry, as he is getting ready to ascend to heaven, he shares these words: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." (Matthew 28:18) Jesus doesn't just have all the authority of this earth. He has all the authority of heaven, too.

What do we learn from all this?

Conclusion

The Best king can do battle with the enemies of his people. And he can win decisively. Jesus is qualified to be the great King because he did battle with our greatest enemy, the Devil. And yes, he won decisively.

This is not just a nice story. Because Jesus did battle with our adversary and won, he can show us the way. We can have victory over our enemy. In order to do this, we need to understand the following principles.

Jesus was led by the Spirit.

- We need to be led and taught by the Spirit, too.

Jesus was led up into the wilderness.

- We need to learn the importance of wilderness; time alone with God.

Jesus knew he was being tested.

- We must understand that sometimes, we will be tested, too. God does it for our benefit
 - He tests, as any good teacher.
 - The Devil tempts – he wants us to fail.

The Devil has worked over the centuries the same way he worked in the Garden of Eden.

He wants us to:

- Doubt God's Word.
- Doubt God's power.
- Doubt God's character (his goodness and love).

The Devil takes advantage of our deepest longings.

- We want the Five 'Ps': Prosperity, Protection, Pleasure, Popularity, And Power.
- We can summarize those into two words: Provision and Protection.

The Devil will try to tell us that God won't provide our needs.

- We need to trust that God will provide.

The Devil will tell us that we are alone and vulnerable in a scary world.

- We need to trust in God's protection.

And we must realize that, when doing Battle with the Devil, Jesus relied on resources that are available to us. In particular, he used God's Word. Friends, there is no substitute for reading the Word of God. There is no substitute for learning the Word of God. There is no substitute for being in church on Sundays as God's people learn his Word together. Finally, it's a very good idea to memorize verses and passages. Maybe the three that Jesus used in the passage we studied today would be a good start?

Centuries ago, Adam and Eve faced temptations when they stood in a beautiful garden. They were surrounded by every evidence of God's power and love. Yet, they failed.

Jesus faced incredible temptations in the mountain wilderness of ancient Israel, where there was almost no physical evidence of God's goodness and love. And yet, he succeeded. Later, he faced the greatest trial ever faced by a man – the cross. At that event, he was surrounded by a jeering mob and tormented beyond belief. And yet, he was triumphant.



He now has all authority in heaven and on earth. He wants us to follow him. But be aware: If we follow, we too, will face temptations.

Jesus faced temptation and won. He wants us to win, too. Let him teach you how.