

ARE YOU READY?

THE WORD OF GOD

Matthew 4:1-11

I encourage you to find a Bible if you didn't bring one. There is one under a seat near you. I hope that you'll take a minute and find the book of Matthew, chapter 4. We'll be in verses 1-11, which are appropriate verses for us as we continue in this season of Lent, the time of preparation as we anticipate the celebration of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday morning, rapidly approaching us.

In this passage, Jesus is in the final stages of his preparation for public ministry. This won't be the main topic of the message, but we'll look a little bit at fasting and why we should fast. Doesn't that excite you? See, you are already thinking about lunch. Then we'll talk more thoroughly about the subject of preparation. We're going to go to God's word in Matthew 4. Let's begin with prayer.

Lord, we come to you in this moment and ask for the help of your Holy Spirit as we open the scripture. We pray, Lord, that you will speak to us because this is your word and we pray that we would have understanding, that we would respond with faith, that our minds, our thinking would be renewed. Lord, we just quiet our hearts before you. I pray that we would be without distraction as your Word is taught. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Word of God, Matthew 4:1-11:

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And 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, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Are You Ready? – The Word of God

Matthew 4:1-11 | Sunday, March 17, 2019 | By Brian Brookins

Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said 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, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”

Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall 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 glory. And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’”

Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

Last week we looked at the life of David. In particular, we looked at Psalm 51, his confession after his great sin with Bathsheba, then taking the life of Uriah. Perhaps you heard that message and you thought, “Wow, if that’s what happened to David, there’s no hope for me.” Or maybe you heard that message and you thought, “Wow, if David was that bad, I’m not so bad!”

Either way, that’s not really the takeaway that was intended or the response that we want. **We come today to someone who isn’t defeated by temptation, who isn’t defeated by sin, but who overcomes. Very specifically, Jesus overcomes, not just showing us how to overcome. Certainly, there is that aspect of this passage, but he comes as our representative. He comes in our place. He is tempted, and he faces this battle because we are tempted and because we are in a battle. In fact, this assumption permeates scripture. It’s so thoroughly assumed as a backdrop for our human existence that we frequently miss it, misunderstand it, assume it ourselves, but then live in a practical denial of it.**

Just a couple of biblical examples. There is a verse that as a teenager I memorized, 1 Corinthians 10:13: “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man. God is faithful, and he will with it give you a way of escape.” It’s a marvelous verse to encourage us, but I always understood this verse to represent this idea. “Okay, I’m being tempted. It feels really unique to me, but the reality is, it’s just a common old temptation that everyone faces.” But when you put it in the context of 1 Corinthians 10, I think it’s saying more than that. Because in this passage, there is a parallel to what’s happening in Matthew 4, then all the way back to the book of Deuteronomy.

Are You Ready? – The Word of God

Matthew 4:1-11 | Sunday, March 17, 2019 | By Brian Brookins

You're like, "Wait a minute. Matthew 4, Deuteronomy..." Well, as Jesus is tempted in the wilderness, he quotes Deuteronomy 6 through 8 three times to overcome the enemy. In Deuteronomy 6 through 8, Moses is reflecting upon the experience of the children of Israel in the wilderness. He is reminding them of what God did and what God taught them as they were in the wilderness and as they were about to now go into the Promised Land. **It seems like Jesus is meditating on, reflecting upon that scripture as he is in the wilderness for 40 days, and he uses the word of God to overcome the enemy.**

1 Corinthians 10 – in that passage the Apostle Paul talks about the sin of the children of Israel and how they fell in the wilderness. He's talking about this same passage of scripture. Here's what's remarkable. He says in this passage: "Now, all of these things happened to them as an example. They were written down as instruction for us, on whom the end of the ages has come." Listen to this very carefully: "Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man."

Stay with me for a second, okay? Here's what I think a fuller interpretation of this passage is. You don't want to undo the point of the passage by saying, "Hey, every temptation you have is just this common old temptation. Don't worry about it." In other words, "Don't invest it with too much power." I think Paul was using this context: "Don't assume you won't fall to the same temptation that the children of Israel did. Every temptation that is common to mankind is in you." Whoa. That's a whole different admonition, isn't it?

You are capable of the sin that's out there that you think is not really an issue for you. Be careful. Scripture is warning us about our vulnerability and our need. Or consider Galatians 6:1, where we are told, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness." Now look at this: "Keep watch on yourself lest you be tempted."

I wonder if we get the magnitude of this. You're going to help a brother who has fallen into some terrible sin and you want to restore him, and the Apostle Paul is saying, "Be careful, because if you are not aware of the situation, you are going to be vulnerable to that which you are confronting." This is a tremendous caution.

We've been looking in recent months at The Lord's Prayer. We've been talking about how Jesus calls us into kingdom prayer, and that as we do, we are praying for transformation. We are praying for transformation of this world, of this culture, of our city, of our own lives. When we pray, "Give us this

Are You Ready? – The Word of God

Matthew 4:1-11 | Sunday, March 17, 2019 | By Brian Brookins

day our daily bread,” I’ve been sharing with you that these personal requests are also requests not just for our needs to be met, but they are a prayer for personal transformation. We pray, “Lord, as I need forgiveness, make me a forgiving person. Keep me from the evil one. Keep me from temptation.” This one little phrase, “Give us this day our daily bread” -- we are pretty sure that Jesus is taking that idea from a couple of references in Proverbs.

Here’s one example. In Proverbs 30:8, we find this, and you’re not going to like it. I’m going to warn you right now, before I tell you, you’re not going to like it. “Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.” I told you you wouldn’t like it, right? This is what we want to pray: “Don’t give me poverty. But riches?”

When Jesus tells us to pray to the Father, “Give me this day my daily bread,” there is a call to contentment, but it’s not detached from, “Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil.” It’s not detached from the spiritual warfare that’s in front of us. Here’s what Proverbs is saying and here’s what Jesus is saying. He is saying that there is a point where with too little you are going to be tempted to be angry and frustrated at God. And with too much, you are going to be tempted to be presumptuous and prideful and at ease and vulnerable. You are saying, “God, would you peg that point in my life, where I’ll be tempted the least?” That is the picture of vulnerability that we experience in a spiritual battle.

I don’t know if you’ve seen *Green Book*. It won the Oscar for best picture. There was some controversy surrounding its selection, which is a whole other story. In it, Dr. Don Shirley, a famous concert pianist, is a black man who is about to embark on a journey through the Midwest and into the Deep South, so he hires a driver. As he is interviewing these drivers, he interviews this rough New Yorker, who is in “public relations.” He goes by Tony Lip. His public relations activity is actually that he’s been a bouncer in an upscale New York club.

He is being interviewed, and as he gets ready to leave, he is told, “If you take this job, you’ve got to iron my clothes. You’ll be my butler, so to speak, my valet.” He says, “No, no, no, no. I’m not signing on for that. I am unavailable for that job.” But then he says, “Listen, I’ve seen everyone else in that interview room. They may be able to iron your clothes, but trust me, where you’re going, you don’t want them. You want me, because you are about to go into a battle.”

It’s foolish to enter into battle presumptuously and without a situational awareness of what we face. That’s our first point. Our first point is very simple.

Are You Ready? – The Word of God

Matthew 4:1-11 | Sunday, March 17, 2019 | By Brian Brookins

I. You are in a battle.

Let's see if we can unpack it a little bit. Jesus here faces three temptations. In the first one he has been fasting for 40 days. He is obviously hungry. The scripture tells us that he's hungry, and he's tempted to turn stones into bread.

What I wish I could do, what I wanted to do (I've seen others try to do it) -- is take these three temptations: Temptation 1, Temptation 2, Temptation, and get three categories. The first one is obviously the physical. **Some temptations fall in the area of what scripture would call the flesh, the physical. Our appetites get the best of us and we fall.**

Then there are these other categories. I don't want to do that, because I think I have to be untrue to the text. I think I have to press it and force it to make that work. Though that fits the first temptation, the second temptation, according to Matthew, is a temptation that Jesus rebuts by saying, "Don't tempt God." **The temptation is to tempt God, to test God. How do we do that?**

Well, he is being told here to jump from the pinnacle of the temple, and Satan says that according to Psalm 91, "...angels will bear you up. They'll catch you. In fact, they'll so watch over you that you won't even stub your toe against a stone."

The temptation here is the temptation where we presume upon the grace and the kindness of God. We say, "You know what? I know I shouldn't do this, but I'm going to do it, and God will forgive me." Truthfully, it's probably a temptation that to some degree we've all fallen into. **Jesus overcomes through the use of the word of God.**

Then in the third temptation, there's a temptation to compromise. There's a temptation to get to the goal by taking a shortcut, by cutting corners. Satan takes Jesus and shows him all of the kingdoms of the world. We would assume that there he looks at the magnificence of Rome. He sees the marvelous Greek structures and he sees all of the culture, all the magnificence, all the power, all the wealth, all that is available in the kingdoms of this world. And he says, "All of this is yours. Just bow down and worship me."

Of course, this is what we do. This is one of the ways that temptation very subtly but very powerfully confronts us in our lives. **We believe there is something other than God that's going to get us to where we really want to go, and we take a shortcut. We enter into a relationship or an**

Are You Ready? – The Word of God

Matthew 4:1-11 | Sunday, March 17, 2019 | By Brian Brookins

agreement, or we go a certain path, compromising, because we've moved our worship and our faith and our confidence from God to something else.

I had a friend in another city who was a pastor. He had several children. He pastored for many years. One day he called in his wife and his four little children and said, "I'm leaving you. I'm leaving you because I'm moving in with my childhood sweetheart." A group of pastors went to confront this man, and by God's grace he repented, broke the other relationship, came back, and began the painful process of restoring his marriage and his family.

This is what he said: "I didn't struggle with pornography. Never been unfaithful. Never inappropriate relationships in my life. In fact, I'm pretty sure (listen to this statement) this is the only person on the face of the earth that this could have happened with. She reached out to me on social media. We began to converse, then the next thing led to the next thing, led to the next thing." I think, "Wow, that's just a picture of the internet, social media – it's one of those spheres where we're naïve to our vulnerability. I think technology puts us in that position frequently.

You know another place where we're naïve to our vulnerability, where we think we're invisible? The car. The cage for road rage. We are unaware of how we are going to be accountable for our actions in that moment. The truth is, we are often unaware that we are always vulnerable! We are in a place of a battle. Jesus enters into this battle on our behalf. This is really our second point.

II. He teaches us to use the word.

You're in a battle. This passage should awaken us to that reality, then secondly use the word. **You fight the battle with the word of God. That's what Jesus does. Of all the weapons that are at his disposal, everything that Jesus could do, he uses the word of God.**

Here he is, in the wilderness, fasting, quoting scripture from Deuteronomy 6 through 8, very powerful. It's interesting. I think there's a takeaway here: **the power of God's word.**

I had the opportunity this week to take an intensive course at a local seminary. The professor was a man named Bryan Chapell. He's a seminary president of many decades. He's actually a preaching professor as well. He is a seasoned preacher. He's even older than I am. Wow. He told the story

Are You Ready? – The Word of God

Matthew 4:1-11 | Sunday, March 17, 2019 | By Brian Brookins

about a man arrested in Tennessee and placed in a jail. He was middle-aged, but he had the mind of an eight-year-old. He was there in jail, surrounded by others who'd been arrested. Most of them were accustomed to being in that position, but he was terrified. So this man with an eight-year-old mind went over to the corner and just began to weep and sob. One of the other individuals who had been arrested went over to him and said, "Listen, you don't know me, but I want to tell you: If you will trust in Jesus Christ, he'll take care of you." And this man, very simple in his approach, did.

Then Dr. Chapell said, "You know, I know this story is true because that man with an eight-year-old mind was my brother." He said, "He wrote us a letter, and in it he said, 'This is what I now believe: For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.'" He said, "What was remarkable about this letter was that I'd never heard my brother speak in a full sentence before. He always spoke in single syllables and noises and sounds.

He said he had done some very bad things and he's in prison today. Every month he gets a letter that's mostly a quotation of the word of God. It's a beautiful story, but here's the point he wanted to make, and it's the point I want to make for you. He said, "You know what? I'm a seminary president! I'm a pastor and a preacher by trade! I've been telling him the good news of Jesus Christ all my life – all his life! And God used another criminal. God used a man in jail under arrest. **The power is in God's word.**" **The power of God's word to create, to sustain, to renew, to transform, to change.** **The short-term takeaway is this: Get into the word of God. Just get into God's word.**

I promised you that I would say a little bit about fasting and I want to give you four reasons to fast. I'm going to persuade you today to go without food. Here they are: **Detox, Dependence, Desire, and Desperation.** I'm taking these as a meditation from the first quote that Jesus gives: Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the Father's mouth." The word of God.

1. **Detox.** There's an opportunity for us to experience cleansing. It's an aid for us to come before God and say, "God, the truth is, I try to live off of everything but the word of God, and I need to be cleansed. So I'm going to set aside either this food or this drink or this form of entertainment, or this activity for a season of time, as a way of expressing that I need to be cleansed."
2. **Dependence.** Lord, we are truly and ultimately sustained by you and by your word. And fasting is a way for me to express that dependence. Actually, I view fasting as an aide to other spiritual activities. It's an aid to prayer. It's an aid to spending time in scripture and

Are You Ready? – The Word of God

Matthew 4:1-11 | Sunday, March 17, 2019 | By Brian Brookins

scripture engagement. It's like putting on hearing aids, because we are setting aside other things to quiet our hearts before God, so that we can hear the word of God, so that faith will rise in our hearts. It's like a megaphone in prayer. Some individuals would say that fasting itself is even a form of intercession or prayer. Dependence.

3. **Desire.** We say, Lord, create in me a greater desire for you, that there would be less of everything else and more of you.
4. **Desperation.** Sometimes we fast because we need God to move right now. We just need help expressing that.

Please understand I'm not saying at all that fasting earns merit points with God. That's not a biblical perspective. It's a gift to you to help you express these things, pray these things, practice these things.

Point #2: The immediate take away is scripture engagement. Get in the word of God. Let's go to our final thought for today.

III. Christ is the word.

You're in a battle. Use the word. Christ is the word. If scripture engagement is the short-term goal, Christ-engagement is the long-term goal. It is the only goal that ultimately wins the battle. We win in Christ. Here's what I mean. The scripture points to Jesus. Jesus fulfills the word of God. Jesus is the word of God.

I spoke earlier about *Green Book*. The Green Book was a directory of hotels in certain cities (this is very troubling to me) -- places in our nation where people of color had to stay in certain facilities, and which hotels would accept them. So as Tony Lip is going to depart from New York, he is given this Green Book so that they'll be able to find places to stay.

One of the criticisms of the movie is that it doesn't really grapple with the systemic nature of racism in this country and in our history and in that time period. Some felt that it was misleading. I don't think it helped that in the Academy Awards it was up against *Black Panther*, which some felt addressed this issue in a more aggressive fashion.

Are You Ready? – The Word of God

Matthew 4:1-11 | Sunday, March 17, 2019 | By Brian Brookins

I thought about that interesting debate, because critics on both sides said, “Hey, the acting is superb and the story is great and it’s entertaining.” And you know what? I almost didn’t want to talk to you about this as an illustration. Do you know why? Because I’m thinking, “Okay, I need to be careful about the vocabulary. I want to be respectful to other people.” You may not know this, but I’m white. I’m a male. I’m older. I’ve lived an insulated life racially, really. There’s such a debate that goes on around these things. There is a temptation in these moments to get really discouraged. I don’t even want to be a part of the conversation, because I get it wrong. I hurt people. I don’t want to. I’m not qualified. I want to retreat. And that experience will play out in your life over and over and over again.

If you’re a parent, there will be moments where you will feel like, “If I do this, I’ll be in trouble. If I do that, I’ll be in trouble. If I do nothing, I’ll really be in trouble. I’m just confused!” **The battle can be very intense and you only win in Christ. It’s enough to make you run to Jesus. And that’s what we need to do. We need to run to Christ.**

My wife and I used to teach parenting seminars when our children were little. But as they got older we quit. We realized how little we knew. I’m daily reminded thereof. By God’s grace our kids have done well and we are proud of them. They’ve really done better than makes sense to us. We see God’s grace all over that experience. And when people ask me for advice for parenting, the advice I give them that I believe the most is the hardest to communicate. That is, really more than anything else, it’s about prayer, getting in the word of God. It’s about fighting the fight in a spiritual battle. It just is.

Here’s the danger. If you and I do not hear this third point, we are in big, big trouble. Because if what you hear makes you say, “I’m going to pray more, and I’m going to be in the Bible more, and I’m going to do more,” you and I will just become little Pharisees. We’ll be going around bragging about how much we pray and we’ll beat people over the head with big King James Bibles. We’ll just be mean as the day is long, and it won’t work. It’s Christ. It’s Jesus Christ, who is revealed in scripture.

The transformation in my own time with the Lord took place when somehow by the grace of God I moved out of “I’ve got to do this. I’ve got to do it. I’ve got to discipline myself. I’ve got to do it,” to receiving. I’m just receiving Christ. **When I open God’s word he meets me there and by faith I’m just receiving all that I need from Jesus.**

Are You Ready? – The Word of God

Matthew 4:1-11 | Sunday, March 17, 2019 | By Brian Brookins

Listen, we have a Bible reading plan. It's on the YouVersion Bible App. It's on our website. We have printed copies. I think you should have a plan. **I think you should read through the Bible, but please know that the goal is not reading through the Bible. The goal is to know Jesus Christ. You win the battle in Christ.**

Eric Liddell. Many of you have seen *Chariots of Fire*, the story of Eric Liddell and the 1924 Olympics. It's the amazing story of a man who had a powerful conviction about the word of God. As a Scot running for Britain, he gets to the Olympics in 1924 and he finds out that his event, the 100 meters, will be run on a Sunday. He refuses, out of his conviction from the word of God, to do that, and he withdraws from this event.

There is a fantastic scene in the movie where Eric Liddell is in a church on the Sabbath, reading Isaiah 40 as the Olympic Games are taking place. He is reading Isaiah 40, "The nations are as a drop in the bucket, like dust on the scales." He is making this powerful statement: "I'm not going to compromise. I'm not going to take a shortcut." Frankly, this is a matter that many of us would say is secondary to the Christian faith. It's not a doctrine that Christians all agree on, by any stretch.

Then the story goes on. He unexpectedly gets a spot to run the 400 meters, which isn't really his event. He runs it and he wins and there it is. We want to say: "This is how you win in Christ." Mmmm....maybe not. If that is our picture of how we win in Christ, as glorious as that is and as wonderful as that is, if I leave you with that, I think I'll be misleading you. Because Eric Liddell goes to China as a missionary. He lays down his entire life to serve, gets married, and has kids. And when World War II begins to roll over the world, he is in China. He sends his family back home, then he dies of a brain tumor on the mission field, separated from his family.

It isn't revealed for another 63 years...63 years later, on the eve of the Beijing Olympic Games, the Chinese government revealed that a prisoner exchange had been worked out between Japan and Britain, and that Eric Liddell was going to be sent home. But instead of going home, he sent a pregnant woman in his place, then he died.

I would suggest that that is a picture of winning the battle spiritually, more than Olympic Gold in the 400 meters. The picture that touches me deeply is that this woman took his place. But the reality is, what made that possible is Jesus took *his* place. Jesus took *your* place. Jesus took *my* place. I really cannot even get my mind around the fact that the Son of God, the Word of God, the eternal second person of the Trinity becomes a man and goes without food for 40 days for

Are You Ready? – The Word of God

Matthew 4:1-11 | Sunday, March 17, 2019 | By Brian Brookins

you and for me. We come undone when we miss a mid-afternoon snack! Right?! We've even devised an entire vocabulary, words that don't even exist; we're "hangry."

Jesus loves you. He took your place. You win in Christ. Don't neglect the word. Go to the word to receive Christ. It's not ultimately about...okay, listen, we want a better marriage. We want our children to be safe. We want to be financially sound. Of course we want all those things and we pray for them. But, friends, God has called us to a battle. There are 28-year-old white nationalists walking into mosques shooting unarmed people. It's a dark world. Jesus has called you to be the light of the world. Would you bow your heads?

Lord, we want to respond before we close out this service by saying, "Yes" to the word. We want the word to dwell richly in our hearts. And I pray Lord right now...I'm not going to call for anyone to respond, but for anyone who has not trusted in Christ, may today be the day where they say yes to you. "Jesus has taken my place. I admit my sin before God, and by faith in Jesus Christ, and all that he has done for me, and his sacrifice for me, I receive forgiveness as a gift from you, God."

I encourage you, if that is who you are and where you are, trust in Christ today. There are a number of possible responses. God has awakened some of you today to a vulnerability in your life, and I encourage you to run to Jesus, to run to Christ. Lord, help us, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Are You Ready? - The Word of God

Matthew 4:1-11 | Sunday, March 17, 2019 | By Brian Brookins