

Text: Matthew 4:1-11

Title: "The Temptation of the Lord Jesus"

Time: 3/13/2025 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: The first formal battle of the Revolutionary War happened in June of 1775, more than a year prior to the signing of the Declaration of Independence. It is remembered today as the Battle of Bunker Hill, even though it was actually fought on a hill nearby called Breed's Hill.

Col. William Prescott had his 1500 or so men build a 160 ft. earthen bunker under the cover of darkness the night before the battle. The advance of the British regulars did not happen until late in the afternoon of the following day. The British ultimately won the hill, but they did so at such a great cost that the Colonists were convinced that the War for Independence was a war they could win. It is said that the command from Col. Prescott, which made the revolutionaries so difficult to handle that day, was his order: "Don't shoot until you see the whites of their eyes."

Matthew 4:1-11 is about the temptation of the Lord Jesus. In the spiritual realm, temptation is an attack from a very real enemy in a very real war. This enemy gets very close to our Lord in this passage. It is as though Jesus can see the whites of his eyes. This happened to Jesus because He was human (note "Man," v. 4), and the enemy's attack of temptation has been the experience of all humans since the time Eve met the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

Only our Lord was victorious in every battle like this, and in this particular battle we are given details about what to do when we confront the enemy's temptations, what to do when we see the whites of the enemy's eyes. I want us to notice four things we must do when facing temptation from our Lord's example this morning.

I. Always remember the nature of the enemy (v. 1).

Illustration: The article I read on the Battle of Bunker Hill mentioned that one of the keys to the success of the Colonial troops was that their ability to fight was greatly underestimated by the British. At the start of the march up the hill, the British soldiers fixed bayonets on their guns, but many of them did not even bother loading their guns. They thought that all they had to do was march up the hill and shoo the Colonists away. That miscalculation cost them greatly.

Application: Failing to remember the nature of the spiritual enemy we face can cost us greatly. Our enemy is very good at disguising himself. He does not want us to know his true nature. Scripture tells us that it is his practice to disguise himself as an angel of light, as something truly attractive, as an ally and a friend (2 Cor. 11:14).

In spite of this deception, we need to remember the true ruthless nature of the enemy we face if we are going to effectively battle him in times of temptation. Our passage describes this nature by giving our enemy three important labels:

1. *Diabolos* (“devil”; vv. 1, 5, 8) means *slanderer*. A slanderer is a liar who seeks to use his lies to destroy his enemy. We see this especially in the life of Job. Satan slandered Job; Job’s wife slandered Job; and Job’s well-meaning friends slandered Job. The Lord explains how Job resisted these attacks: “Have you considered my servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause” (Job 2:3). Job endured the enemy’s slander by holding fast to his integrity, which meant trusting God in the face of circumstances that made it look like God was not trustworthy.

2. Tempter (v. 3). A tempter is one who draws people away from life with God. James explains, “But each one is tempted

when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (James 1:14-15). Ultimately, a tempter is a murderer, because he is one who draws someone away from life with God, and the result is death.

3. *Satan* (v. 10) means *adversary*. We need to remember that Satan is a dangerous and powerful enemy. The world depicts Satan as a ornery guy with horns and a pitchfork that is stuck in hell. Peter points to a different image: 1 Pet. 5:8, "Be sober; be vigilant; because your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him firm in your faith." We must always remember the nature of our enemy. He is always a very present danger. He is stronger than we are, and he hunts us every hour of every day.

II. Know well the topography of the battlefield (vv. 1, 5, 8).

Illustration: Before our church had Abby, it was blessed with Bonnie. Bonnie Bartelt used to come from Dublin to play the piano for us. Like Abby, she had a burden for missions, and I can remember a trip she made to Myanmar to serve the Lord.

She sent me some emails during her trip, and one of them included her thoughts about God's purpose in some of the difficult circumstances she was experiencing in her travels. They touch on a truth I want to point out about the topography of the battlefield we face in our war against the enemy's temptation. Bonnie wrote this: "I am convinced that most of our trials have nothing to do with what God is going to do with and through our circumstances, but what He wants to accomplish in our own hearts." In other words, the topography of the battle field is not to be found out there in the circumstances we face, but in here, in our hearts.

Application: Places are very important in this description of the tempter's work. We see the wilderness, the holy city, the temple, and a high mountain all mentioned. This variety tells

us that temptation can happen anywhere, both the wilderness and the holy city, both on top of the temple and on a high mountain. Our outward circumstances do not define this battle, because temptation is a spiritual conflict, not a physical one. The battlefield of temptation is the human heart.

James informed us that temptation begins with human desire (James 1:14, "But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed"). The desires of our heart define the battlefield of temptation – and the topography of the human heart in this regard is best described by the Apostle John in 1 John 2:15-17. John mentions three strategic hills on the battlefield of the human heart, which Satan seeks to attack, and we see the Lord battling on each hill in Matthew 4.

1. We are tempted by the lust of the flesh. This is the temptation to do what comes naturally to our nature rather than what Spirit of God enables us to do (vv. 1-4).

Jesus was hungry after 40 days of fasting. The temptation Satan presented our Lord was that of allowing his hunger be the only thing that determined His action. It was God's will that He be led by the Spirit (v. 1). In this case, it was the Spirit's leading that He fast until the angels came to minister to Him (v. 11).

Every day we live as believers, God expects us to be led by the Spirit, not by the desires of our own flesh, even though some of the desires of the flesh are not always in themselves sinful. Gal. 5:16-17, "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please." We must choose – do what comes naturally, or let the Holy Spirit be in charge through the power of God's Word in our life. "It is written" determined Jesus's response, not "I am hungry." We need to learn to live that way.

2. We are tempted by the pride of life. This is the temptation to give more weight to being seen of men than to being seen of God (vv. 5-7).

Illustration: The passage tells us that Satan brought Jesus to a pinnacle of the temple [literally, "the edge of the temple"]. One of the secular historians of the day, a man named Josephus, describes the south side of the temple complex as overlooking a very deep valley or ravine: "and this cloister [a porch or balcony with a wall on one side and pillars on the other supporting the roof] deserves to be mentioned better than any other under the sun; for while the valley was very deep, and its bottom could not be seen, if you looked from above into the depth, this further vastly high elevation of the cloister stood upon that height, insomuch that if any one looked down from the top of the battlements, or down both these altitudes, he would be giddy, while his sight could not reach to such an immense depth."

Application: Why this cloister or balcony of the temple and not some cliff out in the wilderness where they were? I think the best answer to that question involves the need for an audience. The essence of this temptation is an invitation to do something spectacular before men, who would naturally think the feat truly awesome. Satan tries to incite the pride of life.

I think the Baptist commentator Broadus has it correct when he says: "Let him throw himself down, and see if God would not protect him; and thus descending in so public a place and supernaturally protected, he would be observed, and at once hailed by the populace as 'he that should come.' This last seems to have been part of the idea presented; for otherwise why take him to the temple? A precipice in the wilderness would have sufficed for the mere temptation to throw himself down; the carefully chosen place indicates that the idea was also to exhibit himself in public" (p. 65).

Any time we do what we do or fail to do what we fail to do because we want to be acceptable to the watching eyes of men,

we are being motivated by the pride of life. This is a huge part of the battlefield of temptation.

3. We are tempted by the lust of the eyes. This is the temptation to possess what God has not given to us (vv. 8-10).

Eve fell to this temptation: “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate” (Gen. 3:6). Satan is very good at delighting the eyes. Clearly, it took a miracle for Christ to see all the kingdoms of the world and their glory while up on that mountain. But you and I can see the same thing any time we feel like on the screens of our televisions, computers, or phones. The temptation of the lust of the eyes is empowered in our day in a way never before seen by mankind.

That is the topography of the battlefield. It is in our hearts. Our flesh desires pleasure, our pride desires praise, and our eyes desire possessions. That is our human weakness. Here is where the attack of temptation will come.

III. Skillfully arm yourself with the right weapon (vv. 4, 7, 10).

Illustration: I mentioned that on Bunker Hill some of the overconfident Redcoats did not even have their guns loaded. They thought that their status as a world class professional army had little to worry about when it came to the Colonials.

Application: As the Son of God, Jesus certainly was world-class in His ability to resist temptation. But it was the Father’s will that He become a man, and it is as a man that He resists the enemy’s temptations in this passage. He does not rely on His world-class status, but rather on a weapon given by the Holy Spirit, not only to Jesus, but also to you and me – the Scripture. The correct interpretation and application of the Bible is a weapon that we need to skillfully arm ourselves with, and Jesus’s example shows us what this looks like:

1. Jesus's knowledge of the Bible was detailed and specific. He could quote appropriate Scriptures when He needed them without looking them up. The passage on manna from Deuteronomy 8 teaches that it is God's promises, not our own solutions, that sustain us with life. This is a subtle application of a pretty obscure passage of Scripture. It takes thorough knowledge of the Word of God to respond the way Christ responded to Satan.

Psalm 119:105, "Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee." Becoming expert in the Word of God should be a daily passion we all share. We should never be satisfied to allow our Bibles to become something we blow the dust off of on Sunday mornings. Do not be like the Redcoats who approached the enemy with no bullets in their guns.

2. Jesus's knowledge of the Bible was broad and comprehensive. He was a good theologian. Jesus could decipher when Scriptures were being quoted inappropriately, so as to contradict the teaching of other Scriptures. Satan can quote Scripture, but he does so deceitfully. Note that when this happens, the mistake is pretty obvious because the Scriptures are pretty clear. Who would think that the correct application of Psalm 91 is to throw yourself down from the top of a temple into a ravine whose bottom you cannot see? The sad truth is that blinded people have trouble understanding the Bible. They often need misconceptions about Scripture corrected.

IV. See that your Captain wants you to face temptation victoriously (v. 1).

Application: Did you notice that the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness for the purpose of His facing this temptation? In fact, Mark's Gospel puts it this way: "And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan" (Mark 1:12-13a). Jesus came into this world of temptation to win great victories against the enemy's temptations through the Holy Spirit. The

Spirit has left us in this same world desiring that we accomplish the same victory. What Satan means for evil, the Holy Spirit means for good. When we see the whites of his eyes in temptation, we are right where our Captain wants His victory.

Conclusion: Though they fought valiantly at the Battle of Bunker Hill, the Colonialists ultimately lost the hill. They had to regroup to fight another day. Jesus never lost a battle, but we will at times.

Because Jesus won the war against our enemy through the cross and the empty tomb, we too can regroup when we lose a battle and fight again victoriously. 1 John 1:9 tells us how: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Prov. 28:13, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." Are we bloodied on the battlefield of temptation? All we need is the merciful balm of confession to rise and fight again.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching