

Confronting the Enemy
Matthew 3:13 – 4:11
By Rev. Keith Davis

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, ever since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, temptation has been a constant and unrelenting part of our human existence. Satan is engaged in non-stop spiritual warfare over the direction of men's lives and over the destiny of men's souls.

We know from experience how Satan can distort and twist the truth, so as to make us believe a lie. We also know how he can beguile us with his clever schemes and illusions—so that things which are deadly and dangerous to us are made to appear harmless, sweet, and attractive.

Because of Satan's great power, many have tried to flee from the influences of Satan. Men have gone so far as to live in complete isolation (in caves), others like monks cloister or seclude themselves in monasteries, seeking to insulate themselves from the influences of Satan in the world and in society.

But that doesn't work. Satan's power and influence follow us wherever we go. We cannot escape temptation no more than we can escape our flesh and blood. All humans will be tempted. That was true of Jesus as well. In ways we will never know, in degrees which we cannot imagine, Christ was tempted and attacked by Satan. He could not escape it either.

This was all part of his suffering, His humiliation. And it was a very important part of his work of salvation on our behalf—so that by being tempted and overcoming Satan, He could free us from the power of sin and temptation.

The account before us in Matthew records one of the two most monumental spiritual battles of Christ's ministry. The other battle came at the end of his ministry, in the Garden of Gethsemane. This is at the beginning. Here ***Christ Confronts Satan in the Judean Wilderness***. This confrontation serves to teach us, encourage us, and help us in our own spiritual warfare! Notice,

- 1) The Divine Purpose for this Confrontation;**
- 2) The Deceptive Strategy of this Confrontation;**
- 3) The Definitive Triumph through this Confrontation.**

1. The Divine Purpose for this Confrontation

People of God, the last thing we read in chapter 3 are the words of Christ's heavenly Father. They were words of validation and vindication: *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.* This man *Jesus* truly is the Son of God.

Now, chapter 4:1 tells us that right after Jesus baptized and authorized, he was led by the Holy Spirit out into the wilderness **to be tempted.** One of the things that surprises right away then is the timing of these temptations. Immediately upon being anointed and appointed to his task, Jesus is sent into the fray.

Why so soon? Why must this be the first thing he does? When a minister accepts a call to a new church, it's said that his first year is like a honeymoon period. The church gives him plenty of time (slack) to get acclimated to his new calling, to get used to his duties and responsibilities.

But there's no getting used to the job here. Right from the start, the Father lays upon his Son the full burden of His mission and calling. This was the Father's plan. It was the Father's will to put His Son to the test, to test his readiness for his ministry.

But let's take a step back and consider this from a broader perspective. Isn't this a very fitting and appropriate way for the Christ to begin His ministry? Who is Christ after all? He's hardly a new recruit sent out into battle. No. God's Son is not unfamiliar with spiritual warfare. Christ is the King, the Ruler, and Representative of the kingdom of heaven.

All along His kingdom has been at war with the Devil, the prince of darkness, the founder of the kingdom of this earth. So this confrontation is no surprise. Besides that, we have to consider this confrontation within the scope of redemption history. Paul refers to Christ as "the second Adam". Christ has come so that He might stand where the first Adam fell.

So Christ too must face temptation. But notice the differences in the surroundings. The first Adam was placed in Paradise, in the Garden of Eden--a place in which God provided everything good, nothing harmful existed. Yet, even in that ideal environment, Adam fell.

Now Christ comes along, the second Adam. He must confront this same enemy but in a desolate place; in a barren wilderness. Adam had all the trees from which to eat, but Christ fasted for forty days. But even in the face of these difficult circumstances, Christ with stood the test!

So here's living proof that our spiritual failures, our sins, cannot be blamed on our surrounding circumstances or on environmental factors (we seek to even partly justify our actions). No. Our spiritual failings are a direct outworking of our character, and *our response to the temptations*.

But I want you to notice as well, the clear connection between God's plan to put His Son to the test, and Satan's work of temptation. Now there's no doubt, that what Satan is doing here in chapter 4 was enticing Jesus to evil. The Devil's intent here (as it always is) is to disrupt and destroy the plan of God. Yet verse one clearly places the Devil's evil intentions, strictly within God's greater plan of salvation.

The same was true in the case of Job. *God often uses Satan's tempting unto evil, as a means of testing unto our own good*. God employs Satan's actions to accomplish His perfect ends. That's hard for us to understand, but it's true nonetheless.

Here in Matthew 4, God's perfect and sovereign plan of salvation called for His Son be tempted and tried by Satan. These temptations are designed to test the mettle of Christ's faith, to test His resolve, His trust, His willingness to do all that the Father has called Him to do.

Christ knew that. That's why the Spirit didn't have to drag Him off into the wilderness kicking and screaming. Christ knew that the pathway of life/salvation would be strewn with tests and trials and temptations. He expected that. Christ understood that every temptation from the devil was also a test from God unto true faith.

That point is so fundamental to our own spiritual welfare also. Everyday of our lives we too are engaged in spiritual warfare. Satan lives to put stumbling blocks in our path; he wants to see us trip and fall into sin. But we also have to see that every temptation is a testing ground for faith!

Every temptation is a test of the substance and sincerity of our faith; of the sincerity and depth of our love and devotion to God. God may even permit us to be tempted for the furtherance of His own purposes in our lives.

We have to understand that. Since we belong to Christ, Satan is *our* sworn enemy also, and he will most certainly seek us out. But always remember, our heavenly Father controls Satan. All that Satan does is still within the scope of God's divine plan.

2. The Deceptive Strategy of this Confrontation

That is the Divine Purpose of this great Confrontation. Next, we consider the *Deceptive Strategy* of this Confrontation. First, I should mention that there are those who insist that our Lord Jesus was never *truly* tempted. They say that because Jesus was God, Satan's temptations really had no affect on Him. In other words, there was no real struggle there, no real test.

Yet we know from Hebrews 2:18 that these temptations caused Christ *to suffer*. We attribute that to the fact that that Christ was flesh and blood, and according to his human nature, he could be tempted like any other man.

We know that the things which Satan placed before Jesus *were* desirable, ranging from the bare necessities of life: food for a hungry person; to the earthly desire for power and glory. So this was not pretend, or make-believe. This was real spiritual warfare, with everything at stake.

Let's look at the first temptation. Jesus had been in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights, and as vs. 2 tells us, he was hungry. Jesus hadn't eaten for **forty days!** He was fasting, which was a religious discipline accompanied by prayer and reflection.

So there's no doubt that Jesus was weak and tired. It's under these trying circumstances that Satan comes along. Satan could have come along at any point, but being the cunning hunter that he is, he attack at the most opportune time, at a moment of weakness (prey is most vulnerable!).

Already we see application there, don't we? Satan attacks when we are weak and where we are weak. He exploits our weakness; if we don't keep ourselves spiritually strong, he will pounce.

Verse 3, *The tempter came to Him and said, ‘If you are truly the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread’.* The first and second temptation are similar in that they both touch on the revelation just made about Jesus—that he was God’s own Son. Satan is mocking Jesus, taunting Him in his hungry state. These words are a prelude to the scoffing and mocking that Jesus would hear on the cross, as the crowd said, *if you are the son of God, come down from the cross!*

Notice as well, Satan’s temptation involves a great deal more than satisfying a physical need—filling his stomach. This temptation is directed at something much deeper. Satan is trying to expose the injustice here—he’s trying to make Jesus act on his sense of entitlement (a real weak spot for man!).

Hey Jesus, you’re the Son of God. So why should you have to endure all this? The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof...*so why does the Lord of creation hunger?* You deserve better than this. In the past, God miraculously provided bread for His people in the wilderness. But here you are starving.

So how much more ought not the Son of Man to be able to provide bread for himself. Turn stones into bread, it’s your right”! So Satan tests Jesus’ resolve to trust His Father’s timing and provision.

How does Jesus respond? With God’s Word. Vs. 4: *It is written; ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God!’* Jesus declares that a child of God (even a starving one at that) has no greater right and responsibility than to obey the Word of His heavenly Father.

The Bible tells us time and again (even as we heard this morning) that God will supply our needs. And for Christ, even in the wilderness, even after 40 days and night without food, Christ trusted that His heavenly Father would prepare Him a table in the presence of His enemy.

Do you have faith like that? Are you waiting right now for the Father’s provision in your life? Then wait faithfully. Wait patiently. Wait obediently. Know that the most necessary part of life is not what we eat, or what we drink, or what we own, or what we want. But what’s

necessary and important is being obedient to our God everyday, trusting in His power and His perfect will, that is our daily bread.

Verses 5-6 record the second temptation. Here Satan takes Jesus to the holy city, to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the temple. (Satan did this by means of his great power, and Jesus was willing to be transported along the way). In this temptation, we're reminded that Satan is the Father of Lies, how he twists the truth, how he twists God's Word with great craft and deception.

Jesus had just said that *Man must live on the every Word that comes from the mouth of God*. So Satan takes God's Word upon his own lips, and tries to use that against Christ. He says to Jesus, throw yourself down, and then he quotes Psalm 91: 11-12 to reinforce his argument.

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. In essence Satan is saying, *If you really are the Son of God and you won't prove it to me; if you refuse to act in your own self interest, then let your Father prove it. Let your Father demonstrate to me and to the world that you are His Son.*

But Jesus wouldn't fall for this deception either. Again in his answer he quotes Scripture saying, *It is also written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test'*. Jesus did not have to prove his power and authority to Satan. To call upon the angels for such a frivolous display of power would have been vanity, it would have been selfish and self-serving.

Satan's third temptation tested Christ's resolve to follow the Father's way, the Father's plan for His Son's glory. We know that the Father had a plan to glorify His Son, to honor and exalt His Son above every creature, above every nation, above every kingdom on earth—to give Him the name that is above every name, to make his enemies a footstool for his feet.

As we read in Psalm 2:8 *Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession!* God plans to give Jesus the highest position of honor! But what path must Christ take to get there? The Father's way to glory was the way of shame and humiliation, pain and suffering, agony and humiliation. It was the way of the cross and the grave.

But look at the way Satan is offering. Satan seems to be offering everything that the Father does. He transports Jesus to the highest mountain, and by way of some supernatural power, he enables Jesus to see *all the kingdoms of the earth, in all their glory and splendor and power--Rome, Athens, Egypt, and of course Jerusalem, and much more.*

All this could belong to Jesus—right now--if only He would bow down and worship Satan. Just think of that. Satan is such a counterfeiter, isn't he? He speaks like a slick talking salesman. He offers what seems to be the same prize that God offers, (glory and power, nothing but the genuine article), but at a much cheaper price than what God was asking.

He made it sound as if He could have everything that His Father promised, minus the pain and suffering--Jesus could be king without having to endure the cross, death, and the grave. All He had to do was bow down and worship Satan.

But Jesus resisted this temptation as well, finally saying to Satan, *Away from me, for it is written, Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only!* Beloved we can thank God, that for the sake of our salvation, Jesus saw Satan for what he was: a liar, a cheat, a swindler.

As John Mac Arthur writes, *Jesus knew that Satan's price is always immeasurably more than he leads us to believe, and what he gives is always immeasurably less than what he promises.* For Jesus to have succumbed to this, or any of the temptations, would have meant that He was not fit to be our Savior and King.

It would have meant that instead of redeeming the world from its doom and despair, he would have *joined* the world in its doom and despair. Instead of one day inheriting the world, Christ would have lost the world, and everyone within the world, to the Devil.

And what a powerful lesson this is for us, to be reminded that God's ways, though they're not easy, are always best for us. Yes, at times it is tempting to take the easy way out. For example, confessing our sin (shameful though they are), and telling the truth, is often the hard way, especially when we're caught in a lie, especially when it requires us to swallow our pride, and admit that we were wrong about something.

So, too, Satan tempts us everyday to live a lie, to go the easy way at work and at school, to take the path of least resistance. Satan tries to convince us that we can still be a faithful Christians even though we indulge every now and then in the sinful pleasures and sordid sins of the world. But being a faithful Christian in this world, living out the truth of God's Word every day in every situation, in every relation means going the hard way.

It's much easier to live a lie at work, isn't it? To hide our Christian faith. It's much easier to blend in with the world, to go along with the crowd, than to set ourselves apart from them. It's much easier to go along with our friends and drink what they're drinking, smoke what they're smoking, talk like they're talking, see what they're seeing.

It's often much easier to simply give in to sinful thoughts and desires which inundate our minds, than it is to resist those urges, and take every thought captive to the Truth of God's Word! Yes, we're all experienced sinners. We all have taken the easy way out more than once.

We all have worshipped the things of this world, instead of God. But thankfully, Jesus didn't. He stood firm. He resisted and overcame Satan's temptations, and as a result, He enjoyed a great triumph. We see that next: the definitive Triumph through this Confrontation

3) The Definitive Triumph through this Confrontation

Verse 11, *Then the Devil left him, and angels came and attended Him!* When the test was completed, the Father sent His angels to care and provide for His Son. What a beautiful picture, what a wonderful demonstration of the reward of obedience. How much sweeter, how much better is the ministry of angels, than the deception of Satan.

These ministering angels attended to Christ's needs, no doubt bringing food for his hungry body, encouragement and assurance for His weary soul and spirit, rejoicing with him in His triumph over Satan. What a great victory for Christ. What a great victory for us, a foretaste of the final victory over Satan on the cross, when Satan is once and for all cast out of Christ's presence!

In the end, Satan's temptations failed, but God's testing succeeded. In the end, Jesus proved that He was truly the Son of God, by obeying God's Word, not by doing what Satan said. What a

victory this was for Christ! And comfort we have as believers is knowing and believing that we can triumph over our sins, we can enjoy the same victory over our sins as Christ did!

Yes, we all have known many moments of failure, shame, and deep disappointment that have come on the heels of giving in to temptation and sin. Without a doubt, we all have fallen and failed many more times than we have resisted and stood firm.

Yet beloved, we must never get used to failure; we must never accept living with failure. Sometimes I fear that this mentality creeps in on us—where we just grow accustomed to the idea that we're eventually going to temptation, we're eventually going to fall, and then we live down to our expectations.

But if we are careful to observe how Jesus resists Satan if we are careful to see the way Satan attacks and pay attention to his lies and deception, then we can properly arm ourselves and prepare for battle. And there's no reason at all that we cannot enjoy victory over Satan in particular areas of our life.

Of course we have to want victory, and work for that victory—and perhaps that's where our greatest weakness lies—in the weakness of our desire for holiness; perhaps our love for that particular sin is much greater than our desire to fight it.

We know that Christ has equipped us for victory: Hebrews tells that Christ *is our faithful high Priest, who can sympathize with our weaknesses, who has been tempted in all things just as we are, yet was without sin.* Hebrews 2, *For since He Himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

Then we have the words of I Cor. 10: 13, *no temptation has seized you except that which is common to man. And God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

But the key is we have to look for the way out; we have to strive for victory! In the end, we also have to see that God has a purpose in allowing Satan to tempt us. Temptations are a testing

ground for us. Are we willing to place our trust in God; willing to believe His Word, willing to trust in God's provision, to trust that God's way is better, that God offers more joy than the sinful pleasures of this world?

God assures us in His Word, *He that is in you is stronger than he that is in the world.* Christ proved that in the Judean wilderness and again on the cross of Calvary. And now you and I are called to prove that same truth everyday, as we stand firm in our faith, as we resist the Devil, and as we trust in God's faithful provision. Let us also stand firm in the face of temptation and enjoy the victory which we have in Christ. Amen!