

Has He Got a Deal for You!

Matthew 4:1-11

If you had not eaten a thing since January 25, you would be either very hungry, or very dead. After Jesus had been in the wilderness for forty, long, hot days and forty long, cold nights, he was hungry – an understatement if there ever was one. What follows in Matthew’s gospel is a temptation that nearly every person here can understand – the temptation of food. Most churches and organizations discovered a long time ago, that the single thing you can do to assure high participation or attendance at an event is to offer food. It satisfies a fundamental need, and it can do it quickly, if not elegantly.

It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to extend this first temptation to the place where we live. Anything that gratifies or satisfies can be a temptation. For all the human fish in the sea, there are plenty who go for this one hook, line, and sinker. It is a powerful, even deadly temptation. It is also the first one which Jesus resists with the power of the Word.

The second temptation, the one that would make a big splash, is the throw yourself down from the temple temptation. It urges Jesus to put his heart where his brains belong. He knows his heavenly Father cares for him. He knows his Father watched out for his safety and his well being. He also knows that our bodies can be injured, that the Heavenly Father permits bandages and splints to be made. God permits hospitals to operate, and allows people to take first aid classes. God is not in the insurance business, nor does he prevent people from doing foolish or sinful things. God doesn’t compensate people for their troubles, their misfortunes, or their stupidity. He does not prohibit people from dying, and as a matter of fact, he brings about our deaths because the wages of sin is death.

God doesn’t stop people from climbing impossible mountain, or from participating in publicity stunts, or any other assorted foolishness. Some of these are done by people who deny God’s existence, while some are done by people who mistakenly believe that God would never permit someone to be hurt or killed because of a miscalculation.

We might include here all the temptation in which we make God our servant, where we expect

him to pick up our pieces and compensate us for our sinfulness, or selfishness, and our self-centeredness. By the grace of God, Christ demonstrated none of those. His trust in his heavenly father was rooted in his eternal relationship with his father, and so is yours. Christ our Lord was not going to ask his father to suspend the law of gravity, and he didn’t expect his father to scrape him up from the pavement and re-form his body in the way that Adam was formed in the first place.

We fall for this temptation so often, but Jesus resists and defeats the second temptation with the Word. He knew it from memory. He applied it correctly.

The final temptation might be called the “let’s be reasonable” temptation. Satan, the prince of the world, drives the cast-off from Nazareth to the local scenic overlook, where he sets the parking break on his Lamborghini Countach. The prince of the world shows his guest more real estate than he could walk around in a full week, and makes him an offer. Mind you, it all belonged to the prince of darkness. It was his to sell, lease, or give away as he wished. He was ready to part with everything in sight, for just a few seconds of worship from Jesus. Perhaps he didn’t care if Jesus didn’t even mean it. He would accept insincere and half-hearted worship – any kind of worship. All Jesus had to do, was to give the devil what the devil wanted from him.

To many, it seemed like a reasonable offer. The devil very often makes reasonable offers. The bargains and deals that Satan proposes are common. World literature is filled with bargains made with the devil, and usually involve the soul of the person or a family member.

As the devil offers Jesus land – the stuff they’re not making any more of, he’s not asking for Jesus’ soul. He’s asking Jesus to compromise. If Jesus will just compromise a bit, Jesus can have the whole shooting match. If Jesus doesn’t want to rule the land or exercise power, just think of the good he could do with it. He could establish a model nation on earth, the kind that just never worked for the people of Israel.

He may not have been asking for the soul of Jesus, but if Jesus had played let’s make a deal, our souls would have been lost. It was not going to be enough for Jesus to keep most of the law of God on our behalf. It was not going to satisfy the Father’s

justice with an A-. Christ knew it and we know it. There is no compromising when it comes to the perfect obedience required of the Son of God. When Christ's blood and sacrifice is required for our sins, it must be innocent blood. When Satan offers this bargain, he is asking for OUR souls.

The Father has only one son, begotten from eternity. If this son doesn't resist the best temptation Satan can contrive, there are no other son to try and do better. It may not look like much out there on the scenic overlook, but our eternal destiny is teetering on the edge. If Jesus takes the bait – if Jesus says OK, you and I are history, in the eternal sense of the word.

But thanks be to God, Jesus Christ our Lord met the twisted words of the evil one with the eternal word of God. "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only." Concise. On point. Satan cannot argue or pick at the powerful response. He is defeated. The angel minister to Jesus, and in a sense, they are fanning us, too. Even though this story reads quickly, it was not an easy victory.

Our struggle with the father of lies, the accuser, is not easy. The closer you are to God, the harder he will work. The future will be filled with temptations, day after day. There will be temptations of gratification. There will be temptations to make God our servant. There will be temptations to be compromising and to depend on something else – anything else, than the blood of Christ to pay for our sins. If, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are able to overcome these or other temptations, it will not be by our own strength. It will be by the strength of the almighty, eternal Son of God, who gives us hope and life and salvation and eternity. So it is. So it shall be. Amen?

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March 5, 2017
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