

## **Glory in His Face: Obedient Servant**

**Matthew 4:1-17**

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This evening we are continuing in our series called, "Glory in His Face." We're thinking about the person and work of Christ. And we began by wrestling with the Bible's teaching about the union of deity and humanity in the one person of Christ. And then last time, we were thinking together about Christ our compassionate Savior. This evening, I want to begin to think less about His person, His two natures, His emotional life, His attitude toward us, and more about His work. For what purpose did He assume our natures and to what end, as our Savior touched with the feeling of our infirmities, did He come as a compassionate Lord and Redeemer? And so the third of the glories that I want us to see shining out upon us in the face of Jesus Christ is the glory of His perfect obedience for us and for our salvation. And to help us to begin to trace some of the contours of His obedience together, let me invite you to turn with me in your copy of God's Word to the book of Matthew, chapter 4. Matthew chapter 4. We'll be reading verses 1 through 11. Before we do that, would you bow your heads with me as we seek God's help in prayer? Let's pray together.

*Our Father, our prayer is simply, "Speak Lord, Your servants are listening." Give us ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to His church in this portion of Your Word, grace to believe, faith to receive and rest on Christ as He comes to us in the Gospel. For we ask it in His name, amen.*

Matthew chapter 4 from verse 1. You'll find that on page 809 in the church Bibles. Listen now to the inerrant Word of Almighty God:

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.'"

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.

Amen, and we praise God that He has spoken to us in His holy and inerrant Word. May He write His eternal truth upon all our hearts.

### **Repaying the Sacrifice: the Fuel for our Obedience?**

The movie, *Saving Private Ryan*, tells the story of the last of four sons, all of whom were serving in battle during the Second World War. Private Ryan had parachuted behind German lines and so an elite team of army rangers were sent to find him and bring him home. Their search eventually led them to a bridge where German tanks sought to break through Allied positions and the rangers paid a terrible cost to locate and deliver orders to Private Ryan that he was being called back home. As Captain Miller, the commander of the rangers squad lay dying, he drew Private Ryan close and with his final breaths issued his last orders: "Earn this. Earn it." They paid the ultimate sacrifice to rescue Private Ryan and now Captain Miller wanted Ryan to feel the weight of duty to live a life that repaid the debt. The movie ends, years later, with Ryan now an old man on his knees at Captain Miller's grave. "Every day," he tells the white stone cross before him, "Every day I think about what you said to me that day on the bridge. I've tried to live my life the best I could. I hope that was enough. I hope that at least in your eyes I earned what all of you have done for me." And then in a heartbreaking moment he turns to his wife, who was with him, with a note of sheer desperation in his voice he says to her, "Tell me I have led a good life! Tell me I'm a good man!"

It's a powerful moment in a gripping movie that's also a heartbreaking moment. Here is a man who lives under the impossible obligation to earn the sacrifice paid on his behalf by those soldiers. Captain Miller made it perfectly clear to him with his dying breath that his sacrifice was not a free gift. Ryan would have to pay him back every day for the rest of his life. And how would he know if he'd ever done enough? He lived under a crushing obligation. Some of us, I fear, live like Private Ryan. Our understanding of the Christian life is - "Jesus died to save me. Now I have to live the rest of my life trying somehow to earn it, to pay Him back, to make myself worthy of His sacrifice." If we think that, ours is a life driven by guilt. Maybe you even find yourself agreeing with Captain Miller thinking the best way to motivate obedience is by what John Piper has called "a debtor's ethic." We think unless we drive ourselves with the whip of indebtedness, well then, unless we do that we're virtually inviting self-indulgence and sin. It's the only way to really motivate obedience; it's to crack the whip of indebtedness, of guilt.

Now look at the account in Matthew chapter 4:1-11, the account of Christ's temptation. If you are someone busy trying to fuel obedience in your Christian life by means of shame and a sense of indebtedness, you will almost certainly read this story mainly as a lesson in how to do the right thing. You'll watch Jesus rebuff the onslaught of the devil. Maybe you'll pay particular attention to His methodology in answering Satan's attacks; He's carefully quoting Scripture. And all the while you will be constantly telling yourself, "Here's what I ought to be doing. This is how I should be living." Now do not mishear me. Christ is our example. We are to learn from Him. But if we are using a passage like this to crack the whip of guilt all the harder over our own heads and to shame ourselves into still greater and greater feats of obedience, we have fundamentally misunderstood both this passage and God's method of generating new obedience in the hearts and lives of His children. The Bible remedy to the guilt of sin and the call to obedience is not first to copy Jesus' methods - we must imitate Christ, we should learn from His example; that's not where to begin. We do not begin with our duty but with Christ's obedience for us, which is where we are to start in properly understanding Matthew 4:1-11. Would you look at it with me please?

### **Obedient on our Behalf: The Beginnings of Jesus' Public Ministry**

In that great Trinitarian moment in which His public ministry began, having been baptized, having been endowed with the Holy Spirit, having been declared to be the Son of God by the voice of the Father Himself, Jesus is now led by the Spirit out into the wilderness. Mark 1:12, in his account of Jesus' temptation, says actually He was "driven by the Spirit" - propelled out; compulsion was laid upon Him to go, under a necessity to go out into the wilderness of Jordan in this His first great act of ministry. This is something He had to do - part of the will of God and the program of the Father for our salvation.

In view of the supernatural glories that attended His baptism, we might be forgiven for expecting a dramatic public beginning to His Messianic work, some display of mighty supernatural power or a sermon of such force that huge crowds are swayed by the message. Instead, for more than the first month of His ministry, Jesus is taken from public view altogether, out into the no-man's-land of the wilderness of Jordan. And there He fasts for forty days and nights, and there, weakened in body and starving, He is put to the test. Satan himself assaults the Lord Jesus in a three-fold ordeal. Like Adam, He is tempted by the devil. Like Israel, He is tested in the wilderness. And He is tempted in every way that we are yet without sin. And if we are going to understand why, we need to consider each temptation in turn. Would you look at the passage please?

### **I. A Temptation to Dissatisfaction**

First, there is a temptation to dissatisfaction. A temptation to dissatisfaction. In verse 3, the devil came and said to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." Jesus, remember, is starving. His fast is almost to an end. Why not use the power that is properly His as Son of God and make bread from stones? It seems perfectly reasonable, doesn't it? The power of temptation, you know, often lies in its very plausibility. But Jesus' answer penetrates Satan's reasonable tone to the lie underneath. "It is written," Jesus says, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." He's quoting Deuteronomy chapter 8 and verse 3. It's a chapter that rehearses God's care for Israel during their forty years in the wilderness. And it explains God's purpose in the tests that Israel faced during those days. "The Lord," we're told in that passage, "humbled you, Israel, and let you hunger and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." In their forty years in the Sinai wilderness, Israel was tempted to dissatisfaction with God's provision for them and with His plan for that period of their lives. But God, we are told, brought them into that trial in order that they might learn to depend more upon the word and promise of the Lord than upon bread for their bellies. They were being taught that every word from the mouth of God was more necessary for them than daily bread.

It was the same temptation Satan suggested to our first parents that day back in the Garden of Eden - the temptation to be dissatisfied. When Satan darkly implied, remember, that God's Word was overly restrictive. "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" He's suggesting that on close inspection - doesn't God's unreasonable prohibition here actually reveal a terribly uncaring attitude toward your deeply felt needs, Eve and Adam? It was a temptation to be dissatisfied with God and with His plan, with His command, with His promise, with His provision. It's a powerful temptation. Actually, many of us know very well that the more we have the more we want, and yet we never have

enough. When our lot is hard and another's is easy, aren't we tempted to accuse God or see Him somehow as having failed to provide? That was the temptation Jesus faced - the temptation to dissatisfaction.

## **II. A Temptation to Doubt**

Or think about the second temptation. This time it is not a temptation to dissatisfaction but a temptation to doubt. Verses 5 to 7 - "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.'" In Eden, remember, Satan leveraged the sin of our first parents by questioning God's Word - "Did God really say?" - and by contradicting God's Word - "You will not surely die." Here, however, with the second and last Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, the stakes are higher. Here is God's Redeemer, come to undo Adam's sin. So now a subtle approach is required, a more oblique strategy. The temptation comes cloaked in the very words of Scripture this time. Satan loves, you know, to use the Bible to give sin some plausibility. Maybe you've experienced something of that as temptation has assailed you. Maybe you've even done it yourself - distorted Scripture to justify rebellion. That's what's happening here. He cites Psalm 91:11-12 and the devil wants Jesus to test the reliability of the promise of God. Will He really do what He promises to do?

In the primeval Garden of Eden, the temptation was also to doubt the promise of God, this time a promise of judgment - "You will not surely die in the day that you eat the forbidden fruit. God will not follow through on His promise." And now in the fallen wilderness of Jordan, the temptation is likewise to doubt God's promise; not this time a promise of judgment but a promise of deliverance. Would God really be faithful to His promise to save His Son from destruction? "Let's find out," Satan was saying to Jesus. "Eat, you will not surely die, for God has lied to you." Edmund Clowney paraphrases Satan's temptation to Eve, "Eat, you will not surely die! God has lied to you. To Christ he said, 'Jump, You will not surely die unless God has lied to You.'" But notice Jesus' reply. He again quotes from the book of Deuteronomy, this time chapter 6 in verse 16. "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test," and again, the connection is made not just back to Adam in the Garden of Eden but to Israel in the desert. Deuteronomy 6:16 comes in the context of a call to God's people to be faithful to the Lord when they finally enter the Land of Promise. And verse 16 reminds them of a time in their own history when during their wilderness wanderings they had no water and they grumbled against the Lord. The place was renamed Massah, because they tested God there. Deuteronomy 6 calls Israel not to repeat the mistake. "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test as you did at Massah."

Adam and Eve were tempted to doubt God's promise of punishment. Israel doubted God's promise of provision. "You brought us out into the wilderness to die, did You? Where's the water we need to sustain us?" And now Satan comes against Jesus, tempting Him to doubt God's promise of protection.

### **III. A Temptation to Desire**

The temptation to dissatisfaction, the temptation to doubt, then thirdly there is a temptation to desire. Verses 8 to 10, 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.'"' God had given Adam, remember, God had given Adam rule over the earth and dominion over the creatures, but when Satan tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden, he offered them even greater dominion. He told them, "You can be like God!" Instead of living under the rule of the Lord and tending and guarding the garden into which the Lord had placed them, Satan suggested he could help them erect a kingdom of their own, independent of God's rule, equal to Him. They could be rivals to His mastery. They would know good and evil; that is to say, they would be like God in determining for themselves where moral boundaries would lie. God would be, in Satan's vision, an object of jealousy, not a person to be trusted.

And so he angles his temptation at their desires. "You will be like God." "And when Eve saw that the fruit was good and desirable for making one wise, she took it and ate and gave some to her husband who was with her." "It's a shortcut. You don't have to obey the promise. You just have to listen to my alternative strategy and we can bypass the hard work of obedience and go straight to glory." That was Satan's lie. Illegitimate desire ensnared our first parents. Instead of challenging the serpent's right to question God, their desires blind them and they pursue a path to glory that completely sidestepped the call of obedience. Adam had been given dominion over the world, promised even greater glory to come if he would keep God's covenant, but he failed, forfeited the glory to come, shattered his dominion over the world, and here now is Jesus, the last Adam, standing in the wasteland of a sinful world, and before him is set the promise of the dominion Adam lost and the glory he never gained. In Christ, the possibility of Eden regained and glory won, was held out upon condition of perfect personal obedience to the will of God.

And now Satan comes, as he did to our first father, and suggests a shortcut. "All the kingdoms of the world will be yours, Jesus. No need for a life of obedience. No need to endure the rejection of your peers. No need for the cross. You can sidestep all the pain, all the sorrow, all the loss. You can avoid all right now and enter into Messianic glory in this instant if you'd just do one small thing - bow down and worship me." But Jesus answer- with the words Adam should have

said but didn't - "Be gone, Satan!" And again He cites Deuteronomy, this time chapter 6 verse 13 - "You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve." The context, remember, is Israel's possession of the Promised Land. "When you finally make it out of the desert," God told them, "and I bring you into this land of plenty and blessing, don't forget Me. Don't neglect Me. Don't turn aside as you once did and worship the golden calf and give my honor to a false god. Worship Me and worship Me alone." It was the temptation to paganism, one that played to illegitimate desires. We have good things and we want more. And the false gods of the nations promise us more - gods for the harvest and gods for fertility and gods for war. We want more and they can deliver if only we'll worship them. Desire for prosperity. The desire for blessing without required obedience. Those are desires, again, we know all too well. That's the temptation that comes against Jesus - for glory without the cross, for victory without obedience.

### **Christ comes not first as our great example, but as our Perfect Substitute**

Dissatisfaction, doubt, and desire - those were the components of Satan's assault against Adam, against Israel, and against Christ. And as we read of Jesus' victory over those assaults, let's be sure we understand they were not confined to this moment in Matthew chapter 4. Luke's account, in Luke chapter 4 verse 13, tells us that at the end of His ordeal in the wilderness Satan merely left Him until an opportune time. Christ's was an entire life marked by conflict with the devil. You see that in Peter's attempt to stop Jesus from going to the cross, remember? Matthew 16:23 - "Jesus turned to him and said, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are a hindrance to Me for you do not have in mind the things of God but the things of man.'" Satan had used a serpent in Eden, he's used Scripture with Jesus here in the wilderness, and now he even uses one of Jesus' disciples, Peter. And we hear it again, don't we? At the moment of His greatest agony at the cross, the echoes of Satan's voice from Matthew 4 ring crystal clear in the mockery of the crowds. Matthew 27:40 - "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." His is an entire life filled with constant conflict to temptation. Will He obey? Can He be derailed from a path of faithful obedience? An entire life like ours, marked on every hand by temptation to sin, tempted in every way as we are, but unlike us He never once conceded. He never once gave way. He never once turned from the path of faithful obedience to the will of His Father. "He was tempted in every way as we are" - Hebrews 4:15 - "yet without sin."

And that means the message of Matthew chapter 4 is not that Jesus merely had a better technique than Adam or Israel or you or I so that where Adam failed and Israel failed He succeeded, and if we want to succeed too, we'd better get out our WWJD bracelets and get busy imitating the Master! No, no, the message is - Adam failed to obey, and as a result, as Israel's history has demonstrated to us, everyone else has failed to obey ever since. You have failed to obey and so have I. "All mankind descending from Adam by ordinary generation sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression." In Adam we are guilty, in Adam we are helpless, in Adam we are dead in trespasses and sins. In Adam obedience

eludes us and no one, not even God's own covenant people or even Israel, can hope to obey so perfectly that they are able to earn the favor and grace of God. But Jesus Christ, the second and last Adam, the true Israel, the representative and substitute of His people, Jesus Christ has come. Where Adam sinned and Israel sinned and we have sinned, Jesus obeyed, and He has done all of this not first as our example, but as our substitute. His obedience constitutes the righteousness God demands. The terms of the covenant require obedience to the law of God. Adam broke the covenant; transgressed the law. Christ has kept the covenant and obeyed the law that all who believe might be counted righteous in Him. As Paul puts it in Romans 5:19 - "For as by one man's disobedience the many were made sinners," - that's Adam's work - "so by the one man's obedience the many will be constituted righteous" - that's Christ's work.

### **Free Grace: the Fuel of a Life of Love and Obedience**

And only as you grasp the wonder of the work of Christ on your behalf - keeping the broken covenant, meeting its every stipulation, enduring all its terrible sanctions, obtaining its glorious promises for you in your place - only then will you begin to see salvation as a gift. Jesus doesn't come to you now like Captain Miller in the story that we began with, like Captain Miller to Private Ryan. He doesn't come to you now and say, "Well now, since I've done all of this for you, earn it. Earn it! Don't make Me regret all I've done for you! Earn it!" That is a lie as satanic as any Jesus faced in the wilderness. No, Jesus obeyed and He obeyed to the point of the cross that you might live. Instead of trying to pay Jesus back, as though you were a debtor working off a temporary loan, understand He loved you and gave Himself freely for you, without you ever earning it, as if you could, and without requiring repayment after the fact.

When that really begins to sink in, you will find you do begin to live for His glory after all - not now as a debtor, driven by the burden of guilt trying to repay an impossible obligation; you will begin to live for His glory not as a debtor but as a lover who delights to please their beloved. Guilt, the debtor's ethic, are inadequate mechanisms for dealing with sin or for generating obedience. And some of us know the misery of that firsthand. Some of us live under the misery of that day after day. But love to Christ who first loved you, love like that changes everything; it changes everything. Love like that enables you to look at the law of God and the example of the life of Christ no longer as unsettled bills that demand a lifetime of repayment for services rendered, but as descriptions of the life of love you now delight to live. I wonder if you continue to live under the terrible burden of the debtor's ethic. Let me say to you, you don't need to a minute longer. You need turn and rest on Christ. All has been done; the debt has been paid. The requirements met, the law fulfilled, it's demands satisfied. He has loved you and given Himself for you freely as a gift. He does not demand repayment. He does not come to you saying, "Earn it." He comes saying, "I love you and I simply long to have you as Mine." And when you grasp that, all you will want to do is love Him back. And a life of love is a life that seeks to keep His

commandments.

So let me commend you to Christ and to a free Gospel of free grace. Let's pray together.

*O Lord our God, we bless You for the Lord Jesus, the second Adam, the true Israel, who obeyed where our first father fell and condemned us to a life of guilt and sin in Your sight, apart from the work of Christ. But He has now come and kept covenant where we never could. The law is now satisfied, its penalty removed, and its promised reward won. Teach us to receive and rest on Christ alone, and doing so, teach us to seek to love Him in a life of joyous obedience, not driven by the debtor's ethic but driven by delight in our Beloved. For we ask it in Jesus' name, amen.*

Would you stand and receive the benediction?

And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God our Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore. Amen.

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