

The Faithful Son in the Wilderness

Matthew 4:1–11



Introduction

"This isn't about you." How many times has someone in your life said that to you? How many times have you said that to someone else? If you're anything like me, as you get older, you begin to realize just how prone you really are to making everything about you. I've heard it said before, "I didn't realize how selfish I was until I got married." I've also heard it said, "I *really* didn't realize how selfish I was until I had children."

Life has a way of revealing our weaknesses, does it not? And one of the weaknesses life often reveals is our tendency to be self-centered—to make things about ourselves when they really aren't meant to be about us at all. This is part of what it means to live in a fallen world as fallen human beings and it is something that we all wrestle with throughout our lives.

One significant way this tendency often shows up is actually in the way we read our Bibles. If I were to ask for a show of hands this morning from those of us who grew up in the church, I would imagine that a vast majority of us would report that we have heard teaching from Scripture that sounds something like this—be brave

like David and stand up to the giants in your life. Work hard like Ruth if you want to attract a husband. Resist sexual temptation like Joseph and run the other way. Dare to be a Daniel by remaining faithful to God in a hostile culture.

On the surface, there isn't anything necessarily wrong with these statements. These are all good things to do. And yet, they all betray our tendency to want to make the Bible about us. So often, we come to the Scriptures seeking examples to follow so that we can become a better version of ourselves. We can find ourselves prone to moralizing these biblical characters without taking into account that, just as often, they serve as examples for us to *not* follow. "*Be like David*" doesn't ring quite as beautifully when you remember the full picture of his life—especially the part where he committed both adultery and murder. More often than not, the Bible goes out of its way to show us that even the great heroes of our faith were flawed and imperfect at the best of times.

And how about our passage this morning? Let me ask you—how many of you were taught at some point in your Christian life that the point of Jesus' temptation in Matthew 4 is that you should quote Scripture when you're being tempted?

Please don't get me wrong—it is good and right to quote Scripture when you're being tempted, and nothing but good can come from memorizing the Bible in a way that keeps it on the tip of your tongue and at the front of your mind. However, I intend to argue this morning that 'quote Scripture when you're being tempted' is *not* why the apostle Matthew recorded this story for us and, in fact, he was seeking to accomplish something far more significant.

Because, as it turns out, the Bible isn't about you, and the Bible isn't about me. The Bible is about the unfolding of God's eternal plan in history to redeem sinners through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and there is something *far* more profound taking place in this passage than a moralistic reading could ever help us

understand.

That is what I want us to spend our time diving into this morning. And in order to do that, it will be very important for us to first consider everything that Matthew has been doing in this book up to this point. We can never understand a passage of Scripture rightly without first understanding its context, and so, my first point is simply **Understand the Context**.

Understand the Context

In order to get a grasp of everything going on here, we're going to need to exercise our brains a little bit here this morning. But stick with me, and it will be worth the effort.

If you were to use a single word to describe the book of Matthew, one of the words I most often hear is "fulfillment." Compared to Mark, Luke, and John, Matthew seems to be particularly interested in pointing out all of the ways that Jesus fulfills various elements of the Old Testament. Ten times throughout this book, Matthew says something like, "this happened to fulfil what was spoken by the prophets." By the time we reach our passage this morning, four of those fulfilment passages are already in the rearview mirror.

Understanding this focus on fulfilment is the first step, but if we really want to understand what's happening in Matthew chapter 4, we need to go deeper. In particular, we need to focus on one particular fulfilment quote in Matthew 2:15, which occurs right as Joseph, Mary, and Jesus flee to Egypt from King Herod. Here's the full quote beginning in verse 13, "*Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' And he rose and took the child and his mother by night*

and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod." Now this is the really important part for us this morning—Matthew says, "*This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'*"

That is a quote from the prophet Hosea where God is speaking about how he called the people of Israel out of Egypt during the Exodus. Throughout the Old Testament, God calls the nation of Israel his son. For example, in Exodus 4:22, God tells Moses to say this to Pharaoh, "*Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, 'Let my son go that he may serve me.'*"

Matthew explicitly tells us that Jesus spending time in Egypt and then leaving is a *fulfilment* of Hosea's prophecy. Just like God called his son Israel out of Egypt, so he also called his greater Son, Jesus, out of Egypt.

The next thing we need to consider is what takes place right before our passage, at the end of Chapter 3, where Jesus is baptized. In Chapter 3, verses 16 and 17, we read, "*And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'*"

First, note this proclamation from God that Jesus is his Son, because Satan is going to spend a lot of time pressing on that during his temptations. Second, notice that, as Matthew presents this story, Jesus, the Son of God, has been called out of Egypt and has just passed through the waters of judgement in baptism. That sounds kind of familiar, doesn't it?

In the book of Exodus, God's son, Israel, was also called out of Egypt and then passed safely through the waters of judgement in the Red Sea. And where did they go immediately after? That's right, they went

into the wilderness. And at the risk of belabouring the point— where does Jesus immediately go after he passes through the waters? He also goes into the wilderness.

You see, Matthew is setting a grand narrative before us, one in which Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Testament story—he is God's True Son. He is the new Israel who is retracing the footsteps of Israel of old (who, if you'll recall, failed spectacularly). They sinned against the LORD—they failed to listen to his word, they put him to the test, and they quickly turned away from serving the LORD to serving idols of their own making.

As we'll see as we step into our passage this morning—Jesus is going to succeed where Israel failed, and in so doing, he is going to obtain a righteousness through perfect obedience to the Law that Israel failed to accomplish in their own strength. In fact, before Jesus was baptized—he spoke in exactly these ways. In Matthew 3:15, as he is preparing to go under the water, Jesus says to John the Baptist, "*Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.*" We'll come back to what that means a little later on.

Unlike Israel—God's unfaithful Son—Jesus is the Faithful Son, walking in the same wilderness, experiencing the very same temptations, and yet without sin. Once you can lay a hold of everything Matthew is doing here, the story of Jesus' temptation comes alive in a whole new way.

Now, there might be someone here this morning unconvinced by everything I've said so far. Perhaps it feels to you like I'm making all of this up—that I'm seeing things in the Bible that aren't really there—that I'm reading between the lines in an overly-speculative way. If that's you this morning, let me make one more argument to address your concerns before we dive into our narrative.

In our passage, we know that Jesus quotes Scripture to Satan three times. As it happens, all of these quotations come from the same

place—they all come from Deuteronomy 6–8, which is a passage where Moses reminds the people of Israel about their wilderness wanderings and all the ways they sinned against God and put him to the test.

All that is to say—during all three temptations, Jesus specifically quotes God's words about what Israel *should* have done in the wilderness but failed to do. There is no question— something is going on here. Matthew is trying to say something to us, and it is far bigger than what you or I should do when we face temptation.

And so, we have a sense of what Matthew is trying to accomplish here—he is presenting Jesus as the true Son of God, succeeding in all of the ways that his son, Israel, failed. We realize that for much of the book of Matthew up to this point, Jesus has been presented as participating in a new Exodus that ultimately fulfills the failed purposes of the first—to rescue his people from slavery to sin and to bring them to an eternal promised land in the new creation. And so, now we have taken steps to **Understand the Context**.

Next, I would like to spend a majority of the rest of our time this morning in the narrative itself. My second point **Behold the Victory of the Faithful Son**.

Behold the Victory of the Faithful Son (vv. 1–11)

Beginning in verse 1, we read, "*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*" The first thing I immediately want you to notice is that Jesus didn't end up in the wilderness by accident. He didn't get lost on his way to somewhere else. What does Matthew say? He says that Jesus "*was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness.*" In other words, this whole experience was a part of God's plan. Whatever happens next, God intended for it to happen.

And why did he intend for it to happen? Well, we are told that he was led up "*to be tempted by the devil.*" And this word, "*tempted*", is really important, because the English language has a bit of a difficult time communicating the fact that the word being used here can usually carry a range of meaning. It can mean "tempt" as it is translated here, but it can also mean "test," and is often used in Scripture without any negative connotations at all.

When taken in connection with the Holy Spirit leading Jesus into the wilderness, we begin to realize that both things—tempting and testing—are actually taking place simultaneously. Yes, Satan is tempting Jesus, but at the very same time, Jesus is being tested by God who works all things for his good purposes even through the evil intentions of his enemies, as in the words of Joseph from Genesis 50:20—"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." Here, Satan means to do evil to Jesus, but God's sovereign power overrides Satan's intentions and instead causes everything he does to work out for

immense good. Jesus is being tested by God the same way Israel was tested by God, and he is being tested in order that he might achieve victory on behalf of his people.

What follows in verse 2 is probably my favourite example of the literary device of understatement in the entire Bible. I don't know if this was meant to be taken humorously, but I find it hard not to read it that way—at least a little bit. Matthew tells us, "*And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.*"

Now, aside from the blatantly obvious being stated here, the fact that Jesus had fasted "*forty days and forty nights*" is actually quite significant. First, because Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, and many interpreters understand that Matthew's intention here is to connect the wilderness wandering of Jesus directly with the wilderness wanderings of Israel.

Additionally, we are told in the book of Deuteronomy that Moses spent "*forty days and forty nights*" without food or water with God on Mount Sinai—not once, but twice. In the book of 1 Kings, the prophet Elijah would also spend "*forty days and forty nights*" without food in the wilderness. Given that Matthew will later reveal that both Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus during his Transfiguration, it is quite possible that he intends to reference them in connection with Jesus here.

Beginning in verse 3, we see the first of three temptations that Satan will use to attack Jesus. We read, "*And the tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.'*"

Here we see another name for Satan—"the tempter," and notice first how his temptation begins—"if you are the Son of God." Remember that I pointed out earlier that this story follows right on the heels of Jesus' baptism, where God declared very plainly, "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*"

And it isn't as though that happened a long time ago. We are told that Jesus was "*immediately*" driven into the wilderness after his baptism without any break in the narrative, and in terms of the Bibles we have in front of us, this marvelous proclamation from God happened three verses ago. And so Satan immediately seizes the opportunity to test the limits of that pronouncement. "*If you are the son of God,*" Satan says, "*command these stones to become loaves of bread.*"

Food was one of Israel's greatest sources of failure as they wandered through the wilderness, wasn't it? In Exodus 16, we have recorded for us the moment when Israel grumbled against God when they began to hunger. We are told in verses 2 and 3 that "the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt,

when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

We like to make fun of the people of Israel for how ridiculous they were being in that moment. They had *just* seen the LORD send the plagues on Egypt and part the Red Sea in front of their very eyes, and only a month or two later, here they are talking about their former slavery like it was some sort of vacation resort. And yet, if we stop to be honest with ourselves, we know that we are often just as fickle as they were.

By contrast, how does Jesus respond? Satan has pointed out something true about Jesus—he absolutely has the power to command stones to become bread. He is unspeakably hungry, and he could use his power and authority for his own benefit in this moment to make that hunger go away. Doesn't that sound nice? Are any of us surprised that Jesus would find this to be a tempting proposition? What about you? If you had the power to fulfill any of your fleshly cravings whenever you wanted, what would you do? Dig down deep and honestly ask yourself the question—How would you respond?

Then, consider how Jesus responded. In verse 4, we read, "*But he answered, "It is written, " 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*" Here, Jesus is quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3, where Moses says to the people of Israel, "*And he humbled you 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 that passage, Moses was telling the people of Israel that the manna was meant to be a lesson to them. It was meant to teach them that there are things in life more important than food. Yes, food is important—and God provides his people with food like he provides

for the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. And yet, Israel's time in the wilderness shows us that even if God rains down bread from heaven, it will not ultimately satisfy, because "man does not live by bread alone."

Israel failed to learn the lesson; but do you think Jesus got it? I think this verse makes it clear that he did. He understood that his hunger was a part of God's purpose for his life in that moment, and he did not use his own powers to go against his Father's will. Instead, in faithful, trusting obedience, he chose to submit to his Father's will rather than take the easy way out. Indeed, Jesus—the Bread of Life himself—knew that some things in life are more important than bread. He understood that "*man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*" In this way, Jesus succeeded where Israel failed.

Next, in verse 5, we are set up for the second of Satan's three temptations. We read, "*Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple.*"

At this point, it seems that we are switching into a more visionary kind of mode. While it is certainly possible that Satan instantly teleported Jesus to Jerusalem physically, many commentators understand at this point that Satan is most likely giving these next experiences to Jesus in a vision. That becomes a bit clearer during the last temptation, where it seems like the place Jesus ends up isn't a real place at all.

But here, we are told that Satan set Jesus "*on the pinnacle of the temple.*" Many of you will know that the "*holy city,*" (which is what the city of Jerusalem is called throughout the Bible), was built at the top of a large hill. Some of you may have seen it for yourself. The city was built on top of a hill, and it is well-known that the temple was built in such a way that the east portico would have been right on the edge of where the hill dropped off into the Kidron valley. That is to say, you can imagine Jesus being at the top of a very tall temple, but

the temple itself is on the edge of a very tall cliff. What's the point here? Probably simply that a fall from this height would have been way too high to survive.

From this high place, Satan attacks Jesus with his second temptation. He says, in verse 6, "*If you are the Son of God*"—there it is again—"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.*'"

Here, Satan tries to use Jesus' own tactics against him. He actually quotes the Bible to encourage Jesus to perform this foolish action. Here, he quotes Psalm 91, verses 11 and 12, but in doing so he shows us something that we already know to be true, which is that with a little creativity, you can make the Bible say exactly what you want it to say. Not only does Satan take Psalm 91 pretty far out of context, but he also takes out a line from the passage which would have been inconvenient for his purposes. How often do we see people try to contort the Scriptures like this to suit their purposes? How many times have we done the very same thing to suit *our* own purposes?

Now, the question is often asked, even among scholars and commentators, "why would Satan want to tempt Jesus in this way? What is so tempting about throwing yourself off a cliff?" While many argue that doing so would gain Jesus an earthly following through a visible display of spiritual power, we aren't given any indication that anyone is actually watching any of this happen. In fact, if this is indeed a vision that Jesus is receiving, it is even less likely that there would be anyone to be impressed by this daring feat.

No, as one commentator helpfully pointed out, I think this has more to do with *knowledge* than it does about miraculous displays of power. Think about it—as a man, Jesus knew the unspeakable horror that he was about to endure at the cross. Do you think it ever crossed his mind to ask the question, "is my Father actually with

me? Will he actually take care of me?"

By throwing himself off the temple, Jesus could flip the script. Rather than submitting to his Father, he could *force* his Father to submit to him. He could *force* his father's hand—force him to prove without a doubt that he will save his Son from danger. Just like Adam and Eve craved knowledge in the garden, I imagine Jesus could have been very tempted by the prospect of *knowing for certain* that God would act to save him rather than having to live by faith and rather than needing to trust in something that he couldn't see with his own eyes.

Israel faced this same temptation when they were in the wilderness. In Exodus 17, we see that there was no water for them to drink in the camp, and they quarrelled with Moses. And here is what we read. Beginning in verse 6, God says to to Moses, "*Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.*" *And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.*" In the next verse, this is what we are told, "*And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel,*" and listen very closely here, "*and because they tested the Lord by saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'*"

The people of Israel wanted God to prove himself to them. They had a severe case of the "what have you done for me lately?"s despite all of the amazing miracles they had already witnessed. They didn't trust God—they were not willing to walk in faith—and so they demanded that God prove himself to them yet again. And if we're honest with ourselves, are we not also so prone to the same kinds of thinking? How often do we forget God's former faithfulness and demand in our hearts that he prove himself to us once again? How many of us have, in our attitudes if not in our words, asked God the same question—"what have you done for me lately?"

Again, how does Jesus respond? In verse 7, we read, "*Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the*

test." Here Jesus is quoting from Deuteronomy 6:16, where Moses directly references the events we just spoke about when he says, *"You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah."*

Unlike Israel—and unlike ourselves so often—Jesus understood the command not to put the Lord to the test. He understood the importance of walking by faith and trusting in his Father rather than demanding that he prove himself beyond a shadow of a doubt. In this way, Jesus once again succeeded where Israel failed.

In verse 8, we find the setup for the third and final temptation. We are told, *"Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory."* Here again it seems likely that Jesus is seeing a vision—especially given that there is no mountain on the planet that would allow one person to see *"all the kingdoms of the world"* at one time.

And in this final temptation, Satan doesn't even bother trying to be subtle. All of his earlier tactics have failed. He tried sneaking in the back door, and that didn't work, so instead he now tries to charge the front gate with a battering ram. This attempt is so thinly veiled that he doesn't even bother repeating his *"if you are the Son of God"* shtick a third time, because it would make what comes next seem even more ridiculous than it already is.

We read in verse 9, *"And he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.'"*

The wise men—gentile Kings—already fell down and worshipped Jesus with this exact same language in Matthew chapter 2. And of course, we know that all will fall down and worship him in the end as the one to whom all authority in heaven and on earth belongs, as we are told at the end of this book in Matthew 28. But here, Jesus is being offered a shortcut—he is being offered what one commentator called "a bloodless path to glory." He is being offered a way to avoid

needing to endure all the pain and suffering that awaited him at the cross and to simply take the easy way out.

Now, does anyone actually think Satan really has the power to make this offer to Jesus? Do all the kingdoms of the world and their glory really belong to him? He is often described as the Prince of this world, but we know that he is really under God's control. This entire temptation really is a bunch of smoke and mirrors, and Jesus sees right through it.

In his final rebuke of Satan, Jesus stands up as a warrior-king fighting on behalf of his people and speaks sharply and powerfully. He first says, "*Be gone, Satan!*" and then follows up with one last biblical quotation—"For it is written, '*You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.*'" This is almost a direct quote from Deuteronomy 6:13, where Moses says to the people of Israel, "*It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear.*"

How many times did Israel really grasp this command and obey it wholeheartedly? Judging from the whole Old Testament, I'm not really sure they *ever* did. It is instructive also for us to realize that this quote comes from the same passage of Scripture where Moses gives the greatest commandment in the well known passage known as the Shema in verses 4 and 5—"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

That is ultimately what Israel failed to do, and this is what we all fail to do every day of our lives. And yet, here for a third time—when it matters the most and when the most is on the line—Jesus succeeded where Israel failed. Not only that, but as Jesus succeeds here with the serpent whispering in his ear, Jesus also succeeded where Adam failed. And that means everything for us today. Jesus didn't do battle with Satan in the wilderness to teach you to quote Scripture when you are tempted. He did battle with Satan in the

wilderness to *defeat* him on your behalf and to accomplish *for you* what you could ever accomplish on your own.

Finally, in verse 11, we read, "*Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.*" Having failed three times, the Devil makes a strategic withdrawal to plan his next attack, and Jesus finally has his physical needs attended to. Given the context of this passage, we have every reason to believe that these angels (who Jesus refused to call earlier) have now been sent by God to give him the food he so desperately needed, and having perfectly endured immense temptation unlike what many of us have ever faced, our great warrior-king finally receives his well-earned respite. I enjoyed this note from the ESV Study Bible on the appearance of these angel. It said, "All of heaven knew the significance of Jesus' initial victory in this cosmic battle"

We've now seen the story, and we have had the opportunity to **Behold the Victory of the Faithful Son**, who succeeded in every way that God's unfaithful children failed. Now, finally, as we close our time this morning, my final point is this—**Receive the Victory of the Faithful Son**.

Receive the Victory of the Faithful Son

You see, brothers and sisters, Jesus didn't simply succeed where Israel failed. He succeeded where *you* failed, and where you *continue* to fail each and every day. Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tested like Israel and Adam before him, and *he passed the test* with flying colours—with perfect obedience, perfect faith, and perfect trust in his Father.

How many of us can say that we have done that? If we're honest with ourselves for even a moment, the answer is obvious—none of us can. How many times have we succumbed to much gentler temptations

than these and failed to live up to the standards of God's law? Dear saints, if you are anything like me (and I'm willing to bet that you are) you have not loved the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength for a single moment of your life.

And that is a serious problem, because God's law is the standard by which all of us will be judged on the last day, and his standard is nothing short of perfection. A holy God and righteous judge can not admit anyone into his presence unless they are clothed in perfect righteousness—and brothers and sisters, we are not perfectly righteous. Based on what we bring to God in our own strength, we deserve nothing but eternal wrath and judgement.

Do you remember what Jesus said in Matthew 3:15? Before being baptized, he said to John, "*Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.*" What does that mean? Did Jesus need to be baptized to be cleansed from his own sins? No—he had a different purpose in mind. He was "*fulfill[ing] all righteousness*"—he was obeying every element of God's law perfectly on behalf of his people so that he could earn a perfect righteousness with which he could clothe all who come to him in faith.

In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul speaks to these same realities. In Chapter 5, verses 18 and 19, Paul compares Christ to Adam—whose original sin plunged all of creation into brokenness and in whom we are all condemned sinners from the moment of our birth.

Here is what Paul says—"*Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.*"

If you are in Christ this morning, you *are* righteous. You will stand before God, and he will see you clothed with nothing short of perfect,

spotless obedience. Why? Because you lived such a great life? Because you were so strong? Because you did such a good job obeying his law? No—but because Jesus succeeded where you failed and because you trusted in him to accomplish on your behalf what you could never accomplish for yourself and to graciously and mercifully clothe you in a righteousness that you could never earn.

God didn't lead Jesus into the wilderness to teach you to quote Scripture when you are being tempted. God led Jesus into the wilderness so that he could become your Great High Priest who, in the words of the author of the book of Hebrews, *"in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."* Later on in that same book, we are told about Jesus that, *"Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him."*

Whether for the first time or the ten thousandth time—trust in him today. Rest in him today. Feed on him as the Bread of Life every time you partake in the Lord's Supper. And as you do, let your soul be nourished by him, and be strengthened in the knowledge that he will never leave you or forsake and that he has promised that not a single one who has been given to him will ever be lost. **Receive the Victory of the Faithful Son** by faith alone, apart from your own works.

Conclusion

Because, remember, the Bible isn't about you, and it isn't about me. The Bible is about the unfolding of God's eternal plan in history to redeem sinners through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, as you continue to read the Scriptures and have them regularly taught to you, don't ever forget that. And remember that the same is also true for your Christian life. Your life is not about what you accomplish for God, it is about what God has accomplished for you in Christ. This isn't about you; it's all about him. Let's pray.

Questions to Ponder and Discuss

1. Apart from the examples given in the sermon, what other moralistic readings of Scripture have you encountered throughout your life?
2. When you come to a familiar passage (like the temptation of Jesus), what is your default instinct—to look for what you should do, or for what Christ has done?
3. Jesus says at his baptism that it is “fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Where do you still live as if God is waiting for you to fulfill righteousness, and what would it look like to consciously rest in the fact that Jesus has already fulfilled it for you?
4. Hungry after forty days, Jesus refuses to use his power to satisfy a legitimate physical need contrary to his Father’s will. Where are you tempted to meet real needs (comfort, security, affirmation) in ways that bypass trustful obedience?
5. Satan quotes Scripture to Jesus but twists its meaning and context. How have you seen Scripture misused (in your own life or in the wider church) to justify sin or manipulate others?
6. At Massah, Israel tested God with “Is the LORD among us or not?” In subtle ways, how do you sometimes ask the same question in your heart, especially when God feels silent or circumstances are painful?
7. The sermon stresses that Jesus “succeeded where you failed...to clothe you in a righteousness that you could never earn.” On a heart level, which feels more real to you most days—your failures, or Christ’s finished obedience on your behalf? Why?
8. The sermon warns that your life is not ultimately about “what you accomplish for God,” but about what God has accomplished for you in Christ. How might that reframe your approach to spiritual disciplines, service, or ministry expectations?

The content of this booklet was written by Luke Burrow, Family & Ministry Coordinator at Community Bible Church in Ilderton, Ontario. We are a gospel-centered church devoted to the faithful teaching of Scripture, the building up of believers, and bearing witness to Christ in our community and beyond. To learn more, join us for a Sunday service, or connect with us directly, scan the QR code or visit: cbcilderton.ca/contact-us

