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## *Bible Study*

### Mathew Ch. 4 > What would Jesus do (& how)?

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#### Part I: Verses 1-11

The temptations of Satan are all around us. Since the dawn of man, humankind has been burdened with this plague. At some time in life, every one finds herself tempted to do that which we have reservations about - something which doesn't seem quite right. We've find it very hard to resist temptation. Believe it or not, our Lord can sympathize with us quite well. We only have to look at what happened in the desert. As soon as he was baptized in the River Jordan, He was led away by the Holy Spirit into the desert where He was repeatedly tempted by Satan. Even if none of us ever face the exact situation our Lord did in the desert, I am sure that examining how Jesus coped with His testing will help us to understand our game plan when we face temptation.

St. Mathew tells us how Satan tried to tempt Jesus into departing from God. Satan wanted Jesus to put God to the test by asking for certain things. You have to understand that Jesus had not eaten in forty days (some of us cannot go forty minutes without eating)! Satan knew that Jesus was quite hungry. Likewise, Satan knows our every weakness. Today, while food may not be such a scarce commodity, the desire for worldly possessions has increased, giving Satan an opening into our psyche.

Satan then asks Jesus to get down on his knees and worship him. He offers Jesus the kingdoms of the world and their glory in exchange. We must ask ourselves: Does fame and fortune tempt us? Do our lives focus on seeking the riches of the world? We seek to be the center of conversation, the center of attention, the life of the party. We seek what we don't have and we try to fill that emptiness with worldly pursuits. What we fail to realize is that Satan has put these things before us in order to gain victory over God. You may not often feel it, but in every aspect of life Satan tempts us to defy the will of God.

#### *Easy way out?*

Jesus refused to take the easy way out - to cave in and surrender to the Devil. Jesus came on a mission to bring salvation to a fallen world, meaning every human being would gain the opportunity to return to God. He would remain sinless to bear the sins of a fallen world and would die on the cross for our redemption. Satan offered him an easy way out: to worship him, instead of God, and be given authority over all the nations of the world. What a temptation that must have been - avoiding the



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ridicule and rejection of mere men and the suffering and death on the cross – it could all have been avoided by simply saying, "Yes" to Satan just once. It would have also meant that His mission to save us had failed. God's way is not always the easiest way, but Jesus knew it was always the right way.

As St. Mathew tells us, with every temptation Jesus answered with God's word. When temptation occurs, we should get into the "Word of God" to find the strength to resist, because prayer can't be our only defense in these times. As Christians we must carry the "Word of God", each and every day, as armor to protect us from Satan's temptations.

Ephesians 6:10-18 "... Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all...TO STAND. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod you feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints..."

Notice that St. Paul tells us to use the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" against Satan. This is precisely what Jesus did when He was tempted. Using the "Sword of the Spirit" entails an intimate understanding of how to apply Scripture judiciously. Just as a sword may seem unwieldy at first glint, the Word may seem distant or incomprehensible. As knowledge of Scripture builds, it matures into understanding, watered by the Holy Spirit. Exercise this weapon, and it becomes an even greater strength over time, just as an athlete gets stronger with training and practice.

We must be strong enough to say "No!" to Satan. There is an ongoing moral battle in our lives. The battle is for the minds and souls of men and women, boys and girls. It is very easy to surrender to the temptations of Satan without thinking. But it is harder to turn our backs on something we feel we want, even if we know it's not right. Satan tries to con us into thinking we should have everything we want and that this will be ok. We must learn to see deeper, rebuking Satan as Jesus did that day.

Why you might ask? Why must we do such things? Because in each of us there is a strong desire to serve God. The only way to follow that desire is to accept Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives, to accept him as the Master of all existence. We as true Christians must focus our lives on becoming more like Him, replacing what enslaves us with a love for His lifestyle.

*Lead us not into temptation...*



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Does God tempt us, as the Lord's Prayer seems to suggest? If you mean, does God set traps for us, waiting in ambush for us, the answer is no! If you mean, does God give us freedom and responsibility to make choices, the answer is Yes! These choices are tests, revealing our character, faith and maturity OR the lack thereof. John Calvin, a famous French Protestant theologian, explained

...The evil one tempts us in order to destroy us...God tests us to strengthen and purify us. God tests us to know what is in our heart of hearts... To be human is to be tempted. To be human and to seek a life of faith is to be faced with choices, choices which test our innermost convictions. Jesus knew that. Jesus was tempted just like that. There is nothing wrong in that. What is wrong is when we choose to leave God's way as we know it, to pray "my will be done," instead of "Thy will be done" to give in to the corrupting power, and to forfeit the freedom of prayer.

We must be aware of these temptations and rebuke Satan in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has given us control over Satan. He did not give Satan control over us. If you are out there knowingly doing wrong and saying you are a Christian, then you need to stop the wrongdoing right now! Drugs, alcohol, smoking are not just bad habits, they destroy you from the inside out physically as well spiritually. 'Peer pressure' is by far Satan's greatest temptation for mankind as well as his greatest success among our young people. Peer pressure is Satan taking the form of people we look up to or want to be accepted by. Sadly enough, this is the battle ground we lose on constantly. We lose this battle because we fail to grasp one simple truth. Knowingly destroying our bodies, this flesh we live in, is one of greatest sins we can ever commit.

Revelation 21:7-8 "...He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. "

God has called us to be His sons and daughters. He has created us in His image, and given us the power and grace to choose whether we will return to His love and obey Him as our Father. The path toward a godly life may not be an easy one. We must sacrifice as Jesus sacrificed to save us. This means fighting not only our internal enemies, but combating Satan in the world around us. By the practice of virtues and prayer toward our Father, it is possible to conquer the temptations of this world and ultimately sin.

Part II: Verses 12-25

Having received fortitude to begin His public ministry after rebuking Satan and engaging in an intense fast, Jesus begins to preach in Capernaum. Right off the bat, Jesus starts fulfilling prophecy via His physical presence: "Land of Zebulun and Naphthali...the people living in darkness have seen a great light..." taken from Isaiah 9: 1-2. The Word of God, discussed at length in Part I, is intimately active with



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regard to Jesus. Indeed, elsewhere it is recorded that Jesus came to fulfill the Word of God, and that in fact He is the embodiment and fullness of the Word.

Zebulun and Naphthali are two of the twelve tribes of Israel and here refers also to their lands. Capernaum, on the Sea of Galilee, was a principle city in the region. Removed from the centers of Judaism, by the time of Jesus this area became slack in strictly observing the faith. It is here that Jesus chooses to start shining. His message is simple, and connects the ministry of John the Baptist with His own:

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

Near is a funny word, isn't it? Can one calculate the distance to the kingdom of heaven? Can any one find it on a map? How can it then be far or near?

When one thinks about a "kingdom," one expects a certain order, a realm different from that which is outside the King's rule. Here, it is goes unexplained what exactly "the kingdom" means, but we can suppose that the kingdom of heaven is a radically different concept than the Roman kingdom in which Jesus' kinsmen live and work. Brutality is replaced by God's justice. Sweat, toil, and disappointment are replaced by an ever increasing knowledge of God's presence and provision. Love, cooperation, and trust are the norm. Sin and disobedience cannot exist much less surface.

None of this was "near" to the average person living in the Palestine of Jesus' day. Rulers, both Jewish and Roman, were corrupt. Life, though peppered with good moments, was a constant struggle against the elements, hunger, political and religious strife, war, and disease. Yet this Fellow, supposedly a carpenter's son, comes along proclaiming "the kingdom of heaven is near"! How could Jesus convince people He knew a better way had come?

He employs the Scriptures, preaching, healing, miracles, and compassion. Importantly, he chooses *not* to do it alone. He chooses to use sinful humanity in His divine purpose. He Himself accomplishes the heavy lifting at the Cross. Yet He finds people, caught in sin like you and me, running the rat race of life just like you and me, and transforms them into amplifying messengers. He chooses "to disciple" many, and selects a few to hold very close and teach them about His glorious nature. He casts His vision of love and redemption for humanity upon these, and through these He transforms the world as they freely share what they hear and see.

Jesus chooses His initial disciples from the ranks of fishermen. Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Working stiffs. Average Joes. The guys who sweat for a living, probably enjoy a wild tale or two after hours, and are not necessarily pious. These, supposedly far from the kingdom of heaven by conventional wisdom, were privileged to see the kingdom unfold before their very eyes.

"Follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."

Radical. Outrageous. What could these fellows, smelling of fish guts, have to do with the gathering of men?



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Really they are the perfect choice for several reasons. First, they are willing to leave their occupations and families behind. In those days it was a great honor to be selected by a rabbi as a member of an "inner circle" of students. Many rabbis called, but none delivered such an evangelistic promise: becoming fishers of men.

Jesus spends a great deal of time shaping these disciples into Apostles (a Greek word meaning "those who are sent."). They are teachable. They are without education and therefore not arrogant, but rather eager to hear God's message delivered in power. They are persistent, willing to stick around when things became tough or controversial. Finally, they are risk takers. They sought to apply what Jesus taught in daily life, and thus desired to experience more of God's fullness. Through this desire they receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and are able to lead skeptics to faith in Christ by example, not just word.

The nearness of the kingdom of heaven depends upon our nearness to Christ and the time we spend in His teaching. Let us seek to be like the disciples in following our Master. When we are near Christ, then the kingdom principles of Justice, Love, Cooperation, etc. shine in our life and beckon those standing outside along the path of faith. As we follow and share in the Apostolic ministry, let us cast our nets wide and catch all manner of humanity, drawing them closer to the Fount of Life so that He might effect a change. His kingdom marches ever closer.