

Sunday, October 20, 2021 | It Is Written

Week 4 | Matthew 4:8-11 | "The Means, Message, and Motivation."

Announcements:

- Teen Activity, Saturday, Oct. 30, 7:30-9:30, Beachmont Corn Maze. Cost \$25.
 - This past Sunday night, we voted in Bob Libby as our Associate Pastor. He'll be coming on board this coming February.
 - The Trunk-or-Treat Event was a huge success. Thank you to all our volunteers who made it happen. There are cornstalks available for the taking outside.
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In week 1 of this series, before diving into Matthew 4, we had to understand the nature of God's word. After all, this whole series is called "It Is Written," and if you don't know how the Scriptures work, you will not understand how they can deliver you from temptation. But once you do understand the nature of the scriptures, victory over temptation is secured when the Christian is armed with a book, chapter, and verse.

In week 2, we finally got to Matt 4. The Devil tried to get Jesus to use his divine powers for selfish reasons. But Jesus wouldn't bite. He knew why he had come to the earth, and it wasn't to serve himself. It was to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many. Rather than take the demonic route of self-centeredness, Jesus took the divine route of God-centeredness. After all, **to truly live, we must not only eat that which sustains our physical life, but we must also consume that which sustains our spiritual life: God's word.**

Last week, we saw Satan uses the very words of God to entice the very Son of God. That illustrated that evil often comes to us in the guise of something we know very well. The temptation to do evil doesn't appear at your door looking like a being colored in red with horns on its head and a pitchfork in its hand. Instead, the pull of wrongdoing speaks with a voice that we are accustomed to, it wears the face of a friend, not a foe, and it tries to lead us to places that make sense to us rather than places foreign and unknown (cf. Matt. 16:23). Temptation finds us when our guard is down, not up. And when that happens, we might be tempted to tempt God in our lives. **We must trust God to lead, but we must never tempt God to prove himself.**

READ: Matthew 4:8-11 (ESV)

⁸ Again, the Devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”¹⁰ 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.’” ¹¹ Then the Devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

Let's break down that third temptation.

The Devil's methodology in life: the ends justify the means.

The ends justify the means is well-known in our world. Often this philosophy is touted by extremist groups (i.e., Nazis, communists, the radical right, the fanatical left, etc.). And, essentially, at the heart of this philosophy is the idea should the goal be good enough, any and all actions that seek to achieve that goal are permissible (i.e., “all’s fair in love and war,” “Winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing.” – Vince Lombardi). Since the Devil seeks to glorify only himself, he will do whatever he wants to achieve that end. Imagine the amount of arrogance you'd have to look at God and demand that He worship you.

Now, the odds that the Devil took Jesus to an actual mountain in which they could survey all the kingdoms of the world are pretty low. This was likely a vision. But the point is that just as he took Jesus to the supposed seat of God's rule in the last temptation—the Temple—Satan took Jesus to the very seat of his own rule—the whole world. After showing the Lord all the kingdoms of the world in all their glory and dropping all pretense at questioning his sonship, the Devil says to Jesus, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” In saying this, he meant, “This whole world is my kingdom. This whole mountain is my throne. I gave it once to Alexander the Great. It is now Caesar’s. But it can all be yours, if you will but bow down before me.”¹

Essentially, the Devil was presenting Jesus a shortcut. Rather than having to walk the Via Dolorosa² of the Cross, all Jesus would have to do would be bending the knee before Satan's authority. And, should the Lord do that, the Devil promised to give Jesus the keys to his worldly kingdom. And while true, Jesus would forever be subservient to Satan, the upside is that Jesus wouldn't have to suffer. In fact, he could probably come alongside the Devil and help rule the world from the inside. People would be saved, and Jesus could avoid the Cross.

Before we get to Jesus’ answer, we should ask a couple questions.

¹ Phillips, John, *Exploring the Gospel of Matthew*, The John Phillips Commentary Series, (Grand Rapids; Kregel Publications, 1999), p. 66.

² Latin for “Sorrowful Way.”

Was Satan bluffing? Possibly. Who can know for certain? He is the great deceiver, after all. However, considering he's the embodiment of vanity, the odds that he would share power with Jesus, even as one who would rule over Jesus, seems unlikely to me.

Did Satan have the power to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world? Yes. Throughout the NT, Jesus himself has acknowledged that Satan has dominion in this world (cf. Matt. 13:4,19; Jn. 12:31; 16:11). This is an uncomfortable truth backed up repeatedly in the epistles (cf. Eph 2:1-3; 6:11-12; 1 Pet. 5:8-10; Heb. 2:14; Rev. 12:9-17). And while true, Satan only has this power because God has allowed it to be so; nevertheless, the Devil is the ruler of this world.

For instance, after Jesus had the Passover with his disciples, he said,

READ: John 14:30-31 (ESV)

I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.

Paul explains that part of why the world hates Christians is because the Devil has blinded their hearts from seeing the truth.

READ: 2 Corinthians 4:4 (ESV)

In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

What's more, John the beloved disciple, said something similar when he said,

READ: 1 John 5:19 (ESV)

We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

Sad to say, Satan has real power and real authority in this world. And he wields it to accomplish his own twisted goals. No tactic is off the table for him. He will do whatever he can if it means getting what he wants. For the Devil, the ends always justify any means. This is his methodology in life: "Do whatever you have to—however you have to—to get what you want out of life.

The Messiah's methodology in life: the means justify the ends.

Jesus would not be coerced into worshiping Satan and so say, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" Afterward, we're told that he was ministered to by angels. We assume this meant food, as the Greek word used is typical of dinner being served.³ But, either way, angles relieving Jesus is illustrative of what James means when he says, "submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (Ja. 4:7)

Anyways, late-nineteenth-century sportswriter Grantland Rice famously said, "It's not about winning or losing; it's about how you play the game." For many, this phrase is thought to be a naive idealism that may be good for teaching kids a sport, but it doesn't work in the real world. In fact, you can see the cynicism that arises when this phrase is brought up in quotes from pro-athletes. For instance, Pete Rose, infielder for the Cincinnati Reds throughout the '60s-'80s, said, "Whoever said, "It's not whether you win or lose but how you play the game" is full of it! Winning makes all the difference in the world. Winning is fun. Losing is not. Losing sucks." And, in the realm of sports, I sorta see Pete's point. To quote another one from Vince Lombardi, "If winning isn't everything, why do they keep score?" At the heart of every game, the objective is to beat your opponent. However, I'm sure if we were to push both Lombardi and Rose, they would distinguish between "winning" in an honorable way and "winning" in a dishonorable way.

<INSERT PICTURE> In 1980, Rosie Ruiz was the first woman to cross the finish line in the Boston Marathon. She was crowned with the laurel wreath and lauded as the fastest woman in Boston. However, it was later discovered that Rosie had registered for the race but hopped out of the bystander crowd and onto the course just a few hundred feet from the finish line.

<INSERT PICTURE> On Jan 6, 1994, Nancy Kerrigan was clubbed with a police club an inch above her kneecap, putting her Olympic dreams in jeopardy. Suspicion immediately went to Tonya Harding—her rival—even though she denied any involvement. Later, Tonya's husband, along with three others, admitted to being the one who clubbed Kerrigan. After the 94 Olympics, where Kerrigan would win silver and Harding would only gain the eighth place, Harding took a plea deal admitting she knew about the attack and lied to the FBI. She was banned from ever participating in a figure skating competition again.

³ France, R.T., *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), p. 136.

<INSERT PICTURE> On June 28, 1997, Mike Tyson vs. Evander Holyfield. In the third round, Tyson bit a piece of Holyfield's ear clean off.

Paul too liked "the sports." He would often use them to illustrate the Christian walk. And, in 1 Corinthians 9, he says something that people like Rosie Ruiz, Tonya Harding, and Mike Tyson would've been better off had they known it:

READ: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (ESV)

²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.²⁵ Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.²⁶ So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷ But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

We are running a race. We ought to run that race with the intention to win. Why even compete if you're not in it to win it? However, the method by which you run is essential. No one wants to dedicate their life to a race, get to the end of it, and find out they've been disqualified. Paul says he "disciplines" his body and brings it under control so that he runs his race honorably without hypocrisy.

Jesus not only wanted to win, but he also wanted to win the right way. The Devil gave Jesus a shortcut: "Worship me, and you will rule the world." But to be the supreme ruler of the earth is not to be compared to glorifying God. For Jesus, the ends do not justify the means; instead, the means justify the ends. How you play the game is far more important than whether or not you win the game. The journey is far more important than the destination.

So, what's the takeaway?

Whatever we do and however we do it, the glory of God ought to be our motivation for doing it.

READ: 1 Corinthians 10:31 (ESV)

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

READ: Colossians 3:16-17 (ESV)

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

When Satan tempted Jesus to worship him, he gave the Lord a means to an end but at the cost of the message. The Devil (not unlike us sometimes) wrongly assumed those were two different things. Jesus' reply makes it blatantly clear that the means and the message are indistinguishable: glorify God.

So, what's the takeaway?

Whatever we do and however we do it, the glory of God ought to be our motivation for doing it.

When we sacrifice the message on the altar of our means, it means we've allowed our ambition to replace our convictions.

Video Description

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TEXT: Matthew 4:8-11

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Essentially, in this third temptation, the Devil was presenting Jesus with a shortcut. Rather than walking the Via Dolorosa, all Jesus would have to do would be to bend the knee before Satan's authority. And, should the Lord do that, the Devil promised to give Jesus the keys to his worldly kingdom. For the Devil, the ends always justify any means. This is methodology in life. Do whatever you have to—however you have to—to get what you want.

But Jesus not only wanted to win, but he also wanted to win the right way. The Devil gave Jesus a shortcut: "Worship me, and you will rule the world." But to be the supreme ruler of the earth is not to be compared with glorifying God. For Jesus, the ends do not justify the means; instead, the means justify the ends. For the Lord, the journey was far more important than the destination. The Devil (not unlike us sometimes) wrongly assumed those were two different things. Jesus' reply makes it blatantly clear that the means and the message are indistinguishable: glorify God. Thus, whatever we do and however we do it, the glory of God ought to be our motivation for doing it.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: