

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

Lesson 3

Matthew – Part Three

The Temptations and the Sermon on the Mount #1

I. BACKGROUND

After the birth and infancy narratives, Matthew sets forth the actions of John the Baptist as they pertained to the preparation of Jesus for his ministry, including Jesus' baptism. Next, Matthew records two significant events that we consider this week: first, the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness; and second, the Sermon on the Mount. Just like the rest of Matthew, these accounts are written in a manner to aid Matthew's overall purpose of confirming Jewish believers in their faith in Christ (for more details, read the previous two Matthew lessons). For now, we should remember that as Messiah, Jesus is proclaimed the Messiah Prophet, the Messiah Priest, and the Messiah King in both the stories and whole book of Matthew.

II. TEMPTATIONS (Mt. 4:1-11)

Matthew tells of Jesus being led into the desert to be tempted by the devil. The temptations do not begin face to face until after Jesus has fasted for 40 days and nights. This echoes the life of the greatest Old Testament Priest (Moses) and the greatest Old Testament Prophet (Elijah). Moses fasted before the Lord in the wilderness 40 days and nights (Ex. 34:28) and Elijah fasted similarly 40 days and nights (I Kings 19:8)¹.

A. *Temptation One*

The first direct temptation does not occur until after the 40-day fast. The temptation itself is not a direct confrontation where Jesus is taunted by the challenge of blatant disobedience. Instead, Satan comes out in a very beguiling manner. Much like the tempting of Eve in the Garden, Satan offers up the temptation as a friendly gesture. After all, Jesus had not eaten in over a month. And, what

¹ The I Kings text does not mandate a reading of a 40-day fast. That premise, however, certainly seems to be the implication of the text. It was also the Jewish traditional interpretation of the text.

could be friendlier than offering a starving man bread? Certainly, there is no sin in eating, right?

Of course, the barb in the temptation comes from Jesus getting his sustenance and ideas from Satan rather than from God. Jesus responds by quoting scripture. Jesus references Deuteronomy 8:3 and says, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

B. Temptation Two

Having failed to appeal deceitfully to Jesus’ physical passion and desires, Satan escalates the temptations to more of a pride issue. Satan challenges Jesus to prove his “credentials.” Matthew records that Satan took Jesus to the highest point on the temple in Jerusalem and challenged Jesus to “throw yourself down.” This time, Satan quotes the scripture pulling from Psalm 91:11,12, “He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

Jesus’ response again comes straight from scripture. Referencing Deuteronomy 6:16, Jesus says “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Jesus denies the need to transgress the law and “test” God in order to answer the credentialing challenge of Satan. Jesus knew who he was and Jesus was confident in his relationship with God. Jesus had no need to prove anything to anyone.

C. Temptation Three

Having failed twice and seeing that Jesus was intent on fulfilling the Messiah king role, Satan offers to make Jesus the Messiah King. In other words, Satan offers Jesus the Kingdoms of the world, but with a twist – the kingdoms come with honoring Satan as God overall rather than Yahweh God.

At this “offer”, Jesus sends Satan away, adding one last scriptural admonition: “Away from me, Satan! For it is written, ‘Worship Yahweh your God, and serve him only’” (Deuteronomy 6:13).

Satan then departs and angels come minister to Jesus.

III. TEMPTATION LESSONS (Early Points For Home!)

Many lessons are drawn from the experiences of Jesus as Matthew related. Among them are:

1. Watch out. Satan comes in as a charmer “on your side” much more so than dressed in a red devil suit with a pitchfork and tail.
2. Store the word of God up in your heart and mind. Memorize it. It provides wisdom in days of temptation and struggles. You never know when you might find yourself in a wilderness without a Bible handy, but in need of some good scriptural guidance.
3. Don’t test God; we have no right. Be yourself. Honor God in what you do. Offer him your best. Trust him to be what you need when you need it.
4. NEVER, NEVER, NEVER put your own way before God’s to get what you want. The way we go about our business is ever bit as important as the goal itself. ALWAYS honor God’s direction in how God wants you to get where you need to be.

IV. SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Matthew 5, 6, and 7 set out a sermon Jesus gave to the people. It is called “The Sermon on the Mount” because Jesus delivered it on a mountainside. Matthew 5 starts the narrative saying, “Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down ... He began to teach them saying...”

The sermon itself has many natural divisions. It begins with what we call the “beatitudes.” We get that word from the Latin word *beatitudo* which means “blessedness” or “happiness.” Jesus sets forward eight areas where people will find themselves “blessed” in the sense of “happy” or “fortunate.”²

² Many are familiar with the Hebrew word for “blessed:” *baruch*. That word is most likely NOT the word Jesus was using. Matthew has translated Jesus’ sermon with a Greek word *makarioi*. That Greek word was used to translate a different Old Testament word than *baruch*. It translated the Hebrew word *ashre*.

Jesus instructs us that people are happy and fortunate (blessed) who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who are meek, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who are merciful, who are pure in heart, who are peacemakers, and who are persecuted because of their righteousness. These are people who have the kingdom of heaven, who will be comforted, who will inherit the earth, who will be filled with righteousness, who will be shown mercy, who will see God, and who will be called children of God.

Following these beatitudes, Jesus explains that his followers are the seasoning and preservative for the world. We followers of Jesus are the “salt” of the world. We are to permeate and flavor culture and the world with God for God. Where we work, where we live, where we play, where we go to church, who we see casually, professionally, or accidentally – we are to permeate all with God and his nature.

Much like a light shines in the darkness, we are to set apart from the rest of the world by the way we act and the things we do.

A. *The Law*

Jesus then turns his sermon to explaining the heart of the law that many saw only as cold harsh rules to be obeyed to the letter. As a precursor, Jesus explains that his purpose was never to abolish the law. Rather, Jesus came as a fulfillment of the law, teaching a righteousness that exceeded that of the best “rule followers.”

On murder, Jesus says to start with anger, getting it under control. On adultery, Jesus says to start with lust as it violates God’s will for us just as adultery does. On divorce, Jesus says it produces sin outside of marital unfaithfulness. On oaths, Jesus says to honor your word, regardless of whether it has an elaborate and earnest plea with it. On retribution, Jesus clarifies that for individuals, forgiveness and going on down the road is the proper response. On dealing with enemies, Jesus says to love them, not hate them.

B. *Holy Living*

After discussing the spirit behind the letter of the law, Jesus turned to the positive actions we should take as part of our holy lifestyle. Jesus urges us to give to those in need privately and with no fanfare because it is right never to show off. Otherwise, we are giving because of what it does for us, not because the recipient needs it.

We should think of this as a reflection of God in his perfection. Did God give to us for what God got out of it? Or, did God give to us for what we got out of it? Jesus' redemptive death, was it done for Jesus or for us? We should similarly do things because they are right before God, not because they bring us "kudos."

Our prayers are to be simple and straightforward. We pray to God in the same language we speak with to each other. Our prayers are fitting for praise, for God's work, for our needs, for repentance and forgiveness, and for protection.

Fasting, like giving, is to be private before God. We are not fasting for the attention from man. We are fasting in dedication before God.

We are to seek God and his kingdom, not money and this fallen world. Jesus set out a true spiritual rule – that we will find our heart where we put our treasure. This rule is important to everyone. If we find our hearts where they do not belong, then check and see if we haven't been wrongly "investing" there.

Likewise, should our hearts not be where we would like them to be (or, for that matter, where they should be), check to see if we are investing there. By investing, Jesus is not referencing solely money. We invest our time, our emotions, our energy, our expectations, and our hopes. We invest many things that move our hearts in the direction of the investments. Jesus says that with this principle, we should invest in God and our relationship with him.

Part and parcel of investing is not to worry about provisions. Investing in God includes having confidence that he will see to our basic needs. Worry is not logical for a Christian!

Part of holy living includes NOT judging others. Jesus explains that our own sins are big boards in our eyes compared to the specks of sawdust in the eyes of those we judge.

Jesus teaches us that we are to ask and seek for important things from God. God will honor with what is good and right for us to have.

Jesus recognized that this approach to life was rare. Jesus knew not many would follow it. Still, Jesus said this narrow gate was the way to enter. We are not to follow the crowd. We are to follow the Lord.

Jesus draws his sermon to a close warning the listeners about false prophets that are wolves in sheep's clothing. The test Jesus gives centers on watching how people live holy lives. Verbal acclamation of Jesus as Lord is not adequate proof of one's relationship with God. Many who say "Lord" never knew God. Also, preaching and "performing miracles" is no proof of truth givers. A holy life is the key.

Matthew then closes with an admonition to heed his words and put them into practice. One who does will be like a wise builder of a house on a foundation that is stable and long term, as opposed to those who build on a shifting foundation that soon renders the home inhabitable and useless.

V. POINTS FOR HOME (Final!)

1. What beatitude promises do you want? Go after your beatitude goals!
2. Permeate everything with God and his love.
3. Do right, from the heart.
4. Do right, and not for show.
5. Invest in the right things.
6. Hand your worries over to the Lord
7. Get your own house in order. God will deal with every one else's.
8. Don't say "good points!" Actually do them!