



Matthew 4

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Tape #8003
By Chuck Smith

In the third chapter, Matthew records for us the baptism of Jesus, and as He came up out of the water, the heavens opened to Him and John saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him. And to John that was the sign that Jesus was the Messiah. And John said he didn't know until he saw this, for the One who sent him to baptize told him that the One upon whom the Spirit descended and remained, that that was the Messiah. He had been prophesying that the Messiah was coming soon, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." (3:2) But now at the baptism of Jesus, John recognized that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. And then to confirm it, the voice of God speaking from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (3:17)

Now Jesus was aware of His relationship with God before this event. When He was but twelve years old and He was not found in the company of the pilgrims returning to Nazareth from the feast in Jerusalem; and when Mary and Joseph returned and found Him in the temple and began to rebuke Him for the fright that He had brought to them by His not being with them; He said, "Didn't you know I had to be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49) And He wasn't talking about Joseph, but about His heavenly Father. Now the confirmation, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (3:17)

And then, after His baptism, after He came up out of the water, this marvelous experience,

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. (4:1)

Now the temptation of Jesus was very important because Jesus is our great high priest. The go-between between man and God. The holy God is unapproachable by unholy man. We need a go-between. The infinite God and the finite man. The distance between the two is so great that it cannot be bridged, except by a go-between.

As Job realized the greatness of God and how nothing he was, he said, "What is man that he can plead his case with God that he might justify himself?" And he said, "And besides, there is no daysman between us who can lay his hand on us both." The distance between an infinite God and finite man can never be bridged by man starting with an earth base, and that is why all religions are doomed for failure. Religions that begin with an earth base and try to reach to an infinite God are faced with an impossible situation.

The initiation has to come from God, for God so loved the world and for an infinite God to reach finite man, you got no problem at all. But for finite man to reach an infinite God, you've got an insurmountable problem. So we needed a daysman, someone who could stand between us and lay his hand on us both. And that's exactly what Jesus came to be, the daysman between God and man, the mediator; "One God, one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (1 Timothy 2:5)

He became man so that He could touch us, He continued to be God so that He could touch God. "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. [And] all things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made." (John 1:1-3) "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

And so the Word was incarnate. He became man so that He could touch man, still touching God. As our great high priest, not after the Levitical order, not a descendant of Aaron, but a priest after another order, the order of Melchizedek, He became our great high priest. If He is going to really intercede on my behalf, He has to understand my weaknesses, He has to understand temptations. And so in the book of Hebrews, the writer tells us, "That God has put all things in subjection unto Him... yet we do not at this point see all things in subjection. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." (Hebrews 2:8-10) He had to suffer in order to

understand fully our sufferings.

“For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them [His] brothers, Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee. And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me. Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brothers, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest.” (Hebrews 2:11-17). Taking on the limitations of a human body; feeling tired, feeling pain, feeling weakness, “A faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able then to succour them who are tempted.” (Hebrews 2:18)

The fact that He was tempted, He understands you. He understands the temptations that you experience. He has that kind of empathy having been tempted, He knows what it's all about. And thus, He is able to minister to us adequately, having Himself experienced it. So being led of the Spirit into the wilderness for the purpose of being tempted was a part of God's ordained plan that He might be our high priest and might understand our temptations that we experience through this body of flesh in which we live.

And so he had fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards was hungry. (4:2)

Forty is a significant number in the Bible and it is a number that usually indicates judgment. It rained for forty days and forty nights. And there are other instances of the forty years, for instance, in the wilderness. And it is a significant number in the Bible and here, Jesus fasting for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards was hungry.

As we mentioned this morning, they say that after fasting for seven or eight days, a person loses their appetite. Now you cannot go very long without food and water. The longest you can survive without water and food is about eight or nine days, until the body is completely dehydrated and you die from dehydration. But a person can go without food for up to forty days but once hunger sets in again, then it is imperative that you eat rather quickly because it is a sign that you are now starving to death. And death is not far off, once the hunger returns after prolonged period of fasting.

And so the tempter came to him, and he said, If you be the Son of God, (4:3)

Now, God had just declared that. He said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (3:17) And Satan knew that He was the Son, thus it is not indicative ‘if’, but it is ‘since you are’... the Son of God, use your powers,

and command these stones be made bread. (4:3)

Use the divine powers that You have, use the divine authority that You have and command that these stones be made bread. Use Your spiritual powers in order to feed your physical need, or let the Spirit be in subjection to the flesh. Let the Spirit serve the flesh.

Now all of our temptation has to do with the life of the flesh and the life of the Spirit. Consistently, the Bible teaches us that the life of the Spirit is superior to and more important than the life of the flesh; that the flesh should be subservient to the Spirit, that the body need should not reign or rule over you. When they do, you have then the mind of the flesh, your mind is on fleshly things, “What shall we eat, what shall we drink, what shall we wear?” (Matthew 6:31) And Jesus said, “It's after these things that the heathen are concerned. But you should be concerned about the kingdom of God and His righteousness. And when you are, these other things will be in their proper place. They will all be taken care of.” (Matthew 6:32-33) So the emphasis in the Bible is upon the spiritual side of your nature and that should be the predominant aspect of your being, the spiritual side of your nature.

Now Satan is suggesting that the spiritual side of His nature, “You are the Son of God, then use the power, the spiritual powers as such, to take care of the need of your flesh. You're hungry? Go ahead and let the Spirit be subservient to your flesh.” Now I have no doubt that Jesus could have turned the stone into bread. He turned water into wine. And if He could change the elements and turn water into wine, surely He

could have turned the stone into bread. And thus the idea again is let the Spirit serve the flesh, rather than the flesh serve the Spirit.

And Jesus answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, (4:4)

Just the physical life is not enough, the fleshly life is not enough. We need that spiritual side of our nature developed and we shall live...

by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. (4:4)

God directing and guiding my life, walking after the Spirit and the things of the Spirit. I will put my trust in the word of God. And I will live after the Spirit.

So Satan then took him up into the holy city of Jerusalem, set him on a pinnacle of the temple (4:5)

And just exactly what that was is a matter of debate among the scholars which, it's silly to debate over just where it was or what it was because, what difference does it make to the truth that is being declared? And yet they can write theses on where the pinnacle of the temple was. It was no doubt an elevated place, the word "pinnacle" would indicate that.

And he saith unto him, Since you are the Son of God, and since you have declared your trust in every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, cast yourself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time you dash your foot against a stone. (4:6)

The suggestion is, if you really trust in God, then show God how much you do trust Him. You're trusting the word of God, then let's demonstrate it. If you're going to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, then go ahead and jump from here, because the word of God says, 'He will give his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways, to bear thee up lest at any time you dash your foot against a stone.' Do something spectacular to prove your trust in God and to prove the word of God. You're going to live by the word, okay, prove the word of God.

And Jesus said, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt [or test] the Lord thy God. (4:7)

It is wrong for me to deliberately put myself in a position of danger or jeopardy just to test my faith or to test God's faithfulness. There are many people who are taking scripture out of context as Satan did, "It is written, isn't that the scripture, doesn't it say, 'He will give his angels charge over thee, keep thee in all...' Yes. "Then go ahead and jump."

It is written again--how important that we not wrest the scripture from its context, or that we not compare the scripture with the whole of the body of truth that is found in the Word of God.

There are many people who have built doctrines upon portions of scripture. And so many times when you take a scripture out of its context, you can give it an entirely different meaning. How many times have you heard people say, "Well, the scriptures says to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." (Philippians 2:12) So you are to work and it's your works that are so important because 'work out your salvation with fear and trembling.' But what does the rest of the verse say? "For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." (Philippians 2:13)

When you finish the passage, it's entirely different. It is God that's working in me, both to give me the will and the capacity to do of His good pleasure. And so it isn't me working to be saved, it isn't me working that I might offer to God my good works as a medium for my salvation, but it's God working in me giving me the will, giving me the desire and then giving me the ability to fulfill it. And so taking scripture out of its context, or taking a scripture and interpreting it in conflict with the whole body of truth, can lead into error. And so here, It is written, He will give his angels charge over thee. So put it to the test. But Jesus said, "It is written again, you are not to test or to tempt the Lord thy God." (4:7)

And then the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And he saith unto him, All these things will I give you, if you will fall down and worship me. (4:8,9)

Now Satan in another Gospel went on to say, "For they are mine and I can give them to whomever I will." (Luke 4:6) Satan is boasting and claiming that he is in control of the kingdoms of the world, the glory of the kingdoms of the world. He claims them as his. And the scripture would seem to indicate that the claim is true.

As we are in the book of Daniel, we read of the prince of Persia, the Satanic force that ruled over the kingdom, behind the leadership but over the kingdom of Persia. And so Satan is bragging, "It's mine, I can give it to whomever I will. And if You will fall down and worship me, I'll give it to You." This is an extremely powerful and strong temptation because Jesus came to redeem the world back to God. That was the purpose of His coming, "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10) The world originally belonged to God, He created it. He gave it to man when He created Adam and placed him upon the earth. Adam turned it over to Satan, and Satan became the prince of this world, the ruler of the darkness of this world.

God desired the world again to be the kingdom of God. It was in rebellion against the authority of God, led by Satan. And our prayer is, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10) It isn't that way now, but our prayer is that it shall be that way. And the purpose of the coming of Jesus was that the kingdoms of this world might again become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Messiah.

So here the issue is, "You don't have to go to the cross. I know that You came to redeem the world but You don't have to follow God's plan, to fulfill the purpose of God of bringing the kingdoms under the control and the authority of God. If You will bow down and worship me, fall down, prostrate Yourself before me, and I'll give them to You, apart from the cross." He is trying to say that you can find fulfillment, the realization of your heart's desires apart from the cross in your life. That you don't have to deny yourself and take up your cross to find life. That you can find life in this experience or that experience, in this relationship or that relationship. And the idea is always that of immediate fulfillment; "You can have it now without the cross if You just submit to me, worship me, fall down before me."

The cross was not a pleasant prospect to look forward to. The Bible tells us that "He endured the cross despising the shame." (Hebrews 12:2) Coming to redeem the world to God, that again this portion of the universe that is out of sorts with the Creator, this portion of the universe that has rebelled against the authority of God might again know the blessings and the peace and the glory of being surrendered to God. He came to give His life to pay the price, to redeem the world back to God. We're redeemed, "not with corruptible things as silver and gold, from the empty lies but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:18,19) So He came to shed His blood, He came to give His life in order that He might redeem us back to God. And Satan is suggesting that you can do it apart from God's will.

There is an element in the church that sort of takes the posture that the end justifies the means. It really doesn't matter quite how you do it, if it's accomplished, that's what's important. And so they can justify many things that are not really right because of the end result. So we have bingo games to raise funds, to feed the poor. "Isn't it wonderful, we're feeding the poor?" And using bingo as the means. So that justifies bingo. Well, then I suppose that would justify poker too or anything else, because if we use the profits for some good cause, then, let's do evil that good may come. But the scripture opposes that idea, Jesus opposed that idea.

And He said, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. (4:10)

Now Satan had to obey.

And the devil left him, and, behold, the angels came and ministered unto him. (4:11)

When He said, "Get out of here," Satan had to go. He is subject to the authority of Jesus. And he did come back many times. This was only one of the many encounters that Jesus had with the powers of darkness. And in every case, He overcame them.

Later on, Satan was using Peter to offer the same suggestion that He evade the cross. In Caesarea, Philippi, when Jesus said, "Who do you say that I am?" And Peter said, "Thou art the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." He said, "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, flesh and blood did not reveal this to you but My Father which is in heaven, and I say unto you that you are Peter [Petros, little stone], and upon this 'Petra' [the rock]--a confession that I am the Messiah, the Son of the Living God--I will build My church." Foundation of the church is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And on that foundation, He said, "I'll build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:17,18)

And then He began to say, "If any man will come after Me, he has to deny himself and take up his cross

and follow Me. For if you seek to save your life, you'll lose it; but if you'll lose your life for My sake, you'll find it. And what would it profit you if you gained the whole world but lost your own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:24-26) And then He began to tell His disciples how that He was going to be betrayed, given over to the hands of the heathen, and He would be crucified and slain, but He would rise again the third day. And Peter began to rebuke Him saying, "Be that far from Thee, Lord." (Matthew 16:22) [Don't talk about a cross. Spare yourself.] And Jesus said, "Get thee behind Me, Satan. You're an offense to Me, because you cannot discern that which is from God and that which is from man." (Matthew 16:23)

The cross spelled the defeat for Satan. Through His death, He triumphed over the powers of darkness. But the temptation, shortcut, the path of the flesh, the easy way. You don't want a cross. You don't want to deny yourself. Take the easy way. Live after the flesh. And thus temptation is to yield to the flesh rather than to the Spirit. To live after the flesh rather than to live after the Spirit.

And Jesus knows what that temptation is all about. That's what comes to us, yielding to the flesh or yielding to the Spirit. And every situation that arises, I can respond after my flesh, ugly, nasty response. And we see so many people doing it today. I mean, there is just a bunch of hostile people out there on the highway. And if you do something that displeases them, they're going to respond after the flesh with all kinds of nasty signals and everything else.

Or I can respond after the Spirit. I can respond in love, in forgiveness, in kindness, in mercy. Now, whenever I respond after the flesh, I always feel miserable. I always feel sorry and miserable. But whenever I respond after the Spirit, I feel so good. When someone has done something that is wrong and foolish and I say, "Oh, that's alright," it's so good.

The other night, I pulled into a parking lot of the supermarket and my car hit, just bumped, this shopping cart that someone had parked it up at the front of the stall, and I hit it and there was an incline there and the cart started rolling, and there was a fellow getting out of a black pick-up right next to me, and it rolled right around and hit the front fender of that pick-up. Now you know how the reaction of some people would be on an accident like that. And I, of course, jumped out quick, I tried to get around and didn't get there in time, the thing hit the pick-up, and the fellow said, "I don't care, I don't give a darn," and he said, "It didn't hurt anything," and it was just a neat response. Rather than yelling, "You crazy fool, why did you run into that basket? Look what you did, you put a scratch in my..." He said, "I don't give a darn, it doesn't matter." He said, "Don't you like a person who responds like that?" I said, "I sure do." And I like it when I respond like that. And I hate it when I respond after the flesh. But we're always faced with those issues, where I can respond one way or the other. I can respond after the flesh or I can respond after the Spirit. And that's what temptation and testing is all about. And to this testing, will I respond after the flesh or will I respond after the Spirit? And the Lord continues to test us in these areas. And there's one bad thing about taking a test, you have to take it over.

Now there is probably a year's gap between verse eleven and verse twelve, because from the time of the baptism of Jesus and the temptation followed immediately after, until the imprisonment of John the Baptist was about a year. And what are called the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, do not tell us anything of that particular year in the life or ministry of Jesus. John gives us some details. In first and second chapter of John, he tells us of the ministry of John the Baptist and he tells us of Jesus coming and John saying, "Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world," (John 1:29) and some of John's disciples turning and following Jesus and how that Andrew came to Jesus and he went and got his brother, Simon, and brought him to Jesus. And Phillip and Nathaniel... and John fills in some of the events of that year between the baptism of Jesus and the imprisonment of John.

But here Matthew gives us nothing, there's a void here of about a year of the life of Jesus which Matthew doesn't give us any indication of that year. But reading Matthew, you would think that it's just concurrent but there's a year's gap here.

And now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, (4:12,13)

Now Capernaum became, more or less, the center of the ministry of Christ, there around the Galilee.

Most of the events that are recorded, the miracles and so forth, were done in and around Capernaum. So He moved from His home in Nazareth, probably from the family, and came to Capernaum,

which is on the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim:

the two tribes of Israel that were apportioned, that area up in the north, the tribe of Zabulon and the tribe of Naphtali. Naphtali had the upper Galilee region and Zabulon, the area around the Galilee and down towards Mount Gilboa. And Matthew points out,

that it might be fulfilled... (4:14)

It's interesting how that every place Jesus went was sort of a fulfillment of prophecy: born in Bethlehem that the prophecy might be fulfilled; went to Egypt in order that the prophecy might be fulfilled; brought his son out of Egypt, went to Nazareth in order that the prophecy might be fulfilled, He would be called a Nazarene; and now even the move to Capernaum was in order to fulfill a prophecy that,

... in the land of Zabulon, and in the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. (4:15,16)

This is a prophecy that's from Isaiah chapter nine, and it is in that same prophecy that we read, "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given." (Isaiah 9:6) So this is an area that was populated by many non-Jewish people, this area of Naphtali. It was one of the first areas that was taken captive by the Assyrians and it was called Galilee of the Gentiles. There were the many Gentile cities around the area, the Decapolis up there. And yet the prophecy of "the people who were sitting in darkness, they saw a great light. They sat in the region and the shadow of death and unto them light is sprung up."

And from that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, (4:17)

Now when Jesus began to preach, what was His first word? We know what John the Baptist's first word was, what's the first word of the gospel that Jesus began to preach? Repent. Why do you suppose He said that? Because the need of most people is to repent. And so the first word of the Gospel is to,

Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (4:17)

That's basically the message that John the Baptist was preaching. And now Jesus picks it up.

And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, (4:18)

Now they were not strangers to Jesus. As we mentioned, the gospel of John tells us how that they had already come to Jesus. They had already known Jesus, they had already followed Him, they had seen His ministry, they had watched the miracles, they had been around Him. And He was walking by the sea of Galilee, and He saw the two brothers,

Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, and they were casting their nets in the sea: because they were fishermen. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. (4:18-19)

New vocation. You'll become fishers of men.

And immediately, they left their nets, and followed him. (4:20)

The call of the Lord, immediately responded to. Now there were others who were called but they had excuses. Allow me first to bury my father and then, I will follow you. Jesus said, "Let the dead bury the dead." (Matthew 8:21) You say, how cruel! How heartless! The problem was his father wasn't dead yet. And what he's saying, "I'm going to stick around home until my Dad dies, and then I'll consider coming." (Matthew 8:22)

Here's the immediate response to the call of God:

And going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, and they were in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and they followed him. (4:21,22)

He is now beginning to gather His disciples, starting out with four fishermen.

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues,

Now notice, He was first of all preaching. Now He is teaching. There is a place for preaching and there is a place for teaching. The place of preaching is the proclamation of the Gospel to the world, to the unsaved. But for the believer, the necessity is not preaching but the teaching of the Word. And there are too many churches that have only preaching and no teaching. And churches are being preached to death where the

saints of God need teaching. And so in the synagogues He was teaching,
and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing (4:23).

So the ministry of Jesus was preaching, teaching and healing.
all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. (4:23)

These were the three predominant aspects of the ministry of Jesus: the healing, the preaching, the teaching.

And his fame went throughout all Syria: (4:24)

So it spread on up beyond the borders of Israel, on into Syria.

and they brought unto him all of the sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from the Decapolis, [that is, those ten cities in that northern area] and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan. (4:24–25)

The fame of Jesus spread very rapidly and far away. And people began to come to see the miracles and all that He was performing. They began to bring their sick, the people who had various problems, illnesses, that they might be touched by His hand.

The ministry of Jesus was always that of restoration--the restoration of the bodies that had been racked by illness, by disease; the restoration of the lives that have been racked by sin, giving new life, new hope unto those that sat in darkness. The light of the glory of God is now shining unto these people. And what a glorious day when the light of the glory of God shines upon our hearts through Jesus Christ. And He ministers to us and to our needs. Our great high priest, how thankful we are for Him.

Father, we thank You for Jesus Christ, Your Son, who was sent into this world that He might redeem us from our sin. And Lord, as we study the life of Christ in the gospels, help us to realize, Lord, that You set an example for us that we might follow in Your steps. That we might understand the importance of the life of the Spirit, its superiority over the life of the flesh. Free us, Father, from the bondage to our flesh, from that tendency that we have towards the flesh, that penchant for fleshly things. May we realize the emptiness and the frustration of the life of the flesh and let us live after the Spirit, follow after the Spirit, walk after the Spirit, be filled with the Spirit, and be led by the Spirit, even as our Lord was. Lead us, Lord, in your path. In Jesus' Name, Amen.