



Matthew 4:3–4

3 The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.' 4 Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the God."'"

In the beginning Satan came to tempt the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, and in this new beginning Satan comes to tempt Jesus.

Adam and Eve failed, and through them sin and death entered the world. Jesus succeeds, and through him, sin and death are defeated, and new hope is offered to the world. Here's how it plays out in today's passage.

Jesus has been fasting for forty days and forty nights and he's hungry. Now there is an economy of words here isn't there? I think we can build on 'hungry' a little bit. Can you imagine what it would be like to go without food for such a length of time? It's a superhuman feat, but Jesus was fully man as well as fully God, so if he was sustained by God through this period of fasting we can be assured that it was only so much as to keep him from dying. Jesus would have felt all of the hunger and pain and distraction and desperation that would come with going without food for that period of time. In addition to the physical ag-

ony you can imagine some of the thoughts that might have begun to haunt Jesus. Just before he fasted the heavens were torn open and God said 'This is my son, whom I love' but then God sent his Spirit to lead his son out in this desert to starve. Surely this is no way to treat someone you love. When we're under pressure, and we're hurting, even when we know better, thoughts like this can taunt us can't they? Jesus being fully human, would have gone through all this.

And Satan, he's so cunning, he knows exactly when to strike doesn't he? He comes right at the end, when Jesus is at his lowest, and three times he tries to tempt Jesus. He uses the same line three times which we'll look at over the next few days – "If you are the Son of God." Can you see how crafty and how slippery Satan is? So many insinuations in such a few

words delivered with perfectly evil timing. 'If you are the Son of God' – 'If God is actually telling the truth, maybe he isn't? You better show me, you better show yourself just to be sure, and if you are the Son of God, well why is he making you starve out in the desert, sending you out here? He says he loves you but then he does this, you must be starving, but if it's true that you're the Son of God, you've got all the power in the world, you could turn these stones at your feet into delicious, oven bakes, crusty loaves of bread. So show me, prove it to me that what God says is true, prove it to yourself, the son of God deserves better than this.'

See how cunning the devil is. He picks the perfect moment, he subtly questions the truth of God's words, Jesus is starving and so he offers him bread, and he makes it sound reasonable,

he plays on Jesus' identity, tries to stir Jesus's pride, 'you're the son of God, you shouldn't starve, making bread is easy for you, do it and show me, show yourself, show the world who you really are, isn't that why you came, you deserve this.'

And you know if Jesus made himself bread I'm not sure he would have been sinning. Obviously doing something the devil asked him would be sin but, along with all the best lies, what the devil was saying actually, in and of itself, wouldn't be a sin. Jesus making bread for himself to eat is not sinful. But you see temptation isn't always temptation to sin. Sometimes it can be simply temptation to not go along with God's will for your life. You see if Jesus had gone around using his powers to help himself he would have been going against God's plans for his time on earth. It

was crucial to God's plans that Jesus be fully human, living exactly the life that we lead, so that he would be an appropriate substitute for us on the cross. Feeding himself miraculously wouldn't do, he needed to be one of us so that he would be a fair swap for all of us on the cross. So later on Jesus will miraculously feed 5000 people from a few loaves of bread but never once will he use his powers to feed himself.

I love Jesus' reply to Satan. 'It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." 'Enough with your words Satan, I trust God's words. He said I am his son, he said that he loves me, I trust that he'll provide for me. I trust him and his words and that is why I am here.' And of course, as we've come to expect from Matthew, Jesus with these words is also quot-

ing Moses from Deuteronomy 8. The quote comes from a period of time when Israel were wandering in the desert and God was true to his word, providing for them when they were hungry by sending them bread from heaven. Here again, we see Jesus presented as Israel reduced to one, succeeding in the desert where they failed. In fact, thinking back to Eden, Jesus is presented as all of humankind reduced to one, the representative man, succeeding where Adam and the whole of the human race since have failed. Being tempted by Satan but not giving in.

I hope this passage is giving you plenty to think about. For me what's stood out is how temptations often come at their strongest when I'm at my lowest. What to do? Perhaps take better care of myself but also to be extra vigilant when I'm tired or down. I've also been struck

by how temptation isn't always a temptation to sin. Temptation can be anything that might keep you from the direction God wills for your life. For example there's nothing sinful about turning down a new ministry opportunity in church – and sometimes it might be wise. But in the same way, could you be giving in to temptation, and turning down something that is God's will for your life? Or consider your workplace. God tells us that whatever you do, work at it as if you're working for the Lord. Now that means giving your very best game in your workplace. But in some workplaces to do this means very little time for relationships outside of work and even sometimes for your wife and family. Working hard isn't a sin, it can bring great glory to God. But sometimes doing so might be giving in to a temptation that sees your life outside of work go against God's will for your life.

So how do we know God's will for our lives – well Jesus answers it here doesn't he, when he says, 'It is written.' Finding out God's will for your life comes through talking to him. We speak to him in prayer and he speaks to us in his Word – 'It is written.' So now that he's spoken to us in his word this morning, why not speak back through prayer? Why not ask him this morning to make it clear to you what his will is in your life? Perhaps this could become a regular prayer. And also, pray that with God's help you wouldn't give in to the temptations that will no doubt come today.