MATTHEW 4:1-25

Matthew 4:1-25

Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 24th November 2024 @ Deal Christian Fellowship **Reading:** 1 John 2:15-16

Introduction

As you know, we're studying the gospel according to Matthew, and this morning in chapter four we are going to cover some familiar ground, for as recently as last year we looked at the same event that Matthew begins with here, but as recorded in Luke's account. And that event is Jesus being tempted by the devil in the wilderness. And so I recommend revisiting that study on the topic of temptation, as while we'll consider that same topic today, we'll not look at it in quite so much detail, as we'll also look at what else Matthew records here in chapter four.

Chapter overview of Matthew's gospel

- Chapters 1-2: The person of the King
- Chapters 3-4:16: The preparation of the King
- Chapters 4:17-20: The preaching & programme of the King
- Chapters 21-28: The passion & power of the King

Now, as mentioned in recent weeks, Matthew wrote his account primarily with the Jews in mind, showing to them that Jesus was King of the Jews. And having described His lineage, His birth, the worship of Him by the Magi, and His escape from Herod's attempt to kill Him in the opening 2 chapters, Matthew then started recording the preparation for and of Jesus and His earthly ministry in chapter three, where we saw how John the Baptist had prepared the way, preaching repentance from sin, and then baptising Jesus in the river Jordan.

Overview of chapter four

- v1-11 Jesus is tested in the wilderness
- v12-17 Jesus begins his earthly ministry
- v18-22 Jesus calls four disciples
- v23-25 Jesus teaches, preaches and heals

And now, as we begin chapter four, having been filled with the Holy Spirit, we see that Jesus returns from the river Jordan, and heads into the wilderness where He is tested. From verses 12-17 we'll then see Him begin His earthly ministry, continuing to preach repentance, as John had done. In verses 18-22, we'll see Matthew record the calling of the first of Jesus' twelve disciples, before the final 3 verses note how He continued to teach, preach and heal.

So why does Matthew record these things?

Well, first I believe he is showing how Jesus is a **faultless king**, who did not sin. And that was a big deal for the Jew, for from the very first king of Israel, we see flawed characters. First, Saul, who despite being given all he needed to succeed, didn't obey the Lord's instructions, and also consulted a medium for guidance. Second, we see King David, who was the best of Israel's kings, yet he still sinned horribly in committing adultery with Bathsheba, and committing murder of her husband, Uriah. King Solomon who followed, was the wisest man who ever lived, yet in his later years was drawn away from God by his love of women that worshipped other gods. And most of the 39 kings that followed acted very wickedly in the sight of God, leading to Israel being taken into captivity. And so Jesus, a perfect, sinless King, was a breath of fresh air to the Jew. Matthew is revealing His character. He is showing what a truly good King looks like.

Now, second, Matthew is recording **the preaching and programme of the King** – that is, he records those things Jesus said and did, that the Jews (and us) might have no doubt as to the manifesto of the King; what His intent was. And that begins in this chapter.

And in both these things, there is *much* daily application we can make to our lives. Indeed, if we don't go home *really* thinking about how we live, and what God is calling *us* to do, then we're not considering this passage enough. Indeed, we're going to start this chapter looking at the devil tempting Jesus in the wilderness while He was alone, which means He felt it important enough to share this with His disciples later on, and for the Holy Spirit to prompt Matthew and Luke to write this down so you and I can read this today.

Chapter four

So let's dig into this chapter. We read in verse 1:

Matthew 4:1

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

So then, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness. Why? Well, we're given the reason right here – so that He could be tempted by the devil. But this wasn't that He might sin and fall, but rather to demonstrate that He couldn't. You see, when a car is designed, it goes through many safety tests, not so that it will fall apart, but to show that it won't. And here, Jesus' character is being going to be proved. How will it be proved? In the same way that Adam and Eve's character was exposed. For they were tempted by the devil, who called into question what God had said, and they fell as they were drawn of their own lusts. But now, Jesus, the second Adam as the Bible describes Him, will not fall or fail, despite Satan employing his same strategies that he always does.

And those strategies are what we heard earlier in our reading from 1 John, that *all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.* Keep those things in mind as we read and study the first half of this chapter.

But also, note the timing of this — for this test of Jesus' character occurs right after He was baptised and filled with the Holy Spirit. And so often the struggles we face as the enemy tries to entice us into sin, will immediately follow those mountain-top like experiences in our lives. Often indeed Christians find it is a tough time right after their baptism. And I can tell you, that not only are Monday's one of the hardest days as a pastor, following the giving out of God's Word on a Sunday, but in the life of this church I have seen countless times, that the enemy rears his head *immediately* following God working in the life of the church, or a life of an individual. As something moves forward, the enemy seeks to disrupt that work. And so often has that happened, that it doesn't even surprise me any more.

And we read that Satan chose the optimum time to tempt Jesus, for we read:

Matthew 4:2

And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.

So, Jesus had fasted — that is, He had not eaten food for 40 days. It makes fasting for 12 hours ahead of a blood test seem more bearable, right? And we read that He was hungry. Now, that might seem like an understatement, but it is said that this is quite normal, that hunger actually leaves a few days into a fast, and returns after a long fast of about 40 days or when all toxic poisons have been expelled from the body, when it is on the verge of death. And so His body was now reaching its weakest point, while He is in the wilderness alone.

Matthew 4:3

Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

So then, Satan appeals to a sense of entitlement and practical need, saying "If You are the Son of God" — in other words, saying "You deserve this, Jesus. You're entitled to this. You deserve to be happy." And we read: "command that these stones become bread.". He's tempting with the physical, with something that's possible. "Think of what you need", he says. He is appealing to the lust of the flesh. And he'll do the same in tempting you; "Don't you deserve this? You're a good person, you deserve some fun, some pleasure. This is good for you. It's your right. You've earned it".

But it's the oldest trick in the book. He wants you to doubt what God has said, to do that which God has said you shouldn't do. Just like in the Garden of Eden where he said to Eve "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"

So what is it that Jesus does in response? Well, He could have turned the entire desert into a bakery if He wanted to. Or said to Satan, I'll turn *you* into bread! For Satan is a created being. He is not God's equal. And so Jesus could have done *anything* to him, but rather Jesus showed us something critical in how to respond to temptation...

Matthew 4:4

But He answered and said, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.' "

So, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, Jesus says *It is written*. He quotes the Bible. He doesn't go on prayer walks, or talk in tongues, or spend time casting Satan out of the desert, or even singing praise songs. No, Jesus responds with the Word. He knows it, He lives it, He quotes it. And there is no reply that Satan can bring — he doesn't try to continue with this temptation, rather he switches to his next tactic.

Matthew 4:5-6

Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.' "

And so he tells Jesus to throw Himself down from the top of the temple, for not only is God OK with it, but he'll even protect Him in it. In other words, You can live how You want, and God will look after You. What we see here is the pride of life.

And, unfortunately this is the modern message; Smile, Jesus loves you. Just the way you are. There is no need to change, He's cool with your sin. Do whatever feels good to you so long as you don't hurt anyone. But the Bible does not say we can do whatever we want, and God is ok with it. Yes, you may come as you are, but that's not so you can stay as you are. Jesus loves you too much to leave you like that. And we need to be wary of anyone who tells us otherwise, especially those that misquote scripture like Satan does here, omitting key information.

For Psalm 91:11 (which Satan is quoting in part) actually says, "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep you in all your ways" — that is, in all *God's* ways. Jesus knew this and answered accordingly, again quoting the Bible, but doing so accurately. We read:

Matthew 4:7

Jesus said to him, "It is written again, You shall not tempt the LORD your God."

So, once again, Jesus responds by quoting the Bible *faithfully*. Not taking it out of context. And He says that we are not to tempt God. That is, we shouldn't test Him to see how far we can go and get away with it. Rather, we are to obey Him. And so Satan moves to his third tactic. Verse 8 says:

Matthew 4:8-9

Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."

And here is certainly a good example of how a verse can be taken out of context. For you could print verse 9 on a fridge magnet, and think "oh, wow, that's what God is saying to me" when actually it is Satan who said that! We need to handle the Word of God carefully, remembering that Hebrews chapter 4 describes it as sharper than any two-edged sword, and so we need to use it correctly.

But what is Satan doing here with this third test, this third temptation? Well, first, he is appealing to the lust of the eyes, saying *all* this could be yours, Jesus. Just fall down and worship me. And of course, Jesus was smart enough to not do that. But are we? You see, this very test is laid before us on a daily basis – that if only we worship our careers, if only we devote ourselves to them, then all the things on Amazon can be ours. And if we just give more of our time and energy to serving the world of commerce, if we just prioritise it a little more over serving God, then our retirement will be even more comfortable. If we're honest, we fall for that all too easily, right?

Yet, there's more we should note from this verse. For Satan offers Jesus a *shortcut* to what He is legitimately going to get anyway. He offers an easier, quicker route. And our instant culture doesn't help us with this. Instant coffee. Instant cameras. Instant messaging. On demand streaming. Microwave meals. Deliveroo and so on. And it's not that those things are wrong, but what's the lesson we take from it? We can have what we want, when we want it — we can have it now.

And so Satan takes it further in our lives, saying, come on man, you're dating this girl, you love her, you want to marry her anyway, so why not sleep with her now? And likewise Satan says, God wants you to be happy girl, and he knows there aren't any decent Christian guys around, so find any nice guy and settle down with him, because God wants you to be happy, so why should you wait?!

And much like Esau prioritised a bowl of soup over his birthright, Satan will try and get us to prioritise the instant over the eternal. Turning our eyes to what we can have now, and away from what awaits us then.

So how do we respond? Well, we look at what Jesus did. We read in the next verse:

Matthew 4:10

Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.' "

And so, again, Jesus responds with the Bible. And *what* He quotes is important too, for Jesus knows that worshipping and serving God alone is the best thing for us. It's ok to desire good things. But even a good thing can become bad when we worship it. That's the basis of idolatry. For when we elevate sex, or money, or power, possessions, career, or even family higher than God, they have become our idols. Which is exactly what Satan wants. Yet we must not worship them.

Satan, then, has made his three plays — he has tried tempting Jesus with the lust of the flesh, the the pride of life, and the lust of the eyes. And Jesus didn't concede, He didn't sin. But rather He resisted the devil, faithfully using the Bible. So what happened next? Well, we read:

Matthew 4:11

Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

But this wasn't a permanent arrangement, for as Luke notes in his account, Satan departed from Jesus *until an opportune time*. That is, Satan would not only continue to tempt Jesus, but he would look for what he thought were the best opportunities to do so. And so he will do with us. A good friend of mine once shared the advice that we should not make decisions when we are hungry, anxious, lonely, or tired — which you can remember with the acronym H.A.L.T. — and I think that's sound advice, for that's often when Satan will try and trip us up. And more occasions beside.

So what do we do? Well, we must recognise that while God might allow the temptation, and Satan might bring the temptation, we are ourselves responsible for whether we give in to temptation, or not. Indeed, we have full responsibility for our own sin, as we read in James chapter 1:

James 1:13-15

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

That is, we are drawn of our *own* lusts. While I don't believe satan knows our thoughts, he sure knows our weaknesses. Hey, even you and I can spot some of our weaknesses. But Satan is *really* interested in them, as Peter wrote in his first letter, saying:

1 Peter 5:8-9

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

So be wary! And be wise, for Satan is subtle — one time he is a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, and the next time he is an angel of light. He even comes dressed like a Christian. He even has his ministers standing in pulpits of some churches. But however he tries to tempt you, and and whatever he tries to tempt you with, we are told to resist him. James writes:

James 4:7

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

And this gets to the key. You see, Jesus quoted scripture. But He also held fast to it. And we mustn't fall into the trap of thinking that quoting the Bible is good enough. For even Satan can quote it. But rather we must *submit* to God, which means submitting to the Bible. As one person put it, Satan flees when he hears us say, "I will do it," not, "I can quote it." So let us submit to the Bible.

But in order to submit to it, we *do* need to hear what it says. So let us read it daily, let us get to know what it says, and not wait to scrabble around for a relevant verse at the moment of temptation. Indeed, let us note King David's words in Psalm 119, which says "Your Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against You".

As I've said before, the Bible is our daily bread, not cake for special occasions. So let us consider the example of Israel in the wilderness, and how they needed to collect Manna afresh each day to survive. If you're going from Sunday to Sunday without reading your Bible, it's no wonder if you struggle to obey God during the week. You wouldn't skip meals and expect to be at full strength. So don't skip the reading of your Bible and expect to be spiritually strong. You cannot walk in the Spirit and neglect the Word of God — the two go hand in hand.

But if you are walking in the Spirit, if you are in regular fellowship with God, then go to Him for help when you are tempted, such as we are told to in the book of Hebrews:

Hebrews 4:15-16

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

We are not in this on our own! We have a wonderful Saviour who has not only paid for our sin, but showed us how to keep ourselves from sin, and will even *help* keep us from sin, if only we submit to Him, to His Word, and to go to Him in our time of need.

Now then, continuing in Matthew's account, we move from Jesus being revealed as a faultless King, to the recording of the preaching and programme of the King. We now see Jesus ministry begin.

And we read in verse 12 onwards:

Matthew 4:12-16

Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee. And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned."

So Matthew underlines that Jesus was the One whom had been promised back in Isaiah chapter 9, and records that Jesus travelled to Galilee, a province in northern Israel that didn't have the best reputation. A reminder to never consider any group or town beneath us, but rather to look at everyone as God does — that amongst immoral, and even wicked people, there are those that God will save. Just as God told Paul that He had many people in the city of Corinth, which was renowned for its sinfulness.

And with that context we read that:

Matthew 4:17

From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

So Jesus preached the same message that John the Baptist did. But of course, this is now the King speaking about His kingdom. And He preached that there should be repentance, a changing of direction, not only of actions, but of the heart and mind. This was not a message of *stay as you are*.

Matthew 4:18-20

And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." They immediately left their nets and followed Him.

So then, we are introduced to the first of Jesus' twelve disciples. Two brothers, called Simon and Andrew — though we're told here that Simon was known as Peter, a name that we find from John's gospel was actually given to him *by* Jesus. And Andrew had been one of John the Baptist's disciples, who, having heard John declare "Behold the Lamb of God!", then followed Jesus around, even going to his brother saying "We have found the Messiah"!

But what we have in this moment recorded in Matthew's account is Jesus specifically, and personally calling them. And He did so while they were going about their day to day lives as fishermen. Their response? They *immediately* left behind what they were doing, and followed Him.

And that should cause us to sit back and think. For are we prepared to leave behind what we are doing, for the sake of following Jesus? I mean, we struggle to lay down our opinions, let alone lay down our careers, our hobbies, our sports, our TV shows, or our family time. But what if Jesus called you to do so? Would you follow Him immediately? Or would you procrastinate? Would you delay? The answer probably comes down to whether you worship those things or not. I'm not saying it's wrong to have those things, but I am saying it's wrong for those things to have you.

The reality is, that each one of us is called in some way – if we are saved at all, then we have already responded to God's call in one sense. But now that we're saved, there is the calling each one of us has from the Lord to follow Him, to serve Him. What does that look like in your life? Probably different to the person sat next to you. But make no mistake, as a Christian you should seek at all times what God would have you do as you take your place in the body of Christ, doing your share (as Paul wrote to the Ephesians). Noting, that that may even change throughout the years.

To these disciples, Jesus declared that He would make them fishers of men. That is, He would use them to throw out the net of the gospel and draw people to Him. They were to lead people to Christ. They were to bring people closer to Jesus. And Jesus' method for equipping them to do this? Well, it wasn't three years at Bible college – it was three years spent with Him. And let me be clear, there is absolutely a place for Bible colleges, but don't think for a moment that is what qualifies you for ministry. What qualifies you for ministry is spending time with Jesus.

Indeed, we can take great comfort in that Jesus didn't call the elite, the highly educated, the academics, the privileged to be His first disciples. But rather, He called these untrained, and uneducated fishermen to follow Him. And that's not a slight on them, but a statement of fact, for we read in Acts 4:13, speaking of the Jewish rulers, elders, and scribes:

Acts 4:13

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marvelled. And they realised that they had been with Jesus.

So may it be so abundantly obvious that we have been with Jesus too. Not obvious that we are *churchgoers*, but obvious that we have spent much time with Jesus in His Word, and in prayer to Him. May it be obvious that we are walking in the Spirit, and not the flesh.

Now, we read next:

Matthew 4:21-22

Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

And so much like Andrew and Peter, James and John left behind their day to day lives, even their father, to follow Jesus. And they did so immediately. And there are a few things to note from this.

First, and the smallest of the points to note, but an important one nonetheless, is that it's OK when family serve God together. You all know that I've grown up in a family that has been very involved in the life of this church, with my dad as the pastor. And that's been a blessing, but it's also been *really* hard. For I've lost track of time that I've heard comments of "the Forders", and the implication that we act as one collective instead of each responding to Christ, and *His* leading. What we *should* expect to see *is* whole families coming to know Christ, and *whole* families serving Him. Such as the household of Stephanas who we read in 1 Corinthians *devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints*. We should pray that *each one of us* would see that in our families, that we might indeed see siblings serving alongside each other, now and in the future, just as with Andrew and Peter, and James and John.

Now, second, and very importantly, look again at what we read of James and John. For we read that not only did they leave their boat, but they left their father. And there's a cost to that. That loss of time with a loved one is hard. But it is part of following Christ. And we need to get this right. For family is not the most important thing. Rather, our relationship to Christ is. Then, *out* of our relationship with Christ comes our responsibility to love our husbands, wives and children, and to honour our parents, to take care of widows and more, as God's Word tells us to. But what easily happens, is that in wanting to love our families as we should, we put them above our love for God. And that ought not be the case, for in doing so we actually do our loved ones a disservice.

And this is especially pertinent for parents. For what we are prepared to give up for God, will send a powerful message to our children as to what their priority should be. And likewise, what we are prepared to prioritise over reading our Bible, over praying as a family, and over attending church — even in the name of family time — will send a message to our children that those things carry more importance. We need to be very careful of the message we send.

Now, you might be thinking I'm going a bit over the top here, but let's look at what Jesus said. We read in Matthew chapter 8:

Matthew 8:18-22

And when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side. Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Then another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

What is Jesus saying? Well, He's saying we need to get our priorities right. And that's very apparent in Luke's recording of the same moment. We read in Luke chapter 9:

Luke 9:57-62

Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

We are to be all in for Christ. For Christ was all in for us when He died on the cross in our place. Speaking of which, Jesus also said in Matthew 10:

Matthew 10:37-39

He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

As someone put it, salvation is free but discipleship is costly. And if we want to be Jesus' disciples, there has to be a leaving behind of much. I'm not saying that you will literally need to leave your families, or quit your jobs. But those are options. And there are many faithful men and women who *have* given up much for the cause of Christ.

AW Tozer offered this warning:

It is doubtful whether we can be Christian in anything unless we are Christian in everything. ...To obey when it costs us nothing & refuse when the results are costly is to convict ourselves of moral trifling & gross insincerity.

AW Tozer

So, let's note a third thing from Jesus calling James and John. And that is they responded immediately. Just as Andrew and Peter had done. So what of us? What is God calling you to do? And what will that require of you? Whatever it is, there is one more question — and that is will you delay, will you procrastinate? Or will you obey God's calling on your life? What does God want you to do for Him *today*?

Now, as this chapter draws to a close we read:

Matthew 4:23-24

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them.

So then, we see that Jesus had great compassion on those who were sick, and He healed them – both for their benefit, for God's glory, and that it might reveal who He was. But note the order here, that it was teaching first, preaching second, healing third. And you can't separate the healing from those first two, creating some sort of miracle ministry that is only interested in seeing people temporarily healed (for remember, they will still die) without caring that believers grow in Christ, and unbelievers come to know Him as their Saviour.

And the result of Jesus' ministry was that, we read:

Matthew 4:25

Great multitudes followed Him—from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

And so not only were there great crowds of people, but they travelled great distances to see Jesus, as these towns cover a 100-mile radius. And that should make us think twice about complaining of the inconvenience of getting out to a church service, or going to a Christian conference!

Application questions

Now, as I wrap up, I'll ask you some questions as usual – and please do make a note of these, or check out the study once it's on our web site, as these questions are also noted there each week. For it really is important that we let God's Word sink into our hearts, and not only our heads.

So, considering this important chapter, ask yourself:

- Are you reading your Bible well and often enough to be prepared for temptation?
- What is God calling you to do?
- Are you prepared to get up and follow Jesus immediately, at any cost?