

Day Trader Christians

1. Warm up: We're in a sermon series on temptation, so tell us about a simple, not-too-heavy temptation you often face on a weekly basis.
2. Last week we began a three-part sermon series called "Life's Three Greatest Temptations . . . according to the Bible." We saw how, right before launching his public ministry, Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness praying, thinking, and making sure he was ready. Realizing this was the last best opportunity to stop Jesus before he got started, Satan pulled out the big guns and challenged Jesus with Life's Three Greatest Temptations. Last week we looked the first temptation; this week we focus on the second. Let's re-read Matthew 4:1-11, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. The second great temptation, as described in verses 5-6, arises out of our tendency to have certain expectations of God. We often think of faith as a two-way contractual relationship – a bargain, if you will – where we love and served God in exchange for which God is obligated to bless, keep, and protect us. And sometimes things seem to work that way. For example, Jeff told the story of a 19th century Christian singer and songwriter, Ira Sanky, who was miraculously spared being shot by a Confederate soldier because he happened to be singing a Christian hymn at just the right moment. Tell us about a time when God blessed you or protected you in a way that left you dazzled and grateful.
 - b. As we've just discussed, there are certainly times when God blesses and protects us, but that's not the foundation for a life of faith. Because the truth is, there are also many times when we, as believers, face the same kinds of tragedies as everybody else. For example, Jeff told us the story of how the daughter of contemporary Christian singer and songwriter Steven Curtis Chapman was killed when her brother accidentally backed over her in the driveway in the family SUV. Tell us about a time when something really terrible happened that challenged your faith.
3. The second great temptation is stated in verses 5-6 of our reading. There Satan tempts Jesus to "put God to the test" before embracing his Messianic call. Jesus knew that following his Messianic call would be very dangerous, pitting him against both the Roman Empire and the reigning religious establishment. So Satan tempts Jesus to make his faith conditional, *i.e.*, to go forward with his call to ministry only if he could be assured God would protect him from all harm. Specifically, Satan urges Jesus to throw himself off the temple spire as a way of testing God's willingness to protect him from ever so much as "dashing his foot against a stone."
 - a. Based on 27 years in ministry, Jeff said he believes this second temptation torpedoes more people's faith than any other. Many people are fair weather believers. To quote a Matt Redman song, they serve God "when the sun's shine down on me, when the world's all as it should be," but lose their faith when "the

road's marked with suffering, when there's pain in the offering." Have you ever known someone like that? What happened to throw them off course?

- b. Why is it so easy to fall into the trap of believing our faith should give us a special exemption from tragedy? Where does that idea come from?
 - c. There's a big difference between ***unconditional faith***, which says, "I will serve you, God, because I love your goodness and grace and believe in your cause" versus ***conditional faith***, which says, "I will serve you, God, so that you will be obligated to bless, keep, and protect me." Why is unconditional faith so important? Why is conditional faith so wrong?
 - d. Ecclesiastes 9:12 says, "Time and chance happens to all." What do you think that means?
 - e. Life is full of ups and downs, even for believers. When in your life did you experience a real low low? Did that challenge your faith? If so, how?
 - f. Jesus said, "In this world you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world." John 16:31. What do you think that means?
 - g. Isaiah 43:1 says, "Thus says the Lord, 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, and you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.'" What does that verse mean? Does it mean that believers will never die in a flood or fire? If not, what does it mean?
4. The pattern of the cross is foundational to our understanding of God, faith, and life. God did not save even his own Son from having to endure the cross. But God did bring him through it and raise him up to even greater life on the other side of it. From this we draw a critical lesson. The promise of God is not that we will be exempt from tragedy. The promise is that there is no tragedy from which God cannot and will not raise us up again.
- a. When in your life has your faith sustained you until God brought you out the other side stronger, better, wiser, and happier?
 - b. Why shouldn't believers get a special exemption from life's tragedies and woes? Why doesn't God give us, his faithful followers, an exemption?
 - c. Jeff told about a long-time member of our church, Joni Craner, who was killed in a car accident on her way to church on Sunday October 6. How would you respond to someone who said, "Why would God allow that to happen?"
 - d. Do you feel you've reached a place in your spiritual journey where your faith has become unconditional? What brought you to that place?

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' ⁴But he answered, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."' "

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you", and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."' ⁷Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."' "

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' ¹⁰Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."' "

¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.