

## Lent 1: Who is In Control?

Nelson Cathedral

22/2/2026

OT Genesis 2:15-17 & 3:1-7

NT Romans 5:12-19

Gospel Matthew 4:1-11

### Introduction

Four priests went on a retreat and agreed to confess their secret temptations to one another.

- The first confessed to plagiarism,
- the second to gambling,
- and the third to occasionally drinking the sacramental wine.
- The fourth priest remained silent until they pressed him. "Brothers," he finally said, "my greatest temptation is **gossip**, and if you'll excuse me, I have some phone calls to make".

As we enter the season of Lent, we hear a lot about the theme of temptation, especially if we give up something we really like over the next 40 days – chocolate for example.

But at the heart of Lent is the issue of who or what is in control of our lives. We began Lent with the ash cross to remind us of our need for God as mortal human beings. But as is so often the case in our secular world, we believe we are in control. All the while, temptations seek to draw us away from God, seeking to replace God in our lives with something else.

So, let's first look at the problem in order to see God's answer as we journey towards the cross of Easter.

### The Problem

There was a husband and wife who were on a strict budget and the wife went to a mall where she saw an amazing dress. When she brought the dress home, her furious husband asked why she didn't just use the

phrase their counsellor taught them: "Get behind me, Satan!"

She replied, "I did! But when he got behind me, he said, **'It looks even better from the back than it does from the front!'**".

In Genesis 2 and 3 we have the origin story of temptation, meaning the enticement to get a person to go contrary to God's will. In these opening chapters, God had given a specific instruction not to eat from the Tree of Good and Evil. These words were twisted into the question: "did God really say not to eat...?" So Adam and Eve were tempted to achieve their heart's desire be like God and they ate. Just as the temptation was acted upon to buy the dress.

This is what we call "Sin" - casting off God's will to have our own way – to be as Adam and Eve were promised, god's of our own life, to be in control.

And just as Adam and Eve represent us all, what is true of them is true for all of us as humans. It is human nature to resist God and go our own way.

### **God's Answer: Jesus in the Desert**

As we now come to the Matthew's Gospel account of the beginning of Jesus' ministry, we see a stark contrast to the failings of Adam. After his baptism, the Spirit of God led Jesus into the dessert for 40 days and nights. Here we see Jesus as the eternal Son of God, and Jesus as fully human - the incarnate Son of God.

So that after fasting for 40 days and nights, humanly speaking Jesus was at his weakest, he was vulnerable. And now the battle begins. The beginning of the end of darkness must come out of the weakness of the incarnation.

Here in the dessert, the devil tempted Jesus to act contrary to God's will, much like the scene in the Garden of Eden, as Jesus faced three situations.

1. First is the personal temptation of turning Stones into Bread. After 40 days of fasting we can only imagine his extreme hunger. And if we think forward to the feeding of the 5000, we also know Jesus could do this but that is not the point.

God the Father had already confirmed the identity of Jesus as the Son of God, and so the question “If you are the Son of God” is really like saying in the garden of Eden “did God really say”, it is a twisting of God’s words – it was the Devil saying “If you are the son of God, go ahead and prove it”.

Jesus was being tempted to go in a direction contrary to the Father’s will, and in replying with words from Deuteronomy, Jesus confirms his trust in the Father’s leading and provision.

- Jesus was victorious in surpassing the experience of Adam and remaining obedient to God’s word.
2. Second comes the Temple scene where Jesus is now being tempted to prove his role as Messiah with a spectacular demonstration of power, while also testing the Father’s love.
- But truth faith is about believing God’s word not testing it, and here Jesus remains obedient to God’s word to live out the role of Messiah following God’s way and no other, which ultimately takes him to the cross.
- Jesus was victorious in surpassing the experience of Moses and Israel. Where Israel failed after 40 years in the dessert, Jesus succeeded in being fully obedient to the Spirit’s leading.

3. Finally, Jesus faced the temptation to have universal authority over the kingdoms of this world – after all isn't that why he came? But this temptation was a short-cut to what it means to be the Messiah, the Son of God, as the devil twisted reality by assuming he was in charge. The kingship of Jesus will be via the cross not worshipping the devil or anything else.
- Jesus was victorious in confirming his identity and mission as the unique Son of God.

When Jesus was at his most vulnerable, the devil tried to foil God's plan by disqualifying Jesus as the sinless saviour and obedient Son. But the devil failed and Jesus won.

### **Application.**

As we hold the accounts of Genesis and Matthew together, I am not trying to say that our Lenten temptations of a sneaky square of chocolate compare.

But this is a time when we can ask, "where do we place our trust, who is in control?" We might even hear those twisted words, "is God really with us always, is God really in control", because we live in a seductive and addictive world.

In Romans chapter 5, Paul uses the contrast between Adam and Jesus to show us how God has dealt with the universal consequences and the spiritual death that result from sin - from our turning from God.

But in doing so we should never assume this is an equal comparison.

1. Paul's focus is not on the sin that came into the world, but on the life that Christ has bought, as he moves from the world as we know it, to the kingdom God is making through Christ.

The power of God's grace operating through the work of Christ means there is a "how much

more” in the quality of what Christ accomplishes in comparison with what Adam has done.

2. In doing so, Paul shows us that death, judgement and condemnation, which are a natural consequence of sin, are countered with God’s unlimited grace. Where condemnation came as result of one sin; being made right with God, what we call justification, followed many sin (vs 16). The grace of God did not just cancel one sin, it cancelled all sins.

As one commentator stated,

- “That one single misdeed should be answered by judgement, this is perfectly understandable:
- that the accumulated sins and guilt of all the ages should be answered by God’s free gift, that is the miracle of miracles, utterly beyond human comprehension”.

Christ by being obedient to his Father and willing to die on the cross, more than cancels the effects of Adam’s sin. He enables those who have received as Paul says, the “abundance of grace” and “the gift of righteousness” (vs 17), not just to experience life but to reign in life. Not to be controlled by this world, but to have freedom and fullness of life in God, now and for eternity.

### **Conclusion.**

Lent is a reminder of the significance of what Jesus has done for us as we follow his journey to the cross and resurrection. It is a time to remind us that the gift of God we have in Jesus is so much more than all we face in life.

As Bishop Tom Wrights says, remember your calling, to bring God’s light into the world... And say a firm “no” to the voices that lure you back into darkness”.

Through all Jesus faced, even at his most vulnerable time, He kept his eyes on God the Father and trusted God's purposes. We can keep our eyes on Jesus, especially as we remember what he has done for us all in going to the cross.

And even though there are many "god's" that vie for our allegiance, only Jesus is the one we must listen to and follow. During this season of Lent, may we live into the fullness of what Jesus has done for us as we realise the significance of God's grace in our lives.

**Amen.**