# Bible Study Matthew 4:1-11

After the heaven’s opening and God declaring Jesus to be his Son, you might expect Jesus’ ministry to begin with bold, public proclamation of the gospel. But the very next thing he does is hidden from all other human eyes. We only know about it because Jesus must have told his disciples about it later. But what Matthew records in 4:1-11 reveals the very heart of Jesus’ mission and points to its outcome…

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1. Why do you think God, by his Spirit, led Jesus to confront the devil at the very outset of his public ministry? ie Why not leave this for a bit later on?

*If Jesus could not confront and defeat the devil, his time on earth would be useless. As Genesis 3 depicts the man and the woman failing against the devil’s temptation at the outset of their role as God’s gardeners, we see Jesus having a similar confrontation. This is what Jesus came to do.* ***Read 1 John 3:8****.*

1. We will soon see that Jesus does indeed have the authority to miraculously produce food (14:15-21). Why is it a “temptation” (something enticing him to reject God as Ruler) to turn a stone to bread, especially when he’s so hungry?

*It’s a temptation because it’s not what God wants. We’ve been specifically and deliberately told that Jesus is in the wilderness because God led him there. So, if God hasn’t yet provided food, that’s his purpose. The devil is tempting Jesus to be autonomous from God’s will. Jesus has not come to serve himself but serve according to the Father’s purposes.*

1. Read Ps 91:11-12. What does the devil leave out? What does this reveal about him?

*God will send his angels “to guard you in all your ways”. The devil selectively quotes the Psalm, as though it’s a promise for every literal physical trouble. But God’s concern is great, to guard the “ways” of the one who loves him. The devil knows Scripture, but will always distort it (eg through false teachers, bad theology, when we rely on vague recollects rather than reading and re-reading the Bible).*

1. Twice the devil starts his temptation with “If you are the Son of God”. The same phrase found later in the Gospel. Read 27:40. What do all three demands to Jesus have in common?

*They are a challenge for him to define being the Son of God in terms of doing things for himself, and using his authority for himself. We saw in 3:17 that the Son of God (as referred to in Ps 2 – conquering King) is also the suffering servant of Isaiah. Jesus came to use his authority in humble service of others, not vain self-service. So see Jesus’ final rebuttal to the devil in v.10.*

1. The devil is called “the prince of this world” (John 12:31), so it seems he could make good on the offer to Jesus in v.8. What is the potential appeal in this for Jesus (it must be appealing in some way to be ‘tempting’)? Why is it so wrong? See also Matt 16:15-16, 21-23, Matt 28:18 and Rev 21:23-24, 26.

*This is about ruling without serving, conquering without suffering. The horror of the cross is before Jesus. Like turning a stone to bread was a shortcut to end his hunger, this was a shortcut to have rule over the nations (Ps 2:8). But it would be under the devil’s authority, which, as well as being the greatest blasphemy, would always be selfish and destructive and dishonouring to God. But see Matt 28:18 – after his suffering God gives Jesus all authority in heaven as well as earth, and in Rev John describes how the nations themselves will bring their “splendour” to God and the Lamb (Jesus).*

Jesus is also in the wilderness because he is fulfilling the role of God’s Son. In 2:15 Matthew quoted Hos 11:1, a reference to Israel coming out of Egypt. There God calls Israel his son. But in the wilderness, the people continually rebelled against God. He made situations that tested their trust in him, and they constantly failed. Now Jesus is the Son, and he too will be tested, as Israel was. Each time Jesus responds to the devil, he quotes from Deut 6-8 that refer to Israel’s 40 years in the wilderness. **Read Dt 8:2-3, 6:16, 6:13**.

1. Read 1 Cor 10:13. If this is true, why do we still sin? How does Matt 4:1-11 help us?

*1 Cor 10:13 is great comfort and assurance, but the fact that we still fail, even as Christians, shows how much we need a Saviour, and how wonderful it is that Jesus did resist every temptation, and in his death ‘destroy the works of the devil’.*

1. Imagine a friend comes to you and confesses a sin. They feel terrible because they have sinned in the same way many times before, though they repented each time. So now, it’s not just the sin itself they feel terrible about, it’s that they have returned to it so many times. How might this passage help you in your response to them?

*It is not a bad thing that they feel the way they do. But grief over sin will only lead to despair if Jesus’ obedience and death is not enough to cover all sin. It is right that we confess and repent of sin, but it is only ever by Jesus perfect obedience and sacrificial death for us that we can be put right with God. Our struggle with sin reminds us how much we need Jesus, and Jesus is enough!*

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