

(mis)Understanding Jesus [Part 4]

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[0 : 0 0] In our morning services at the moment we are doing a study that's got two titles.

The main title is understanding Jesus and we're looking at some of the key moments in Jesus's life as recorded in the Gospels in order to understand more about who Jesus is and why he's come but our other title is misunderstanding Jesus and we are hoping that we'll also be able to identify ways in which Jesus has been misunderstood both in the days of the New Testament and by people today. Today we are coming, are turning to Matthew chapter 4 where we will think about the temptation of Jesus. Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. This is a wonderful passage for many reasons. One of the reasons why it's wonderful is because it's an immensely practical and relevant section of the Gospel and the reason it's so relevant is because it's dealing with an issue that we all face every single day. It's dealing with temptation. So whether it's to be lazy, to be angry, to be selfish, to be greedy, whether it's in regard to lust, gossip, dishonesty, self-clarification, whatever else it may be, temptation is something that every single one of us battles with. And one of the things that we must never forget in terms of temptation is that temptation is tempting. In other words, temptation is by definition something that is appealing, that's attractive and that we're drawn to and that's what makes it hard. So dealing with temptation is not dealing with something that you don't really struggle with. Dealing with temptation is when you're battling against something that is drawing you like a magnet and that you're attracted to in so many ways.

And facing that reality, this passage gives us some really helpful practical lessons in terms of dealing with temptation and understanding it. And I just want to notice two or three things very quickly. If you see in the passage, you'll notice that the devil tempts us where we're weak. So there's a great example of this here. In verse two, Jesus is hungry, he's not eaten for 40 days. And what's the first temptation that the devil comes with?

He says, oh, turn these stones into bread. And so at that point of weakness, the devil tries to exploit Jesus and lead him astray. So the devil tempts us where we're weak, but the opposite is also true. The devil tempts us where we're strong. Because in the second temptation, well, in all of the temptations actually, we see the devil is trying to say, you know, if you are the son of God, do this, that or the next thing. And of course, Jesus is the son of God. That's Jesus's greatest strength. He is God the son. And yet that's the point at which the devil tries to exploit him as well. So whether the devil tries to exploit us at our point of weakness or at our point of strength, he's trying to catch us out. And that's why so often successful people fail. And very often they fail at the point where they're at their strongest.

So the devil tempts us where we're weak, he tempts us where we're strong. He also tempts us with half truths, sometimes even with three quarter truths. You see that in the third temptation, where the devil tries to show Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and say, these are the usual. And of course, Jesus has come as God's King. And so when the devil says, you know, you should be king of all of this, that is a half truth. But it's a truth that's been distorted.

[4 : 14] And the devil is trying to manipulate the truth in order to make Jesus fall into temptation. And of course, that's why the wrong thing can so easily feel right. Isn't that so too when it comes to temptation, something that is actually wrong can feel so right. And that's because we're being attracted by a half truth. And this is reminding us that the devil is not going to try and ruin your relationship with God with harsh, revolting propaganda. The devil is going to try and ruin your relationship with God with things that look and feel incredibly appealing.

And it's crucial to recognize the danger in that. And face with that, you ask yourself, you know, how do we defend ourselves? What's the practical response to this? And Jesus gives us a brilliant example, because Jesus says the same thing every time he's tempted. He says, it is written.

And it's a brilliant reminder that the Bible is a great weapon to protect ourselves in the face of temptation. And Paul speaks about the armor of God. He speaks about the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, a great defense in the face of temptation. And he speaks about that in Ephesians 6. He says that in all circumstances, we are to take up the shield of faith, which we can extinguish the flaming darts of the evil one, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God in our daily battle against temptation. The Bible is our defense system. And so we're seeing in this, there's wonderful practical lessons in this chapter.

We learn about what temptation looks like. We learn about the avenues that the devil tried to pursue in terms of temptation. And we learn about how we can defend ourselves against that kind of temptation. And all these kind of practical lessons are so crucial and so helpful. But if we come to Jesus's temptation and say, it's a brilliant passage full of practical lessons. And if that's all we say, then we are misunderstanding Jesus. And we're misunderstanding what the temptation is all about. So yes, it is true that there are many wonderful practical lessons in this. And I want you to think about them all the time. But if you think that the whole temptation is just about giving us coping mechanisms for temptations, if you think that it's just about getting great practical lessons, if Jesus is just this good example that we are meant to follow, even though that's true, if that's all that you think, then you're definitely misunderstanding

Jesus. Because the truth is, Jesus's temptations are pointing us to something much, much bigger. And if we're going to understand Jesus, we need to recognize what this is. And that's what I want us to think about today. And we're basically going to ask ourselves the question, in terms of the temptation, why is this happening? What's it all about? The truth is, the temptation of Jesus is a massive moment in the whole message of the Bible. And it's not just pointing to Jesus's own personal experience. It's a key moment in all the great steps in God's plan of redemption that he set out across the pages of scripture and across the ages of history. And that's indicated to us by the fact that in verse one, we're told that it was the Spirit, God himself, who led Jesus to this point. In other words, God clearly wants this to take place. It is part of his plan. And the second thing that we see if we look more widely is that the New Testament deliberately makes a very strong and clear connection between Jesus and Adam. And that's why we read from Genesis and from Matthew, because these two passages belong together. We know that this is true from 1 Corinthians.

[8 : 50] It says, the first man, Adam, became a living being. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. It's not the spiritual that's first, but the natural, then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, the man of dust. The second man is from heaven. This verse is one of several in the New Testament that is making a comparison between Adam as the first Adam and Jesus as the second Adam.

And the reason the Bible makes this emphasis between two Adams, if you like, is because that's really what the whole story of the Bible is about. It's about two humanities, one that's under Adam and one that is under Jesus. And ultimately, these are the two categories that divide all of humanity. So Adam as the first human was the head of humanity. In that sense, he was in a way like the Son of God, but he did not remain in the status that was first given to him. As we read, he sinned and fell. The first Adam failed. Because of that, another man, the true eternal Son of God, comes as the second Adam. And he has come to put right everything that the first Adam got wrong. And this great first Adam, second Adam comparison is a key theme in the Bible. And one of the things that's fascinating is that there's a lot of similarities between the two. And one of the clearest similarities between the first Adam and the second Adam is that they were both tempted by the devil. The first Adam was tempted by the settlement and failed. The second Adam would face a similar challenge. This is the reason why Jesus was tempted.

And so I want us just to dig into this a little bit more detail, and we're going to ask two simple questions. Number one, what are the similarities between the temptations of Adam and Jesus? And then what are the differences? So similarities, let's go through these quite quickly.

If we compare what happened with the first Adam and Eden and what happened at Jesus' temptations, you see remarkable correlations. Number one, both of them were confronted by the devil.

It was a time of testing. We sometimes use the word probation. Both Adam and Jesus were appointed for specific roles by God, and then they're both attacked by the devil in order to prevent them from fulfilling that role. They're both confronted by the devil. Number two, both temptations centered around the devil speaking. We see that it's all based around conversation.

[11 : 45] Genesis 3, Matthew 4, there's a dialogue taking place. Number three, both temptations involve food. Adam and Eve were tempted by the fruit of the tree as a knowledge of good and evil.

Jesus was tempted to turn a stone into bread. Number four, both temptations involve a promise of status. We see that in Genesis 3, 5, the serpent said, you know, if you eat of that fruit, then your eyes will be opened. You'll be like God, knowing good and evil. Jesus was given a similar kind of empty but good sounding promise when he said, you know, this is all the kingdoms in the world. I'll give them to you. There was a promise of status. Number five, the devil tries to question the truth of what God has said. So to Adam and Eve, he said, you know, you're not surely dead.

God says you're going to die. That's not going to happen. And when the devil speaks to Jesus, he uses a wonderful little word. I shouldn't really say wonderful. You know what I mean? He said, if you are the Son of God, he started just question the truth of what God has said.

If you, if you remember from Matthew 3, Jesus has just, God has just announced to Jesus, this is my beloved Son. And yet the devil is instantly trying to sow seeds of doubt. Number six, both temptations were based on half truths and were an attempt to wreck the plans that God has. So God had made Adam and Eve in his image. They were like him already, but the devil deceives them by saying, you know, it's only by actually eating of this fruit that you'll actually be like God. Jesus has come as God's King. He's come as a suffering servant in order to bring salvation, in order to establish the kingdom of God. But the devil tries to convince Jesus that he can have the kingdom without the suffering, that he can have the crown without the cross, that actually, you know, you can just shortcut this plan of work. You don't need to do all the other stuff. I'll give you these kingdoms right now. It's an attempt to undermine God's plans with half truths.

Number seven, in both temptations, the devil tries to get Adam and Jesus to question God's care and his purposes. And the devil is coming to try and cast doubt over what God has says, trying to get, you know, trying to doubt that God is true, to doubt that he's reliable, to doubt that we can trust him. And isn't that so often what he does to us? So God will make us ask questions about whether he, the devil will want us to ask questions about whether God exists. Have you ever had that doubt in your mind? You think, I'm praying, does God even hear me? Is God even there? We have these doubts, niggling us. Does God even exist? We've doubts about God's promises, you know, we think, will he keep his promises? You know, will he actually do what he says he'll do? We have doubts about whether God loves us, you know, we think, does he actually care about me? Does he even, does he even have any interest in me at all? We question God's wisdom, the things that God says, surely we know better ourselves. The devil always tries to niggle away at us with doubts about God's existence, his wisdom, his love. Why do you think the devil wants you to doubt these things? Because they're true. The devil doesn't need to sow seeds of doubt in your mind about something that's already false. He only wants to undermine your belief in what is actually true. That's what he did to Adam and Eve. That's what he tried to do with Jesus. He wanted to just question who God is and his purposes. So we've got all these similarities. They were both confronted by the devil, both involved speaking, both involved food, both involved a promise of status, both involved questioning the truth of what God has said. Both use half truths to manipulate God's plans. Both are trying to call into question God's care and goodness and purposes. And number eight, in both temptations, the devil has one great aim, disobedience. That's what he wants. That's what sin is. It's all about trying to get Adam to disobey God. And with his first attempt, he succeeded.

[16 : 28] Now in Matthew 4, the devil wants Jesus to do exactly the same. The similarities are remarkable. Jesus is experiencing the same test which the first Adam failed at, so tragically.

But what are the differences? Well, there are some very important differences between the temptations of the first Adam and the second. What are these? Well, there's four I want to highlight. Number one, there's a difference in location.

Adam was tested in paradise in all the beauty of God's creation. Jesus, by contrast, is in the wilderness surrounded by just emptiness. The contrast couldn't be greater. Adam is in beautiful conditions. He's in all the comfort of the Garden of Eden. Jesus is in a harsh, hostile environment. In fact, Jesus is right in the midst of all the chaos and curse that's result from Adam's failure. There's a massive difference in location. There's also a difference in resources.

So in Eden, Eden, Adam lacked nothing. God has said, you can eat of every three of the Garden, apart from the one in the middle. Adam could have whatever he wanted. Jesus, on the other hand, was starving. He'd not eaten for 40 days. In Eden, Adam had company. God had given a companion made for him. He enjoyed petrific fellowship with his wife, with nature, and with God. Jesus was alone.

Adam was tested with a full stomach, a contented heart, a petrific home. He had no reason to lack satisfaction. Jesus was tested in weakness, hostility, and vulnerability.

[18 : 37] Thirdly, there's a difference in the level of temptation. So with Adam, how many times did the devil have to try and tempt him? Only once, and it was enough. The serpent did not meet much resistance when he came to Adam and Eve, but with Jesus, the devil has to bring things to a whole new level. He didn't try once, he tried three times. The key point that we have to recognise here is that Jesus' temptations were actually far more severe than Adam's. There's a very important point here because it's very easy to think that because Jesus was the Son of God, because he was sinless, it's easy to think, well, temptation wasn't really real for him. He doesn't really know what it's like to be tempted, but the truth is the other way around. We can easily think to ourselves, you know, oh, it's far harder for us. We're sinners. We know what it's actually like to face temptation because we can actually do it. It's harder for us. Not true. The reality is, is that because we are sinners, we give up in the face of temptation long before we've reached the level of severity that

Jesus had to face. With Jesus, the devil threw everything at him. He was confronted by Satan and by all the force of evil. Donald Macleod is a wonderful quotation. He says, against us a little temptation suffices. Against Jesus, Satan found himself forced to push himself to his limits. And that tells us that not only does Jesus know what it's like to be tempted, he actually knows it far more than we ever will. And that of course is why he's always the perfect person to help us when we are tempted. But the big point I want us to notice here is that there's a huge difference in the severity of the temptation. Jesus is pushed in a way that you and I never will experience. So there's a difference in location, a difference in resources, a difference in the level of temptation. But most importantly of all, there is a difference in response.

The first Adam saw the fruit, listened to Satan, disobeyed God and fell. The second Adam was tested with all that hell could muster against him, but he resisted every temptation.

And he was obedient to God. And that's the key point, the fact that Jesus, the second Adam, has come to put right everything that went wrong through the first Adam. This is such a clear statement that Jesus has come as an Adam in reverse. So where Adam failed, Jesus succeeds. Where Adam gave in, Jesus resists. Where Adam disobeyed, Jesus obeyed. And that's beautifully portrayed to us in Philippians chapter two, verses five to eight, where Paul writes, have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was the form of God, did not turn to equality with God, a thing to be grasped, but he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, been born in the likeness of men and being found in human form. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Now you might be thinking to yourself, that's not necessarily the most relevant passage Thomas. I don't see how this connects to the temptation. Well, this is, there's a lot of temptation language in this passage, which is very cool to see because if you think about it, what did the devil say to Adam? He said, go and take from that fruit and you will be like God. Go and grasp that fruit and you will be like God. Go and grasp equality with God, is what the devil told Adam to do in the garden. And here we see that Jesus knows fine that equality with God is not a thing to be grasped. And I think Paul is very deliberately pointing us back to the temptation in this language by saying that, that Jesus is different. He didn't want to grasp onto that statement for himself. Instead, he wanted to be obedient all the way to the point of death.

And this is crucial because here we see where this contrast between Jesus and Adam is ultimately leading because the contrast between Adam and Jesus ultimately is not just about the temptations. The ultimate destiny of the first Adam and the second Adam eventually culminates in the difference between two trees. A contrast between two trees. So the first Adam stood before the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He saw that the fruit was good to eat, desirable and very tempting. He knew that God did not want him to take it. But he chose to put himself first. He went and he went to the tree. He tasted its fruit and death came to us all.

[24 : 02] Well, the second Adam also stood before the tree. But it wasn't the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was the tree to which he was about to be nailed. It was the cross.

And it could not have been more different to the tree that the first Adam had gone to. This tree has the bitterest fruit imaginable. This tree's hideous to your eyes.

This tree meant agony and death. This tree was accursed. And everything in the human mind and heart would want to run away from that tree. And in the garden I get so many, Jesus himself begged that this cup would pass. But the great difference was that for the second Adam, for Jesus, taking the fruit of this tree was what God the Father wanted. So Adam faced the appealing, tempting fruit of history and he took it in disobedience to God. Jesus faced the hideous, horrible, terrifying fruit of the cross. But he obeyed and he tasted death itself.

And in doing so, Jesus reversed the disobedience of the first Adam. He released the world from the curse of sin, destroyed the works of the devil and left him powerless and abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. The temptation of Jesus is telling us that that he is on a great mission to restore the damage that was done by the first Adam and to destroy the devil and his kingdom. Paul speaks about that in Romans 5. I won't read it out because time is marching on. But you can go to Romans 5 and look at it in more detail. You can see in verse 19 just at the end, by one man's disobedience, many were made sinners, by the one man's obedience, the many were made righteous. That is why Jesus had to face this temptation.

He had to undo what had gone wrong in the first Adam. And I hope that in all of that you can see that the work that Jesus has come to do is an amazing work of restoration. I hope that you can see that the whole Bible fits together beautifully according to this amazing plan that's been implemented across the ages of history. And I hope that you can see that that plan of salvation has been implemented to perfection, that we don't need anything more than Jesus, that he's done everything required for salvation to be accomplished. But more than anything else, what I want you to see is that all of this was done for you. It's all done to save people like you and me.

[27 : 24] That's why Jesus came. Hebrews 2 speaks of that. That's why he came, since we share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise, particular same things that through death, he might destroy the one who is the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. He became one of us. He faced all that he had to face in order that we might be saved. As Peter says in 1 Peter 2,24, he himself bore our sins on his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness by his wounds, you have been healed. That, ultimately, is why Jesus was tempted. That is how much he loves you. And if you ever think that Jesus doesn't care about you, if you ever think that Jesus cannot save you, if you ever think that God is not bothered about you, then you are massively misunderstanding him.

And I guess all of that just leaves us with the last question. Humanity ultimately falls into these two categories. The one connected to the first atom we fell, or the one connected to the second atom, who came to restore everything.

Which atom are you with? Amen. Let's pray. Father, we marvel at your work of salvation. We marvel at how it all fits together so perfectly. And we marvel at your Son, our Lord Jesus, the second atom, the Savior of the world, the Savior of sinners. We thank you so, so much for everything that you've done for us in him.

Help us to see and understand more and more of what you've done for us, and may that shape the way that we live every day of our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.