

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 4:1 - 4:17



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this study of Matthew 4:1 - 4:17, Steve Gregg discusses Jesus' encounter with the devil in the wilderness, emphasizing how Jesus overcame temptations related to the three kinds of lusts: flesh, eyes, and pride of life. Gregg explains that Jesus' use of such terms as "good eye" and "pride of life" in his teachings reveals the importance of avoiding self-centeredness and seeking God's will instead. Gregg also notes how Jesus began his ministry by preaching the kingdom of God's arrival, starting in the region of Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee according to Old Testament prophecy.

### Transcript

Let's turn now to Matthew chapter 4, where we'll continue studying through the Gospel of Matthew as we are looking at the life of Jesus. In the first 11 chapters of, excuse me, the first 11 verses of chapter 4, we had the story of the temptation of Jesus. And Jesus was tempted on three points.

He was tempted first of all to turn rocks into bread, and this at a time when he was just finishing up a fast of 40 days and was extremely hungry. He was tempted to jump off of a pinnacle of the temple in order that the angels of God might safely bring him down, probably in the sight of a great multitude. And he was also tempted to bow down and worship Satan so that Satan might give him all the kingdoms of the world in their glory.

I think it is deliberately so that we have one example of temptation from each of three categories here. In 1 John chapter 2, verses 15 through 17, John says, Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. For if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, are not of the Father, but are of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lusts thereof, but he that does the will of God abides forever. Notice John said that all that is in the world is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

There's really very few temptations that I can personally imagine that don't fall into one of those categories. What is the lust of the flesh? The flesh refers to your physical nature,

the natural man, largely focused in your body, your flesh, and your appetites of your flesh, your desire for food, your desire for sex, your desire for drink, your desire for sleep, the kinds of things that a body craves, those things are the desires or the lusts of the flesh. And much of what the temptations that we face are appeal to things of our bodily appetites.

These bodily appetites are not in themselves evil. Jesus himself had these appetites. But to let them rule you, to obey them, to the point of disobeying God, becomes a sin.

And so this is one of the areas of common temptation is the lust of the flesh. Jesus was tempted in this area when he was tempted to turn rocks into bread on the occasion that he was very hungry. He had an appetite for food.

And it was a lust of the flesh that he was tempted to indulge, but he did not. What is the lust of the eyes? Many people, when they think of the lust of the eyes, they think of looking at a woman to lust after her because they're thinking of Jesus' statement that if a man looks at a woman to lust after her, he's committed adultery already with her in his heart. And since it speaks of looking, which has to do with the eyes, and it talks about lusting, it seems to some that the lust of the eyes has to do with looking at the opposite sex lustfully.

However, I don't believe that that is what the expression means. To look lustfully at the opposite sex is simply a function of the lust of the flesh. It's simply a part of that ordinary lust.

Just like when you smell food and you're hungry, it appeals to your appetite, when you look at something that's seductive or alluring and you experience lust, that's part of the same kind of an appetite. It's the lust of the flesh. The lust of the eyes is something entirely different.

It has to do with the desire for acquisition of things, the desire to possess things. We know this because of the common usage of the term, not the term the lust of the eyes, but the way the eyes are spoken of in Old Testament Scripture frequently. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon says that when he was very rich and unprincipled and undisciplined in his life, he gave, he says, whatever my eyes desired, I gave them.

And he's referring to possessions. He's not talking about women in this case. So, if he wanted fancy chariots, if he wanted fancy furniture, if he wanted whatever, whatever his eyes desired, he gave them.

That's the desires of his eyes. In the Hebrew language, the expression, a good eye, meant to be generous. The expression, an evil eye, meant that someone was greedy or covetous.

We see this in the book of Proverbs, where it says that he that has a good eye is blessed

because he gives his goods to the poor. And it also speaks of the man who has an evil eye as a man who's greedy and holds on to his possessions. Jesus also used these terms in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6 when he said, if your eye is good, then your whole body will be filled with light.

If your eye is evil, your whole body will be filled with darkness. He was using that same expression. He was talking about greed and generosity as alternate attitudes.

The lust of the eye is the desire to possess things. It's greed. And Jesus was taken on a high mountain and shown all the kingdoms of the world in their glory and told that he could have them if he would bow down to Satan and worship him.

All the wealth and all the glory of the kingdoms of the world, the things that Solomon would not deny himself, whatever his eyes desired, he gave them. Jesus denied himself, would not take them because of the terms on which they were offered. He would have to then bow down and worship Satan, but he said, it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and him alone shall you serve.

So Jesus was tempted in the lust of the flesh and in the lust of the eyes. And then this temptation of the pride of life that John speaks about. The pride of life simply has to do with being self-centered and egotistical, arrogant, ambitious, and seeking for yourself a position that is perhaps not the position that God wants you to have, but it's just one that you desire because of your pride.

Now for Jesus to have jumped off the pinnacle of the temple and for all the people to have seen him and given him the honor of recognition that he was the king, the son of God on that occasion when Satan tempted him to do so, would have appealed to his pride, would have appealed to his ambition. But Jesus denied that as he denied the other appetites and he instead obeyed his father. The point here is though that John says that all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, these are things that Jesus was tempted in, all three of them.

In fact it says in Hebrews chapter 4 that Jesus was tempted in all points like we are, but without sin. He was tempted in all points like we are? He didn't live in a modern computer age? How could he have all the temptations that we have? Well, he didn't have all the specific instances of temptation we have, but he was tempted in all points like we are. Namely, at the point of the lust of the flesh, at the point of the lust of the eyes and at the point of the pride of life.

Jesus was tempted in all those ways just like we are. You know, it is said of Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3 and verse 6 that when she was being tempted to eat of the tree that which God had told them not to eat from, it says she saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes and that it was desirable to make one wise. There you have it.

Good for food is the lust of the flesh. Pleasing to the eye, that's the lust of the eyes. Desirous to make one wise, that's the pride of life.

And Eve was tempted in these three ways and she fell. We have been tempted in those ways and we have fallen. Jesus was tempted in all the same ways, but without falling.

Now, what I'd like to observe is that Jesus was tempted in these ways more than you or I ever will be in all likelihood. Jesus was not simply tested in those categories, but he was given temptation at the extreme end of those categories. For example, we have been hungry, perhaps even tempted to steal.

We've been so hungry. Maybe you haven't been that hungry at all. Maybe you've just been hungry enough that you've wanted to break a fast before you should.

But Jesus was starving to death when he was tempted to turn rocks into bread, but he did not succumb. We have never been offered all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. We might.

Some people sell their souls for much less than that. But Jesus was offered everything the world has to offer and he turned it down. His temptations were much more extreme than ours.

Furthermore, his temptations were greater because he did not indulge them. You know that temptation goes away as soon as you indulge it, but Jesus did not. And when you do not indulge temptation, you have more of a struggle.

You have more to fight. And so Jesus really faced an intense agony of temptation on this occasion, and I think it's very significant. I would also like to suggest this.

In the story of Jesus being tempted by the devil, it talks about the devil coming to him and taking him to the pinnacle of the temple and taking him to a high mountain and showing him things. What exactly was Jesus' experience at this time? Did he actually see the devil? Did the devil appear to him at this time? Did the devil physically transport Jesus here and there? Well, that's possible. It is possible that this is so, and that's certainly how it reads.

It sounds like it, but the wording would be entirely valid if we would see it a slightly different way. The devil came to him, possibly the way he comes to us, not so much confronting us in a visible apparition, but speaking subtly to the mind, suggestions. You know, I would not find it very tempting if the devil appeared to me and said, I would not find that tempting at all.

Do you know why? Because I would see that he was the devil, and I would know what was at stake, and I'd say, no way. And I really can't say I've ever been tempted to worship the devil, but most temptations that come to me, I mean, the devil has not

appeared to me, that would make it too easy to resist him. It would make it too easy to recognize him and to know what was up.

But the devil usually comes and whispers to my mind and makes suggestions that it doesn't occur to me that it's not me. You know, when you think it's your mind, your guard is down. You don't guard yourself against you, do you? Well, you should, but many times you don't.

But the devil gets much more success by concealing himself than by revealing himself, and by being subtle than by being blatant. And I wouldn't be surprised if that's how he came to Jesus, too. In other words, we would not necessarily see Jesus standing in a face-off with the devil, where they're both looking each other in the eye, necessarily.

It may well be that the devil came to Jesus the way he comes to us, that he whispered in his mind and brought these suggestions to him. But simply, Jesus recognized that it was the devil, and therefore resisted him. Also, when it says the devil took him to this place and showed him that, and so forth, this could have been a physical transportation of Jesus to different places, but it could also be that this happened in a visionary experience, that the devil simply brought to Jesus' mind images of this, could have Jesus picture himself here, and seeing all of this.

And you can have all of this if you just do such and such. We really can't say, but Jesus may have been in the wilderness the whole time, and all of these temptations may have occurred in the theater of his mind, as opposed to actual physical relocation to different places to see these things and hear these things. We can't really say for sure, and some might think it's not even that worthwhile to consider it.

But I think it's worthwhile to consider it, because if Jesus saw the devil face-to-face, his temptation would have been much less testing, I think. Because I think that Jesus, just like you or I, in fact maybe more so, certainly more so, would resist the devil more adamantly and vehemently and resolutely, if he could see the devil and know that there was a devil there. But if the devil just came up, snuck up on him and whispered things into his mind that he didn't immediately know were from the devil, his guard would be down and he'd be much more in danger of lacking the detection and the resolution to resist.

Now, there are some people who say that Jesus could not but resist. They say that because Jesus was God, it's impossible that he could have sinned. This doctrine is called the impeccability of Christ.

It's held by many good Christian people. They say that since Jesus possessed the divine nature, and because God cannot sin, therefore, of course, Jesus could not sin. But this is, I think, not what the Bible indicates.

The Bible seems to indicate that it was an amazing feat, a heroic feat, that Jesus withstood great temptations and yet did not sin. That he faced temptations like ours. See, my temptations, when I'm tempted, I'm tempted in the framework of a situation where I really can sin.

If I really couldn't sin, then there'd be no real temptation to do it, if it's not something possible to do. And I think if Jesus' temptation was like mine, then he must have been in a situation where he could have really made a choice to do the things. But that's not all.

I realize that God cannot sin and that Jesus was God, had the divine nature in him, but Jesus also had human nature. And human nature has many things that God does not have. For example, humans become tired.

God doesn't become tired. In Isaiah chapter 40, it makes it very clear. The Lord God never becomes weary.

He never slumbers or sleeps. But Jesus became weary, and he slumbered and he slept. Why? Because he was in human form.

He was God, but he also had human nature, and therefore he had human weakness. Jesus also got hungry. We have no reason to believe that God ever gets hungry.

Jesus died. We know that God cannot die. But the human being, Jesus, could.

And if Jesus could become weary, which God cannot, and Jesus could die, which God could not, in fact, Jesus could be tempted, and it says in James that God cannot be tempted with evil. Well, then, there's no argument that could be made seriously that Jesus could not sin simply because God could not sin. I think that that would be an inconsistent conclusion to reach.

I do believe that Jesus never did sin, but I think it the more remarkable because I believe that he was quite capable of sinning had he chosen to do so, just like you and I are capable of doing. But many Christians feel differently, and I wouldn't wish to fight with them about that. It's simply the way I understand the passages.

Now, let's move a little further through Matthew chapter 4. At verse 12, we read, 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. Then it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sat in darkness saw a great light, and upon those who sat in the region of the shadow of death, light has dawned. From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Jesus began to preach publicly after John had been put in prison. Jesus apparently spent

almost a year after his baptism in obscurity. We don't know that it was a full year, but there is reason to believe that it was many months, and it may have been as much as a year.

It is believed by most Bible scholars that Jesus' ministry was three and a half years long. And there was approximately a year at the beginning of that ministry after the baptism where Jesus remained very obscure. Part of that time, of course, he was in the wilderness being tempted by the devil.

But there were other times, and those are recorded in the Gospel of John, that occurred before John was put in prison, before Jesus began to preach publicly. That Jesus, he did things, but he didn't really make a big splash. He didn't make a big scene.

He called a few apostles during that time. We don't read of it in Matthew. Matthew skips over it.

But in John's Gospel we read that Jesus met James and John and Peter and Andrew during that time, also Philip and Nathanael. And he also turned the water into wine at the Feast of Cana. He also drove money changers out of the temple in Jerusalem, recorded in John chapter 2. And he also had a conversation with Nicodemus and with the woman at the well.

These are recorded in John chapters 3 and 4. And apart from these few things recorded in John, we know almost nothing about Jesus' life between the time that he came back from the wilderness from being tempted and began preaching. Matthew, Mark and Luke simply skip from the temptation of Jesus to the preaching of Jesus. But John's Gospel tells us a number of things happened in between and those things may have taken several months, maybe as much as a year.

But when John the Baptist was put in prison, Jesus began to pick up and preach the same message that John had been preaching. John had been preaching that the kingdom of God was at hand or the kingdom of heaven was at hand. And now John was put in prison and we find that Jesus from that time began to preach and say, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, in verse 17 here.

So Jesus simply picked up the torch that John had let fall when he fell prisoner. Now it does not tell us here how it is that John was put in prison. And interestingly enough, he was not put into prison by the Jewish authorities who were very threatened by him.

Herod, the king of Galilee, Herod Antipas, put him in prison. And that was because John was frequently rebuking him for living in an adulterous relationship with his brother's wife. And also, as Luke tells us, John rebuked Herod for every other wicked thing Herod did.

And so, eventually, John was put in prison. After a while, he was even beheaded, but that

comes later. At this point, we only read of his imprisonment.

And John was in prison for some time and when he was no longer in circulation to preach this gospel, Jesus began to preach it. Now, Jesus' preaching began in the northern region of Israel, not down in Judea, not in Jerusalem, not near the capital, the religious center, but up in Galilee. Galilee was called Galilee of the Gentiles because even though it was within the territory of Israel, it was actually populated with more Gentiles than Jews.

And, in particular, the region where Jesus began to preach near Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee was in the region that, in Old Testament times, had been given to the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. Of course, the Jewish people were divided into twelve tribes and these tribes had each received certain apportionment of land in the days of Joshua. These apportionments were no longer relevant in the days of Jesus because ten of the tribes had disappeared 700 years before Christ.

They'd been taken into captivity and never returned, so the tribal territories were no longer an issue. But the reason that Matthew mentions that Jesus preached in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, these were tribes that no longer were there, was because he saw in it the fulfillment of a prophecy in Isaiah. This prophecy is found in Isaiah chapter 9, verses 1 and 2, and it says, In the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, that is, the Sea of Galilee, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sat in darkness saw a great light, and upon those who sat in the region of the shadow of death, light has dawned.

Now, obviously, this is not a literal prophecy that Jesus fulfilled. Most of the time, the prophets did not speak in literal terms. Jesus did fulfill some prophecies literally, as when it says he'd be born in Bethlehem.

But in this case, it talks about a day dawning. There's people in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali sitting in darkness, and it's like the sun comes up. The day dawns upon them.

The light has dawned. Now, this daybreak is, of course, symbolic. It represents a spiritual day dawning.

When John the Baptist was born, his father prophesied over him that the day spring, or the daybreak from on high, had visited God's people. And Jesus' coming to earth was like a sunrise, spiritually speaking. By the way, his second coming will be like a sunrise also, according to Peter.

In Peter chapter 1 and verse 19, it says that we are looking forward to the rising of the day star in our hearts, which is the coming of Jesus. And the day star is the morning star. It's a new day when Jesus comes back.

From the time that Jesus left here 2,000 years ago, until he comes back, is likened to a



night time. Paul said in Romans, the night is far spent, and the day is at hand. So, Jesus coming the first time, as well as Jesus coming the second time, is like a daybreak.

And here the people of Israel saw the daybreaking in the teaching of Jesus. We'll have more to say about this next time, but we're out of time today.