

# *Worship the Lord Your God, and Serve Him Only*

## **Matthew 4:1-11**

Wayne Eberly

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The devil tempted Jesus. Jesus said no!

Hungry after forty days and forty nights in the desert, the devil came up to Jesus and tempted him. “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus said no! “It is written, ‘Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

The devil tempted Jesus...again. Jesus said no!

Taking Jesus up to the holy city, to the highest place of the temple, the devil stared out at the steep drop and said, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down.” Jesus said no! “It is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

The devil tempted Jesus...yet again. Jesus said no!

This time taking Jesus to a very high mountain the devil spread his arms in a wide expanse and said, “All this, all the kingdoms of the world, I will give you, if you will bow down and worship me.” Jesus said no! “Away from me, Satan! For it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

The devil tempted Jesus. Three times the devil tempted Jesus. Jesus said no! Three times Jesus said no! Then the devil left him alone.

Because the devil leaves Jesus alone as this encounter comes to an end, it would be tempting to say, “It is finished.” Jesus was tempted. Jesus answered the temptations with the word no. Now the devil has sulked off with his tail between his legs, leaving Jesus alone. Unfortunately, the uncomfortable reality is that the devil does not take no for an answer.

Do you really think after the third no from Jesus the devil left him alone? Well, the answer to that is no. No, the devil does not leave Jesus alone. Throughout the gospels the devil keeps coming back at Jesus in one way or another. The devil is relentless. The devil does not take no for an answer.

- Numerous times Jesus encounters ones who are demon-possessed, ones who have an evil spirit.
- The devil manages to pop his head up even when Jesus does things that are good. When Jesus drives a demon out of a man who is both blind and mute, healing the man in the process so he can both talk and see, his opponents twist the miracle around and say, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons that this fellow drives out demons.” (Matthew 12:22-24)
- Jesus himself alerts us to the ongoing presence and activity of the devil. In the Parable of the Sower the devil makes a cameo appearance. “When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart.” (Matthew 13:19). In the parable of the weeds, where someone sows weeds among the wheat, Jesus tells us, “The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil.” (Matthew 13:38, 39)
- Coming down from that glorious day on the Mount of Transfiguration, with the affirmation of God ringing in his ears, “You are my Son, whom I love. With you I am well pleased. Listen to him”, Jesus again encounters the presence of a demon.
- When the betrayal of Jesus is imminent both Luke and John’s gospels tell us it is the devil who enters Judas and causes him to betray Jesus.
- And when Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane, as Jesus prays a prayer so full of anguish his sweat fell to the ground like drops of blood, Luke drops a big hint that the devil is right there bringing the fight to Jesus. Twice in Luke Jesus warns his disciples that in the garden the forces of temptation are strong.

If you think the devil really left alone just because Jesus said no three times, you do not understand how relentless the devil is. The devil does not take no for an answer. He just keeps coming at you. Look at how he kept after Jesus.

Realizing that the devil does not take no for an answer has caused me a bit of discomfort. I have come to realize that I might fall prey to tempting others. In tempting someone, I do not take no for an answer. For example...nearly ten years ago Julie decided to try being a Vegan. She gave up all the things a Vegan gives up. She invited me to go along with her experiment. When I declined she accepted my refusal graciously. She left me alone. We coexisted peacefully for several months, her following her diet, me following mine. Then I decided to see if I could persuade her to resume a more traditional diet. I knew I couldn't meet the matter head on. I needed to gently approach the subject. This is what I did. One morning I made bacon. That's it. One morning I made bacon. And...I might have waved my hands to make sure the delicious smell made it over to the part of the house where she was that morning. Didn't faze her at all. She said no without even saying no. In fact, she ignored me. Go figure! A few days later I did it again. And again. And again. I think I might have done it for a whole month. By now I was waving a huge towel and pointing fans toward her and walking nearby with bacon on my plate. Still, I never said a word. I just kept at it. In her own way she said no, but I did not take no for an answer. One morning, out of the blue, or maybe out of the haze of smoke from the freshly fried bacon, she said, "Fine, give me some bacon." I wouldn't take no for an answer.

I wonder if Eve felt something similar in the Garden of Eden. The serpent just wouldn't take no for an answer. It is possible that things happened exactly like we have always heard they did back in the garden. Eve was walking by that apple tree, the wily one tempted her, she ate, and that was all she wrote. But what if Eve knew better than to fall for his trap? What if she walked by the apple tree, heard the sniveling snake sweet talk her and what if she said, "No!" What if Eve said no but the devil wouldn't take no for answer? Can you imagine the persistence of the devil as he tempted Eve in every way possible?

Here Eve, try this nice Braeburn apple...NO! What about this Cortland? NO! Fuji...Gala...Granny Smith...Golden Delicious, Red Delicious, Jonathan, Jonagold, McIntosh, Pacific...Southern Rose? No, no, no, no. Eve said no! Eve said no, but the devil would not take no for an answer.

Poor Eve, day by day walking by that apple tree, doing her best to say no, and that crafty old devil...Apple streusel? Apple turnover? Apple cake? I have sympathy for Eve. How many times can you say no when you are tempted? At some point, when the devil won't take no for an answer, at some point you reach your breaking point. Apple sauce? Apple cider? Apple donut? Oh, now that's not fair. A warm apple donut, the smell of that on a crisp fall day, covered in sugar, crispy on the outside, crumbly on the inside...Eve, how about an apple donut? Maybe Eve even said no to an apple donut. Good for her.

But the devil will not take no for an answer. You might guess my weakness. One day Eve sidled by the tree and there was the devil, wearing an apron, covered in flour, hands caked in dough, flattening something out with a rolling pin, flattening out a crust, for a pie, for a pie filled with freshly cut apples, dripping with butter, smothered in sugar, both white and brown, seasoned with nutmeg and splashed with just the right amount of cinnamon. Eve tried to walk right by. Eve knew she should walk right by. Eve almost walked right by, but then the devil put the pie in the oven, and it started to bake, and it smelled so good, well, Eve stopped. When she stopped the devil spoke. "Did God really say you must not eat of this delicious apple pie?" Eve saw that it was pleasing to the eye. She knew it smelled heavenly. Her mouth watered. Her eye was filled with desire. And so, Eve ate. Eve ate and gave some to her husband. "Then their eyes were opened and they realized they were in big trouble..."

They aren't alone. Adam and Eve are not alone. They are not the only ones in big trouble. I tried to have a little fun with the temptation of Eve but what happens to us when we give in to temptation is not funny at all. It has the most serious consequences. And because we all give in to temptation, we are in big trouble. All of us. The Apostle Paul tells us that through what happened in the garden sin entered the world. "Therefore,

just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—” Romans 5:12. Because of what happened in the Garden of Eden we are all in big trouble...death has come. From the encounter in the Garden of Eden to the temptation of Jesus, we are presented with the daunting truth that the devil does not take no for an answer. The temptations just keep coming and coming. If the devil does not take no for an answer, what hope do we have? Paul tells us what our hope is. The sin of one man (Adam) brought death. But the righteous act of one man (Jesus) has brought life for all. What is the righteous act of Jesus? It is not just that Jesus told the devil no! The righteous act of Jesus is that he told God yes!

That is our hope. When Jesus said yes to God there was no amount of tempting and testing the devil could do that could stand against God’s Beloved Son. That Jesus will say yes to God is evident already in the temptation stories.

- “Turn these stones to bread.” Jesus said no. And then Jesus said yes! Jesus said no, human beings do not live by bread alone but (and here is the yes) by every word that comes from the mouth of God.
- “Throw yourself down.” Jesus said no. And in his no Jesus said yes. “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” His no to testing was his yes to trusting to trusting God.
- “All these kingdoms I will give you if you will bow down and worship me.” Jesus said no. And in his no Jesus said yes. “Away from me, Satan! For it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” Jesus said no to worshiping the devil and yes to worshiping the Lord, yes to worshiping and serving the Lord alone.

It is at that point we are told the Devil decided to leave Jesus alone. He didn’t. The devil kept lurking and lingering at the fringes. What he found must have been so discouraging. The one who told him no in the desert spent his every waking moment saying yes to God. Yes, to being a servant. Yes, to caring for the wounded and the outcast. Yes, to rescuing the sinner. Yes, to healing and wholeness for lepers and lame, women and children, young and old. Yes, yes, yes, so many yesses the devil couldn’t really get in a temptation edgewise. Yes, yes, yes. Yes, to the donkey. Yes, to the

parade. Yes, to the Passover. Yes, to the Garden. Yes, in his prayer, “Not my will be done, but thy will be done.” Yes, to enduring the rejection and arrest. Yes, to receiving the wounds given by brutal guards. Yes, to the judgment that sentenced him to death. Yes, to the cross. Yes, to the shame. Yes, yes, yes, and yes. Yes, to giving his life. Yes, to experiencing death so that through his death we might experience life. Oh, the devil does not take no for an answer. But when Jesus said yes, there was nothing the devil could do. The yes of Jesus is the yes that overcomes the powers of darkness and defeats the devil. The yes of Jesus crushes the devil and his dominion.

The no Jesus said to the devil out in that deserted wilderness opened the way for Jesus to say yes to God. The yes of Jesus is a yes only he could say. The death he died is a death only Jesus could die. Only the Son of God could give his life as a ransom. Because the one who said yes is God’s Beloved Son, his death and resurrection open the door for us to experience the death of our sinful nature. Our sinful nature is put to death through the death of Jesus. When Jesus rose from the dead, conquering sin and death, his resurrection came with the promise that you and I have the hope of new life in and with Jesus Christ. The yes of Jesus is a yes only he could say.

During the Season of Lent there is a big emphasis on saying no. No to chocolate. No to soda. No to wine. No to Facebook. No to the internet. Maybe no to apple pie. And maybe, just maybe, even no to bacon. Maybe you will feel called to say no to some things this Season of Lent. Whether you say no or not, please do not miss out on the chance to say yes. Jesus set before us the opportunity to say yes. Because of the Yes Jesus said, we have him in our corner to help us say our yes. Jesus not only said his yes, he showed us what it means to say yes.

- During this Season of Lent, I hope you find yourself saying yes to the word of God. We do not live by bread alone. We live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. Say yes to God’s word, to reading and meditating on the word of God, especially the word of God that tells us of his beautiful and beloved Son.

- During this Season of Lent, I hope you find yourself saying yes to prayer. There are so many prayers and so many ways to pray, I hesitate to suggest just one prayer. But there is one prayer Jesus taught. Jesus taught us to say no in prayer. Jesus taught us to say no to temptation. And the Jesus who taught us to say no also taught us to say yes. Yes, to the holy name of God. Yes, to the kingdom of God. Yes, to the will of God. Yes, to the daily blessings and benefits of God, including our daily bread. Yes, to forgiving ones who are indebted to us.
- During this Season of Lent, I hope you find yourself saying yes to the heart of God. I hope you find yourself saying yes to the people Jesus said yes to, to the least, to the last, and to the lost, saying yes to living a life of kindness and compassion, mercy and generosity.
- During this Season of Lent, I hope you find yourself saying yes to love.
- During this Season of Lent, I hope you find yourself saying yes to being a servant, for Jesus said, “If you want to be great in the kingdom of heaven, learn to be the servant of all.”

It is important to tell that old devil no. Resist the devil. Flee from the devil. Tell the devil no. But just beware, the devil does not take no for an answer. He will be back, tempting you again and again and again. Go ahead and tell the devil no. But don't stop there. When you tell the devil no, be sure you tell Jesus yes. Yes, I will follow. Yes, I will believe. Yes, I will trust. Yes, I will serve. Yes, I will love. Oh, that is always the most important. “Yes, I will love.” Lord Jesus, you said yes for me. With a heart filled with gratitude and love, hear me as I say my yes to you, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen!