

First Sunday in Lent

Ooh, That Looks Tempting!

Matthew 4:1-11

First Sunday in Lent

Analysis by Timothy Hoyer

1Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. 3The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" 5Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" 7Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 8Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; 9and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" 11Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

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Immenraet_Temptation_of_Christ, Philips Augustijn Immenraet, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

When we think Jesus is not worth trusting as our God, we are actually thinking that God would not act this way. ... We don't like gods who are weak and helpless and embarrassing. If God is behind this Jesus, we are against God. And that is our deepest problem.

DIAGNOSIS: Great Things Tempt and Win Our Hearts

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): The Test Is to Look Away from Jesus

Grounding: Jesus was tested. The devil (always God's devil) tested Jesus' heart to expose whether Jesus was loyal or

disloyal to God, faithful to God or unfaithful (to not trust). God's testing is never "an enticement to evil" (*The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 568). It was as if before God sent Jesus towards the cross, God wanted to make sure Jesus had the faith to go there.

Tracking: All of what people experience is a test of their values, morals, character, and of their faith in whatever god they have. For those who are Jesus-trusters, the test they face is, "If Jesus is merciful, why am I not receiving mercy? If Jesus forgives, why wasn't I forgiven? Or, why don't I feel forgiven? If Jesus promises me eternal life, when I die will I really be taken into heaven to live with him forever?"

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): The Heart Gets Tested

Grounding: (Trivia: In this story there are three names for this character: tempter, devil—from the Greek *diabolos*, meaning slanderous, accusing falsely; and Satan—transliteration of the Hebrew word meaning "adversary.") The tempter attacks Jesus' faith with his very first word, "If..." Is the tempter not sure that Jesus is the Son of God and wants proof or is the tempter testing Jesus' confidence or knowledge that he is the Son of God, who did not "regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness" (Philippians 2:6b-7)?

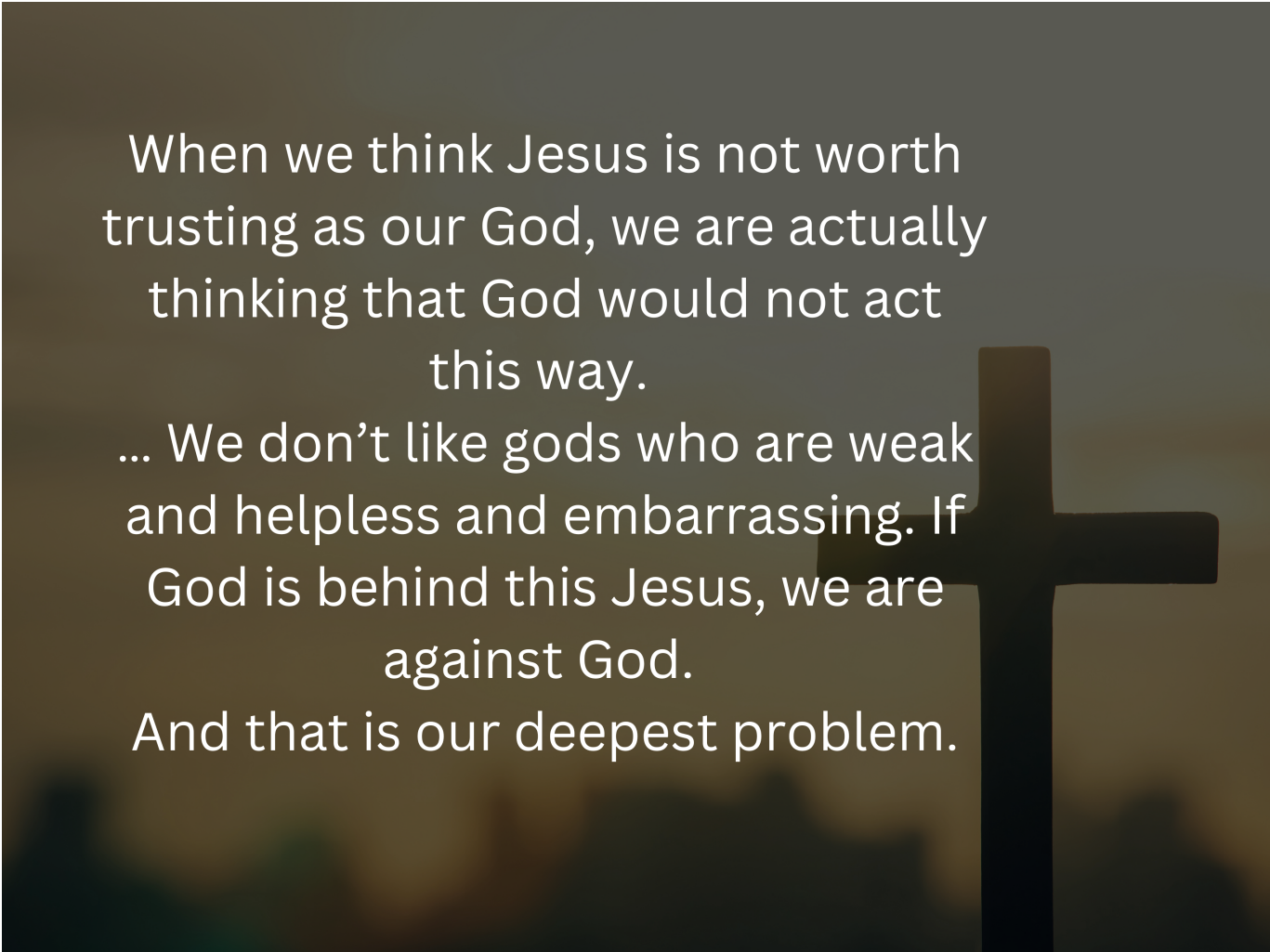
Tracking: Is Jesus really God? More to the point, is Jesus worth trusting as our God? Do we demand signs to prove he is God? And what help is Jesus with our daily challenges of an impatient spouse? Or with gun violence? Or bullying in schools? Or that no one will help a grown daughter buy a bus ticket to a city 250 miles away so she can go bury her mother? Or that no one will help a young mother get diapers for her six-month-old

baby? Or end the war in Ukraine or any other war you want to pick? What good is Jesus? He won't even change a stone into bread.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): We Think God Fails Our Test

Grounding: Jesus is tempted to prove he is God. It's as if Jesus, being in human form, is an insult to Satan's idea of what a god should be. God should not be human or mortal. Or Satan knows of Jesus' mission to die on a cross and he wants to prevent Jesus from completing that mission. Satan just wants to stop whatever God is doing. He is against God.

Tracking: When we think Jesus is not worth trusting as our God, we are actually thinking that God would not act this way. God would not become weak, without power, subject to death. A god who is like that is of no help at all. We don't like gods who are weak and helpless and embarrassing. If God is behind this Jesus, we are against God. And that is our deepest problem. It results in our eventual death.



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Trusting God (from Canva)

PROGNOSIS: The Death and Rising of Jesus Are for Our Heart

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Jesus Passes the Test of Death

Grounding: Jesus remains human and weak, refusing glory and power. He remains so even when he is forced on to a cross and dies. But then we see what Jesus can do. He changes the stone of death into the bread of resurrection for us. He is then seated at the right hand of God above all powers and dominions,

so that he is now the final judge of the living and the dead. As the final judge, he pronounces forgiveness. He acts with mercy. He overcomes all judgment against us. He pronounces us to be good before God. He is our goodness, the very thing we have always worked for but never quite achieved.

Crossing: Jesus remained human for us. He remained weak to be our strength. He died to be our life. He did not just die on a cross. He did all things for us.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Jesus Tempts Us to Trust Him And His Mercy

Grounding: Jesus trusted in God and God's word—God's promises, "One lives by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Crossing: Jesus is relevant for us. We trusted in power, in our self-promoting pride, in our ability to be better than others. We trusted in judging others. We trusted that those who do better receive rewards and those who do worse receive punishment. That faith failed to make us right with God or give us mercy. Now we put our faith in Jesus as the Son of God who died for us, and receive the power of his mercy, the power of his forgiveness, and the power to be raised from death.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Hearts that Trust in Jesus Use His Mercy

Grounding: Risen from the dead, Jesus now gives us his Spirit so that when our hearts get tempted to say Jesus is not worth our trouble, that Spirit keeps our hearts trusting Jesus.

Crossing: Trusting in Jesus' power of mercy, as we keep dealing with the challenges of life—the violence and abuse, our own weariness and selfishness—we follow the way of mercy to heal, to forgive, to give life to others. Maybe changing stones into

bread would help feed the hungry, but it won't change the hearts that refuse to help hungry people. Maybe impressing others with great deeds would get people to pay attention, but only for a day, or until they asked for another display to impress them; impressing others does not change their hearts. Maybe having political power would set things right, but people already have political power and they do nothing for the weak and the sick. It is us, with new hearts trusting Jesus and his mercy, who daily—here and there—help, care, listen, offer a meal, give a ride, tell a story of Jesus and so invite (tempt) people to trust Jesus and his mercy.