

## 1 Invocabit – Matthew 4

Our Lord's life on earth follows the order of the prayer he taught us to pray. The Son of the Father was born to make us God's children. He sanctifies us by the name of Jesus, the name he received at his birth. He brings his heavenly kingdom to rule our hearts by his grace. He reveals the good and gracious will of God to destroy the power of the devil. He shares our human flesh and blood as his own, bearing all our weaknesses, and providing for every need of our bodies. He steps into the Jordan River to be baptized by John, revealed as the Son and Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And now, immediately after his baptism, the Holy Spirit leads him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. There he faces the evil one to defend us and rescue us from all satanic attacks. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we are asking God for everything we could possibly need. And this is because we are relying on everything our Lord did for us.

Jesus teaches us to pray. By teaching us to pray, he is preparing us to face temptation and death. Every petition in the Lord's Prayer leads up to these last two requests: lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil. We pray in these petitions that God would guard us from the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh, which always try to drive us into unbelief, despair, and other terrible sins. In summary, we pray that God would deliver us from all these wicked things and finally take us from this valley of tears on earth to himself in heaven. When you pray, God is preparing you for these trials. He teaches you to rely on everything his Son has done in your place, to confess his Word, and to seek his mercy and kindness the entire way. In this way he strengthens you to face the devil with courage.

The devil wants you to be afraid of death. This is how he keeps people in bondage. He wants them to be afraid of losing their lives on earth. This fear of death isn't only the fear of the last moments of life. It includes more than your final breath and heartbeat. The fear of death begins with smaller things. It is the fear of not having enough of the goods and pleasures of this world, like food, money, respect, popularity, happiness, and self-confidence. Bit by bit, these nagging fears so easily occupy our minds and captivate our hearts. A call from the bank is enough to raise the blood pressure, while any insult or damage to one's reputation is enough to keep a man up at night.

The devil will certainly bring in the big guns when he can. Just pay attention to the news and see how many robberies, murders, kidnappings, and assaults take place in this world. The devil is obviously responsible for these things. But when the devil can't bring out the big guns, when he can't take your life all at once, then he uses his sharp shooting darts to trip you up and gradually drive you to despair and lose hope in God's goodness. He tempts you with seemingly innocent and even holy things, always appealing to your fear of not having comfort in this life.

When the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, he faced this fear of death head on. He went without food for forty days, feeding entirely on the Word of his Father. But of course, he was hungry. He's a human being. He felt hunger more than any of us have ever felt, all while having the power to provide food for himself at any time. The devil took this as a golden opportunity. He told Jesus to make use of his divine powers as the Son of God and turn stones into bread. Satisfy your hunger. This temptation seems innocent enough, just like his first temptation of Adam and Eve. Just eat the fruit, and

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gratify your craving. What's the big deal? Don't you have a right to food and drink? There is nothing more natural than to eat when you're hungry and consume water when you're thirsty. But this invitation to eat is a subtle attempt to drive Jesus away from what he came on earth to do. He came not to serve himself but to serve others, to give his life as a ransom for poor sinners.

Adam and his wife didn't need to rely on their own abilities to get their food. They didn't need to depend on their own ability to distinguish between what works and doesn't work, what is good and what is bad, what is a blessing and what is evil. All they needed was God's goodness. He certainly wasn't shortchanging them. He gave them plenty of food to eat. And yet, the devil convinced them to worry about what they would eat. God has not even spared his own Son from us. He gave him up into death for us all. He gives us his own kingdom. Certainly he will not withhold anything good from us. Yet the devil convinces us to be anxious over whether we have enough. He appeals to our fear of not being full, making us quickly forget that God provides. Like a child who throws an irrational fit over not having a cookie before bedtime, the devil easily gets us to fret over not getting a higher exchange for our trade. Like Eve's thought that the fruit was able to make her wise, this world measures intelligence and wisdom based on how well they can make their investments grow.

But Jesus doesn't give into this little dart of the devil. He returns to the Word of God. He is obedient to the law of God all the way to death. It is written, he says, man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. This is why Jesus was in the wilderness. He didn't go out there on his own. He was led by the Holy Spirit to fulfil the Word of God, the same Spirit by which he would offer himself as a sacrifice for sin on the cross.

Next the devil leads Jesus to the top of the temple and tells him to jump off. He uses God's Word to make his temptation sound holy. He takes Psalm 91 out of context, telling Jesus that God would send his angels to protect him lest he strike his foot against a stone. This is what he does to Christians all the time. If he can't trap you by your basic appetite and natural desires, he then appeals to your spiritual desires. This touches on another kind of fear. A Christian may overcome his fear of lacking earthly comforts. But the most difficult fear to overcome is the fear of a bad conscience. You look at your devotional life, and you see that something is missing. You want to have certainty that you are a good Christian. The thought of not trusting God enough terrifies you.

The devil has a solution for you. Prove yourself. Prove your devotion to God. But don't let God prove you as you do the works he has given you. Don't be content with the calling to which you have been called. You need to search for a mountain top experience, something that seems more honorable than honoring your father and mother, more caring than caring for your children, and more authentic than simply being faithful to your spouse, gathering with your fellow Christians around his Word, and loving your brother. The devil places before your eyes what seems to be more daring, more courageous, and more distinguished than simply living by faith in Christ and serving your neighbor.

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When we depend on anything other than his promise in his gospel, in our baptism, in his word of pardon and forgiveness, and in his body and blood – when we think we can attain a greater faith than what God gives us through his Word – then we are putting God to the test. But again, Jesus sees right through this temptation. In obedience to the Word he came to fulfill, he says, “It is written. You shall not test the Lord your God.” Your faith doesn’t depend on your own tests. Instead, God tests your faith. As you walk in the station he has placed you, loving the neighbors he has given you, he gives you trials, which drive you back to his Word of grace in Jesus Christ.

Finally, the devil took Jesus to a high mountain and showed him the glorious kingdoms of the world. He promised to give them to Jesus if he would bow down and worship him. Here the devil appeals to our fear of losing the honor and praise of this world. Maybe this is the praise from your peers at school or at work. Maybe it’s your public reputation. Maybe it’s an election you or your party are trying to win. And people fall prey to this all the time. The thought that the wrong people would be in charge of a business, the country, or a social circle is enough to terrify people. This fear of who has the power, the influence, and the honor consumes their hearts and minds until they lose sight of Christ’s kingdom, which is not of this world.

But Jesus rebukes the devil by being obedient to his Father. He says, “Go away, Satan! It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only!’” Here Jesus returns to the first commandment. You should fear, love, and trust in God above all things. This devotion belongs to no one else – not the devil, not food, not your own spiritual feelings, not the world, not anything! Only the Lord your God!

Jesus overcomes the fear of death, and he teaches us to fear God instead. Why should you be afraid of what you will eat or drink? God promises to provide for your daily bread. Why should you fear a bad conscience? God has given you his own name in your baptism. He rules your heart by his Holy Spirit. And he forgives all of your sins for Jesus’ sake. Why should you fret over the big names and powers of this world? To God belongs the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Christ has accomplished all of this for you. He delivers it all to you in his Word. And he teaches you to pray and seek it from your loving Father every day. In this way, he prepares you to face temptation with an unwavering faith that he has delivered you from this present evil world. This is according to the will of our God and Father to whom he glory forever and ever. Amen.