

## 1 Invocabit – Matthew 4

The devil has been a source of fascination for a lot of people. There are a number of horror movies about exorcisms, demons, and the devil himself, meant to spook, thrill, and entertain millions of viewers. But the Bible doesn't tell us about the devil to entertain us. Any account God's Word gives about the devil is meant to warn us and keep us on our guard. He prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Jesus calls him a murderer and the father of lies. We need to be on our guard against him. So today we should consider three things about the devil. First, we consider his power. Second, we consider his weakness. Third, we consider his defeat.

The devil's power is not like God's power. You see, the devil can't create anything. Only God is the creator of all things. Jesus Christ, who is the Word and Son of God, is himself God from eternity. By him and for him all things were made. In him all things hold together. Not one thing that was made was made without him. This includes not only the visible things, like our bodies and the earth, but also the invisible stuff, like the angels, logic, and our intellect. Any power or wisdom the devil has he has received from God himself.

Even though the devil can't create anything, he can still manipulate God's creation, both the visible things and the invisible things. Remember, he's a liar and a deceiver. This is his power. He uses God's creation in the worst ways, misleading people into not trusting the Creator, losing hope in God's goodness, and indulging in all sorts of wicked and perverted acts.

The devil's weapons are the sinful flesh, the Word of God, and the pride of this world. He tried to use the desires of Jesus' flesh to get him to disobey God. Jesus had been fasting for 40 days in the wilderness. He was hungry. The devil therefore appealed to his appetite. Of course, Jesus doesn't himself have a sinful nature. But the devil still attempts to turn our Lord's innocence into lustful unbelief. After all, he was able to do it with Adam and Eve. They were innocent and pure until the devil turned them away from God's Word by appealing to their desire to be as wise as God.

The devil uses the Word of God, because he knows that this is the most powerful tool. But he mixes lies in with the truth, or he leaves important details out only to deceive. He told the woman that she and her husband would be like God in knowing good and evil if they ate from the tree of which God commanded them not to eat. In a sense, this was true. God knows all things. God knew both good and evil, because he has authority over both good and evil. So technically, they would have this in common with God if they gained knowledge of evil. But the devil was using this technical truth to undermine and even deny the truth of God's Word. You will not surely die, he says. And yet, this is explicitly what God said would happen. The day you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you will most certainly die.

Of course, the devil doesn't begin with this bold contradiction of God's Word. Not right away. Instead, he leads up to it by asking a seemingly innocent question about God's Word. Did God really say? Here he slips in his serpent's head, getting the woman to doubt or question, even if just a little, whether God meant what he said.

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Now, compare this to how the devil tempts our Lord. He brings him to the high part of the temple and tells him to jump off to see if God will help him. He tells Jesus to tempt God, in other words. After all, Psalm 91 says that God will send his angels to guard you lest you strike your foot against a stone. But notice what the devil leaves out. The Psalmist says, “He will send his angels to guard you *in all your ways*.” The devil leaves this last part out, “in all your ways.” God calls us to various stations and duties in this life. This is what the Psalmist means when he says, “in all your ways.” Your ways are the duties and offices to which God calls you and in which he places you. He has prepared your works for you to walk in. If you are a father or a mother, God promises to guard you in these duties to which he has called you, giving you strength as you raise and train your children. If you are given the authority to chase down criminals, God promises to guard you and give you courage in this dangerous task. If you are a preacher, God promises to guard you and preserve you as you care for his flock with his Word.

But not everyone is a father or mother. Not everyone is a police officer. Not everyone is a pastor. Not everyone has the same duty, responsibility, and authority. God calls us to various duties, and he promises to protect us and give us patience to bear whatever trials and crosses might come our way. But the devil leaves out any mention of our duties or stations in life. Would there ever be an instance when it would be acceptable to jump off the top of a building? Perhaps. Maybe God puts you in a position to help save someone’s life, and jumping from a building is the only option left. In that case, commend yourself to God’s care. But the devil just overlooks and ignores any sort of duty or calling from God. And yet, his temptation is very powerful, because he is using God’s truth.

So let’s go back to his temptation in the Garden. Is it wrong in itself to know good and evil? No, of course not! God knows good and evil. God isn’t wrong. But God did not call Adam and his wife to know good and evil. He called them only to know his goodness. Is it wrong to hit a child. Again, no. Not necessarily. A kid who talks back or screams at his parents should get a spank on the butt or a light swat on the mouth. God gives this authority to parents. But God doesn’t give parents the authority to hurt and abuse their children. God also doesn’t give you the authority to go up to some random kid at the park and start spanking him. The devil takes things that are true in certain circumstances, and then he takes them out of context. He applies them in the wrong way. In this way, he uses the Word of God to confuse us, casting doubt on whether we can even trust what God says.

Finally, the devil’s power includes the pride of the world. He took Jesus to a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. He said to Jesus, “I will give you all this if you bow down and worship me.” The pride of the world is hard to resist, because it seems to rely on good things. You don’t become a ruler of a country or a respected leader if you are stupid, lazy, and incompetent. If everyone thinks you are wise, then it makes life a lot easier. This is what Adam and his wife were tempted with. When Eve took the fruit, she saw that it was pleasing to look at and able to make her wise. But this worldly wisdom inevitably runs out. Jesus is the very Wisdom of God, but he was looked at as a fool when he hung on the cross. The

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Word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. Even though he was atoning for the sin of the world, he did not receive the world's praises. His kingdom is not of this world. This is why the devil is so powerful in this world. He promises worldly praise through worldly wisdom. He convinces people to care more about what the world thinks about them than whether God is pleased with them. And once this world's approval and comfort vanish, those who relied on the pomp and pride of the world lose all hope. They remain in the clutches of the devil forever.

The devil's power is in his ability to use the flesh, the Word of God, and the world. These are in themselves God's works, but the devil uses them to deceive and murder souls. And he's very good at it.

But the devil has one weakness. And this weakness is his pride. He is so sure of himself that he thinks he can manipulate and take down the very will of God. Consider what he does in the book of Job. Here he is called Satan. This means that he is an accuser. He uses his powers to accuse. He's very intimidating, because he twists the truth of God's Word. He tempts you to sin, and when you do sin, he holds it against you before the throne of God. But here is where his weakness comes in. He's so proud and full of himself that he has the nerve to stand before God and accuse Job of having a false faith. He says that Job trusts in God only because God has blessed him with many earthly blessings. When God lets the devil take these earthly blessings away from Job, he proves that the devil was wrong. God knew the whole time that Job would remain in the faith. He gave Job his faith. Yet, the devil still thought he could overturn what God had promised.

A similar episode of the devil is given in Zechariah chapter 3. Here, Satan is standing before the throne of God, accusing Joshua the high priest in Jerusalem. Of course, Jerusalem had sinned against God. That's why God had sent them way into Babylon. But that didn't change God's faithfulness to his promise. He was determined to save his people, to cover their sins, and redeem them from the fires of hell. Yet, there is Satan, thinking he can stand in the way of what God has promised. This same prideful devil thought he could turn God's own eternal Son against him. It's truly incredible how presumptuous he is.

So even as you take warning against his power and tactics, don't be intimidated by the prideful taunts of the devil. They will come in different forms, either from the lusts and imaginations of your own sinful flesh, from the deceit of false teachers who twist God's truth, or from the pride of the world. But it's all a show. It's just empty boasting from the devil. He has no authority to accuse you. The only reason he is able to tempt you in the first place is because God allows him to. And God is simply teaching you to resist him. God is showing you that your faith actually works, because he himself gave it to you. His gospel is true. He will not leave you in your sins. He will not abandon you to unbelief. He who sent his Son into the flesh to die for you will most certainly guard you as you walk through this valley of sorrow. Who is there to accuse you or condemn you? God has justified you. God has declared you righteous by the blood of his Son. Jesus Christ has died for you. More than that, he has been raised, and he sits at God's heavenly

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throne interceding for you. The devil has been cast down. He has no right to accuse you before God. Any attempt to do so is nothing short of vain, pathetic pride. So remember what the Proverbs say, “Pride goeth before the fall and a haughty spirit before destruction.”

The devil’s power is his deceitful use of what God himself says and does. But his weakness is in his pride and arrogance. So how is the devil defeated? He is defeated by God’s rebuke. And God rebukes him by his Word and his work. Notice that every time the devil tempts Jesus, our Lord responds by reciting God’s Word. It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” It is written, “You shall not test the Lord your God.” It is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.” These are the weapons Jesus uses. He takes up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

But Jesus doesn’t speak these words as some kind of magic formula. No, Jesus actually does what these words say. He obeys his Father. He fulfills God’s Word. He doesn’t wrestle with the devil on the devil’s terms. Instead, he appeals to his Father, concerned only about pleasing him. And in this way, he takes away from the devil any right to accuse or condemn or deceive.

This is therefore how we resist and overcome the devil. We trust in the words of our Savior who accomplished salvation for us. We trust in his obedience in our place. We believe in his promise, rely on his blood, and stand before God clothed in his righteousness. In other words, we resist and rebuke the devil by faith. So don’t be intimidated by the devil’s power. He can’t actually create anything. He just lies about and manipulates God’s creation. His weakness is his pride. But you learn humility from your Lord who humbled himself to save you from sin. So resist the devil by faith, and find your victory in Jesus Christ. Amen.