

## **Invocabit, A ✕ D 2010**

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

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

1        1        He really seemed like a nice guy. He genuinely seemed to have their best interests in mind. Did God really say 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?' No, no, you must have misunderstood what God meant. You will surely not die. Or maybe this Creator of yours is just a killjoy, wanting you not to be like Him, for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like Him, knowing good and evil. What harm can it do? Is God really so concerned with what you eat?

2        So the devil came to Eve while her husband stood wickedly by, refusing to defend his bride. He offered them what he convinced them was a better way. His offer to you is similar. He offers to give you what you suppose is best for you. Did God really say? No, no, you must have misunderstood. Perhaps God said that for a while, but times are different. God gave you your body, after all; He must intend for you to enjoy these pleasures without inhibition. Did God really say? Well, then, be done with Him, entreats the devil. I'll be a much better, much friendlier god. Did God really say you cannot serve Him and any other god? I'm not so selfish. I'll let you have as many gods as you'd like. Did God really call you to a life of self-denial? What a killjoy. Come to my church where talk of sin is seldom and never accusatory.

3        That's the devil's greatest trick, to get you to turn in to yourself. Who, after all, knows what's best for you better than you do? Certainly not God with all of his seemingly arbitrary laws. Certainly not earthly authorities. Certainly not parents, or pastors, or the Word of God. No, you are your own best god, he says. If you've accused God of not caring, you've succumbed to the devil's assaults. If you've lamented how much you've had to sacrifice for your children, your spouse, or your parents, you've been his prey. If you've chosen to skip a Divine Service, you've taken your needs into your own hands, believing you know better what's in your best interest than your Lord. It's the same as Adam's eating in the Garden, assuming to know for himself what was best for him. Repent.

4        After His baptism, Jesus went out into the wilderness to fast. There, after God the Father had declared of Jesus, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased," the devil came to tempt Him. So also, every person who is baptized has a similar fate. Where you were marked with the cross, sealed with the name of the Holy Trinity, declared to be God's own beloved child, with whom He is well pleased, the devil takes notice. Those not baptized, those who have no faith, those who do not belong to God cause the devil little concern. But those who belong to God are particular problems for the devil. When you are baptized, the devil becomes your enemy, and he wants to lure you away from God.

5        They weren't big sins the devil sought of Jesus. In fact, what the devil offers is not inherently sinful. Desiring bread to eat, trusting in God to protect Him, and even obtaining all the kingdoms of the earth are not sinful desires for Jesus. But the devil twists God's good gifts, to get Jesus to have them on his terms. It's just bread. And you need bread, after all. So if the boss says work on Sunday mornings or you'll have no pay to buy bread, you work. Or if your budget tells you the only way to afford to buy bread is by dipping into the ten percent that's not yours to spend, you buy bread. But bread rots. Maybe it fills your belly for a while, but your belly is not your god, and it won't save you. "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God," Jesus answered.

6 If you won't make bread, if you foolishly trust your Heavenly Father, put his provision to the test. Just a small test. If you're His beloved Son with whom He is well-pleased, jump off the pinnacle of the temple. Hasn't He promised to protect you? But Jesus is undeterred. "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test." So the devil makes a third attempt. What's the Son of God without some honor? You need some kingdoms, Jesus. Just fall down and worship me—only once—and I'll give you all these kingdoms of the world. There's no need to endure the suffering and death that lay ahead of you. Why die for these people, anyway? What do they offer? I'm offering glory. Why bother with the cross, Christian, when Joel Osteen and TV preachers downplay the cross in favor of telling you God wants you to have prosperity in this life. No, Jesus answered, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only you shall serve.'"

7 He is no nice guy. The devil is real, and he is your enemy. He is the father of lies, and he is remarkably convincing. He's more clever than you; he's been at this for thousands of years. Adam fell, and every descendant of his is fallen. But where Adam failed, the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, succeeded. Adam gave in to the temptation to make himself his god, but Jesus submitted to the Father's will. The first man made his belly his god, but the God-Man would not bow to His belly. Where the first man chose sin over fellowship with God, the New Man chose to set aside fellowship within the Trinity in order to become sin in your place. Jesus lived by faith, trusting His Father's purpose in sending Him to take on human flesh to redeem humanity. Adam lived for himself; Jesus lived for Adam and for you.

8 And He won. He defeated the devil by resisting the onslaught of temptation. He withstood the temptation toward self-preservation, choosing to endure the cross instead. Jesus is not a mere example for how to overcome temptation. He is the victor. He crushed the devil's head when He died on the cross. He took your sin and paid for it. The devil's accusation is silenced.

9 Make no mistake, the devil is still your enemy. He lost the battle against the Lord. And He loses the battle against the Lord's Church. Individual Christians are his target. Blessed Dr. Luther once quipped, "Where God built a church, there the devil would build a chapel." He doesn't need to fight against the world; she is already his ally. He doesn't need to aim the poisoned darts of temptation at those who have no faith; they already belong to him. So the devil takes aim at you. He knows that willful, persistent sin destroys faith. And he knows he has two strong allies in the fight against you: your sinful flesh and the world.

10 But your Lord defeated the devil, overcame the world, killed your sinful flesh—not for Himself—but for you. He defeated the devil for you on the cross, and at the day of your baptism, He snatched you away from the devil's kingdom. You belong to Him. He placed His holy name upon you in baptism; He claimed you as His beloved child. And He promises, as St Paul says, "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear, but with the temptation He will also provide a way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor 10:13).

11 What is the way of escape from temptation? His means of grace. When temptation is fierce, when the devil's accusations ring in your ears, God has appointed a louder, clearer voice to ring in your ears, the preaching of His Word. He speaks to you through the Office of the Keys, declaring your sins forgiven in Holy Absolution. Forgiveness is the way of escape. And in your struggle against sin, you have sustenance. The One who withstood the attacks of the devil in

the wilderness gives you His Body and Blood to forgive your sins and strengthen you for the struggle in the wilderness. Jesus won. His Holy Supper is the foretaste of the victory banquet. As he places and pours Himself into your mouth, you taste His victory over the devil, the forgiveness of sins.

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Pastor Jeff Hemmer