

Re-Writing Our Story

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[0 : 00] Well, Disney have turned big, easy profits the last few years doing live-action remakes of the classics. The Lion King and The Jungle Book were both released the year I was born, but 25 years later, we can now see them in brilliant CGI.

No longer cartoon lions, but what look like real lions. No longer a cartoon jungle or savannah, but what looks like a real jungle or a real savannah.

No prize is for guessing who they've done that for, the kids who were once glued to those cartoons, duly paid up, and went and were captivated by seeing those classic scenes now in real life.

And in lots of ways, that is what you have come to see today. Maybe you didn't think that you were coming to see something that dramatic, but in the big screen of the Bible in your hands, you have come to see a live-action remake of a classic story, but this time with a twist.

We saw a couple of weeks ago how Matthew saw the trauma of Jesus' childhood as fulfilling what the prophets had written. God has sent his son into this ancient drama replayed again and again through history, the story of God confronting the power of sin with his true king.

[1 : 33] Only this time, the story is not only being repeated, it is being completed. And today we see that again in this great showdown between the one who holds the power of death, the devil, and God's true and promised king, Jesus Christ.

And so Matthew takes us back to three iconic, classic locations in the history of his people. The wilderness in verse 1, where like Israel wandered for 40 years, so now Jesus waits 40 days and 40 nights.

Then to the top of the temple, verse 5, quite literally the high point in the kingdom of Israel where Jesus now stands. Then to a very high mountain, verse 8, where like Moses stood and surveyed the promised land before him, so now Jesus stands and looks over the kingdoms of the world.

So what would it have felt like to have read this for the very first time? Well, imagine taking somebody who lived 100 years ago, okay, in the 1920s, to the IMAX to see the film version of their favorite book on the big screen.

Wow! Mind-blowing, right? All of these temptations, those who first seen this would have been transfixed by scenes that they'd read a thousand times in black and white, now played back to them in full color HD.

[3 : 11] With all three temptations, they would have seen the old and blood-stained stumbling blocks that their family had fallen on over and over and over again, now close up and replayed in slow motion.

All three times, in Jesus' replies, they would have heard the words of God that they and their parents and their grandparents and great-grandparents, all the way back to the beginning, had always disobeyed.

But what else would they have seen? All three times, they would have seen something that they had never seen before, something genuinely new in the history of the world, a man who is tempted, who does not give in.

Someone who stretched to the limit of human existence still obeys God's commands. As Jesus resists the power of sin, they saw their own ancient story, but rewritten, because the very points where they had failed are the points where now Jesus overcomes.

Now, there are lots of places in the Bible that help us and teach us how to resist temptation for ourselves. These verses can certainly help us, but we have to see that's not why Matthew's put this in his gospel.

[4 : 41] He's put this here to show us something better, that someone has been tempted in every way that we are, but did not sin.

Someone has stepped into our story, faced our struggles, felt our weakness, taken our place, and overpowered the tempter and overcome the power of sin.

No one has ever done that but Jesus. So, he is the savior that we and everyone who has ever lived desperately need to know.

Three points that help us get there this morning. Firstly, we simply need to be clear that Jesus was really tempted. Because I think we come to these verses and in the back of our heads, okay, Jesus is tempted and we think, yeah, but that's Jesus, right?

Of course he resisted temptation. It's unthinkable to us, isn't it, that Jesus would sin, so why would temptation be a problem? Right?

[5 : 52] Surely it was like for him saying no to a cup of kind of snotty cucumber soup. I think I'll pass, actually. Not for me. And so we think, right, he's got no idea what I go through when I resist sin, right?

He's got no idea what it's like for me to resist temptation. He wasn't born with sin. He wasn't born with a hunger for sin in his heart. So nothing sinful must have ever been a temptation for him.

Right? Well, true. He is completely sinless. But what's missing from that equation?

Two things. One is in verse 2 and one is in verse 3. Just see it with me in verse 2. Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

After fasting 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry. See it? He was hungry. And again, in the back of our heads, we think, of course he was hungry.

[7 : 03] Does he really need to spell out for us that after not eating anything for nearly six weeks, Jesus was hungry? But we know how hunger works, don't we?

We get hungry. Maybe you're hungry now. You get hungry after a few hours. Okay, another hour. And we're not hungry. We're hangry. Hangry. Okay, there comes a point, doesn't it, when we're a bit hungry and patience is lost and tempers fray and others and what they need just takes a back seat because I am hungry and I'm going to have something to eat.

Friends, what would we not do to get a bite to eat when we're hangry? What would we not do to get food after 40 days and 40 nights?

Friends, Jesus wasn't hungry. He was starving to death. That's the first thing missing from our equation. We know he is fully sinless, but we forget that he is also truly human.

He became like us in every way, in every way except for sin. The hunger that he felt is the hunger that you feel. His pain, his tiredness, his tears were the pain, tiredness, and tears that you experience.

[8 : 46] Our hearts can barely wrap themselves around it, can't we? But Jesus is not superhuman. He is God and he is human. But the Gospels are clear that he's not a blend of the two, like a sort of human being but with supernatural powers, or like God but watered down.

No, he is as God as God is, and he is as human as we are. Two distinct natures united in one person. So he didn't have some kind of secret to cope with hunger.

Have you ever seen somebody who hasn't eaten for six weeks? You could count his bones through his skin. Can you imagine being that hungry and not being hangry?

So when the tempter comes, verse 3, and says this, what would it have taken for him to resist?

Here's the other missing bit of our equation. The tempter came to him and said, if you are the son of God, tell these stones to become bread.

Now, think about it. If someone told you that, okay, you're on your way to Greg's, okay, you're hungry, and you're waiting to tuck into your sausage roll, and somebody said to you, oh, just tell these pebbles to become pastry, right?

[10 : 05] What would you do? You would just say, well, I would if I could, but I can't do that. So off I go to Greg's to get my lunch. What's the difference with Jesus?

That he could do that. If you are the son of God, he says, turn rocks into food. Say, let there be bread, create it.

Now, if he couldn't do that, there would be nothing to resist, would there? But verse 1 says he was tempted by the devil. So if he was tempted to do it, it must have been possible for him to do it.

So what's the other missing bit of our equation? He is truly human, and he is truly God. He could have simply said the word and had a feast in the wilderness.

Now, what would you do in his position? If you could create food by speaking, would it even take somebody to suggest it to you, that you might do that? Okay, we would have done it long ago,

wouldn't we, after day 2 or day 3.

[11:10] On day 40, the tempter comes and tempts Jesus to say the word. Was Jesus really tempted?

Yes, he's completely sinless. But factor into the equation that he's also truly human and truly God, and check the answer again. Why is it so incredible that he resisted?

Because he's Jesus. Because he's Jesus. Because he is the only person who has ever lived who was physically starving and could have fed himself and chose not to.

Why? Well, that's our next point. But it's vital we get our heads around this, that he was tempted. I don't know if you've ever thought of it like this, but I found this worth reflecting on in the week.

That Jesus was in fact tempted beyond anything that we have ever known. C.S. Lewis points out that we never feel the full strength of temptation because we give in so quickly.

[12:21] Right, we've never gone the full 12 rounds with temptation, have we? We've never gone that far. The tempter does not have to flex his muscles to make us fall. Well, think then, after 40 days and nights, the spiritual, physical, emotional beating Jesus was taking.

From the God of this world. And still he didn't break. He went the full 12 rounds and he won. So, he understands perfectly what it is you go through when you are tempted to sin.

Because he is the only man who never yielded to temptation, says Lewis. He is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means. He gets your struggles. He knows your weakness.

And he stands with you in it. Because he's been there himself. And to the very furthest possible stretch. Whatever tempts you to sin.

Whatever it is. Your deepest, darkest secret. You can tell it to him. Talk to him about it. Rest on his strength.

[13:37] Because the Bible assures us he is our sympathetic savior. Tempted in every way as we are. Yet he did not sin.

So, why did he resist? Because our second point. He was tempted in a historic way. See, if we drop straight into the scene without knowing the back story.

There's lots we are going to miss. I guess a bit like watching the remake of the jungle book. But not having seen the original. Right? There's lots that you would miss going on in the remake.

If you hadn't known the back story. But say you'd been to the jungle in India. Okay? And then you'd read the book. And then you'd watch the original. And then you saw the remake.

Well, you would get the jungle book. Right? In a whole new way. Well, it's the same with Jesus' temptation. There are lots of clues here that we're supposed to see the shadows of temptations past here.

[14:42] All the way back to the original temptation. So, see what the devil's trying to do in verse 3? If you are the Son of God. He says it again in verse 6.

If you are the Son of God. Now, why is he testing Jesus on that point? It's not as if he doesn't know who Jesus is. But just glance back to chapter 3, verse 17.

And see, the last thing Jesus hears as the Spirit takes him out into the wilderness. A voice from heaven said, This is my Son whom I love.

God has said, This is my Son. So, what is the devil doing? He's not finding out who Jesus is. Right? He's casting doubt on what God has said. So, can we hear the faint hiss of a temptation long ago in this question?

[15:42] Did God really say? Did God really say? See, Jesus is standing where Adam failed.

Being tempted as Adam was tempted. To doubt God's word. Now, not in paradise, but in a wilderness. But the biggest shadow hanging over the scene is the 40 years that Israel wandered in the wilderness.

Jesus spends, how long? 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness. And the devil chooses to tempt him with, what? Bread. Again, can we hear the grumbling and groaning of a temptation passed in this scene?

We have nothing to eat. You've led us out here to die. The Israelites grumbled against God and Moses in the wilderness that they didn't have any food.

And God sent them, what? Miracle bread. So, the devil plays that card too, doesn't he? Have a grumble. Have a moan. Have some bread.

[16:50] He even quotes the Hebrew Bible in verse 6. See how remarkable that is that the devil quotes scripture from the top of the temple. He says, We just sang those words from Psalm 91.

But it's plainly not the right verse for the top of the temple, is it? There's a big difference between tripping over a stone and trusting God with it and throwing yourself off a roof to test God on it. So, again, the devil goes for God's word. This time, not to doubt it, but to twist it. In passing, it's worth saying that all dogs don't learn new tricks.

Okay? The devil's been around a long, long time. But he's clearly not learned anything new since the Garden of Eden and the wilderness wanderings of Israel. Well, you know, sowing doubt over God's word, causing us to mistrust the Bible, or twisting God's words in those who misuse the Bible. Sadly, he doesn't need to learn anything new, does he? He gets his way in the world. And often he gets his way in the church and in us as well. When we sin, we are ultimately following him in one of these two ways, aren't we?

[18:19] We're ultimately denying God's word outright or twisting it to suit our own desires. So, it's worth seeing this when you're tempted to break or bend God's word, who it is who's ultimately behind it.

Sometimes it's as simple as learning to recognize our enemy and seeing through the temptation and running to Jesus. But back to the main point, which is that we see Jesus here standing where Israel had failed, being tempted as Israel was tempted, and on the very points that Israel had fallen on.

They are historic temptations. And it's only when we see the shadow of God's people who had come before and since in these verses that we see then how game-changing and earth-shattering Jesus' response is to these temptations.

Because he is standing in the place of God's people doing what they and we have never, ever done, perfectly obeying God's commands.

And he knows that that's what he's doing. He quotes three times, doesn't he? Verses from Deuteronomy, chapters 6 to 8. Chapters where Moses is teaching God's people how they are to live.

[19:43] In verse 4, he quotes Deuteronomy 8, verse 3, where Moses tells the people, Who here can say that they have learned that lesson and hold the promises of God to be more real and more reliable than the food on our tables?

Well, here's one who has. Then he quotes Deuteronomy 6, verse 16, Do not put the Lord your God to the test as you did at Massa.

Who here can say that they have never judged God on how well or poorly we think he's providing for us? Or given him a kind of love test, God, you must only love me if you will do X, Y, and Z things for me.

Here's one who never would. Then he quotes Deuteronomy 6, verse 13, Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.

Again, who here can say that they have never served a thought or desire or a person rather than God? Or given the love and devotion and adoration and obedience to anything else other than God that he alone deserves.

[21:13] Here is one who never has worshipped, served anything other than the Lord his God. Brothers and sisters, here is one standing in our place and doing perfectly what we have never done, taking God at his word and submitting to his will in every situation, even the very, very hardest and most stressful and painful times.

Perhaps you've heard somebody say, or you've said yourself when you've got it wrong, I'm only human. I'm only human. But that is not why you sin.

We think that being human is an excuse for our disobedience, but there's nothing natural or obvious about human beings rebelling against our creator. He created us for a personal and loving and intimate relationship with him.

Sin is not how it should be with us. So let's not kid ourselves. We sin not because we are human. We sin because we are sinners.

We sin because our hearts are corrupt and our minds are darkened and we want what is wrong and we do not want what is right.

[22:38] But here stands one of us, a human being, but sinless, who did not sin, where every other human being has failed, me and you included, he has overcome.

So why did he not give in? Because we have. Because he was not only standing in our place, but taking our place. He read before how he was baptized with a baptism he should never have had.

Even John objected, you shouldn't be here, he said, a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. But he went into the water with us and for us to take our place and be counted as a sinner. So now he goes into the wilderness with us and for us to take our place so that we would be counted as saints.

He is living for us, friends, offering an obedience to God that we could never offer so that in God's eyes, we who trust in him would be counted as perfectly obedient so that we would have his perfect record.

[24 : 02] What's he doing? He is weaving the robe of righteousness that he would use to clothe us and cover us at the cross when we come to him.

See, if he had failed where we fail, if he had given in where we give in, then that robe would have been useless, ripped, and stained. We could not come to God with it or without it.

If he had sinned, we could not be saved. But there he stood and kept God's commands so that our sins could be covered and so that we could come to God clothed in his perfection instead of the filthy rags of our sin.

That is why it is a historic temptation because the redemption of all God's people from beginning to end rests on how Jesus responds to these temptations.

And he resisted. And he resisted. And he resisted so that you could come to God and be counted right with him.

[25 : 19] If that's you, these verses should fill our hearts with overwhelming praise and adoration and thanks for Jesus. What he went through so that you could come to God is unimaginable.

But here he is doing it for you. Praise him. Delight in him. Thank him. When your team wins, what do you do? You stand up, cheer, you shout, you laugh, and what do you say?

You say, we've won. We've won. Well, who's won? Well, the team has won. They've won. But they have won for you. And you share in the victory with them.

So when we see Jesus overcoming sin in our place, our champion, our savior, we can stand up and sing and rejoice and say, we've won.

We've won. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. If that's not you yet this morning, you can't say that.

[26 : 23] Well, think about what you are saying. If you haven't won through Jesus' life and obedience, what are you saying? That you've lost.

You've lost. With the devil, with the power of sin, there are no uncommitted spectators at the big matches, are there? Everyone is cheering for one side or the other.

So if you're not cheering for King Jesus and sharing in his victory and celebrating with him, think who and what you're cheering for. Think who and what you are losing with.

And let me invite you today to change sides. Donald unpacked wonderfully for you last week what it is to change sides, what it is to repent, to turn to Jesus, to tell him you're not good enough, to confess that you've fallen short and to throw yourself on him, to ask him to cover you with his perfection, to take your sins away.

Jesus has defeated the power of sin, so don't carry on with it. Come to him because he chose to make the way for us to come to God.

[27 : 40] This is our very final point this morning, that he chose to make the way. Matthew ends with the devil offering Jesus the kingdoms of the world in verse 8. Now he's doing something interesting because Luke has the second and third temptations the other way around, so the fact Matthew puts this temptation at the end, at the climax, is important because remember, Matthew wants us to learn to see Jesus as a king for what the world to bow to.

His first worshippers were world travelers. And so when the devil shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor, what's he showing him?

He's showing him what is already his. But verse 9, he says, all this I will give you if you bow down and worship me. So what's he getting at?

The devil has pressed Jesus, hasn't he, on whether he knows, whether he is sure of God's word that he is the son of God. What does God's son get to do in Psalm 2?

He said to me, you are my son, today I've become your father. Ask me, ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. Just ask, says God, and it's all yours, my son.

[29 : 00] So what's the temptation here? Why is this the ultimate test for Jesus? Because the devil is offering Jesus the world, but without him having to pay for it.

See, God will give his son the world when he saves his people from their sins. He will wear the crown when he is beaten and thorns pressed down on his head.

He will take the throne when he is lifted up on the cross to die. That is God's plan that his son will save the world, then rule the world.

But what about the world without having to die for it, Jesus? What about the crown without the cross? Understand, that is far more of a temptation than food for his starving body.

In the shadow of the cross, what do we pray? If it is possible, let this be taken away from me. But now he is offered the prize without having to go through with the plan.

[30 : 13] You don't have to do it, Jesus, says the devil. And our eternity hangs on his answer, doesn't it? And so what does he choose? Jesus said to him, away from me, Satan.

For it is written, worship the Lord your God and serve him only. Then the devil left him and angels came and attended him. He chose me and he chose ye. And he chose whoever would put their trust in him to save them.

He obeyed even to death and death on the cross so that you and I, who have disobeyed, would never have to suffer as he suffered, never have to die the death that he died.

Friends, here is something better than a better life, a perfect life, lived and given for you to take away your sins, to cover you with righteousness, to save you for his kingdom and eternal life.

This is grace in all of its fullness poured out on those who would trust in him. So put your faith in him and let us worship him, Jesus, the Son of God.

[31 : 33] Let's do that as we pray together. Amen.