



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Lent 1
February 22, 2026

What Kind of a Son Are You?

Matthew 4:1–11

¹ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. ³ Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”

⁴ But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’ ”

⁵ Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’ ”

⁷ Jesus said to him, “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’ ”

⁸ Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.”

¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’ ”

¹¹ Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” So came the Father’s voice at Jesus’ baptism. And again later, at His transfiguration, as we heard last week: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Yes, Jesus is the Son of God in a unique, one-of-a-kind sense; in His very being. We confess in the creeds that Jesus Christ is God’s “only Son,” “the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds.”

But in another sense, Jesus came as a “son of God” like others who have borne that identity. Old Testament Israel had the status of being God’s “son.” By extension, we too have that same status of sonship as the New Testament Church. God’s people, whether Old Testament Israel or the New Testament Church, stand in relation to God as His “son,” chosen and placed here on earth to do His will faithfully and obediently and reflect His character. That what sons are supposed to do. You and I fail at that, and that’s where Jesus comes in.

In today’s Gospel Jesus comes as the faithful and obedient Son of His Father, doing His Father’s will and reflecting His Father’s character. He comes resisting temptation and overcoming the devil. We see very clearly in this temptation that Jesus is the son that



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Israel failed to be and that we the church fail to be. Our very salvation hangs on Him being that faithful, obedient Son of God. So, in this account, we see Jesus answering the devil's challenge: "What Kind of Son Are You?"

Following His baptism in the Jordan, Jesus is led into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. He has just heard His Father say, "This is my beloved Son." Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Jesus is tempted in the wilderness forty days. Israel failed the test. So do we. How will Jesus do? What kind of son are you, Jesus? He is a faithful son, an obedient son, the kind of son we cannot be. As we will see, Jesus is the Son who stands the test.

Let's look at these temptations now, shall we?

"And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, 'If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.'"

The temptation here is for Jesus to use His sonship for His own benefit, to serve Himself, when God had something else in mind. This was the same sort of temptation Israel had faced centuries before. When they went out into the wilderness, the Lord wanted them to trust in Him to take care of them. Instead, they grumbled and complained: "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you [Moses] have brought us out into this wilderness to kill us with hunger." Israel failed the test. They did not trust the Word of the Lord.

How about us? Do we grumble and complain that God isn't taking care of us as we think He should? "God, why aren't you providing for me the way I'd like? I deserve more. I deserve better." We, too, fail to trust God's Word of promise, and we get caught up in serving our own desires and our own pleasures instead of serving our Savior. Like Israel, we fail the test.

How about Jesus? What kind of Son are you, Jesus? His answer tells us: "It is written, '*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*'" What kind of a Son is Jesus? Just what a son should be. He trusts in His Father's goodness. He trusts God's Word of promise. He will not use his sonship to serve His own belly. Where Israel failed, where we fail, Jesus prevailed.

In the second temptation, the devil tries his hand at quoting Scripture: "Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: "*He shall give His angels charge over you,*" and, "*In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.*" ' ' "

Here the temptation is for Jesus to take His sonship for granted and presume that God



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would protect Him. Take a promise out of context, twist it, and use it as license for whatever you want to do – that was the devil’s temptation here.

It was a temptation that Israel had faced before. And they had failed the test. Because the Lord had given them victory in battle against their enemies, they began to take that for granted, even when they departed from God’s instructions. “Because you have turned back from following the Lord, the Lord will not be with you,” Moses warned. But they presumed upon God’s protection, went ahead with their plans, and were soundly defeated. The Lord is not some puppet you can manipulate.

Don’t we do that, too, in one way or another? We presume upon God and take His provision and protection for granted. We presume upon His promise of forgiveness and use it as a license to sin, which it was never meant to be. “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” Paul asks. “By no means!”

So what kind of Son is Jesus? How did He do when faced with this temptation? He tells the devil, “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’” Jesus is the faithful and obedient Son. He will not do what the devil tempts Him to do. He will not put God to the test by turning a gracious promise into self-imagined license.

So now the devil pulls out all the stops. The third temptation: “Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, ‘All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.’”

At the heart of this temptation is the willingness to compromise, to rationalize, to do what you know to be wrong for the sake of personal gain. Israel faced that temptation during its time in the wilderness, and again, they failed. Remember the golden calf? The Israelites fell down and worshiped it, because they thought that by it they would gain something. And when they were caught, they made excuses.

Do we do such things? Oh, maybe not a golden calf, but we have our own idols: money, success, pleasure, power. Things we worship more than God. We may pay God a little lip-service – you have to rationalize your idolatry, you know – but we sinners tend to be more interested in the kingdoms of this world and their glory – regardless of what our particular idol may be – than we are in the kingdom of God.

How did Jesus do on this one? He responded: “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘*You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.*’” No rationalizing for Jesus. He doesn’t take the bait. His kingdom is not of this world. The world’s glory does not entice Him. He stays true to His mission: to bring the kingdom of heaven here on earth, to do the will of His Father, to go the way of the cross.

Yes, the cross is what this is all about. Jesus is the obedient Son, and He will be obedient unto death, even death on a cross. He would not be dissuaded or deterred. He



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came to do the will of His Father, He came to save us from our sins by going to the cross, and that is exactly what He would do. He passed the tests – all of them. He withstood temptation, He defeated the devil, there in the wilderness, and ultimately at the cross.

Where Israel had failed, where you and I so often fail, Jesus, the faithful and obedient Son of God, the suffering servant and Savior of the world, always prevails.

You and I, on our own, are not strong enough to stand up to the devil's temptations. And he is not only the tempter, he is also the accuser. He will take your failures and try to throw them in your face and berate you before God. But beloved, you have a Champion and an Advocate on your side! He is Jesus. He conquered the devil in the wilderness, He beat the devil on the cross, and He defeats him now, whenever the devil tries to tempt you or accuse you. So take your refuge in Him, in Jesus! When the devil comes knocking on your door, tell him to shove off and take it up with Jesus! Jesus will strengthen your weak knees. His blood will clear your conscience. His resurrection will lift your spirit and give you hope to carry on.

“What kind of Son are you, Jesus?” The faithful and obedient Son, the one who overcomes the devil. He is your traveling companion in the wilderness, your strong refuge in temptation, your Champion in the fight, your Advocate in heaven. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen