

Creekside Community Church: "Imitating Jesus"  
"Living under the Authority of Scripture" (Matthew 4:1-11)  
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If you asked people today to define a Christian, what kind of answers do you think you would get? Someone who attends church, someone who tries to live by the Golden Rule, a conservative, a liberal, any spiritual person, someone who believes in Jesus - you'd get a lot of answers. But if you looked in the Bible for what a Christian is, you would get one, clear, unambiguous answer. A Christian is a disciple of Jesus. The reason there are Christians in the world 2000 years after Jesus walked on this planet is because of Matthew 28:18-20. *"And Jesus came up and spoke to them, (His original disciples) saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* For three years, Jesus trained His disciples and then He sent them to teach others what He had taught them; to make more disciples of Christ. That's why the early Christians were called disciples. So what's a disciple? The word Jesus used in Matthew 28 simply means a learner, a student. But in His culture, a disciple was a special kind of learner, one who learned by practice and experience and thus gained a new custom or habit. So the word "apprentice" is probably closer to the New Testament idea of a disciple than the word, "student." A disciple isn't just a collector of facts. A disciple is an applier of facts. That's why Jesus told His disciples that they were to teach their disciples to observe all that He had taught them. In the first century, becoming a disciple of a master was the standard way someone learned a trade or received an education. The disciple would attach themselves to their teacher, living with them and working beside them until they became like their teacher. That's why Jesus says in Luke 6:39-40, *"A blind man cannot guide a blind man, can he? Will they not both fall into a pit? A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher."* That's the goal of the disciple. To become like his teacher. So to be a disciple of Jesus means that you are in the process of learning to walk as He walked; to think like Jesus thought and to act like Jesus acted. As author and professor Dallas Willard says, "Discipleship is the process of becoming who Jesus would be if Jesus were you." It's an attitude of learning that makes you a disciple, not how long you've been a Christian. A one day old Christian is a disciple if they want to learn to follow Jesus. A person who's been a Christian for 50 years isn't a disciple if they've stopped learning. Of course, if we keep learning to walk like Jesus, over time, our life and a ministry looks more and more like the life and ministry of Jesus; to walk as He walked, to do what Jesus would do if He were living here today, because He is, inside of each one of us. That's why we're here and not in heaven; to be and to make disciples of Jesus; to become like Jesus and to help others to become like Him.

Well, because our goal is to become like Jesus, I want to spend several Sundays talking about imitating Christ. That's what a disciple of Christ is, an imitator of Jesus. We don't just read the Bible to learn about the history of Jesus. We read the Bible to learn how to walk like Jesus, how to think, speak, and act like He acted. Paul writes in 1 Cor 11:1, *"Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ."* That's captures the essence of what a disciple is - an imitator of Christ. He is our model. And for the next few weeks, I want to focus on imitating Jesus specifically in His relationship to His Father. How did Jesus walk with God? Remember that Jesus, even though He was God, became human - laying aside all of His power and privileges as God and took on all our limitations in order to become the model man; to live the life we were designed to live but had failed to live both so that we could be credited by God with His righteousness and to teach us how God had designed humans to live. So Jesus is the model, everything a person is supposed to be, and by learning how He walked with His Father, we can learn how we're to walk with Him. We're going to look at Jesus and the Scriptures, Jesus and prayer, and Jesus and faith to help us to imitate His walk with the Father. For the month of September, I want to look at Jesus and the Scriptures: how Jesus viewed the Scriptures, how He used the Scriptures, the place the Scriptures played in His life. And this morning I want to look at how Jesus always placed Himself under the authority of the Scriptures. That's why He says in Matthew 5:17-19 *"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."* Jesus didn't show up and announce, "Everything you've been

taught is wrong. I'm here to tell you the truth." When you read the gospel accounts, it is clear that Jesus not only called people to greater faithfulness to the Old Testament and the commandments of God, He consistently placed Himself under the authority of the Scriptures. Which means that if I'm going to imitate Jesus, then if the Scriptures and what I think or what I want are in conflict, the Scriptures win.

Let's look at Matthew 4. *"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."* When John Milton wrote the sequel to his epic, *"Paradise Lost,"* he made the temptation of Christ rather than His crucifixion the hinge event of Jesus' effort to regain the world for God and humanity. The world was lost to evil when Adam deliberately chose to disobey God and sin entered the world and with sin, suffering, corruption, and death. The world became a rebel planet ruled by the ultimate rebel, Satan. In the story of the Bible, what a human lost had to be regained by a human. So Jesus becomes a man to become the 2<sup>nd</sup> Adam. And His temptation in the wilderness is the sequel to what began in the Garden of Eden. The Son of God voluntarily puts himself in the same position as Adam - with one significant difference. Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve was *"Can you be like God?"* Satan's temptation of Jesus, *"Can you defeat me as a human without using Your power as God?"* And in this rematch between the devil and one man representing all people, Jesus limits himself to the weapons which are available to every child of God, revealing how we can defeat temptation. Jesus didn't disguise Himself as a human. To be our Savior, He became human in every way. He accepted all of our limitations; a human mind, a human will, human emotions, and human freedom to choose. Because He could not become our substitute and representative before God, a merciful and faithful high priest or offer Himself as our sacrifice if He's not fully human and subject to all of our limitations. That's why He can sympathize with our weaknesses because wherever we are, He's been there and far beyond in the struggle against evil.

The Scriptures say that Jesus experienced every temptation we experience and yet did not sin. Adam failed his first temptation. Jesus endured every trick in the devil's bag. However, Matthew focuses on three specific temptations with which we are all familiar (and I borrowed this helpful outline from author, Mike Breen) the temptations of appetite, approval and ambition. The devil tempts Jesus to put His own appetites before the commands of God in the Scriptures; then he tempts Jesus to put the approval and recognition of people before the commands of God in the Scriptures. And finally, the devil tempts Jesus to put His own ambitions before the commands of God in the Scriptures. And in each temptation, Jesus is victorious over Satan's schemes because He consistently places Himself under the authority of Scripture. And if we're going to imitate Jesus and defeat temptation, then we need to submit our mind and will to the Scriptures as well.

Let's begin with the temptation of appetite. *"And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry."* God led Jesus to a place where there was no food and Jesus hasn't eaten for 40 days. Jesus is incredibly hungry - and it's not "I kind of feel like a burger" hungry, it's "If I don't get some nutrition soon, I'm not going to make it" Jesus has begun to experience the symptoms of starvation. He is physically weak, He's probably having trouble focusing, He is right at the border between life and death. So Satan suggests - like he suggested to Adam and Eve - that God has abandoned Him and He's going to have to take care of Himself. *And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." (Matt 4:2-3)* "If you really are God's Son, you are suffering needlessly. You have the power to turn these rocks into bread. Why not eat?" Which is not an unreasonable suggestion. Jesus is starving. And because He's God, He certainly has the power to create food for Himself in the desert. He'll do the same thing when He feeds the 5000 and the 4000. And there are no commands in the Bible that say, "Thou shalt not turn stones into bread." What's the devil up to here? He's being very clever. He's suggesting that Jesus use His power as God to satisfy His appetites; power He voluntarily laid aside to become human, power to which none of us have access. Because if Jesus uses His power, He disqualifies Himself to be our Savior. Remember, He HAD to be made like us in all things - He had to be subject to all human limitations - to become our representative. And if He is unable to live the life we were designed to live without resorting to power we don't possess, He cannot be our representative and there will be no salvation. You may think, "Wait a minute. Jesus did other miracles. Why not here?" When Jesus performed a miracle, His Father performed it through Him. That's why Jesus said, "The Son can do nothing of Himself. The Father abiding in Him does His works." Jesus took on all our human limitations and any miracles He performed, He performed by faith in the power of His Father, just as any other human would have to do. But should He act independently of His Father by using His own power, He disqualifies Himself to be our champion. So the devil is tempting Jesus to abandon

God's purpose for His life in order to satisfy His immediate appetites. That ever happen to you? Just about every day. Look, God created us with appetites for our good, for our survival in fact. Food is good. Sleep is good. Pleasure is good. Comfort is good. Appetites are good - unless we sacrifice our long-term good to gratify our short-term appetites. "I know I should get out of bed now and pray, but..." "I know I should pay these bills now, but..." "I know I should stay on my diet, but..." "I know I should be more generous, but..." "I know we should wait until we're married to move in together but..." But it's so much easier to do what feels good NOW and worry about the consequences later. Jesus' appetites were just as real as yours and mine. Let's see what the perfect Man did. *But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'"* (Matt. 4:4) Jesus quotes Deut. 8:3 *"He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord."* In Deuteronomy Moses reminds Israel of everything that's happened to them over the past 40 years in the wilderness; how God let them go hungry at times - just as He's let His own Son go hungry - so that they would learn to put their faith in His promises. Ever wondered why God doesn't meet all your needs as soon as you realize you're in need? Why we all go hungry at times? Why we all have to wait for things? God lets us go hungry to readjust our priorities; to remind us that life is more than bread or satisfying our appetites. Our purpose in life is to know God and to walk with Him and to listen to what He says. When I make listening to Him my top priority, I find that all my needs are met. In the 22 years since we started Creekside, we've never had a reserve fund. We've never had more money than we need. Just about every month we have to pray that God will supply what we need to keep the doors open here. And He always has. I think that's why He will probably never dump a ton of cash on us. Because we'll stop trusting Him and listening carefully to what He says. He keeps us hungry so what we'll remember that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. Of course Israel never really seemed to learn the lesson. Each time they ran out of water or food, instead of trusting God and His promises, they complained and wanted to return to Egypt. After 40 days without food in the wilderness, Jesus responds the way Israel should have. He replies to the devil "Devil, My job is to keep God's commands. His job is to feed Me." Jesus puts the Scriptures over His own appetites. And if we're going to imitate Him, then we need to learn to be servants of God and not servants of our appetites. What we're talking about here is the temptation of consumerism: defining ourselves by what we need and what we want, rather than by whose we are. This week each of us will be tempted to sacrifice our long term good for a short term gain. The devil will whisper, "God has forgotten you. He's never going to give you what you want. You need to take it." And the only way you'll be able to resist him is to say, "It is written." One Scripture that has helped me in facing the temptations of appetite is Matthew 6:33. *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things (referring to the things our appetites desire) will be added to you."* God fed Jesus and God will feed us. We just need to keep our priorities straight. And by placing myself under this Scripture and believing that it is true, I'm able to resist the daily temptations to serve my appetites rather than God.

Let's look at Jesus' second temptation, the temptation of approval. *Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple,* - the highest tower of the temple was called the "king's gallery." and stood 450 feet above the Kidron Valley floor (the Campenele at Cal is 307 feet tall so you get an idea of how high off the ground Jesus is - *and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU'; and 'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'"* (Matt. 4:5-6) The devil can quote Scripture too and he quotes Psalm 91. "It says here that God will take care of you and will protect you with His angels. If you're really the Son of God, then you should believe that promise. Well, prove it. Jump!" Now I'm thinking, "There's no temptation here. I'm not going to jump off that tower." The devil has really misread the situation this time. Or has he? Anybody ever challenge you, "You're not much of a man are you?" "You're not much of a mom are you?" How did it make you feel? I'll show them! We want to prove ourselves. And that's what the devil is doing here. "Anybody can call themselves the Son of God. But if You're really God's Son, prove it. Trust God. Jump." The devil's really tricky here. If Jesus jumps, what do you suppose will happen? Either he will splatter on the temple courts below and the devil has won. Or- far more likely - the angels will protect Him and he would land, unhurt in the temple court below. That would be some miracle. And because it happens in the most crowded and most religious spot in Israel, Jesus would immediately be recognized as Messiah. This is the kind of Messiah everybody expects. One that comes down out of heaven, defeats death and demonstrates the power of God in God's own temple. Not the

self-denying, death-embracing Savior of the New Testament. So this is a temptation for Jesus to prove Himself - prove Himself to the devil and to prove Himself to Israel. Instead of following the painful path of humiliation, servant-hood, rejection, and finally death on a cross which His Father has set before Him, Jesus can win the approval of the masses instantly. He doesn't have to wait. And He can skip the cross. Do we ever face similar temptations? You bet! We're constantly tempted to pursue the approval of people, defining ourselves by other people's definitions of us. It's not enough that God approves of us and adopts us into His family as His beloved sons and daughters. We have to impress people. We need people to affirm that we're important, that we're likeable, that we're valuable. Because the devil knows that once we put people's approval above God's approval, he's won the war. So how does the perfect Man handle the temptation of approval? *Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" (Matt 4:7)* Jesus tells Satan that it is not His place to force God's hand. He quotes Deut 6:6, another passage from Israel's 40 years in the desert. Moses reminds the new generation that when their fathers ran out of water, they began to grumble against God. "Is the Lord among us or not. Give us water or else." Instead of trusting God, they commanded God. Instead of waiting on God to do what was best, they tried to force God to act. They failed this test. Jesus passed it. Because He put the devil's approval and the approval of people below obedience to the Scriptures. If Jesus has to choose whether to win the approval of the multitudes or to obey God, God wins every time. If Jesus would have jumped, He would have been proclaimed Messiah immediately because this was the kind of Messiah the people wanted - but not the kind they needed. They needed a Messiah who would die on a cross for their sins and ours so that they wouldn't spend eternity in hell but have eternal life. If Jesus had jumped, He would have been sacrificing our eternity for short term popularity. Today this is the temptation of celebrity; the idea that we can only feel good about ourselves if we're known and admired by others. The only way to defeat the temptation for approval is to make faith and obedience to the Scriptures a higher goal than what people think about me. I've always struggled with needing people's approval and respect, with worrying about what people thought of me, with wanting to be respected and admired. I've always had a hard time coming to peace with the fact that not everybody likes me, respects me or agrees with me. One Scripture that has helped to overcome the temptations of approval is Matthew 6:1. *"Beware of practicing your righteousness before me to be noticed by them. Otherwise you have no reward with your Father in heaven."* I can live for the approval and recognition of people or I can live for the approval and recognition of God, but I can't do both. I have to decide whose approval means the most. And by placing myself under this Scripture and believing that it is true, I'm able to resist the daily temptations to live for human approval.

Let's look at Jesus' third temptation, the temptation of ambition. *"Again, the devil took Him to a very 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 fall down and worship me."* The devil says he will give Jesus all that Adam lost - the rule over this world - if Jesus will renounce His loyalty to God and worship him. "Come over to my side and you can have everything you want - without the pain, the rejection, and the shame of the cross. Just worship me and you can get this planet back. That's what you want, isn't it?" You see, worship is the devil's number one goal. He wants to be like God. He considers himself God's equal and wants everything God has. He wants to be worshiped so badly he's willing to trade the world for it. And so he shows Jesus a vision all the great kingdoms of the world, from the beginning of time to the end; the great empires, the great kings and rulers, and puts it all on the table. Now remember why Jesus came to earth. He's on a rescue mission, redeeming the world and its people from the curse of death and the rule of evil. And the devil is ready to hand it all over right now. "You can have it. You can be the King kings and Lord of lords. All you have to do is worship me." Jesus will be the new Lord of this world. He can alleviate suffering, and undo all the evil Satan has done to this planet. He can right the wrongs, replace injustice with justice, heal the hurts. And He doesn't have to go through the pain of rejection and suffering and death to gain this crown like He does if He follows God's plan. All He has to do is give the devil one thing: worship. That's the temptation of ambition; to do whatever I have to do to achieve what I must achieve. Compromise to succeed. This is probably where the expression, "a deal with the devil" comes from. How does the perfect Man handle the temptation of ambition? By placing His own ambitions under the authority of the Scriptures and the commands of God. *"Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'"* If I can't get there without compromising my relationship with My Father, I'm not going. God alone is worthy of my allegiance There's no higher priority - even the salvation of the world - than worshiping and serving God alone." And that's what's really at the heart of each of these temptations and every temptation for that

matter. Will I be loyal to God or not? Will I serve my will or God's will? My plan or God's plan? Will I save my life or lose it? Will I use my power to take the easy way, or take the difficult path God has assigned to me, knowing that His path will ultimately be the best path, both for me and for others? Today the temptation of ambition is the temptation of competition; the lie that we can only feel good about ourselves if we're the best, if we're successful, if we're in the power position, if we win. A verse that helps me when I face the temptations of competition and ambition is what Jesus said to His own overly ambitious disciples in Mark 10:42-45. *"You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."* Our culture says, "Reach the top. Be first. Others should serve you." Jesus says, "Put yourself last. Serve everyone." And by placing myself under this Scripture and believing that it is true, I'm able to resist the daily temptations to live for my ambition rather than for God's purpose.

So what do we learn from Jesus in Matthew 4? First, Jesus Knew the Scriptures: Jesus is the perfect Human. He is what God wants us to become. That's why it is significant how well Jesus knew His Bible. Jesus always knows the appropriate verse for every circumstance. In almost every chapter of the gospels, we hear Him saying, "It is written." Jesus didn't know the Scriptures because He was God. He knew the Scriptures because He had devoted His entire earthly life to knowing them. And if I'm going to be like Jesus, I need to become familiar with the Scriptures as well. I cannot live under the authority of the Scriptures unless I know what the Scriptures say. That's why increasing the biblical literacy of our congregation is one of our top goals here. I cannot be a disciple of Jesus without knowing the Bible. Here's a little experiment for you. Try setting aside 30 minutes every day in September to read your bible. Just start at the beginning of the New Testament and see how far you get. More importantly, see how it changes your life. Second, Jesus Trusted the Scriptures. In each temptation, the devil offered Jesus an attractive short cut, a way to get what He wanted now, without having to wait for God. But Jesus was able to wait on God because He not only knew the Scriptures, He trusted the Scriptures. He believed that if He put Himself under the Word of God and did what God said, everything else would be taken care of. The devil never wants us to think about the future. He only wants us to think about now. And the only way I can resist His subtle suggestions is to remind myself of what the Scriptures tell me is true and will be true in the future. Temptations come in all shapes and sizes but they all come down to a simple decision. Will I believe what God says or will I believe what the devil or my lusts or my fears or my culture says? Who do I trust? Jesus knew the Scriptures, Jesus trusted the Scriptures and finally Jesus used the Scriptures. He could only use the tools we have access to. And He used the Bible. Each time the devil made a suggestion or asked a question, Jesus answered with Scripture. The devil's temptations were very subtle. He deceived Adam and Eve and He tried to deceive Jesus. But rather than argue with the devil or reason with the devil or try to think His way through the temptation, Jesus simply turned to the Scriptures. Here's what the Bible says so that's what I'm going to do. The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit, the way the Holy Spirit strengthens, guides and protects us. When we use the word of God, we experience the power of God. I have never conquered any temptation that I didn't have a Scripture I could call to mind to answer it. If Jesus used the Scripture to defeat temptation and He was sinless, how much more do we need to use it?

The temptation of Christ answers the question, "Why does God allow evil to continue? Why won't He do something about it?" The answer is, He has done something about it. He became a man himself and defeated evil in His own life so that we can defeat it as well. Jesus could have used His power to destroy evil. He could have vaporized Satan the moment he showed up. He could have washed the planet clean of evil. Of course none of us would have been left around to see it. But Jesus defeated evil in an unexpected way. By becoming a human and using the only tools available to humans, He as the Second Adam defeated evil in His own life, and broke the power of evil in the lives of His disciples as He lives His life in us. He died for our sins, having no sins of His own to die for, in order to deliver us from the eternal consequences of evil. Then He comes into our lives to make us like Himself, and to defeat the evil that is in us without destroying us or our freedom. Jesus offers freedom from guilt and freedom from our slavery to evil. If you have never asked Him to be your Lord and Savior, you can ask Him now.

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