



Voice Ministries

# ***SPIRITUAL STRENGTH***

## **Reading: Matthew 4: 1—11**

*Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him ( Matthew 4:11)*

Every week of the year people watch teams battle it out for supremacy in various sporting tests of strength. Sports such as boxing, wrestling, rugby, soccer and athletics, all have their fair share of super heroes, but the one thing that always manages to grab the public's imagination – that of small boys in particular – is the competition for the World's Strongest Man. Men like Geoff Capes demonstrate their amazing strength, receiving the adulation of the crowds for their efforts, in addition to glittering prizes. In *The World Book of Records* some while ago there was a picture of Paul Anderson of Toccoa, Georgia. He weighed 365 pounds, and he lifted the greatest weight ever lifted by a human at that time – certainly since records were kept – a staggering 6,720 pounds, or almost 448 stone! He claimed to be the strongest man in the entire world. Throughout history we have recorded the achievements of many fascinating strong men, together with details of their amazing feats of strength, yet not one has ever excelled the strength of Jesus of Nazareth. We have no indication of Jesus' stature from the Bible, all we can do is hazard a guess from the average build that the anthropologists indicate for that period in the region's history. We don't know for certain any detail about His physical stature, not His height or weight, neither the size of His biceps nor the weight that He could lift. Yet despite that, the Bible does leave us with a record of Jesus as the world's strongest person.

Jesus' strength can be seen in His experience with the devil following His baptism, when He had received an anointing from God. Scripture records that ***the heavens were opened, and he (John) saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him (Matthew 3:16)***. After this we are told that ***Jesus was led up into the wilderness by the Spirit, to be tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1)***, and it was here that the devil hurled his assault at Jesus. He triumphed over every one of the devil's temptations, remaining totally without sin and living a blameless life. That's something that no other person has ever achieved in the history of the world. No other person since the world began has been strong enough to withstand the devil and remain sinless, and therefore it becomes logical to acknowledge that Jesus Christ must be the strongest person in the world.

The powerful forces of evil continue to strive against God's work in and through His people, constantly tempting people, using those weaknesses and failings that can be



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found in each of us. No matter how strong we might think we are, we'll never be strong enough to emerge victorious in our own strength, but we can depend upon the Lord, for He will give us sufficient strength to resist the attacks of satanic forces.

The devil will seek to attack us in various ways. For example, he will attempt to get us to give our physical needs precedence over our spiritual needs. The Bible records that whilst Jesus was in the wilderness He became extremely hungry, and the devil tried to take advantage of His hunger by tempting Him to turn stones into bread in order to satisfy His need. Jesus was tempted to use divine power to satisfy physical need, and the devil attempted to persuade Him to relinquish His dependence on the providence of God and use divine power for selfish purpose. Satan saw that Jesus was physically weakened by the need for food, but our Lord defeated the tempter. The devil failed to recognise that Jesus' weakness was only physical and not spiritual. Jesus repelled Satan by quoting from Deuteronomy 8.3, ***It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'***

Every person is similarly tempted to place a greater concern upon the need for physical gratification rather than spiritual fulfilment. Satan's ploy is to tempt people to place their trust on transient things, trying to convince people that it's only their physical needs that are important. We see this constantly demonstrated in the materialistic world in which we live today. For many years, politicians in so many of the so-called 'civilized' countries, have promoted a policy-line based upon satisfying the self-centred desires of the individual, with no thought to the costs involved in spiritual terms. That's why we live in a world of immorality and debt, where spending large sums of money on luxury holidays, motor cars, and designer clothing is considered to be okay, whilst across the globe millions perish for want of a crust of bread or a cup of clean water. Perhaps the policy of '**More! More! More!**' is designed to distract us from the realities that justifiably want our attention. To be delivered from this temptation we need the strength of Jesus Christ, and it's there for everyone to claim if, through their weakness, they have the strength to do so. The world's strongest person can cause us to give greater priority to the spiritual which, in turn will prompt us to be more Christ-centred and less self-centred. This temptation teaches us our need for dependence upon God's strength, and so it's in His strength that we can stand firm when Satan comes to tempt us. It's in Christ that the victory rests, and in Him that we can be more than conquerors!

Satan tempts us to exploit God's providence, tempting us to take unnecessary risks and then expecting God to protect us because of our foolishness. The devil tempted Jesus in this manner, even quoting Scripture to Him in an attempt to support his temp-



tation, by trying to get Jesus to throw Himself from the highest pinnacle of the temple, relying on God to send His angels to save Him. Yet again Jesus repelled the attack by quoting from Deuteronomy 6:16, ... ***it is written, you shall not put the Lord your God to the test.*** God promises to protect us, but He does not promise His providence in the face of our foolish and selfish choosing that deliberately tests Him. Rather, His protection comes through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, pointing us towards right from wrong. He provides for us and protects us when we tread the pathway of righteousness. We should never be guilty of presuming upon God for our personal advantage.

Having failed in his first two attempts at tempting our Lord, the devil finally shows his true intent by taking Jesus up to a high mountain and offering to give Him all the kingdoms of the world if only He would fall down and worship Satan. To someone of lesser strength than Jesus, this powerful temptation would almost certainly produce the required result. Once again Jesus opposed the devil by quoting from Scripture, ***Be gone Satan! For it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only*** (Deuteronomy 6:13).

Every believer is tempted to use the wrong means for the right purpose from time to time, but there must never be any compromise with evil. Lotteries are promoted in which the prize runs into tens of millions, tempting even some who oppose the Lottery to cast aside their objections and seek for ways to justify taking part. But what price the whole world if a man loses his soul to obtain it? In our service for the lord we must do God's work in God's way. Often we will be tempted to depart from God's path of self-denial and to compromise with the world, yet even the slightest deviation gives the devil an advantage.

Every day we come under attack by the devil as we are tempted to gratify our selfish physical desires, and urged to exploit God's divine providence for our self-advancement, as we are presented with plausible means for our selfish interest. There is only one person who has ever fought Satan and won the battle, and that is Jesus Christ. He is the champion over temptation. If we wish to be victorious then we need to recognise that our victory can never come through the avoidance of the assault, but through the abundant resources of the world's strongest person, Jesus Christ.

Amen