

Text: Luke 4:1-13

Title: The Temptation of Jesus

Truth: Jesus was faithful to God when tempted. God help us be the same.

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Introduction

The introductory section of Luke is past: chapters 1 and 2 recount the births of the prophet John the Baptist and Jesus the Son of God. Luke skips over years of growth and preparation to get quickly to John's preaching which prepares the way for Messiah's public unveiling. Jesus marks His affiliation with John and John's message of repentance by sharing in the baptism that signified it. Luke finishes the introductory material with the genealogy of Jesus, which connects Jesus to Mary, to Israel, to humanity, and to God. The action begins in earnest in chapter 4 with a dark scene.

I. The Devil's Strategies to Bring Temptation

What does the Devil do? Following are five of his techniques.

A. The Devil tempts us, that is entices us, to sin.

Does he *make* people do wicked things? Rarely. You could argue that he exercised such a deep influence upon Judas that Judas sinned, but even in this case Judas is not free from guilt, because he still had agency in the matter and was morally culpable. (It would have been better for that man if he had not been born, Matt. 26:24; and Judas transgressed and went to "his own place," Acts 1:25.)

Basically, we can never say, "the devil made me do it." No, he did not. You did whatever the sin was of your own free will. You *chose* to do wrong, at least initially. You do not need the devil's help, because he has an ally *inside of you* that is strong and able to entice you into sin. That ally is called your sin nature. He may have arranged to present the situation to you, but he did not *make you sin*. Especially if you are a Christian, because the Spirit of God in you is simply greater than the Devil who roams about in the world.

Despite this limitation on his power, the Devil is active in our world. The whole world lies under His sway (1 John 5:19; John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11) and He is the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2). He works in the sons of disobedience (also Eph. 2:2). He moves in some individuals and influences all unbelievers in various ways. He especially works at the high level of nations and movements and ideas and philosophies. All that has an influence on individual human beings. We saw that unfold within the past week with the violence in the middle east. The ruler of this age blinds the minds of those who do not believe (2 Cor. 4:4). He tried to work his sinful powers on Jesus, but it did not work.

Let us dispense immediately with the question raised by some doubters when they suggest Jesus could or would not do any wrong, therefore He could not be truly tempted. We do not run with that crowd, because the text of Scripture written by Luke plainly says these words: Jesus was “tempted” for forty days by the devil. Of course, this was a *test* from God, who does not Himself *tempt* anyone. But the Devil is pleased to use whatever means he can to try to get Jesus—and *anyone*—to do wrong things. That is what we call *temptation*.

Did Jesus have the power to turn stones into bread? We presume so, because He created bread out of basically thin air when he took the few loaves and fishes of the boy and fed more than 5,000 souls (Matt. 14:17-21). But what He could do in a non-sinful situation, He could not and would not do in a situation in which that act would be a sin.

- B. Satan tries to get us to depend on ourselves instead of depending on the Lord. The “I can do it myself” or “pull yourself up by your own bootstraps” mentality is all too common. Certainly, there are many things you can and should *do*, on your own from the human perspective. But you can do *nothing* without God. Think of it—God in effect made you, gave you the abilities you have, the background you have, the upbringing you have, the brains you have, the resources you have, everything. There is nothing you have that you have not received. And sometimes, the things you *can* do, you should *not* do. Here Satan is trying to get Jesus to live

independently of God the Father, to take care of His needs with the power of His own to supply it.

We might be able to say that none of us would experience the exact same temptation as Christ, because we have not the power that He has. But in our lesser human way, we can be tempted to provide for our legitimate needs in illegitimate ways, very much like Satan tried Jesus. Always go with God's ways, not our contrived ways. Do not fall to impatience and dissatisfaction.

- C. Satan tries to get us to worship him. Worshipping anything other than the Triune God of Scripture counts in the Devil's record-keeping as a win. Worshipping idols, made-up gods, the gods of false religions, or yourself, or nature, or human ingenuity, or science, or materialism: all amount to worship of the Devil because His wiles are behind the construction of those systems. Satan promises "the world" to those who follow His ways. But he cannot deliver on that promise because 1) people die and face judgment; and 2) the world is not ultimately his to give; 3) he himself will be judged and locked away forever to be punished for his rebellion.
- D. Satan attempts to get us to put God to the test. It is as if he says, "Do this dangerous thing and God will protect you. It's not your time yet, so you can feel free to presume upon God's kindness and protection—especially if you are the Son of God!" Sometimes we make excuses for our poor behavior: God will forgive me, God will protect me, God will keep me from the worst consequences. That is presuming upon the Lord and is entirely displeasing to Him. To rest in God's omnipotent capability as cover for our sinful propensities is no way to treat God. More to the point of the Old Testament illustration is when we outright rebel against God, testing His longsuffering with us.
- E. Satan misuses the word of God as "bait." No surprise there: 2 Peter 3:16 explains that untaught and unstable people twist the word to their own destruction. We would expect the king of liars, thieves, murderers, and destruction to do the same. Whatever it takes for him to lead people astray to destruction, he will do. Whether it is sowing doubt ("did God really say...?") or outright contradiction, or even out-of-context quotations, Satan will do it.

Peter had a big failure when he told the Lord, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to you!” (Matthew 16:22). Peter failed in what was a temptation for him. He was not thinking in accord with the ways of God, nor in agreement with the Word of God which indicated the necessity of a suffering servant. Jesus diagnosed it: “You are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”

I do not believe we should think of these temptations as “easy” for Jesus. Satan selected these with all his wiles, attempting to really trip up the Lord. Satan knows what “buttons to push” in people. Related to this, please note the twice Satan says, “If you are the Son of God.” The temptations related to Jesus’s identity as the Son of God. Supposedly if he were the Son, He would be able to prove it with certain actions. The same “if” came up when Jesus hung on the cross: “If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” Furthermore, these temptations were more difficult because they lasted over 40 days. Apparently, Luke mentions only a few of them.

This section covers a dark subject, but we gave light by exposing the Devil’s strategies that have worked on humanity for millennia. It is important for us to be aware of this. 2 Cor. 2:11 mentions that we are not “ignorant of his devices” and we absolutely do not want him to be able to take advantage of us. One of the general approaches that seems to work so well on humans is the “boiling the frog” approach to getting someone to fall into sin. The process is that you start a little habit—a way of thinking, an attitude, a practice. Then, it becomes fixed, and you cannot see outside of it. You move to another step, and after a while, you are in an entirely different spot than you were years ago—perhaps cold; maybe unfaithful to your church attendance and ministry; maybe you lost the grip on sound doctrine and are embracing false teaching; possibly angry or bitter at people when years earlier you could never have imagined it possible. I have remarked before, “How the mighty have fallen” (2 Samuel 1:19, 25, 27). Some of the most seemingly spiritually mature people fall by the wayside and do not continue with the Lord or their church. They do not usually fall in a moment of time. Satan knows how to use the world and flesh to move people slowly, almost imperceptibly, and by their own poor

choices they put themselves into a situation that is entirely wrong. Have you fallen into temptation by this more subtle means?

II. Jesus and His Successful Response to Temptation

Now to a better topic: How did Jesus respond to the temptations He faced? We traverse the passage again, this time with a focus on how Jesus handled the temptations.

A. Jesus is filled with the Spirit. And for us to succeed against temptation, we too need to be filled with God's Spirit. (We do want to be victorious in temptation, yes?) Spirit-filling is a crucial ingredient in facing temptation, even if you are very hungry! We are commanded to be filled with the Spirit all the time (Eph. 5:18). We are not to be under the influence of alcohol or any other substance or thing but God's Spirit. Drunkenness is absolutely *forbidden* for Christians.

How do we know if we are Spirit filled? We do not determine so by emotions or external displays of so-called spirit-filled worship. Spiritual fruit shows it: holiness, love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, humility, self control, righteousness, truth (Gal. 5:22-23, Eph. 5:9). Being filled with God's word shows it.

B. Jesus uses the Word of God and its principles to repel the temptations and blasphemies of Satan. For you to succeed against temptation, you too must know God's word. In each case Jesus quotes from Scripture (Deut. 8:3, 6:13, 6:16). Look at each of those contexts in turn and see what you can glean from them.

1. 8:3 – God allowed the nation to hunger, made them depend on Him, so that they would know that mankind lives by the words of God, not by bread. Bread is a figure of that which is earthy, even worldly, temporal—not eternal. Do *you* believe that God's word is that important to your life? I do.
2. 6:13 – God demands exclusivity of worship. He is the only real God and the *only* one worthy of worship. The other so-called gods are worthy only of rejection, disdain, and turning away. Jesus refused to short-cut the path to the kingdom. He *had* to pass through suffering to fulfill the Scripture to save His people. The Devil was asking Him to “break the Scriptures.”

3. 6:16 – Do not show presumption or have anger against God when He does not provide what you want or seems to be missing from the action. Exodus 17:1-7 ends with this explanation: they tempted the Lord by saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?” Will God prove Himself to be among us? Satan was basically saying that if God is with you, and especially if you are His Son, He will protect you in your foolish action. To follow the temptation would be to presume, not trust.

C. Jesus does *not* depend on His own powers, omnipotent as He is. Instead, He depends on the Lord. He was learning, as Israel did, that God permitted Him to hunger so that He would know that humans do not live by bread alone, but real life comes through the words that proceed from the mouth of God.

Food is very important to you, is it not? How important is God’s word to you? We too must depend on God instead of relying on our own native powers if we are to succeed against temptation.

D. Jesus refuses to worship anyone else other than His Father. Said positively, He worships God the Father, and He does so exclusively. If you are to succeed against temptation, you too must refuse to worship anything or anyone other than God—not yourself, not the thing or person you are tempted by, not the thing you want, etc.

E. Jesus *resists* the Devil (James 4:7). “Get behind Me, Satan!” You must do the same if you are to succeed against temptation.

F. Jesus will not put Himself in dangerous situations or any situation (physical or spiritual) in which He would be presuming upon God to protect Him or presuming on God to undo natural consequences. He will not question whether God is with Him, because He knows God is with Him all the time. Very simply, to succeed in temptation, you simply cannot put yourself into compromising situations as if God will protect you regardless of your poor choices.

III. Our Response to Temptation

A. Jesus’s temptations were harder than ours in the sense that He faced them all the way to the end and was victorious every time. We are not always victorious, so succumb earlier in the process. His temptations were also a bit “more” than ours in that He had

powers to test that we do not have. Our temptations can come from outside *and* from inside from our sinful desires—Jesus did not have that problem. Adam didn't either, initially. All in all, the Bible's summation is that Jesus was tempted like we are (4:15). In our temptations, we have the same human resources that He had, most especially God's word. We can meet temptation like He did.

- B. None of the responses requested by the Devil include *faith in God* or *love for God* as their motivations. Even the one about making bread—which is itself not a bad thing to care for the human need nourishment—was to trust in self, not in God. All of Jesus's response were firmly grounded in His faith in God and love for God. Our responses must be as well. When you face a test, ask yourself what response would best honor God; what response is the loving response; what response shows faith in God? Does falling to the temptation show such faith and love?
- C. It is difficult news that we all face temptations and none of us have handled them properly like Jesus did. As such, we start out on the Devil's team, on his side. Whether we like it or not, that's the reality. But the good news is that Jesus knows this, and that is why He came—to save sinners. He died in place of sinners, like you and me, to take the heat for us so that we could be blessed with eternal life. He requires us to respond properly, according to His word. Here's how:
- Acts 17:31 – God commands all people to repent.
- Acts 20:21 – The Christian message is to repent toward God and have faith toward our Lord Jesus.
- Romans 10:9-10 – Confess that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. If you confess and believe that truth, you will be granted righteousness and salvation.
- D. When you are created anew as a Christian, then He Himself will undertake to come alongside of you and help you with the temptations *you* face. And who else better to do that, than the one who knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21), and was tempted in all ways like we are, but without sin (Heb. 4:15)?

IV. The Big Picture

- A. All the above is very interesting and as far as my study goes, it seems to be a legitimate exposition of the passage. But this section of Luke is not meant to be Jesus's "master class" on how to handle the Devil and sin. There is something bigger going on here.
- B. A big question, if not the big question underlying this text is this: "Who is your God?" "Will you be faithful to Him?" God recorded for us three temptations that Satan put to Jesus. One had to do with eating, the second with worship, and the third with putting God to the test. But there is a common thread among them having to do with your relationship to God. You will either make yourself your god, or the devil or other idols will be your god, or you will have a twisted version of the real God as your god. The influences of the world outside of us, the sinful nature inside of us, and the Devil prowling around us all conspire to get us to worship something other than the true God. That's Satan's game plan.
- C. After they left Egypt, Israel was 40 years in the wilderness. They failed the tests that God arranged for them through the natural progression of moving through the unfriendly wilderness. They lusted after food instead of desiring God. They fell into idolatry, worshipping Moloch and Remphan. They expected God to give them whatever they wanted, doubted His presence with them despite the evidence, and disregarded God's law. They put God to the test. They died in the wilderness because of their unbelief.
- D. Jesus went 40 days in the wilderness with no food. He was given similar tests as the nation. He passed with perfect marks as He trusted in the Lord. Jesus rejected all three false forms of worship. His god was not His belly. His god was not the Devil but only the true God and creator of all things. His god was not an enabling, give-me-what-I-want god who protects me from all my foolish decisions. He would not use His power for selfish ends, or to prematurely kick-start God's kingdom on earth, or do amazing feats that would draw attention to Himself (Morris, *Luke*, p. 120).
- E. In a similar manner, we can compare the first Adam with the second Adam. The first Adam transgressed the clear and plain

commandment of God. Eve was deceived but still culpable for turning away from God's command. Jesus did not turn away from God when confronted by the serpent.

F. The tests were for Jesus, so He could demonstrate His utter faithfulness to God the Father and thus His fitness for the ministry that He was about to undertake for the next three years.

But His tests were also directed at us, to show us His perfection and to leave us footsteps to follow. He shows us that overcoming even the most difficult temptations is possible. You and I face circumstances that try us daily—all the time. We live in a world chock-full of temptations in the media and out in the world. Will you follow Jesus's example in handling them? And even more importantly, will you follow His example to be 100% committed to your Father, God in heaven?

E. By God's grace: Avert your eyes. Say "no" to bad thoughts. Pick new habits. Turn off old entertainment. Control your tongue. Regulate your emotions. Tamp down your anger. Lower your voice, check your tone, put a kind smile on your face instead of the nasty looks you give. Abandon the silent treatment. Beat down unforgiveness in your heart. None of those bad behaviors are useful tools to glorify God—so quit them and move on to things that are borne out of faith toward God and love toward people. Reject any other God but the one true and living God.

Conclusion

Satan left Jesus alone, but only for a little while. There would be many other temptations throughout His life, but God did not record most of them for us in Scripture. He did detail the internal and very human struggle of Jesus at Gethsemane. But then as in Luke 4, Jesus chose not to give in to the lure of personal comfort, instead committing to do God's will, not His own. Jesus would be a perfect model of a God-fearing man.

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