

The Temptation Of Christ

Luke 3:23-4:13

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I want to read just the first two verses of our text. Luke says in chapter 4, verses 1-2, "Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan..." that was when He was baptized "...and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness..." It's known as the Judean wilderness, by the Jordan River. "...being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry."

"I have circled this block 20 times. I have an appointment to keep. 'Forgive us our trespasses.'" When the owner of the car returned, he found the following reply attached to his note: "I've circled the block for 20 years. If I don't give you a ticket, I lose my job. 'Lead us not into temptation.'"

Temptation is something that we all experience. Someone said, "I can resist anything but temptation." We all face times when the devil comes to tempt us to do evil. So this is an important story for us in the life of Christ.

The temptation of Christ is recorded by all three synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke. And the interesting thing about this is that it is autobiographical; only Jesus could have related the story of this incident in the wilderness.

You say, "Well, the devil was there; he could have related it." Why would the devil relate this story of him tempting Jesus? The devil didn't succeed. So the story is autobiographical; Jesus has related it to us. And it's filled with doctrine, theology and important things. By no means can I, in this one sermon, exhaust all that is in it.

Now Jesus is ready to embark on His public ministry, a ministry designed to destroy the works of the devil. So it was no surprise that He would encounter the devil Himself. And the setting and background for the temptation is in verses 1-2. "Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness."

The time here is important; it's right after His baptism. Have you ever thought of that? Jesus just experienced this glorious time at the Jordan River when He was baptized. The heavens opened, the Spirit descended and the voice of the Father audibly said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). This had been a high point in the life of Christ. But immediately after this, Satan attacked Him. Jesus was led or driven by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

The devil will come after a great blessing. Maybe you come to church on Sunday morning, you're worshipping the Lord and singing your songs and feeling so blessed. Then you have to get in your car and get out of the parking lot, for starters, without losing your sanctification. Then you drive on the street and start talking about the other drivers around you. It's like the

little boy who said, “Mommy, how come when Daddy drives, all the idiots come out? They’re never there when you drive.”

So the devil will come to try to rob you. You might come to church and hear a message that speaks to your heart, that deals with issues in your life, and then immediately Satan will come to do something to rob you of that blessing that God has brought into your life. When Jesus was transfigured on the mountaintop and the disciples saw His glory, the first thing they encountered at the foot of the mountain was a demon-possessed boy. Satan attacked them immediately. So Jesus was baptized and immediately was driven out into the wilderness to be tempted.

I like what J. Oswald Sanders said. He said, “After the dove, the devil. After the reassuring voice of the Father, the insinuating hiss of the serpent. After the comforting words, ‘Thou art My beloved Son,’ the sinister challenge, ‘If Thou be the Son of God....’” So Satan came and attacked after Jesus’ baptism.

There is a contrast between Luke 3:38 and the story we’re reading. It says, “...the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.” We skipped over it, but the end of chapter 3 has the genealogy of Jesus. I did that intentionally; I don’t want to read every one of those names. If you want to read them, have fun.

There are two genealogies in the Bible. In Matthew 1, we have the genealogy of Joseph, giving Jesus His legal line to Messiahship. It traces Jesus from Abraham down to the birth of Christ. But Luke’s account is Mary’s, which goes from Jesus, past Abraham, all the way back to Adam. Matthew’s Gospel is Jewish, showing Jesus is the King of the Jews. Thus it goes back to Abraham. But Luke’s Gospel is Gentile or universal, thus it goes back to Adam.

The contrast between the genealogies in Matthew and Luke is intended. Adam the first was tempted in the garden, he obeyed the devil, so it plunged the world into sin, death and condemnation. Jesus is Adam the last—not the second—who Himself was tempted in the wilderness but was victorious over the devil. Jesus will go on to rescue or redeem fallen mankind back to God. So there are two contrasts: Adam the first in the Garden of Eden, bringing sin, death and condemnation; and the last Adam, Jesus Christ, who was victorious in resisting the devil, dying for our sins and rising from the dead. He will bring a new heaven and a new earth when Christ returns to establish His kingdom forever.

Also in Luke 4:1, Jesus was “filled with the Holy Spirit...and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness” in order to be tempted by the devil. The question is, “Why would the Holy Spirit lead Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil?” You’d think He would lead Him in the opposite direction. Why would the Holy Spirit lead you into temptation?

In our English word “temptation,” we have only an evil connotation. When we use the word “temptation,” we mean “an elicitation to evil.” When I say, “I’m being tempted,” I mean “I’m being tempted to do evil.” But in the Greek and Hebrew, the word “temptation” has two meanings. It

can mean “test” or “tempt.” So when God tests us, He’s allowing a trial to bring out our worth or good. When Satan tempts us, he’s soliciting us to sin.

There is an example in Genesis 22:1-2. “God tested Abraham. He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love...and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.’”

Now the question is, “Is God tempting Abraham?” No. The word should be translated “testing.” It comes from God. So from God’s perspective, it was a test. But from the devil’s perspective, it was a temptation. In James 1:13 it says, “God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.” We are tempted by our own lusts and enticed and sought to be drawn away into evil when the devil tempts us. So God tests us to bring out our worth; the devil tempts us to bring out our worst. So when the Spirit led Jesus, on God’s side it was to be tested. The Spirit led Him to the devil where He would be tempted.

Many times Satan will use a test or trial and turn it into a temptation. Maybe God allows you to get sick, then the devil shows up and says, “God doesn’t love you. God doesn’t care about you. God isn’t real. God isn’t going to heal you.” Satan starts whispering in your ear when you’re being tempted to doubt God’s love so you’ll disobey God’s Word.

Why would the Spirit lead Jesus into the wilderness? First, to show us that Jesus could not sin. The temptation was real. When you study the life of Christ, you need to understand that He’s truly, fully man and truly, fully God. So the temptation lies in His humanity. Jesus was fully human but without a sinful nature; He was born of a virgin. So He wasn’t tempted as God; He was tempted as a man. It was a full, genuine temptation. The reality and intensity was just as real as our temptations. But there were no sinful desires in the heart of Christ; He was the sinless Son of God.

Theologians call this “the impeccability of Christ.” What that means is that Christ could not have sinned. Even though He could not sin, because He’s God; He also couldn’t sin as a man, even though the temptation was real, authentic and genuine.

Second, Jesus was tempted by the devil to qualify Him as our sympathetic and compassionate High Priest. The Bible says, He “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

Third, Jesus was tempted in order to expose Satan’s tactics. That’s why Jesus wanted this story recorded in the synoptic Gospels. We learn that Satan will tempt us in “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16). So He gives us an exposure of Satan’s tactics.

Fourth, Jesus was tempted by the devil to give us a pattern of our own victory. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” So God will not

allow you to be tempted beyond your ability to resist, but will make a way to escape the temptation so you can bear up under it. It's a promise in God's Word that we can claim and stand on.

Let's look at the temptation that Jesus faced and discover how we can detect and defeat the devil. The first temptation is in verses 3-4. "And the devil said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.'" The devil was probably holding it in his hand and pointing to it. "But Jesus answered him, saying, 'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God."'" Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3. This was the favorite book of Jesus. Three times He quotes from Deuteronomy to be able to combat the devil. Jesus is pulling out the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, and answering temptations with God's Word.

Notice that the devil is mentioned in verses 2, 3, 5, 6 and in 13. There really is a devil. If you don't believe there is a devil, you're being deceived by the devil. He's done a good job with you. His job is to convince you that he doesn't exist or that he's not a real being.

The devil was created by God as an angel. His name was Lucifer. He was so powerful and so glorious that he was filled with pride. The mystery of the Bible is the origin of evil. All we know is that it started in the heart of Satan or Lucifer. He was lifted up with pride, which was the original sin. He said, "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God....I will be like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:13-14). So Lucifer rebelled against God, and God kicked him out of heaven. Now there is war between Satan and God.

Satan is not divine; he was created. He's not omniscient or omnipotent. He doesn't have all the power God has. He's a creature. But a third of the angelic host rebelled with Lucifer and were also thrown down to the earth with him. They are known as demons. The devil and demons are real. They're fallen angels and are enemies of God and mankind, especially of Christians.

There really is a devil and he hates you. He is "the accuser of [the] brethren" (Revelation 12:10). He wants to "kill, steal and destroy" your life. Your number one defense against the devil is to have God's Word hidden in your heart. Psalm 119:11 says, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You." There is nothing more important for you than to know the Bible so you can detect and defeat the devil.

It is important for you to understand that Jesus was "tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). His divine power could not be used to feed His flesh. So wherein lies the temptation to turn the stone into bread?

I've never been tempted to turn a stone into bread, because I can't do it; I'm not God. But Jesus could do it, so it was a temptation for Him. This indicates that the devil knew who Jesus was. The devil never would have tempted the Lord to turn a stone into bread if he knew Jesus couldn't do it. Jesus could do it.

In the Greek, the word "if" in verse 3 could actually be translated "since." So the devil wasn't

questioning whether Jesus was the Son of God; he was affirming that. He just heard the voice of the Father say, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased." So Satan would have said, "Since You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." The devil knows just when to attack. If you're hungry, he'll attack with "the lust of the flesh."

So this first temptation was toward "the lust of the flesh"; that Jesus would use His divine power in a selfish way to meet His own need. The sin would lie in Jesus using His divine power to satisfy His human need outside of the will of God. That's where so many times Satan will tempt you—to satisfy your human appetite outside the will of God.

Charles Erdman said that "If Jesus were to use His divine power that way, there would have been no hunger, no pain, no sorrow, no Cross. But He would have defeated the very purpose for which He came into the world." If Jesus had used His divine power to feed His own human appetite, He would have defeated the purpose for which He came into the world. His purpose was to experience our sorrow, our suffering and to bear our sins upon the Cross.

It was also a temptation to doubt God's love. When you have a trial or testing—maybe you're sick, have just been diagnosed with cancer, have had a stroke or a heart attack, someone you loved has just died, you've lost a child, you've lost your job—that's when the devil will say, "Where was God? How could God be good if He allowed this? How could He really love you?" He makes these sinister suggestions. He says, "You should just forget God and forget God's will. Forget the Word of God and just do what you want to do. Satisfy your own flesh."

How did Jesus defeat the devil, and how should we defeat him? Use the Word of God, verse 4. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'" So Jesus takes out "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17). Jesus said, "Satan, the Word says that we shall not live only by bread, our human appetite, but by every word of God." True satisfaction comes by doing the will of God to the glory of God. It is better to be hungry in the will of God than be full out of the will of God.

I would rather go hungry smack dab in the center of God's will doing God's work in God's way than to have a full stomach out of the will of God. Matthew 6:33 says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." So don't let the devil deceive you.

The second temptation is in verses 5-8. "Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain..." we don't know which one "...showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, 'All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours.'" He was basically saying that if Jesus would bow down and worship him, he would give Jesus all this power. "And Jesus answered and said to him, 'Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"" Here Jesus is quoting Deuteronomy 6:13.

This temptation is actually the last of the three in Matthew's account. But Luke puts it second. We're not sure of the right order, but this could be the last temptation, because Jesus said, "Get behind Me, Satan!" which would finalize the temptations. And I believe that Jesus was being tempted all through the 40 days, and Jesus culminates with these three, last temptations.

This temptation involves "the lust of the eyes." The first temptation was "the lust of the flesh." And wherein lies this temptation? Jesus came to redeem the world back to God. So the devil is offering Jesus a shortcut. This shortcut would involve Jesus not going to the Cross to suffer and die. The devil tried to entice Jesus to take that shortcut. He is saying that the end will justify the means. No, it does not. You can't get a godly end through an ungodly means. You must be obedient to God's will, go God's way to arrive at God's glory. So Jesus makes it clear that "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve."

Why did Jesus add that? The devil didn't say anything about serving. The devil said, "If you worship me, I'll give you these kingdoms without You going to the Cross. Take a shortcut." But Jesus said, "We worship God and only serve Him." Jesus knew that whatever you worship, you serve. If you worship the true God, you'll serve the true God. If you worship an idol, you'll be worshipping that thing made of stone or clay. So Jesus knew that worship and service were tied together.

The third temptation is in verses 9-13. "Then he brought Him to Jerusalem...." This is the devil bringing Jesus to Jerusalem. "...set Him on the pinnacle of the temple." The pinnacle of the temple is on the southeast corner of the outer wall of the temple. From this temple pinnacle atop the wall to the bottom of the Kidron Valley below was 450 feet down.

Then the devil "said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. For it is written: "He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you," and, "In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" The devil gets very subtle by then quoting Scripture. Yes, the devil knows the Bible. He is quoting from Psalm 91:11-12. So the devil was saying Jesus could throw Himself off the temple, God had promised in His Word to save Jesus and all the people would see Jesus was the Messiah and follow Him. That is not God's will.

"And Jesus answered and said to him, 'It has been said, "You shall not tempt..." or "put to a foolish test" "...the Lord your God.'" Jesus was quoting Deuteronomy 6:16. Some scholars believe that Jesus is quoting that to the devil about Himself; that He is "the Lord your God," so the devil shouldn't be testing Him.

Verse 13, "Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time." That means that the devil would be back. If you think it's going to be smooth sailing just because you resisted temptation, you're wrong. "I'm under the spout where the glory comes out. I'm just going to float through the golden gates!" No, because the devil won't give up.

I've discovered that the longer I walk with God, the more intense, the more subtle, the more sinister are the devil's attacks. If he doesn't come in the front door, he'll come in the back door. If he can't get in the back door, he'll come in the window. He will get into your house. The devil is relentless; he will not give up.

It's interesting too that Jesus was directly tempted by the devil. When we are tempted, we are tempted by demons. The devil doesn't mess with us. There are only a few select people in the Bible who were recorded to be tempted by the devil himself: Adam and Eve, Jesus, Judas, Job. So the devil doesn't tempt us directly; he sends his demons to tempt us. But he will not stop tempting you. So there really is a devil, and he's not going to leave you alone.

Wherein lies this third temptation? It's in "the pride of life." Our temptations come from "the lust of the flesh," your passions; "the lust of the eyes," your possessions; and "the pride of life," your position.

In the previous temptation when the devil quoted the Scriptures, Psalm 91:11-12, he left something out. Whenever the devil quotes Scripture, he'll take something out, he'll add something or pull it out of context. A text out of its context becomes a pretext. It's Scripture twisting. Even pastors do that. It's demonic, Satanic. They twist the Scriptures to get what they want or to get gain.

Paul wrote about this in 2 Corinthians 4:2. He said, "We have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully." So be careful when you're listening to a preacher. I've had people say, "Well, he preaches from the Bible." So does the devil! But is he preaching the true meaning of the text in its historical, grammatical, theological context? That's true Biblical preaching.

I think it's important for a church to be educated on what is true preaching. It is preaching the meaning of the text. It's called "the authorial intent." Otherwise you're taking the Bible out of its context, and you're making it say what you want it to say. Why even use the Bible? You could just give a little pep talk. True, Biblical preaching sees the text as master and that we are bound to convey the meaning of the text. That's expository preaching. That's what all pastors should be doing in the pulpit. "Thus saith the Lord," preaching the Word of God.

So whenever the devil's quoting Scripture, beware, be careful. He's twisting it for his own gain.

Now what's the suggestion from Satan in this third temptation? Presumption. He suggests placing yourself in a purposely foolish way so as to be physically or morally in danger expecting God to deliver you. It's putting yourself deliberately in a dangerous position and presumptuously expecting God to save you.

Some churches in the south have snake-handling services. Can you imagine that you're in church and the preacher says, "At this time, the ushers will pass out the rattlesnakes. We're going to find out who the true believers are"?! I'm outta here! I hate snakes. That's just plain stupid! You don't put yourself in a dangerous position expecting God to deliver you! Be very

careful.

Years ago when I had just gotten saved at about 19 and I lived in San Bernardino, my friends and I decided we wanted to go tobogganing at midnight in the mountains where we had just gotten a lot of snow. We found this place that at the end of the run it dropped straight off onto the Rim of the World highway. I'm thinking, This is probably not very smart. I was just going with the flow, but I made sure I was on the back of the toboggan, so I could jump off.

So we got on this toboggan, were ready to go, the guy on the front had a flashlight when one guy said, "I think we should pray first." I felt like slappin' the dude! No we should not pray first, because what we're about to do is stupid. That's like saying, "God, protect me as I go rob this bank." That's dumb.

We took off and halfway down, I bailed out. And everybody else bailed out, the toboggan went off the cliff, smashed onto the street and blew up. To pray about something that's dangerous?! No. Just don't go down the hill!

When I was young, we would go into a restaurant and just get dessert. We would get this giant banana split, and someone would say, "Let's pray and ask God to bless it to the nourishment of our bodies." No. We're just going to eat it, suffer the consequences and repent later. We're not going to tempt God.

These are ludicrous examples, but maybe you're a Christian dating a non-Christian, and you're praying God would protect you. You're playing dangerously. Maybe you've had a problem with alcohol and God has delivered you, and you're a Christian now. But you decide to walk into a bar to play pool. You'll just smell the brew. No; get outta there!

Sometimes the way God has given for you to avoid temptation or to get victory over the temptation is your two feet. Just run! When Joseph was being tempted by Mrs. Potiphar, she said, "Joseph, lie with me." It's called the subtle approach. He said, "I'm outta here!" He just started running. Smart dude! Good job, Joseph! Sometimes God just wants you to run. That's the way He makes for you to get victory over the temptation.

Now Jesus answered with the Word of God. He said, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God." Don't put God to a foolish test.

Let me give you three, practical suggestions in dealing with the devil. Number one, temptation will come; expect it. Verse 13 says that the devil "departed from Him until an opportune time." That meant that he would be back. He will come. Number two, temptation will come; detect it. It will come in the form of "the lust of the flesh," your passions; "the lust of the eyes," your possessions; or "the pride of life," your position. And number three, not only expect temptation to come, but reject it. So temptation is real and it will come.

How do we reject temptation? By the Word of God, by praying to God and by relying upon God the Holy Spirit. Jesus used the Scriptures, Jesus prayed and Jesus, filled with the Spirit, was

led by the Spirit. Galatians 5:16 says, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." Remember that "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."