

5. The Temptation of Christ

Luke 4:1-13

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

¹Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. ³The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." ⁴Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.' " ⁵The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. ⁷So if you worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" ⁹The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. ¹⁰For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; ¹¹they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" ¹²Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ¹³When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time (Luke 4:1-13).

The Timing of Satan's Temptation

In my own Christian experience, I have found that there are certain periods of time when I have been aware of a strong, spiritual attack in the form of doubt, confusion, or depression. Such an attack can come after God has touched your life in some way, such as when a person comes to Christ. After my conversion to Christ, I remember that I had a battle going on in my mind. I had terrible thoughts come to me. While I was yet the enemy's pawn, I did not have much opposition from him, but as soon as I started thinking on the Lord Jesus, it was as if I found myself in the middle of spiritual warfare.

An attack can also come after a time of usefulness to the Lord when one is on a spiritual high, like a spiritual "mountain top" experience. This could be after a time of service to the Lord, in speaking openly about the Lord Jesus to friends, or when you have walked in obedience to the Word of God, or when He has delivered you from a habit that has been intoxicating to you. A temptation could also come after a powerful time of prayer when God has used you in intercession for the lost. Of course, every battle that we are in makes us stronger. In the passage about Satan's temptation of Jesus, Satan came slinking around just after Jesus had been praying and was baptized and the Holy Spirit had descended on Him. At Christ's baptism, the Father had also spoken openly so that all could hear:

²¹When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened ²²and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:21-22).

Every advance of the Kingdom of God will be challenged by Satan. With every life won to the

Lord and with every sinful habit broken and forsaken, Satan loses ground and territory. We are told in Scripture that, “**Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour**” (1 Peter 5:8). Too often, though, people leave themselves open to temptation. They go to places that they know will bring temptation upon them, or they watch programs on television that they know will more than likely invite an appeal to some weakness they have. Listen, Satan baits his hook according to the appetites of the fish. Be careful not to give in to your appetites. Give the enemy a foothold in your life and he will get his knee in the door. Allow him to have his knee in the door, and he will get his arm in, and before long, he will take the opportunity to be fully through the door of your life and wreak havoc in the home of your heart (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). Give him an inch and he will take a mile.

When a lion is on the prowl, he is pacing forth with his focused eyes on his target, looking for a weakness before attacking. Satan gives no warning to the believer before he attacks. He often stays hidden and hopes that you know nothing about his strategies and that you don't even realize that you are under attack. Do not be naive about the schemes of Satan. He is a very real spiritual being that has been waging this cosmic war for thousands of years, and in all that time he has learned a thing or two about how to cause the downfall of men and women of God and hinder their fruitfulness.

We don't go looking for a temptation, for that would be foolishness. However, realize that, when you are under attack and being tempted in an area of your life, this is an opportunity for you to grow closer to Christ. With every temptation that is overcome, we grow in our faith and trust in God. Overcoming the tempter will bring you into a season of power and blessing and increase the presence of God in your life. This is why the Spirit will allow temptations to come to you. Oftentimes, the enemy will attack when he senses that you will become a threat to him if you are not stopped. Martin Luther said, “One Christian who has been tempted is worth a thousand who haven't.” The Lord promises a safe landing after temptation, but it will often not be a calm passage. Satan will never put a dish in front of you that you do not love. It is better to shun the bait than to struggle in the snare.

Matthew tells us, “**Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil**” (Matthew 4:1). Jesus did not put Himself in the way of the tempter, but after His baptism by John, the Spirit led Him into this dry and barren place in order that He might be fully prepared for every assault that He would endure in His ministry. Luke tells us that He was “**full of the Holy Spirit**” (v. 1) when the Spirit led Him into the wilderness, but later we are told that, after the temptation, “**Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit**” (Luke 4:14).

Have you ever thought as to why the Spirit would lead Jesus into the wilderness and to be tempted by Satan? I think it is a hint to us when we are told that Jesus moved under “the power of the Spirit” when He came out of the wilderness battle. The Spirit needed to train Jesus in the proper use of His power. The Lord was drawing close to His Father and learning how to hear clearly His voice. A time of hardship, temptation, weakness, and battle will bring every emotion and human tendencies firmly under the Spirit's control. Jesus could not wield the power of the Spirit without knowing the mind and will of God for each and every situation. How important it is to learn to quiet our minds and hearts and be aware of God's intimate presence and voice.

Do you think that Jesus, being fully man as well as fully God, was able to use His own power as God while on Earth? How much of this temptation was appealing to His humanity? Was He able to overcome because He was and is God, or was He overcoming Satan as a man?

God Became Fully Man

¹⁴Since the children have flesh and blood, **he too shared in their humanity** so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— ¹⁵and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁶For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. ¹⁷For this reason **he had to be made like them, fully human in every way**, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. **¹⁸Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted** (Hebrews 2:14-18).

The Savior in Whom we have placed our trust was fully human in every way; otherwise, He could not have been a perfect example to us. Yes, Christ was fully God, but yet fully human, too. While He lived on Earth, though, He had to be totally dependent on the Father just as we do.

⁵Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, **⁷but made himself nothing**, taking the very nature of a servant, **being made in human likeness**. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! ⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (Philippians 2:5-10).

The words *made Himself nothing* (v. 7), is the Greek word, *Kenosis*, which means to self-empty. Jesus emptied Himself willingly of being able to be call on His divine qualities, His power, and His God-knowledge of all things. He was completely committed to trusting the Father to work through Him as a man. Bible teacher and commentator, R. Kent Hughes, writes:

In actuality, when he became human he placed the exercise of his divine knowledge and power under the discretion of God the Father (cf. Philippians 2:5-11). So we understand that his human mind progressively acquired a divine awareness as his Father willed it. Jesus implicitly expressed this when he said, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees the Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does” (John 5:19), and again, “I do nothing on my own” (John 8:28).

In His humanity, he was different to us only in that He was given the Spirit without measure:

³⁴For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit (John 3:34).

Jesus was totally abandoned to using the Spirit’s power and not His own. He had to be led by the Spirit just as we have to be led, although, if He wanted to do so, He could have at any time

exercised Himself as God. In the Garden of Gethsemane, for instance, when Peter resisted the soldiers that had come to arrest Jesus, the Lord said, “Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53). He would have been stepping out of His Father’s will to do such a thing, though.

Why Did Jesus Have to Fast?

We are told that Jesus had been fasting for forty days (v. 2). Fasting is a forgotten discipline for many Christians today. In teaching His disciples on the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus didn’t say, “if you fast,” but, “when you fast” (Matthew 6:16-17). He fully expected His disciples to have times of fasting. At the time of Christ, the disciples of John the Baptist asked Jesus about fasting:

¹⁴Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" ¹⁵And Jesus said to them, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast (Matthew 9:14-15).

I have personally known several people that have fasted forty days on water. They have all been people that God has used greatly. A normal healthy person can fast for forty days. If fasting is new for you, I would not start off with a long fast. At first, you may want to fast by not eating breakfast and lunch and eating in the evening. Most people fast in this way. I would recommend a fast on water for three or even four days. Precede this kind of fasting by not drinking any caffeinated products the day before. In that way, you will get the customary headache (if you drink caffeinated products) as a result of kicking coffee, tea, Pepsi or Coke on the day before starting your fast and not at the same time as being hungry on the first day.

My wife and I have fasted several times, to the most part three days and with water but, sometimes, still drinking tea. (I’m British, come on!). The hunger pangs get acute on the second day, and they are relieved by drinking much water. At this point, a person’s urine turns yellow, and the breath is foul-smelling as the body begins to burn toxins. The body is said to be in a state of ketosis. This is very healthy for the body. The body is weak at this stage, so one should rest much. Great temptation and visions about all kinds of food also come at this stage. About the third or fourth day, as the toxins in the body are consumed, the hunger pangs go away and one’s strength returns about the fourth day. One is also aware that there is greater power in prayer and intimacy with God that sustains a person, as long as he or she is able to give time to prayer, Bible reading and worship.

On one occasion, Jesus was coming down the mountain of Transfiguration to meet the nine disciples. He was confronted with a man whose son had a demon and was also suicidal. The problem was that the disciples had no power to deliver the demon from the boy. Once Jesus had delivered the boy from the spirit, the disciples asked Him as to why the spirit had resisted their efforts.

Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting (Matthew 17:21 KJV).
But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting (Matthew 17:21 NASB).

Some translations of the English Bible skip this verse completely, saying at the bottom of the page that some manuscripts of the New Testament omit this verse. I think this verse is very important, though. Notice the explanation by Jesus. There are some situations in this world that takes a level of power and authority that only comes by periods in a believer's life when he or she is in prayer and fasting.

We once had a certain situation that was an emergency to us. It was at that time we gave ourselves to a ten-day time of fasting on water and much prayer. We call it God's atom bomb of the Spirit! God powerfully worked in the life of the person for whom we were fasting and praying. Several days into the fast, she came knocking on our door in tears and much brokenness, saying that God was speaking to her so clearly to get her life right. She was powerfully converted to Christ and is still walking in a close relationship to Christ.

God uses fasting and prayer to great effect. Try it! The longer you fast, though, the more careful you should be in coming off of the fast. The stomach shrinks after a few days, so eat small portions of fruit and vegetables after a fast of more than four days. I would recommend you read the book, *God's Chosen Fast*, by Arthur Wallis if you would like to learn more about the discipline of fasting for breakthrough.

If a healthy person were to fast for around forty days, when the hunger pangs start to return, this would be a sign that the fast should be broken, for the body will start to sustain itself on living tissue and will then go into a very weak condition of starvation. Matthew, in his gospel, tells us that Satan waited until the forty days were over when Jesus was starving before he threw the most difficult temptations at Him:

²And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. ³And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread" (Matthew 4:2-3).

Have you ever been hungry? Have you ever fasted? What foods do you crave when you are hungry?

The First Temptation

Cleverly, the Devil uses Jesus' deity as leverage to try to get Him into acting independently of His Father. ³"The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.'" This temptation was very real for Christ, remember, He was totally human while He was on Earth. It would not have been much of a temptation for each of us mere mortals, for none of us are able in ourselves to make stones into bread, but the temptation was very real to Jesus. The enemy knew exactly who He was and of what He was capable. The implication is, "How can you—the Almighty Creator—be hungry? Prove who you are! Create some bread for yourself!" The temptation was to act independently from His Father. No one will know, he insinuated. You deserve a little pleasure. As an example to all of us that also face various temptations, He turned the offer down with a quote from the Word of God: ⁴"Jesus answered, 'It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone'."

The Second Temptation

⁵The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. ⁷So if you worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only'."

Why go to all the trouble and pain of winning the world when it can be handed to you on a silver platter? If Jesus would have given into Satan, this cosmic war between God and Satan would have been over at this point. For Jesus, this would have meant no suffering, no struggling, no sacrifice, and no hanging naked upon a cross! With just one little compromise, this world and the war would have been over with Satan's winning. Jesus would have been subservient to Satan, and we would have had no hope. Thank God that He did not compromise! We are all tempted to compromise, i.e. to make concessions in the hope that our flesh can benefit by giving in to a fleshly weakness. What is the problem with one act of worship toward Satan? This will be the compromise that people will be offered in the last days, by taking the Mark of the Beast (Revelation 13:14-17). Taking the Mark of the Beast will be a recognition that Antichrist is god (2 Thessalonians 2:4). For Jesus, the temptation was to bypass the cross. God wants His Son to rule over all the kingdoms of the world, not with a crown of power given by the enemy, but with a crown of thorns worn on a cross.

Notice that Satan claims that the world belongs to him. He says that he can give it to anyone he wants, for it has been given to him (v. 6). Jesus did not refute this claim, for when Adam gave in to Satan's temptation in the Garden of Eden, he gave up his ruler ship and authority over the world by obeying Satan rather than God. God had given dominion over the Earth and its resources to man:

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (Genesis 1:26).

Three times Jesus had called Satan "the prince of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). The apostle Paul was also familiar with Satan's usurped authority, calling Satan "the ruler of the kingdom of the air" (Ephesians 2:2), and elsewhere, "the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4). To have gained dominion over the Earth, the claim was very real.

All those who are not yet born-again of the Spirit (John 3:3) are under Satan's dominion. "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves" (Colossians 1:13). Only blood-bought men and women are delivered out of Satan's power and authority. The penalty and price of humanity's rebellion was the death of the one who had sinned, but Jesus paid the price for all humanity by going to the cross as us and for us. Christ was the sacrificial substitute for everyone who places his or her trust in Christ's finished work on the cross.

The Third Temptation

9“‘The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. 10For it is written: "‘He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; 11they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' " 12Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' " (Luke 4:9-12).

How does Satan’s use of the Word of God differ from Jesus’? (Psalm 91:11-12). What does Satan omit, and what does this teach us about spiritual warfare?

How cunning the enemy is in his use of the Word of God by not quoting all of it. The enemy is a master manipulator and twister of Scripture. We should not listen to anything that he says. The highest point of the temple could have been one of two different places. First of all, it could have been from the outside corner of the temple walls—a drop of 450 feet down into the Kidron Valley, or, secondly, it could have been from the temple building itself, a drop of 150 feet down to the Court of the Priests. What a grand entrance and proof to the Israelite priests, Pharisees, and Chief Priests, when the angels would catch Him and bring Him slowly down to the entrance of the temple. The Scripture says that, “**the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple**” (Malachi 3:1). If Jesus had flung Himself off the pinnacle, His life would most likely have been preserved, but not his mission. The temptation was to see whether He would draw all people to Himself by relying on the way of sensationalism rather than the way of the Cross. Jesus chose the Cross.

We must remember that temptation puts nothing into a man, but only draws out what is in him. Take a close look by what you are tempted, and you will find out more about yourself and what to guard yourself against. All of Satan’s temptations put out a welcome mat toward the child of God. For heaven’s sake, don’t take that side turn! H. O. Fanning once said, “Temptations have a way of dividing the world into two classes: those who fail and go down under them and those who meet them successfully and gain strength of character through overcoming them. To the one class, they are stumbling-blocks; to the other, they are stepping stones. To the one, they are hindrances; to the other, they are helps. It is not our temptations but the way we respond to them that counts.”

Can you think of examples in history of individuals who faced great trials or difficulties and were able to overcome the temptation to be bitter or unforgiving? What was the result in their character and what they were able to accomplish?

I would like to finish with some words from a song we used to sing in Britain. It was about giving your life to God for Him to mold and shape, like the pressure on a piece of coal will transform the lump into a beautiful stone, a diamond.

Jesus, take me as I am, I can come no other way.
Take me deeper into You, let my flesh life melt away.
Make me like precious stone, crystal clear and finely honed.
Life of Jesus shining through, giving glory back to You.

So, what do you do in the heat of the moment when you are tempted? One thing that we can learn from Jesus is to cling to the Word of God. This will be easier to do when you have already hidden His word in your heart. For example, “**your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You**” (Psalm 119:11). Storing the word of God in your heart will not only give you peace on your journey in life, but also it will actually guard you from all kinds of temptation and deception. Praise and worship are also sure ways to overcome the struggle with evil. Why is this? It lifts up the name of Christ, but in so doing, we are also lifted. Also, praise and worship focus us outside of ourselves. Temptation to sin always gets us focused on ourselves. When we reach out to God in prayer and adoration, we will find ourselves moved from looking inward to looking upward to God. It puts us in a different place.

I don't fully understand how this happens, but I know that it can change not only our situation but also our hearts in the process. It is somewhat of a mystery as to how praise and worship can be life-transforming. Another strategy is to say the Lord's Prayer. I am not saying that there is anything magical about the words themselves, but Jesus taught His disciples this prayer, and one part of it in particular asks the Father to deliver us from evil. How often do you ask to be delivered from evil? The fact that we are in a spiritual battle is something about which we do not like to think; however, if Jesus taught His disciples to pray this way, we should consider that this is an important part of our prayer life.

Prayer: Father, our prayer is for You to deliver us from temptation and from the evil one. In every temptation that we may encounter, remind us that Satan is like a lion with his teeth removed. His power has been broken at the cross of Christ. Thank you, Lord! Amen!

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