

Series Gospel of Luke

This Message #5 Jesus Overcomes Temptation

Luke 4:1-13

Dr. Luke, in his Gospel account, carefully documented both the deity and the humanity of Jesus. He explained the circumstances of the birth of Jesus — the announcement by the angel and then the conception by the Holy Spirit in the physical body of a young woman who yielded herself to the will of God. Only a unique kind of person, someone who was fully human and fully God had the potential to accomplish God's plan of redemption.

Humanly speaking, Jesus could trace His genealogy back a thousand years to David, and beyond David to Abraham, and all the way back to Adam. That connection was through both Mary and Joseph, although Joseph was not the actual human father. Spiritually speaking, Jesus was the Son of God, and as the eternal Son of God who appeared on earth in fleshly form, Jesus did not inherit the sinful nature which was passed on from human generation to generation from the time of Adam's disobedience.

In chapter 3, in the verses we thought about last week, both God the Father and God the Holy Spirit gave witness to Jesus. The heavens were opened, the Holy Spirit descended on, and remained on, Jesus, and the Father's voice was heard, confirming that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Last week I emphasized that Jesus was the first man in human history since the disobedience of Adam to be pure, righteous, and holy enough to have an open intimate relationship with God. Hence, because of Him, heaven was opened and God was once again able to dwell with mankind.

Today our message focuses on the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the activities of Jesus. Immediately after His baptism experience, the Spirit led Jesus into a desolate wilderness area which became for Jesus a place of intense testing.

Read Luke 4:1-13

The Holy Spirit is mentioned twice in verse 1. The Holy Spirit has already been mentioned several times previously in this Gospel account and will be mentioned many more times because Luke emphasizes the ministry of the Spirit in the life of Jesus. Jesus was sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Throughout His life, He was always dependent on the Father and the Spirit, and obedient to their guidance. The fact that the Spirit led Jesus into the desert area indicates that the confrontation with evil temptation was not an accident; it was planned and allowed by God.

There was a special purpose for this time. Just as the identity of Jesus was confirmed to people at the time of His baptism, the time in the wilderness was to confirm to the spiritual powers in the world that Jesus was the righteous Son of God. The Holy Spirit deliberately led Jesus into the wilderness so that there would be an encounter with the devil, the source of sin and spiritual evil in the world. Luke wrote that the Son of God was tempted by the devil for forty days. Furthermore, Luke indicated that Jesus' hunger in the wilderness was the result of His voluntary fasting.

Jesus, as the designated Savior of the world, had to stand up to Satan and to prove that He was Lord over evil, and that He would not give in to temptation, as the first Adam had done. If Jesus was to be qualified to redeem humanity and restore people to the kind of relationship that God intended at the time of creation, then Jesus had to successfully endure the pressures of temptation, come through that experience victoriously, and thereby prove that He was God in flesh and Lord over both human and spirit realms.

The Spirit led Jesus into a situation in which He had to deal with a persistent assault of evil over an extended period of time, for 40 days. Jesus' experience was in contrast to that of Adam and Eve, who apparently gave in to temptation rather quickly. During the temptation encounter with Adam and Eve, Satan successfully undermined God's good work of creation. And during the temptation encounter with Jesus, the devil tried to undermine God's plan of redemption. However, God wanted to use this same temptation experience to successfully underscore His plan by having His Son emerge victoriously and sinlessly. Just as the failure of the first Adam brought sin upon the entire human race, so the victory of Jesus would make eternal salvation available to all who would place their faith in Him. That's why the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness.

Let me digress here to explain the nature of temptation and the strategies of the devil and of God. The Hebrew and Greek words for “temptation” both have more than one meaning. The word “temptation” always has an evil intention behind it; it is an effort to get a person to do something that should not be done. Depending on the context, the same word can mean “testing” or “trying.” The distinction between these meanings is important. Proper interpretation depends on the source and objective behind the word. The objective of the devil is always to get people to do evil. On the other hand, God frequently “tests” people of faith but it is not in His nature to tempt people with evil intentions.

There are many illustrations of God’s “testing” in Scripture, just as there are many examples of the devil’s temptings. For example, God tested Abraham when He commanded that Abraham sacrifice his son Isaac. God’s purpose was to determine the degree of Abraham’s obedience and faith. Abraham obediently built an altar, and put his son Isaac on the altar. Abraham successfully “passed the test” when he raised the knife to kill his son. He put obedience to God ahead of his own feelings in regard to his son and, as a result, God declared him righteous.

God tested the Israelite people on several occasions to determine if they would walk in His ways or not. For example, when the Israelites, after their exit from Egypt, complained about their lack of food, God said, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. On the sixth day they are to ... bring in twice as much as they gather on the other days (in preparation for the Sabbath). In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions” (*Exodus 16:4-5*). Unfortunately, there were some Israelites who failed this test, and God was displeased.

Let’s consider another famous story which also illustrates this point. Satan sought to bring Job to the point of forsaking his faith, to the point where he would curse God because of all his emotional and physical suffering (*See especially Job chapters 1 and 2*). God allowed this situation for a positive reason. Through the testing of Job, God wanted Satan to understand the strength of Job’s faith. Satan learned that Job’s love for God was not based upon material blessings nor upon his health.

The New Testament makes it clear that God does not tempt people. James, the leader of the Church in Jerusalem, wrote, “Let no man say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted of God,’ because God cannot be tempted with evil; neither does he tempt any man” (*James 1:13-14*).

As I said earlier, temptation is the enticement to do evil. Temptation is the technique used by Satan to draw people into evil choices and behavior. He places inducements in the minds of people. He appeals to the lusts, fantasies, selfishness, greed, and other bad attitudes of people in his efforts get people to act in ways which are contrary to the requirements and expectations of God. Temptation is the most effective tool in Satan's arsenal because he doesn't usually encounter much resistance to his temptation efforts. Scripture declares that "every man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed" (*James 1:14*).

The technique of Satan can be recognized in his very first temptation effort. When Satan approached Adam and Eve, they were perfect creatures, exactly like God wanted them to be. They were in a perfect environment in the Garden in Eden, and they were in intimate fellowship with God. Yet the words of the serpent, who was Satan in disguise, caused Eve to have doubts about the goodness of God. "When she saw that the fruit of the forbidden tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate, and she also gave some to her husband and he ate it" (*Genesis 3:1-6*).

In taking and eating the fruit, they were not following the instructions of the LORD God. The gratification of their own desires was more important than obedience to God. Their acts of disobedience became sin, which caused their separation from God and brought on them, and us, hard labor, pain, and death. Temptation came to them as an outside enticement to disobey God as well as through the inside inclinations of their own lusts and desires.

In similar fashion, the devil tempted Jesus to act in ways which were contrary to the will and the word of God. The first temptation mentioned in Luke chapter 4 concerned the physical needs of Jesus. He had eaten nothing during the 40 days in the desert, and at the end of those days he was hungry. That's when the devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

The issue here is whether it is more important for a person's well-being to trust God or to take care of one's own felt needs. It was a question of whether God was going to provide for Jesus or not, and, if not, why wasn't it OK for Jesus to use His power as the Son of God to provide for Himself?

There was no doubt in Jesus' mind about what was most important: the true essence of life was not the satisfaction of physical needs, as basic to human life as they are. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 as His response: "Man does not live on bread alone."

The context of this Old Testament reference concerned the word of God. As God explained to the Israelites, "Be careful to follow every command I am giving you, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land that the LORD promised on oath to your forefathers. Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, ... to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." Jesus knew that there was something fundamentally more important than the satisfaction of physical needs, even legitimate ones, and that was a deep, personal connection with God Himself which comes from trust in, dependence on, and obedience to, the Words of God.

Let's look at the second temptation. This temptation concerned materialism. The devil led Jesus up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And 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. So if you worship me, it will all be yours."

The question behind this second temptation is whether God is enough for us, or whether there is something else we need and can obtain for ourselves. All of us have felt this temptation. We have too often made choices on the basis of what seems best to us, of what offers us the most likely chance of success and happiness, rather than wait on the clear guidance of God.

The devil said to Jesus, "All the authority and splendor of the kingdoms of the world have been given to me." The devil was exaggerating a little bit, but only a little. He does have a limited amount of power and influence over the systems of the world, which he controls through the self-interests, exploitation, greed, and deceit of spiritually fallen people. This is why he is called the god of this world. The issue was whether Jesus would buy into the philosophy of the world, give allegiance to its principles, and worship its god, or follow the ways of the Most High God of heaven.

Jesus' response to this temptation was clear and unambiguous. He quoted Deuteronomy 6:13: "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only." The one true God in heaven is the only one worthy of our worship. He is the only One who can satisfy in an ultimate sense. He is the only One who has the power to change the world we live in. We must worship Him and serve Him only.

For the third temptation in this sequence, the devil led Jesus 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. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

The crucial question here is, Can God be trusted to hold up His side of a relationship? This is a very interesting temptation because the devil incorporated the meaning of "testing" into his evil intentions. The devil tried to get Jesus to put God to the test, a kind of reverse application to the usual meaning of "testing." "Jesus, how will you know that God is watching over you? How can you find out if He is really concerned about you? How can you prove that God is as faithful as He says He is? Just cast yourself off this high place and see if God's promise to protect you is true."

Jesus refuted this temptation by quoting Deuteronomy 6:16: "Do not put the LORD your God to the test." The quotation refers to an event in which the Israelites were complaining about the way that God was taking care of them. They had quickly forgotten how God had set them free from slavery, had miraculously brought them through the Sea on dry land and destroyed their enemies behind them, and provided food for them during their days in the wilderness. The people whined and complained, and God told Moses, "They must stop testing me. They must keep my commands and do what is right and good in the LORD's sight."

The question is, Do we trust God? Are we willing to follow his way? What is our confidence level in Him? Certainly God would have been able to save Christ if He were in some sort of perilous circumstance, but the issue was not about whether God had the desire and ability to rescue Jesus or not, but whether Jesus was willing to trust God and follow His leading. We must not imagine that we can control God's agenda. Rather we must be willing to follow His. We must cooperate with Him rather than to challenge Him.

All of the devil's temptations were an effort to get Jesus sidetracked from His Messianic mission. Jesus successfully refuted the temptations because He was committed to God's plan for humanity. Scripture explains that God had His plan in mind before the process of creation began, and even though Jesus knew that His pathway involved encounters with evil, sacrifice, and death, He was not deterred by anyone or anything, even Satan himself.

Verse 13 indicates that Satan was not finished with his efforts to tempt Jesus. Scripture indicates that he retreated but in anticipation of another "opportune time." Jesus' victory over Satan was not yet final. In similar fashion, our struggles with the devil never end in this life. We can win a victory today, but the enemy will bide his time and return another day. As long as we are in this body, we cannot claim complete and final victory over the world, the flesh, or the devil.

Someone has said, "Temptations, unlike opportunities, will always give you many second chances." Constant vigilance is required. Scripture gives us the secrets of spiritual warfare. The first rule is to stand with Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. He has overcome the enemy, and if we depend on Him, He will help us to resist temptation.

So what do you do if you find yourself in the wilderness? Remember these three truths:

- A. You are not there by accident.
- B. You are not there alone.
- C. You will not be there forever.
- D. You will be able to overcome

I Cor 10:12-13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear; but when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

When God's purposes in your life have been accomplished, the Spirit will lead you out of the wilderness, and you will come out stronger in your faith than when you went in.

When we face temptation successfully, when we refuse to lower our standards, when we say no to sin and yes to righteousness, when we refrain from evil words that we are tempted to say, after we have passed the fiery trial, we will come out of that experience with new confidence.

Here is a fact that is good for our soul,
That should help us to fight a bit longer:
The things that don't kill you outright
Will only make you stronger.