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Luke 4: 1-14

## Three Big Temptations in Life

I think that we all understand what temptation is. There is a story told about a little boy in a grocery store that I think illustrates the nature of temptation. The boy was standing near an open box of peanut butter cookies. “Now then, young man,” said the grocer as he approached the young man. “What are you up to?” “Nothing,” replied the boy: “Nothing.” “Well it looks to me like you were trying to take a cookie.” “You’re wrong, mister, I’m trying not to!” That’s temptation!

We understand that temptation leads to trouble. Such was the plight of man that I read about in Reader’s digest. This man said he was shopping in the mall with his wife when a shapely young woman in a short, form fitting dress walked by. His eyes followed her. Without looking up from the item she was examining his wife asked, “**Was it worth the trouble that you are in?** That’s the trouble with temptation.

How many of us have shrugged and said, “The Devil made me do it!” and used that as an excuse when caught doing something we weren’t supposed to? It’s a convenient defense. But there’s one problem: the Devil can’t make us do anything. He may be clever, but he’s not all powerful. It may feel that way, however, when we’re dangling on temptation’s hook, because Satan has a tried-and-true strategy for luring us into his net.

**First, he lays out the bait.** Satan knows people, like a very skilled angler knows fish. He notes our habits. He observes our hangouts. Then he prepares a tailor-made lure and drops it right in front of our noses.

**Second, comes the appeal.** He can’t make us bite, but he does know what happens inside us when we catch a glimpse of that tantalizing bait. Our **fleshly sinful nature** draws us to it. We linger over it. We toy with it. We roll it over in our minds until it consumes our imagination.

**Third, the struggle begins.** Immediately, our conscience jabs us in the ribs, warning us of the danger. We know it’s wrong to take a bite. We may even see the barbed consequences poking through the bait. But Satan’s invitation looks so delicious. What do we do?

**Fourth, the temptation ends with the response.** Either we resist or yield; swim away or swallow it whole. Anyone **who has resisted** knows the feeling of freedom that decision brings. On the other hand, anyone **who has yielded** knows the feeling of emptiness that follows and the pain of the hook in your cheek.” [Charles Swindoll. *The Origin of Something Glorious: Jesus Birth and the Beginning of Ministry - A Study of Luke 1:1-6:49. Bible Study Guide.* (Anaheim, California: Insight for Living. 1994). p. 83]

This morning we are going to see Jesus meet and master temptation. In this story we will see three general kinds of temptation that our **adversary is still using against us today.** By way of introduction I want you to see with me when the testing of Jesus came about (vv. 1-2). “*Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the*

*wilderness, (2) being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry.”*

**First**, Matthew 4 records that this temptation of Jesus came directly after He was baptized. It was here that God the Father spoke and said, *“This is my son in whom I am well pleased!”* What a spiritual high. You will discover that testing will often come on the heels of a spiritual high point in your life.

**Secondly**, it came at time of physical weakness; Jesus had not eaten in 40 days. Temptations often come when we are a weakened state physically or emotionally, when we are exhausted and emotionally spent. “In a survey on temptation among readers of the “Discipleship Journal”, the respondents noted temptations were more potent when they had **neglected their time with God** (81 percent) and **when they were physically tired** (57 percent). Resisting temptation was accomplished **by prayer** (84 percent), **avoiding compromising situations** (76 percent), **Bible study** (66 percent), and **being accountable** to someone (52 percent.)” [Discipleship Journal, November/December, 1992.]

**Third**, this temptation came to Jesus **when he was alone**. We are the most susceptible to temptation when we are alone.

As we continue it is necessary that we understand that these temptations were very much real. C. S. Lewis made these insightful observations about temptation: *“No man knows how bad he is until he has tried very hard to be good. A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. That is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is.... Christ, because He was the only Man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only Man who knows to the full what temptation means.”* [Today in the Word, November, 1998, p. 24] The temptations of Jesus had to be real for the consoling truth of **Hebrews 4:15** to be true: *“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”* To sympathize with us, Christ had to have fully experienced the Devil’s temptations!

## **1. THE TEMPTATION TO DO IT YOURSELF (vv. 3-4)**

The Devil Speaks (v. 3), *And the devil said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.”*

Don’t be misled by a false understanding of the Devil’s statement when he says, *“If you are the Son of God”* - this is not a supposition but an affirmation. It literally means “since you are” or “in view of the fact that you are the Son of God.” The first temptation would be no temptation at all if Jesus were not indeed the Son of God.

The devil is well aware that God exists and I don’t think that he expends a great deal of effort trying to dissuade us from a belief in God. His basic strategy is to make us believe that God can’t be trusted. Satan entered into the Biblical picture at creation in the form of a serpent. He said to Adam and Eve, *“Do you really believe that God is good? He has told you not to eat from that one tree because he knows that the moment you do so you will be as wise as He is? He is not your friend. He is holding out on you”* (Gen. 3:4).

The temptation sounds innocent enough, doesn’t it? You could almost sense the innocence in the devil’s presentation of this temptation – “just make these stones into bread” – what’s the big deal? You the Son of God – just do it! There is no law against turning stones into bread. It won’t hurt anything. Jesus had been without food for six weeks! Because he was the Son of God he could invoke his supernatural powers, the temptation was very real. Jesus could have done it in an instant and his

hunger was screaming, “Do it.” Satan is suggesting to Jesus that there must be something wrong with the Father’s love since “His beloved son” was hungry. Satan was tempting Jesus to disobey the Father’s will by using his divine power for his own purposes.

*John Piper says that sin... "gets its power by persuading me to believe that I will be more happy if I follow it. The power of all temptation is the prospect that it will make me happier." [E. Lutzer, Putting Your Past Behind You, Here’s Life, 1990, p.54.]*

Jesus Answers (v. 4): ***“But Jesus answered him, saying, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.’”***

We often brag that we are “people of the Word.” But are we really? **The question is not how much Bible do you know but how much of the Bible that you know are you applying in your life.** Jesus lived by the word. The key phrase in each of his answers is, **“it is written.”** He did not allow the situation or the circumstances or even the enemy to dictate the truth. The answers to all three temptations came right out of Deuteronomy, the story of God’s pilgrim people coming out of bondage.

Jesus in his answer was saying, ***“I will not complain. Neither will I take matters into my own hands. I will trust my Father and his word.”***

Our temptation is not to turn stones into bread because the impossible does not tempt us. But the compliant behind the temptation is still very strong. The devil’s ploy in this world is to make us believe that **if we want something done we need to do it ourselves – not trust in God.** We regularly are tempted to go outside the confines of God’s will to satisfy our personal needs or desires. **We** often promote ourselves because we are sure that God will not do it. **We** scheme and we plan for our well-being, because we assume that God does not care or maybe does not know about our needs.

## **2. THE TEMPTATION TO TAKE THE EASY WAY (vv. 5-8)**

The Devil Speaks (vv.5-7): ***“Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. (6) 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. (7) Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours.”***

The devil was not lying when he promised Jesus, for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish” (v.6). The devil was offering Jesus a kingdom without the cross. Why go to all the trouble and pain to win the world when it can be handed to you on a silver platter. **No suffering, No Struggling, No Sacrifice. But a crown without the cross would mean that there would be no forgiveness for our sins.**

Jesus Answers (v. 8): ***“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.’”***

We do not have to look far to see the application for today. Our world teaches us to avoid pain, to take the easy way, the path of least resistance. Avoid sacrifice. **Why** give all that money to the church when you can spend it on a new fishing boat. **Why** spend the rest of your life with the same mate? Go out and find yourself someone new – after all you only live once. You deserve to be happy. What is the result?

### 3. THE TEMPTATION TO NOT BELIEVE IT UNTIL YOU SEE IT (vv. 9-13)

The Devil Speaks (vv.9-11 ): The devil took Jesus to the point of the temple roof that overlooked the Kidron Valley, about a 450 ft. drop. Whether he took him there physically or in a vision we do not know. But once there he made Jesus very tempting offer.

Having seen Jesus defeat him two times by quoting Scripture, Satan now quotes it himself, for his own purposes (vv. 9-11). *“Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. (10) For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you,’ (11) and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’”*

Satan misquotes the promise of God, it was right as far as it went, but he did not quote it all. For Jesus to have supernaturally survived a fall from the pinnacle of the temple in the full view of the people would have immediately identified Him as the Messiah. But it would have insisted that God “show” that you love me and is a test of God. This would be the equivalent of saying to God –**“I won’t believe in you until I see you SHOW it to me by MY terms.”**

Jesus Answers (vv. 12-13): *“And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘It has been said, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’”* But Jesus understood to start His ministry by dramatically jumping from the pinnacle of the Temple would be completely **contrary to the will of God**. To do so **would be to test God**. Jesus refused to take this shortcut.

There are many subtle ways that we can put God to the test. We may not jump from the top of the church – but we do it in other ways. **We do it** when we not put the worship of God and attendance at church as a priority – and yet we expect God to keep our children on the right path – that is putting God to the test. **We do it** when we dive into a path of our own choosing and then cry out to God to bail us out. **We do it** when we test the boundaries of known sin. God says, “Here is the line,” and see how close we can get to that line. Then we are surprised when we fall. Then we blame God. But it happened because we tested God.

The one **thing common to all three temptations is that they attempted to distract Jesus from his mission or destroy his relationship with His heavenly Father.**

Don’t miss the truth given in verse thirteen, *“Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.”* This verse says that “when the devil had ended every temptation” – the temptation was “ended” when he carried to completion and every avenue of attack was employed. When it says that the Devil “departed from Him” the Greek is much more blunt it says he “stood off.” This battle was over but he had not given up. Margaret Thatcher, the first woman prime minister of England stated, *“You may have to fight a battle more than once to win it.”* This verse reveals that the Devil will always be lurking in the shadows, watching, waiting for the next vulnerable moment.

**When you are weak – expect a major assault.**

**When you resist – be ready for a different approach.**

**When he leaves – count on another attack.**

When Martin Luther was asked how he overcame the devil, he replied, “Well, when he comes knocking at the door of my heart, and asks ‘Who lives here?’ the dear Lord Jesus goes to the door and says, **“Martin Luther used to live here, but he has moved out. Now I live here.”** When Christ fills our lives Satan has no entrance.