

Luke 4:1-13  
Jesus, Our Strength In Temptation  
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Does anyone here know what it feels like to be tempted in some way?

Think about your own life now, it may seem narrow to you now, but think about when you are at home or at work, or with that certain group of friends or in that certain social situation, do you know that feeling? Someone says something, and you know the right thing to do, but there's that temptation. You know where your ambitions should be directed, but there is that invitation to go down that path that you know is not the right road.

The world needs men and women who grow strong, strong enough to know what the right direction is and to go that way. And if one person does that, well so what, maybe we think they are a goodie goodie. But if an entire community commits to growing in that way we can become God's light in a world that is dark. We can become an instrument for God's healing in a world that is broken, instruments that have power in a world that is weak, not with our own power, but with God's power.

This morning we are continuing in our year long series in which we look at the Gospel of Luke for Clues, insights into the kind of world God has in mind for his people. Jesus gives this dominion a name, he calls it the Kingdom of God. Jesus, very tangibly and practically, not only taught, but showed his followers—as he shows us—what it looks like to reside as citizens in the Kingdom of God. And it often looks very different from the way this world looks, its values, the things it sees as good and worthy of our attention. The Kingdom of God sometimes looks strangely different from what we have become accustomed to. The places that one person might think are lost or decrepit, impoverished, or unworthy of our compassion, are actually of the highest value to Jesus. Jesus stands with those places.

Now let us look at our text in order that we might grow and be good instruments of God to those around us, because that's what you were meant to be—not just on Sunday mornings when we gather in a church with mustard yellow carpeting, but when you are at work and at home and with your friends, in other words, all the time.

Let's look together at our text, it comes from Luke chapter 4 beginning with verse 1.

**And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness <sup>2</sup>for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup>The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.”<sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’”<sup>5</sup> And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, <sup>6</sup>and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. <sup>7</sup>If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.”<sup>8</sup> And Jesus answered him, “It is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.” And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of**

**God, throw yourself down from here,<sup>10</sup> for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you, and “On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.” And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”<sup>13</sup> And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.**

Very simply, what we learn from this text is this: If you will consciously choose to follow God, it will often lead you right into a place of being tempted to walk away from him.

In this text, Jesus consciously chooses to follow God, and as a result of his decision to go where God leads him, he goes right into temptation. Even though he's Jesus he is not exempt from temptation, and just because we decide to commit to following Jesus does not mean that we will not also face temptation. But there is a way through, and Jesus shows us this way.

Before we get into the text and unpacking each of the temptations, I need to say something about the context of this passage. Do you remember the event that comes immediately before this story? Jesus' baptism. Jesus, along with many other men and women go down to the Jordan to be baptized by John, when he does God's voice speaks out from the heaven and says this is my son I love him a lot. And there Jesus says with his actions, I want to do the will of God, I want to follow him. Do you remember that? It's a beautiful moment in Scripture, one of only a very few moments in the New Testament where God's voice is audibly heard. But do you see, immediately following that moment of intimacy with God, Jesus is immediately thrust out into the desert to be tempted by the devil.

Let me just say this, by way of a bridge: It should not come as a surprise to you in your Spiritual life, that when you are trying to follow God's word and obey his commands, and live the kind of life he intends for you, if you are also presented with very challenging obstacles that seek to discourage and distract that walk. In fact, I would say that you should expect temptation. Why is that? Not because God can finally check the box by your name and move on to the next project—leaving you to fend for yourself. But because in the moment that you are most receptive to hearing and obeying God's word in your life, you are also the most vulnerable. You are malleable, you're sensitive, you're able to be influenced for good or for bad.

That's the first point. But what I want to do now is look at each of the temptations Jesus undergoes at the hand of the Devil

1. “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.”

If I had the power to turn rocks into food, I would weigh 500 pounds. Jesus has been in the desert for 40 days and nights without food. He's famished, his stomach is empty. At first, this temptation doesn't seem that bad, right? What's wrong with food? After all it's day 40. If it had been day 20 we might say no don't do it because God wants him to have the spiritual experience of fasting. But it comes at the end of the fast, and it would seem as though Satan, the tempter is just suggesting that Jesus use his power to satisfy his hunger—not unreasonable.

But if we think for a moment about the deeper implications of this invitation, Jesus is being invited to get on a path that will lead him away from what he was meant to do. In one sense Satan is suggesting that Jesus use the power he has to help himself. Your stomach is empty, you are hungry,

use the power that is yours by right to take care of a pain you have, to satisfy your hunger. Very simply Jesus is being tempted to use his powers to satisfy himself.

But Jesus' response is fascinating: **Man does not live by bread alone.** In this moment Jesus, instead of thinking just about his own discomfort thinks about what God's word says to him. And the passage he thinks of is from Deuteronomy 8:3. There the people of Israel were in the very same desert he was in, but when the Israelites were there all they did was complain. If only we were still in Egypt, at least there we had meat and bread to eat. They were concerned with their own discomfort and were willing to do whatever it took to alleviate it—even if it meant going back to the slavery that was so miserable to them.

But Jesus is in the same place and he doesn't complain. Even when the suggestion comes, Jesus remembers what God said to Israel. **Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the word of God.** What God was asking Israel to do is to place their trust in him, to have faith that he will provide their every need, without taking things into our own hands. Jesus is confronted by the tempter who invites him to use his power to ease his pain, and Jesus says I will not let you determine how I use my power, I will let one thing and one thing only do that—God's word. And God's word tells Jesus to do this—serve others. Exactly the opposite of what Satan says to Jesus.

This will be the first invitation of many, that will eventually lead to the cross, in which Satan will tempt Jesus to abandon his God given mission, and if he does this none of us are saved.

Listen, every one of you has power from God, power because he calls you beloved son or daughter, and each of you has the choice time and again as to how you will use your power. Will it be for good, in serving others and showing Jesus' love to the world? Or will it be to satisfy yourself, for your own needs, our own agendas, our own comfort or prominence or appetites? This is how Jesus prevails over the first temptation or test.

Here's the second temptation, it's actually the third in Luke, but I want to look at it second. "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here,<sup>10</sup> for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you," and "On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone."

This temptation is different from the first. With the first the tempter went after Jesus greatest weakness, his empty stomach. But with this approach he comes at Jesus' greatest strength, his trust in God and his knowledge of God's word. So Satan comes at him quoting scripture, in the places where we are strong.

Think for a moment: what is your greatest strength as a Christian? And this is not like a job interview, this is a moment where you can say "my greatest strength is that I'm really humble, or I work too hard, or care too much." Because this is where the tempter will try and exploit you, it will always begin with something small, but it will always get higher and higher, bigger and bigger. With grander visions of who we might be, he wants Jesus to make a bigger and bigger name for himself, drawing more and more glory and admiration to him.

Do you know that again, Jesus does just the opposite? First Jesus gets in the river with sinners, and after that he goes off to build his community, but he doesn't use the good religious folks but he uses

the bad folks that nobody else wanted. Then he goes down even lower as his own people, who should have revered him, reject him. And even lower when he gets whipped and beaten for their rejection of him. And even lower still onto a hill called Golgotha, and even lower still to a throne that's a cross and a crown that's thorns, and even lower still as he dies and goes into hell. When Jesus follows the Spirit of God he goes down. The tempter will always tempt us with grand visions of how great we can be. But Jesus, with the Spirit of God is always leading us on a path of downward mobility (repeat).

The other thing the tempter does in this one is use the oft used tool of the tempter, it's the one that has more success than any other. Do you know what it is? Doubt.

Do you see it? "If you are the son of God." Are you really God's son or daughter? Did he really tell you not to eat that fruit? Are you really called to that mission or that work? Did God really give you that gift or that calling? Does God really love you? When you hear that voice in your life say to it "Away from me, foul tempter." The devil tries to play into his doubt, and Jesus resisted.

The last thing I want to mention about this temptation is this, there is a big difference between falling and throwing. Quoting Scripture, Psalm 91 says that when we fall God will catch us, that he will keep our feet from stepping on the lion or the serpent, but do you see how the tempter phrases it? Throw yourself off. Throwing yourself is much different than if you fall I will catch you. Sometimes we tell God what our plans are, and then we steam ahead with them believing that it's God's job to snap to it and help us with our plans. Has anyone ever did this. God I believe it is your job to bless the things we do, so I'm going to go ahead with my plans and you'd better bless me.

Now let's look at the third test Jesus undergoes. "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. <sup>7</sup> If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."

This is such a seductive temptation, because this is the one and only person, who, if he said yes, would do really well. Jesus came to exert authority over all kingdoms, and his mission is to come and exercise grace and mercy and power for the good of everyone. And in this moment Satan is saying to him, I will give it all to you. I will give you success in the mission that you've been given.

This is the craftiest of all, this is temptation with the success of mission he has. Do you know how subtle this is? Here at WPC we have a great mission, to share God's mercy and grace with our community and the world, we don't exist to make ourselves feel good, but to serve others and help people who don't know Jesus, know him. Even that good mission can be used by the devil to tempt us. Here the devil tempts Jesus to achieve his good ends, but with a slightly compromised means. You've heard the phrase the ends justify the means. Here the devil tempts Jesus not by asking him to bow down to him over and over continuously in order to achieve the good ends. But the Greek suggests that this is just one simple bow, one little compromise, because after all, the ends justify the means.

And what Jesus says is this: away with you Satan, for it says worship the Lord God and serve him only. This path that the devil is offering is success without a cross. And the path Jesus is on will lead him to the cross. No matter what the ends are, he will say no, because he will never confuse his mission for his God.

This is the lesson of this final temptation, we are always and only to give allegiance to God, even if that means the mission we are working towards doesn't succeed, even if we look like the greatest failure ever. Do you know what appeared to be the greatest failure ever? The cross.

Do you know that the only other place where Satan is named in the Gospels is when Jesus tells Peter, "Get behind me Satan." Why, because again he was trying to tempt him to achieve his mission by another way, by circumventing the cross. Faithfulness to God is more important for us than success, we should be very careful not to confuse the two. If we compromise faithfulness to God in order to achieve success, then we should implode as a church and this building should just cave in where it stands.

These are the three temptations Jesus faces: to use his power to serve himself, twisting God's words around to suit your agenda, and sacrificing faithfulness to God alone for success in his mission. We can all relate to these temptations. But I want to tell you the good news that is available to you in these. It comes from Hebrews chapter 2 verse 18.

Hebrews 2:18 **"For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."**

Jesus is here to help us in our temptation, he is strong and caring and ready to come to you if you will ask him.