THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

Luke 4:1–13

Key Verse: 4:8

**The Desert of Temptation (1-2)**

Last week, we learned about Jesus’ big inauguration to his ministry. He was baptized by John in the Jordan River. Heaven opened up, the Spirit of God descended on him like a dove, and God spoke from heaven saying, “‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’” It must’ve been a beautiful scene for Jesus; to be there, the lush green banks along the river, to stand in that water and see heaven open, hear God his Father speak such affirming words to him. As days go, probably up there for Jesus in terms of “best days”--a great way to start his ministry.

So, after his baptism, what happens? Look at verse 1. “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led into the wilderness.” There’s a contrast here in setting. Jesus leaves the banks of the Jordan River and is led by the Spirit of God into the wilderness. Now, this wilderness next the Jordan wasn’t like a forest reserve wilderness, but it’s the Judean Desert. And the terrain of the Judean Desert is not only desolate, but dangerous--it has these jagged cliffs that go up to 1,000 feet high, has steep canyons that drop suddenly drop 1,600 feet. The climate is extremely dry, and temperatures during the day in summer, in the shade, get over 104 F. Then, temperatures at night can get close to freezing. There is no vegetation, no water. Sounds nice, right? And if verse 2 describes that Jesus was there in that desert for 40 days. Not only was he there, in those extreme conditions, by himself, but for 40 days he didn’t eat anything. Just from a medical view, this is intense. After the first three days of not eating, your liver starts processing your body fat. After three weeks, the body goes into what is called “starvation mode” and begins to process muscles and organs for energy. I heard that after about 42 days of not eating, there’s irreversible damage. Not only is Jesus surrounded by danger everywhere in the desert, but he himself without food was definitely in a very weak and fragile state.

So, physically, Jesus was going through a lot. Not look at verse 2a. It says for all forty of the days Jesus was in the desert, he was tempted by the Devil. “Jesus was tempted. Isn’t Jesus sinless? Is that okay, that he was tempted?” Now, it’s important to note that temptation is not the same as sinning. When we’re tempted by something, we’re not actually doing it, but we’re being led to. Temptation is like the finger that is motioning us towards sinning. In James 1, it talks about temptation giving rise to desire, and then giving into desire, which leads to sin. So, temptation itself is not actually a bad thing. Temptation, in fact, can be a *good* thing. “What?” Yeah. The word “temptation” here in Greek is *pi-rad’-zo* which actually means “to be put on trial or to be tested for one’s integrity.” Temptations are these moments of contention--we stand before sin and have to make a decision whether or not to. It may sound spiritual to say, “Well, I’m not being tempted.” But, to be honest, if you’re not being tempted in life, then you should be a little concerned, because it may mean that there is no hesitation when led to sin.

So, what was happening to Jesus, being in that very dangerous environment, without food, for those 40 days, was that he was being tested by the devil to see if he could stand up against temptation. Before starting his ministry, it really was like a tough exam, to see if he was made of the right stuff.

But still, that sounds pretty brutal. And didn’t God, being God, know already Jesus could stand up to temptation? Why in the world did he lead Jesus into this situation?

Later on in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus explains why this happened to him. He says, ”’When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe.” Jesus here paints a picture of the world he had come into. This “strong man, fully armed” guarding his “house” is the devil, who guards his possessions, which, in this world, would be us. But then Jesus continues, saying, “But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder’” (Luke 11:20-22).

God was leading Jesus into the dangerous desert, to be without food, to be tested so to overcome temptation. Jesus going through all of this really wasn’t for himself, but it was for us. God was leading Jesus to go on this rescue mission to get us out of Satan’s kingdom and his rule over us.

You see, all the temptations in our lives can very much feel like standing alone in a desert-- with jagged drops and extreme conditions, we’re weak and hungry. And up against the testing and luring for us to sin, we will lose every time. We become almost like puppets, possessed by our desires, and controlled by them. But Jesus was led into this situation, making himself completely weak and vulnerable, so to show us how to overcome temptation. Jesus shows us that we don’t have to be controlled by sin, or pushed around by the temptation. As we follow Jesus through these temptations, we can learn very practically how to face these tests, how to depend on God, how to listen to his voice through his word.

**The Temptation of Bread (3-4)**

If I don’t eat for just one day, the only thing I’m thinking about is food. Some days that happens. I’m running around doing stuff, or I just forget to eat. So, usually it’s around like 10pm where I realize, “OMG, I’m so hungry.” Then, the best feeling ever is going over to your favorite restaurant (Allende) and eating until you can’t eat anymore (huevos rancheros).

If you look again at verse 2, it says that Jesus didn’t eat for forty days. Imagine not eating for forty days. The end of verse 2 says that Jesus was hungry. This hunger must’ve been intense. Jesus must have had to fight against any thought of food, ignored the groans of his stomach, the extreme fatigue of his body. And really, it’s a wonder that he survived in a desert without food for forty days. And it’s at this very vulnerable condition that the devil comes to Jesus.

Look at verse 3. “The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” The devil knew exactly how to tempt Jesus. He’s really good at it. And this is true for us. The devil knows what gets us, knows our weaknesses better than we know ourselves. And he knows exactly how to get us to fall for our weaknesses. Let’s look at verse 3 again. He challenges Jesus as the Son of God, and reminds him that if he wanted to, he could easily turn any stone into a loaf of bread. Jesus must’ve thought about it, how easy that would be for him, the pleasure of biting into a warm loaf of bread. And, why not? It’s just some bread.

This temptation Jesus faced of “bread” the same desire we face in life to live for physical provision. This could be very simply for food, But, essentially, the temptation for “bread” is the temptation for money. Money, financial security and provision, can become what we live for. We even define our well-being by how much money we have. We worry about how much money we have in the bank, checking our accounts online. Usually I’m checking my account to make sure I have enough so I don’t overdraft. We worry about our job, if we’re making enough. Of course, we should manage our money well and be responsible, but it’s a real temptation for us, to become obsessed with money.

College today is 600 times more expensive than it was 50 years ago. An average student graduates from college with over $30,000 in debt. A bachelor's degree doesn’t count for much any more, and finding a full-time job in your field of study, that you can live off of is very hard to come by. It’s its easy for us to worry about money when you don’t have much. And you may find yourself in a situation where you have a lot of money, and a lot of stuff. But for some reason, there seems to never be enough “bread” around. Because, the more we eat this bread of money, we still find ourselves constantly hungry for it.

But how does Jesus respond to this temptation? Jesus quotes Scripture. He quotes from a passage in Deuteronomy, and says, “For it is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’” This portion of Deuteronomy is where God reminds the Israelites about their time spent in the desert. For 40 years, God led them to be hungry, so that they could learn not to live for just bread, but to rather depend on him, and listen to his words. And God reminded them that when they did so, he provided manna for them from heaven. Jesus quoting this verse was a reminder to himself that life was more than physical things and the satisfaction of them. Those things will never satisfy us. Instead, it says in Deuteronomy, God wants us not to live for bread, but “on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Dt8:3b).

The bread of God’s voice is something that satisfies us. We listen to his voice and it fills us up spiritually. Not only so, but spiritually it gives us sustenance, and strength. It’s clearly true in this passage, because we see throughout his dealing with temptation, Jesus keeps holding onto, with his own hunger speaking loudly and the luring of the devil’s temptation, to what God says. God’s word fill us up, gives us strength, more than anything else can. Job, who was a man who lost all of his possessions and money. But after losing all of that, he thanked God saying, “My feet have closely followed his steps; I have kept to his way without turning aside. I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread” (Job23:11-13). Especially with temptation around us God wants us to feed on, hold onto his words as if it were our spiritual life source. It says in Proverbs “Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread” (30:8).

What is your bread? Is it stuff, is it money, security? We have this hunger, we’re starving, and we try to fill that with the security of money. But it’s never enough, we’re never full. Without the bread of God’s voice, his word, we are spiritually starving. But, no matter how malnourished we are within, God calls out to us with his voice to come to him and gain life through his words.

This is what God says in Isaiah: “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters, and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live.” (Isa 55:1-3a).

**The Temptation of Authority and Splendor (5-8)**

Look at verses 5-7. The devil leads Jesus up to a high place. Probably one of those high cliffs in the desert. There he shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, in what was likely a vision before Jesus, like a big TV screen appearing and showing him images of all the riches and power and strength of all of these kingdoms. Then, the devil then tells Jesus, “I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours.” Why was this a temptation for Jesus? It was prophesied about Jesus in Daniel, “He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and people of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” It was actually God’s ultimate plan that Jesus have power and authority over everything. So why would Jesus be tempted by what was going to happen anyway? The devil’s temptation was that Jesus could have this authority and splendor right away. Because, knowing what was ahead of him, Jesus had to undergo a lot of suffering, rejection, ridicule, and who was put to death by people in power. Jesus was going to live a very powerless and lackluster life on earth. But right now, the devil was tempting Jesus that he could have it all now; that he didn’t have to live like that, but could have all the authority and splendor the world could offer.

There are a lot of opportunities to gain authority in this world. Whether it is warranted or not, we as human beings tend to like to have authority. I remember when I became a teller manager, and realized I wasn’t at the bottom of the banking totem poll. It changed me for a little bit. I started wearing full suits to work. There was an empty office room, and I really didn’t need an office, but I asked for a name plate to put on my desk and set up for myself an office. I would tell people that I was a manager of customer service and money management at a financial institution. But really, I was just a self-glorified head teller at a bank that was going under. But, the little authority I got, I easily let it get to me. This desire for authority we can have it even in our relationships, we like to feel empowered, that we have some authority over somebody else. This authority was a temptation for Jesus.

Now, this word, “splendor” or what is sometimes translated as “glory,” essentially means “shininess.” The vision of the kingdoms of the world that the devil showed Jesus, I’m sure there were a lot of shiny things. The idea is that the shine of something that has splendor outshines other things. Raccoons have this tendency. They love shiny things, and if they see something shiny from a distance, they go after it and have to have it. Human beings are like raccoons in that way. We love shiny things. Different splendors that we see before us, we have to have. The splendor of being successful, of “making it,” as an actor or doctor or designer or musician.. The splendor of people liking us, the splendor of having a going out and having a good time, the splendor of lust. There’s also the splendor of somebody in our lives, someone we have to have and our relationship with them becomes a kind of splendor. I mean, we can find splendor in anything and in anyone, and turn that into things we worship.

Many of these things themselves aren’t inherently bad, but it’s when we make them into things we have to have, they become idols. It’s actually how we were made. We were made with this capacity, even this need, to worship. And we feel that need with all these things. And that’s essentially what the devil is tempting Jesus to do, to worship the splendor of this world.

So, look at how Jesus responds to this temptation in verse 8. Let’s read this verse together: “’It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’’” Again Jesus quotes Scripture. “Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.” We worship other things in this world, and we bow down to them so easily. But really, the way we were created, and the only thing worth worshiping is God himself. His splendor never diminishes and his glory never goes out. And the splendor and authority is in the Good News of his love for us. The glory of God is that, even though we live apart from him, we ignore him, we live for ourselves, he still so wants to be with us. And when we turn to him, he’ll accept us as we are, with all our blemishes. When we come before him, he wants to forgive and forget everything we’ve done. we can come to him any time, he will always listen to us, he will always accept us. And so, this love he has for us is more beautiful and filling that anything else. So worshiping him is living with him being worth more than anything else. And when we serve him, he has us serve him only, no useless idol, and the service he wants us to do is to love others, to show the splendor of his love. And when we worship God himself, it’s when we’re truly happy. We’re complete. We never run out of God, his splendor or authority never diminishes. When we worship him and see him as worth more than all the things of this world, then we have peace. The thing is, I think in our hearts we keep a lot of shiny trinkets and treasures. We have things we worship. I know I sometimes I do. And when we worship them, we serve them. We act and make decisions based on them. And, we try to find satisfaction. So, the question is, am I worshiping God and serving him only?

Let’s read verse 8 together. The psalmist wrote, “give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name” (Ps86). When we don’t divide up our hearts and worship God alone, we give our lives to serve him only, and then we can have peace. So the question is, what are the idols in my heart? What are the shiny things that I have in my heart that I’ve bowed down to that I can’t live without? May we get rid of the idols of authority and splendor in our lives. May we resist the temptations of idols around us by actively giving ourselves to God and his authority, and the splendor of his love, and serve him only in our lives by sharing his love with others.

**The Temptation to Test God (9-13)**

Look at verse 9-11. Next, the devil leads Jesus to Jerusalem and has him stand at the highest point of the temple. Then he again challenges Jesus divinity: “If you are the Son of God,” Then he tells him to, “throw yourself down from here.” And verses 10-11 are amazing, because the devil actually quotes scripture to support his temptation: “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.’” It seems at this point the devil could see that Jesus really depended on God. So now, he tempts Jesus to test God, to see if he would really rescue him if he would jump off this cliff. Essentially, the devil is saying, “God loves you right, so if you jump down, he will for sure save you.” This must’ve been tempting for Jesus, because it would be a comfort for him to know in a very real way that God was with him.

I remember when I was a kid; there was another kid who had a knack for the dramatic. His name was Ronnie. He once stood outside at recess and said in a loud voice, “If God is real, let him strike me down right now with lightning.” I stood there with a couple of other kids, waiting for the kid to be struck down be smoked. And I remember, he looked pretty nervous too. But then, after a bit, his concerned face turned into a smirk. Then the kid looked at the crowd and said, “See?”

This temptation to test God, we face that all the time. We think things like, “If God really cares about me, then he would do this.” Or we even pray things like, “If God would help me pass this class, then he really loves me.” Or even if something tragic or bad happens in our lives, we test God to say he isn’t there, or he doesn’t care. This testing of God comes from mistrust or his. love. That’s what the devil is saying, “If God really cares about you, he’ll save you.” It’s like in a really dysfunctional relationship, where somebody doesn't really believe the other person loves them. So they do concoct these weird tests to make the other person prove their love. Like, they’ll text, “I’m going to get some coffee right now. I can grab you some, or you can come with.” And then say to themselves, I*f he/she wants to come with me, then they really like spending time with me.* We test God similarly, because we’re very mistrusting.

We also test God to test with him what we can get away with; a lot like how kids test their parents. My nephew David does this, he’ll do something like stand by a wall with a permanent marker, holding the marker to the wall, and then will just wait and look at you watching him, to see if he could get away with it. We do this with God in so many ways, we fight with one another, intentionally disobey him, live before others, we lie, we get legalistic with people, we get immoral, we get sexually immoral, we complain about our situation. In so many ways, we test God; and try to gauge what we can get away with. But, instead of testing God, we should learn to trust him. Look how Jesus responds. He says, “It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” God is not one to be tested. It’s a way of demanding from God. But this is really a distorted kind of relationship, a temptation we all face. The kind of relationship God wants us to have with him is one of trust, not mistrust. Jesus trusted that God was with him, he didn’t have to have God prove it by jumping off, but knew that wherever he was in his life, what he was doing, God was with him and was guiding him. God wants us to trust him.

Looking at Jesus in this passage, he’s awesome. He’s really weak and vulnerable, yet stands up to the devil’s temptations. But what about us? In the face of so many temptations, how can we overcome them? Where can we turn? It says in Hebrews about Jesus, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet he did not sin.” Jesus understands us. Jesus went through the worst of it. He knows how we feel when we are completely vulnerable to temptations. And 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will provide a way out so that you can endure it.” There’s hope. We can get through temptations. And Jesus understands us. We can turn to him in those moments when we’re tempted, and God will help us out of it. We turn to his voice, we turn to him in prayer, he’ll show us how to overcome it. And out of these temptations, he wants to show us how we can live fully satisfied lives worshiping and serving him.