

Tempted

Luke 4:1-13

INTRO:

Do you remember Flip Wilson.

In the 1970s he made "**The Devil made me do it**" a national catchphrase.

As host of his own TV show, Flip Wilson created a recurring character named Geraldine.

And every time her husband accused her of doing something wrong, whether it was buying an expensive dress, or crashing the car into the side of the church, her excuse was always the same:

"It wasn't me. The Devil made me do it."

Maybe in this day and age we are ready to reconsider the idea of Satan.

While, the existence of a Satan, a devil, may be something many have rejected, the idea of Satan may be worth reevaluating as we consider the mystery of evil.

WE:

The devil made me do it!

Have any of us ever said those words to excuse our bad behavior?

I know I have.

Have you?

Let's reexamine the idea of Satan and temptation.

Let's pray together and see what Luke has to say about this...

GOD:

Luke 4:1 Jesus returned from the Jordan River full of the Holy Spirit, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. 2 There he was tempted for forty days by the devil. He ate nothing during those days and afterward Jesus was starving. 3 The devil said to him, "Since you are God's Son, command this stone to become a loaf of bread."

4 Jesus replied, "It's written, People won't live only by bread."

5 Next the devil led him to a high place and showed him in a single instant all the kingdoms of the world.

6 The devil said, “I will give you this whole domain and the glory of all these kingdoms. It’s been entrusted to me and I can give it to anyone I want.

7 Therefore, if you will worship me, it will all be yours.”

8 Jesus answered, “It’s written, You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him.”

9 The devil brought him into Jerusalem and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, “Since you are God’s Son, throw yourself down from here;

10 for it’s written: He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you 11 and they will take you up in their hands so that you won’t hit your foot on a stone.”

12 Jesus answered, “It’s been said, Don’t test the Lord your God.”

13 After finishing every temptation, the devil departed from him until the next opportunity.

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This is one of the few places in the New Testament where Satan is mentioned.

Satan is an accuser, the personification of evil.

Is our inability to believe in Satan just an aspect of our denial of the reality of evil?

Someone once said, "Luke says that, at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. We modern people may find it hard to believe in the devil, a Satan, who tempts us. But we need not believe in the personification of evil in order to believe that evil is real."

PAUSE

So, **do you find it easy to believe in a personal satan?**

I do.

Maybe it's because I'm now over 50, but I'm not shocked that, at the beginning of his career, Jesus met Satan.

PAUSE

Several years ago Elaine Pagels wrote a book [The Origin of Satan](#), and explored our fascination with the devil.

Pagels says Christians borrowed the idea of Satan from the Jews and then applied it to Jews, demonizing them as working with Satan against Christians.

Then they demonized their pagan enemies, Christian heretics, and anybody with whom they disagreed.

Pagels says Satan is just the ancient Jewish and Christian name for the **"other,"** for anyone who is different from us and whose existence challenges our identity.

Church history is a long record of ways in which we have demonized those we did not understand or saw as a threat.

So white people pictured the devil as black, though there's no mention of color in the Bible.

The Bible says that Satan often **"Disguises himself as an angel of light."**

Evil hides among the good.

Scott Peck says the one good place to look for evil is at church, not because church is evil, but because the church is where evil attempts to hide among the good.

Pagles' book is not good.

For Pagels, Satan is just the tendency to regard other people as a threat.

Or a result of the **"profoundly human view that 'otherness' is evil."**

We take those we don't understand and label them as Satanic.

The idea of Satan, for Pagels, is only an example of the way in which we tend to project our evil ideas upon others and call that Satan.

Pagels mixes it up;

Instead of Satan creating evil, she thinks evil created Satan.

The modern world reduces religious faith to nothing more than a **psycho-logical** or **socialological** problem, and Pagels does just that.

If Satan is only a projection of our evil tendencies, then why isn't God only a projection of our good tendencies?

It's all only a projection anyway, right?

Wrong!

By saying that Jesus was confronted by Satan, that evil had a face, Luke wants us to know that the resistance against Jesus was organized, subtle, a genuine threat to Jesus.

In resisting Satan, Jesus wasn't just overcoming his own inclination.

Jesus was confronting and defeating the **principalities and powers within the whole universe**, evil even greater than that of our own creation.

Pagels says that belief in Satan has tempted Christians to demonize those who are merely different from us, and has contributed to human sinfulness.

PAUSE

A great Jewish scholar, John Levinson, says there's another side to the coin.

If Satan *tempts* us to do things that, in our better moments, we might not have done, might satan also *energize* us to do good things that, left her own devices, we might not have done?

As an example Levinson shares about Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Bonhoeffer was dismissed from his teaching post by the Nazis.

He lectured for a while in America but decided to return home to Germany at the outbreak of WWII to work against the Nazis.

Earlier, he criticized a Christian organization that was working with Hitler.

Bonhoeffer did not shrink from using the inflammatory term AntiChrist to describe Hitler and those who helped the Nazis.

Eventually, Bonhoeffer paid for his resistance with his life as the Nazis hung him to death.

Levinson wonders if Bonhoeffer would've been as courageous in his resistance if he just thought Hitler and his followers were the **unknowing victims of inner psychological distress**.

No, Bonhoeffer believed in the existence of the demonic, the possibility of evil having a face, a name.

Levinson is willing to at least consider the possibility that evil is real.

Maybe because he is a member of the people who have suffered unspeakable evil at the hands of others,

Evil may have a personality, a face, a name—Satan.

He says,

*Given the mysterious capacity of human beings for unspeakable evil, a belief in Satan and his works not only lead to acts of **demonization**, but also lead to acts of **redemption**.*

In explaining away the true challenge posed by the satanic to the divine—Elaine Pagels unknowingly contributes to the sentimental view of religion.

PAUSE

There's an old book on sin, evil, and the Christian life, called Sighting for Eden.

It gives the view that when discussing the idea of evil, the existence of a personal devil, or Satan was not helpful.

That evil is **more in us, than outside us**.

Besides, those who say, "**the devil made me do it,**" are probably just trying to excuse their sinful behavior just like Geraldine.

The author received a letter from a woman who has been a pastor for a few years.

She said:

What you say about there being no real Satan may be true.

However, as a woman Pastor, I have to believe that, if evil doesn't have a name it ought to.

I came into ministry because God called me.

I have sacrificed and worked to gain skills to be a pastor.

The churches I have served are full of good people, at least better than average people who are in the church wanting to be good to do good.

For the most part, my ministry among them has been well received.

But not completely.

I have seen good people do some terrible things.

I've witnessed the depth of cruelty, some, but not all of it directed toward me, that shocked me.

I'm now willing to believe that our lives are not entirely our own, that we are in the grip of something, someone who leads us down dark paths,

In short, I am more willing than you to conceive of Satan.

Her comments struck the author.

As someone who has rarely experienced real evil, who is well fed and in good health—to dismiss the idea of Satan as outmoded, naïve, and unnecessary . . . is short-sighted.

For someone who has been the recipient of real evil, it is possible for evil to have a face and a name—that is, Satan.

It is not kind to tell someone who has encountered real evil that *evil is only some projection of our human psyche, a result of poor education or poor child-rearing practices.*

The pain and anguish suffered by the victims of injustice, sin, and evil are real, so real we even have a name for it.

Have you experienced evil?

Maybe that's why you're here this morning.

You're not alone.

The church stands with you in the midst of Satan's temptations, and in whatever wilderness you find yourself.

Jesus, who knows what it's like to be face-to-face with evil, stands with you.

PAUSE

THE BOTTOM LINE

Although temptation is real, Satan does not have the last word, thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ we are more than victors!

PAUSE

YOU:

Here are your action steps to put this to work in your lives today and this week:

- **Use your brain!**

This message didn't really deal with specific temptations we face, but you've got a brain, *USE IT!*

If you are tempted to do something, ask yourself if it will honor God or not.

If it will, then carry on, if it will not ... **don't do it!**

- **Use your eyes!**

Be on the lookout for evil in the world.

If you see it, *run!*

Unless it's happening to someone else, *then help if you can!*

PAUSE

WE:

Imagine the difference in our daily lives if we used our brains and our eyes to protect against evil...

Imagine the difference this would make in the lives of others if God used us to fight the evil in their lives...

Imagine if we truly realized that the Devil didn't make us do it, because it's ultimately up to us...

Let's pray for eyes to see and minds to think and protection from the Holy Spirit . . .