

Who Do you Trust?

Luke 4:1-13

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Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was led by the Spirit. And Jesus was tempted in the wilderness. The Spirit did not lead him *away from* difficulty and struggle, but *in* the place of testing and trial and temptation.

We too are tempted. We go through times that try our faith. It seems that the more devoted we are to doing the right thing, the greater the opposition we face. God is not the only one at work in the world. God's power is not the only power in the world. There are forces and people who resist God's rule and compete with God's power. Depending on how we respond to opposition, it can either wreck our faith or drive us to greater trust in God.

Temptation is an invitation to sin. The word "tempt" can also mean "test." What our enemy intends as an enticement to sin, God can use as an occasion to test or prove or refine our faith and trust in God. The struggle of temptation can become a time of training in righteousness. We can learn more about trusting God in those times.

Trust is at the heart of dealing with temptation. Temptation is an attempt to interfere with our relationship of trusting obedience to God. Trust is essential to any relationship. Without trust, the relationship breaks down.

Twin brothers were in business together. They had taken over their father's store and were running it. One day, one of the brothers laid a \$10 bill on the counter and walked a customer to the door. When he came back, he realized the 10 was gone. He accused his brother of taking it for himself. They argued. Mistrust grew. They partitioned the store into two stores and didn't speak to each other for twenty years. One day a stranger came into one of the stores. He said that he had been a vagrant twenty years ago and that he had sneaked in and taken a \$10 bill off the counter. Now he had come to pay it back. The stranger had no idea why the old storekeeper began to weep. He took the stranger next door where he told the other brother his story. The brothers were reconciled. But what a

tragedy that twenty years of broken relationship was based not on fact, but on mistrust (Bruce Larson, *The Communicator's Commentary*, NT: Luke).

As trust is essential in human relationships, isn't it even more so in our relationship with God? That was the area where the devil attacked Jesus and where he often attacks us. The tempter tried to turn Jesus away from obedience to God and so from fulfilling his task as Messiah. The temptations in this scene represent the continuing temptations Jesus faced: "To prove the reality of his calling by signs and to adjust his ideas of his calling" to fit popular ideas of the day (I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC). The basic issue is Jesus' relationship as Son to God the Father and his obedience to the Father.

Temptation comes to us in many ways. If we don't respond to one form, it tries another approach.

Fred Craddock says, "A real temptation is not an offer to fall but to rise. The tempter in Eden did not ask, 'Do you wish to be as the devil?' but 'Do you wish to be as God?' ...no self-respecting devil would approach a person with offers of personal, domestic or social ruin. That is the small print at the bottom of the temptation" (*Luke, Interpretation* 56).

Sometimes, we sort of blunder into temptation. We're like the man who had a black eye. He explained that he was trying to read a sign on a door. He said, "I'm near-sighted, so I had to get close to see the sign." His friend asked, "What did the sign say?" "Caution: Door Swings Out."

Sometimes we get into situations where we know we will be tempted. Other times, temptation seems to sneak up on us. We may give in at the tempter's first suggestion or we may put up a fight. However it comes, temptation is something we all face. How do we deal with it?

The fact that Jesus was tempted and overcame not only shows that he identifies with us. It also gives us hope that temptation can be overcome. Jesus is the model of the Spirit-filled life and he is our example for dealing with temptation.

In the wilderness, Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit where for forty days the devil tempts him and he eats nothing. This reminds us of Moses' forty day fast on Mt. Sinai, of Elijah's forty day journey through the desert to the mountain of God and of Israel's forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

As we look at each of Jesus' temptations we will see parallels with Israel's experience in the wilderness.

Luke has already mentioned various kinds of opposition and hostility: those who sit in darkness; Simeon's prophecy to Mary of opposition to her child; rulers like Caesar, Pilate, Herod, Caiaphas and Annas (1:79; 2:34; 3:1, 19-20). Luke now shows that these as well as other, less visible, evidences of opposition are manifestations of the evil that wants to hinder the coming of God's salvation. "Behind these efforts stands the devil, who now steps out from behind the curtain for a direct confrontation with the one through whom God would manifest his redemptive will. Behind Jesus, on the other hand, stands the Holy Spirit." So we have here a clash of cosmic proportions (Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT 192).

Jesus' being full of the Holy Spirit did not exempt him from the struggle, but put him right in the middle of it. Those who are most engaged in the way of God seem to experience most intensely the opposition of evil. If Jesus struggled, who is exempt? We need to recognize the reality of Jesus' temptation—and that includes the possibility that he could have given in, he could have sinned. Without that possibility, the temptations were just an act; they weren't real. But he really was tempted and he really did overcome. He did not sin.

Also, we are not tempted to do things we can't do, but things that are within our power. "The greater the strength, the greater the temptation." If that's so, Jesus' battle must have been fierce!

In fact, Jesus alone has felt the full force of the tempter's power. A tree that blows down in a storm doesn't feel the full force of the storm. The tree that stands through the storm does. When we give in before temptation has done its worst, we don't feel its full power. But Jesus endured all that the devil could throw at him. And, filled with the Holy Spirit and armed with Scripture, Jesus won the victory.

After not eating for forty days, Jesus was famished. The devil's first temptation appealed to that need. "If you are God's Son, turn this stone to a loaf of bread. You have miraculous power—use it to take care of yourself." The devil was trying to get Jesus to misuse the status and power he has as God's Son. This temptation raises the question: Will Jesus follow

the leading of the Spirit and show unwavering trust in God to supply his needs; or will he relieve his hunger by exercising his power apart from God's purpose?

Jesus answers, "It is written: 'People do not live on bread alone.'" He's quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, where Moses reminds the people of Israel that part of God's testing them—seeing if they would trust God—was to let them get hungry so God could give them manna. The Israelites would have to trust God for their bread. But the people grumbled and resisted God.

By refusing the devil's temptation to satisfy his needs—as if God could not or would not meet them—Jesus affirmed his trust and reliance on God's provision. What Israel failed to do, Jesus did. Now Jesus doesn't minimize his need for food. He actually identifies with God's starving people in their hunger while at the same time he affirms his trust in God's provision.

In trying to lead us into mistrust of God the devil's strategy is to try to make us believe that God is not trustworthy, to doubt God's goodness and God's word. Perhaps we are tempted to take care of ourselves above all else instead of trusting God's care and provision. Jesus enables us to give up that fearful self-protection and to live in trusting dependence on God's grace.

In the second temptation, the devil shows Jesus a spectacular vision of all the kingdoms of the world. He offers them to Jesus *if* Jesus will worship him. Jesus had come to redeem the world and here is a chance to be given the world without the painful conflict and suffering of the cross. Yet if he does this, it will be inconsistent with his relationship as Son to God the Father. And it would be saying that God is not the only one worthy to be worshipped.

The Old Testament background here is Israel's tendency to chase after other gods. Unlike the Israelites, who so often got caught up in idolatry, Jesus steadfastly affirms his loyalty to God alone by refusing the devil's offer and by quoting Deut. 6:13, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" Notice that this is in the context of the *Shema*: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God

with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut 6:4-5)

The devil may try to convince us that God’s way is not the best way or that God doesn’t really want to make us all we can be, that God doesn’t care about fulfilling us. The devil may suggest shortcuts to doing God’s will. He certainly delights in dividing our loyalties, getting us to worship and trust something or someone instead of God or alongside God.

But just as Jesus could not bypass the cross if he would remain true to the Father, we can’t go other than the way of the cross. The shortcuts we might take keep us from experiencing all that God has for us and from becoming all that God intends us to be.

Finally, the devil challenges Jesus to leap off the top of the Jerusalem temple into the ravine some 450 feet below. To increase the challenge, the devil now quotes Scripture (Psalm 91:11, 12). This is a temptation to prove the truth of God’s promise by putting it to the test.

Israel in the wilderness again provides the background. They tested God with their demands that the Lord provide water for them. Moses called the place where this happened “Testing” and “Quarreling” because they tested the Lord saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?” (Exodus 17:7). In Deut. 6:16, Moses reminds the people of this event and says, “Do not test the Lord your God as you did at that place.”

That’s the Scripture Jesus quotes in answer to the devil’s challenge. He would not follow rebellious Israel’s example by faithlessly putting God to the test. He didn’t need to try to force God’s hand or see if God would keep his word because he trusted his Father.

We may be tempted to try to force God’s hand, to get God to prove himself to us. But faith means believing God’s promises are true and resting in them. We don’t have to worry whether God will come through for us. We trust that he will.

We also see here a reminder that we need a thorough knowledge of Scripture. The devil quoted Scripture for his own purpose. Isolated passages of Scripture can be twisted and misused. We need to see each passage in its immediate context—how does it relate to what’s around it? And in its

broader context—how does it relate to Scripture’s broad themes and to Scripture’s central message, its witness to Jesus Christ?

Jesus was radically committed to God’s rule and purposes. The devil had a competing agenda. He wanted to recruit Jesus to participate in a test of God’s promises in Psalm 91. But the devil overlooked the key truth that the psalm is addressed to those who “live in the shelter of the Most High” (v. 1). That is, those people who through faith reside in God’s presence.

Also, the devil failed to recognize an even deeper mystery—and that is that God may rescue his people *through* suffering and death and not only *before* or *from* suffering and death. Those people who mocked Jesus when he was on the cross echoed what the devil was saying here. They said of Jesus, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” (Luke 23:35). And some said to Jesus, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” (Lk 23:37). This has been called “the last temptation of Christ.” And surely it was tempting for Jesus to consider coming down off the cross in a blaze of power and glory, to call down the legions of angels that were available to him (Matthew 26:53). But he stayed true to the purpose the Father and he had agreed on.

Jesus doesn’t deny that God’s promises are valid. But he does reject misusing them in the way the devil suggests. He knows the devil is trying to “deflect him from his single-minded commitment to loyalty and obedience in God’s service.” He sees the devil encouraging him to question God’s faithfulness (Green 195-96).

Jesus remains unflinchingly faithful to God and God’s commandments. This is another example of his being God’s Son who is qualified for his role as Messiah. He is now ready to begin his public ministry.

Not only that, but Jesus’ victory over the tempter gives us hope and help. When we are in Christ, we share his victory. “Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (Hebrews 2:18). “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. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb. 4:15-16).

Jesus helps us by making available to us the same Spirit and Word of God that were available to him. He also reminds us that God is trustworthy.

There are some basic questions we have to deal with. Is life good? Is God good? If God is inconsistent and arbitrary, then we need to manipulate and control all we can. But if God is good, we can trust. The God revealed in Jesus Christ is good and we can trust him.

“No testing/temptation has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested/tempted beyond your strength, but with the testing/temptation he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Let's trust our good and faithful God. Let's receive God's grace that empowers us to overcome sin.