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Luke 4:1-13
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Temptation of Jesus

One of the things I love about backpacking is how slow life becomes on the trail. Everything you need is on your back. What you don't need, you leave behind. And the daily rhythm is so simple. Wake up. Have breakfast. Put gear away. Hike for a while. Stop for lunch. Hike some more. Maybe grab a snack with a gorgeous view. Find a place to camp for the night. Make dinner. And go to sleep. That's it.

I tend to keep my meals pretty simple as well. Again, everything I eat has to be carried in and any trash has to be carried out. Thanks to freeze dried meals, my food is pretty light. Just reconstitute with hot water, you can have some pretty delicious meals. And after a long day of hiking, I am usually famished!

One of my favorite back packer meals is the Mountain House Freeze Dried Beef Stroganoff. Mix that with a little Taco Bell sauce and you have the perfect meal! Nothing like going to bed with a full, warm tummy.

Now, I would have failed miserably if I had to fast in the desert for forty days and forty nights. Pretty sure if I had the super power to turn a stone into a Mountain House Beef Stroganoff meal, I'd have done it in a heartbeat and made the devil watch me eat it. Sorry to burst your bubble on that.

As we talk about slowing down to the pace of Jesus, this is the scripture story that we will feast upon today. Join me as we listen for the Word of the Lord from Luke 4:1-13.

4 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan River. The Spirit led him into the desert. **2** There the devil tempted him for 40 days. Jesus ate nothing during that time. At the end of the 40 days, he was hungry.

3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

4 Jesus answered, "It is written, 'Man must not live only on bread.' " (Deuteronomy 8:3)

5 Then the devil led Jesus up to a high place. In an instant, he showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. **6** He said to Jesus, "I will give you all their authority and glory. It has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. **7** If you worship me, it will all be yours."

8 Jesus answered, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God. He is the only one you should serve.' " (Deuteronomy 6:13)

9 Then the devil led Jesus to Jerusalem. He had Jesus stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here. **10** It is written,

“The Lord will command his angels to take good care of you.

11 They will lift you up in their hands.

Then you won’t trip over a stone.’” (Psalm 91:11,12)

12 Jesus answered, “Scripture says, ‘Do not test the Lord your God.’” (Deuteronomy 6:16)

13 When the devil finished all this tempting, he left Jesus until a better time. Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

This morning I want to explore what was the purpose of Jesus’ trial in the desert? Who set it up? Who or what was the source of Jesus’ temptation? How specifically was Jesus tempted? How did Jesus escape temptation? What wisdom does it provide us today when we face trials and temptations of many kinds?

The first thing that I noticed as I studied this text was that it was a set up. At Jesus’ baptism, he was signed, sealed, delivered from sin and full of the Holy Spirit. Then he was led by that same Spirit into the desert. So this trial was set up by the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word for desert, *eremos*, could mean desert, wilderness, solitary, lonely, or desolate place. In other words, a place where Jesus could be away from the distractions of ordinary life and ministry. A place where he could be with God and God could have his undivided attention. That way he could hear from God and be ready to step into whatever God had in store for him. And he would remain in this solitude for forty days.

Now, I can handle a day or two or at most three in silence and solitude. But as an extravert, forty days of not seeing or talking to anyone sounds torturous. Do our introverts agree? Or does this sound heavenly to you? My point is that this was a long time, a time that harkens back to the Great Flood in the Old Testament when it rained for forty days and forty nights...testing Noah’s endurance and faithfulness until the rains stopped and the floods receded.

We know that Jesus often retreated to these quiet places for the night or several days. We see this in the Gospels and how it was part of his regular spiritual discipline that kept him even keeled and in step with God the Father. The Bible distinguishes between God-sent trials or testing, which build faith and maturity, and temptation, which lures one toward sin.

All seemed to go well with the testing...until...the devil showed up with temptation. Isn’t that just how it seems to work when we are tested? Temptations flood in to lead us into sin when we are weak.

The Greek word for devil or diabolos could mean devil, tempter, or slanderer. Only Mark in his Gospel account calls the devil by name, Satan. Regardless, the devil showed up and made an already difficult experience more challenging by tempting Jesus with all sorts of things.

We know for certain that it wasn't God the Father or the Spirit who tempted Jesus because James tells us, "When a person is tempted, they shouldn't say, 'God is tempting me.' God can't be tempted by evil. And God doesn't tempt anyone. But each person is tempted by their own evil desires. The desires lead them on and drag them away. When these desires are allowed to remain, they lead to sin. And when sin is allowed to remain and grow, it leads to death."¹

But how exactly does the devil try to lure Jesus into sin? Remember he was called by God at his baptism! He had a target on him. But he was also physically weak with hungry. He was emotionally weak with loneliness. And he was spiritually weak being out of rhythm with his weekly routine of worship.

The first way that devil tempted Jesus was to get him to question his identity. "If you are the Son of God..." Notice how this was in direct contradiction to God the Father's Words spoken over Jesus at his baptism just a few days earlier. "This is my Son. Whom I love. And with Him I am well pleased." The devil needles his way into Jesus' thinking to get him to wonder... "Am I really who God said I was?"

And the devil continued to challenge Jesus' ego by claiming that he had the authority and splendor of all the kingdoms of the world. And that he could give it all to Jesus if Jesus just bowed down and worshiped him.

Folks, this is exactly how tempter works in our lives. Right after a spiritual mountaintop experience with God, the enemy often attacks by weaving his deceit into our thinking. "That was just spiritual high. Not real life. You're really not that special to God. Are you sure you heard God's words correctly? Surely God doesn't have time of all the billions of people in the world to love you that much."

The second way that the devil tempted Jesus was with his physical hunger. The scripture tells us that Jesus ate nothing during those forty days.

Fun fact. A person can only survive a few days without water because of dehydration. Humans can't store up water in our bodies like camels can. But we can certainly store up fat. That is why we can last without food for up to several weeks depending on what energy reserves we have stored. I wouldn't expect Jesus to have had much body fat going into this trial. So he had to rely on the Holy Spirit to sustain him.

¹ James 1:15-15

Have you ever been hangry before? Come on, admit it. Some of my least proud moments come when I am extremely hungry. That's the devil working through my weakness.

The third way that the devil tempted Jesus was when he was lonely and emotionally weak. There was no one to remind him who he was or who's he was. No one else would know if he slipped this one time. But that is what integrity is... what you do when no one else is watching.

This is why community is so key and why groups like Alcoholics Anonymous are so successful. They know that without the accountability of fellow addicts, that sobriety is impossible. You can't avoid temptation on your own. But when you know that you will be facing fellow addicts each week who can sniff out lies and hold you accountable for your sobriety, then it makes them stronger to resist the temptation to abuse.

But then notice that the devil led him out of the wilderness to Jerusalem and the top of the temple. Now Jesus was around other other people. Back among his people. His community of faith. Again, the devil challenged his identity, saying, "If you are the Son of God, prove it now to everyone. Draw attention to yourself so that people will follow you."

You know it can also be lonely when surrounded by community. This is the great failure of social media. It promises that we will be known by others. But in reality, people only truly come to know us on a very superficial level. So we are left feeling more alone than ever.

The forth way that the devil tempted Jesus was to glorify himself...to make a spectacle of himself, to draw attention to himself, so that people would follow him because of his mighty power instead of his words and ministry.

And haven't we seen this time and time again when we place celebrity pastors on pedestals only to be disappointed because of some moral failure because we assumed that all was well with their soul. But it wasn't. In reality, we only knew them by the image they created of themselves or what they portrayed on stage? Folks, pastors are just as human as anyone else. We, like you, have our weaknesses and failures.

The fifth way that the devil tempted Jesus was to attack him while he was out of his regular spiritual rhythm of weekly worship in the synagogue. Christian author and speaker Chuck Swindol allegedly said, "Worship is the minimum diet for a Christian."

Today there is a growing movement among some Christians who claim they can be Christians without going to church each week. This is like an alcoholic saying they can remain sober without going to AA meetings.

Now I get that the Church has done some terrible things through the ages and that sometimes we don't act like the Body of Christ. But regularly skipping out on

worship starves us of real presence of Christ. We aren't fed by the Word. We aren't reminded who we are and whose we are as God's children. We aren't nourished at the Lord's Supper. We fail to remember our baptisms. We don't receive verbal pardon for our sins. We aren't encouraged to pray for and with others. We don't offer our gifts and talents to further God's kingdom. And we aren't given chances to sing God's praises with the great cloud of witnesses.

It's amazing how easy it is to skip worship one week and then the weeks turn into months and months turn into years. Before we know it, spiritual atrophy sets in. Which is prime territory for the devil to feed us all kinds of lies.

Friends, if we want to take following Jesus serious, weekly worship is the minimal diet for us for to maintain our spiritual health.

And finally, the last way the devil tempted Jesus was by misquoting scripture to prove a point. Satan is shrewd. He knows scripture better than any of us. Notice how quickly the right justification rolls off his tongue to lead Jesus to think, "Yeah! That's right. I can abuse my power. Just this once."

The writer of Genesis described the devil as crafty. The Hebrew word is arum. It means crafty, shrewd, cunning in a bad sense. Remember how he even gets Eve to question God's command not to eat from the tree of good and evil. "Did God really say...Surely God didn't mean that you would die."

Adam and Eve ate from the tree, and they died spiritually, relationally, and physically. And the rest is history.

Notice that each time the devil attacked, Jesus escaped the temptation by repeating God's Words back to the devil.

"It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'"

"It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

"It is written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

This is where knowing our Bibles comes in handy so we can combat the devil and his evil schemes. Psalm 119 says, "I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you."²

So what is God saying to us today?

All temptation is spiritual warfare. There is a war going on that we cannot see directly, though we can see how it plays out through people. But we are not left defenseless against the enemy's attacks.

The Apostle Paul commands us to "Put on the full armor of God. So we can remain strong against the devil's evil plans. Our fighting is not against human beings. But against rulers, authorities, and powers of this dark world. It is against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Evil days will come. But we

² Psalm 119:11

will be able to stand up to anything. And after we have done everything, we will still be standing.”³

God doesn’t tempt us. He may bring us trials designed to strengthen and mature us. But temptation comes from the devil.

God provides escape from temptation.

Again the Apostle Paul encouraged the Corinthians, “You are tempted in the same way as all other human beings are. God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted any more than you can take. But when you are tempted, God will give you a way out. Then you will be able to deal with it.”⁴

Look for the escape route.

If our temptation is over eating junk food, then skip that isle when grocery shopping.

If scrolling through social media consumes too much time and attention, then remove the apps from our phone.

If binge watching Netflix leaves us feeling gross at the end of the evening, then make it a practice to stop after just one show.

If viewing pornography is our vice, then put a blocker on the computer or give someone passwords to see what we’ve been watching.

If hoarding too much, then give someone access to there checkbook to see where we spend our money.

If we are spending more than we can afford, then cut up some or all of those credit cards.

If gaming long into the night leaves us feeling too exhausted to wake up for school or work, then set time blocker on the internet so that everything shuts down at 9pm.

If drinking too much is our problem, then find another way home other than past our favorite bar. Find an AA meeting to go to.

If consuming too much news leaves us feeling depressed and anxious about the world, then limit viewing to once per day for a half an hour.

If racing through life seems to be our problem, then be more intentional about slowing down, practicing sabbath and entering into our much needed rest.

Most time temptation begins with something that God ordained as good but then over time the enemy twists it so that it becomes harmful and bad.

My point is not to give simple pat answers to our struggles. But to encourage us that there are ways out of temptation. The real trick in overcoming temptation is stated at the very start of our scripture today. “Jesus full of the Holy Spirit...” We’ve got to be full of the Holy Spirit. That is what will give us the wisdom,

³ Ephesians 6:11-13

⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:13

strength, and power to avoid the temptation and find the way out, so that we do not sin.

And don't forget to come to worship weekly, so that we can encourage one another and be reminded that we are signed as God's masterpieces, sealed with the Holy Spirit, delivered from sin and evil, and claimed as God's beloved children.⁵

In closing, what does all this have to do with slowing down to the speed of Jesus? Time in the wilderness isn't something we can rush. Remember it took the Israelites forty years of wandering until they arrived in the Promised Land. And it took Jesus forty days and forty nights until he was ready to embrace the ministry that he was called to. God's testing must run it's course. But during that time of testing, we can be prepared knowing that temptations will also come and that with God's help, we can overcome anything the devil might throw at us.

Ravensbruck concentration camp survivor Corrie Ten Boom once said, "If the devil can't make us bad, he will make us busy."⁶

So may we know that trials and temptations of every kind are a normal part of life. God allows trials to strengthen and mature us. The devil brings temptations to lead us into sin. May we know that Jesus could relate us in our weakness as he faced temptation as well and yet did not sin.⁷ And may trust the Holy Spirit to provide and the strength to take it.

Amen.

⁵ Hebrews 10:25

⁶ Corrie Ten Boom quoted in Matthew Kelly, *Slowing Down to the Speed of Joy, The Simple Art of Taking Back Your Life* (North Palm Beach, FL: Blue Sparrow Publishing, 2024), 41.

⁷ Hebrews 4:15