

The Temptation of Jesus

Luke 4:1-13

Last week we read about Jesus' baptism and his genealogy, and heard through Jesus' genealogy, Luke made the point that Jesus was, like all of us, a son of Adam. And God gave Adam, our first father, a simple command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But Satan came along and tempted him and his wife Eve, and Adam blew it, and fell. And following in his footsteps we have all failed. We've all fallen in a pit. That's the human condition: and we're all in it together.

And we need someone to come and rescue us out of this pit, someone who faces everything we face, who faces the same trials and temptations Adam and the rest of us face, but who doesn't give in. We don't need anyone else falling into the pit with us – it's crowded enough; we need someone to climb down into the pit and lift us up out of it.

And Jesus is that Man. His best friend John would later say (1 John 3:8) "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." And that's what Jesus starts to do. And Luke tells us in v1 that Jesus 'was led by the Spirit in the wilderness'. The Holy Spirit leads Jesus into this battle. Now in Psalm 23 David says: 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters.' And that's the kind of leading we like, when God brings us into times of rest and refreshing: beside the still waters. But here is Jesus led by the Spirit in the wilderness, into a time of life threatening trial.

Now sometimes we can find ourselves in a wilderness and facing temptations and trials because of our own stupidity. But there are other times when you will find yourself being seriously tested and like Jesus, it's not because you've done anything wrong, its because God has led you there and He allows you to go through it. So this morning, if you're in the wilderness because of your sin, you need to confess it and repent of it and start putting things right; but if you've searched your heart and you know you haven't brought this upon yourself, like Jesus you need to take your stand against the evil one.

And to help us do that this morning, we're going to look firstly at Satan's Tactics as he tries to bring Jesus down – Paul says in 2 Cor 2:11 'we are not ignorant of his designs' we know his modus operandi – the means he deploys to try and wreck lives; then we'll look at Satan's Temptations and what we can learn from the specific temptations Jesus faces here; and then we'll finish by looking at Jesus' Triumph.

Satan's tactics:

This episode, Luke tells us, takes place in the wilderness, in this hot, barren wasteland. Adam's trial, the very first temptation a man faced, happened in a garden. And that contrast between the green, lush garden and this barren wilderness is a powerful picture of the devastation the destroyer has wrought on people's lives. And from how he comes at Jesus I want you to see seven schemes from Satan's book of warfare that he might try on you.

1. Attack After Success. Jesus has just had this wonderful experience at His baptism, as God the Father and God the Spirit endorse Him as God the Son. Then satan comes for Him. The temptation follows the high point. So be on your guard when things are good and going well. He might try and bring you down by sowing seeds of pride in your heart: 'hey, perhaps I am as good as people say'; or by you thinking 'things are going well, I'm standing strong', and you take your eyes off God and you're not so dependent on God as you were, you're trusting in yourself, and in comes the enemy. That's why Paul warns the Christians at Corinth (1 Cor 10:12) 'Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.'

But there's another reason success can make you vulnerable and that's because of the despondency that can set in afterwards. You can have this great experience: that maybe a time of spiritual growth or experience, or it may be success at work, and what can follow hard on the heels of that feeling of ecstasy is this feeling of deflation and despair. That's what Elijah experienced after his battle with the prophets of Baal and he finds himself running from his enemies, asking God to take his life, because he's lost the will to live.

God given success is wonderful and to be enjoyed and received with humility and thankfulness. But it can also make you vulnerable, so be on your guard in the good times.

2. Launch Multiple Assaults: In v2 Luke tells us Jesus was in wilderness 'for forty days being tempted by the devil.' Satan's attacks kept coming over those days and the three specific temptations we know about are just the culmination. It seems like Jesus faced assault after assault. And as they reach their peak, the enemy doesn't just go in once more, he goes in three times. And there may be times when, like Jesus, it feels like you are facing a sustained assault. That might be seemingly constant temptation to look at porn, or blow up in anger, or walk out on your marriage, or develop a wrong relationship or give way to a vortex of negative thinking and these temptations just keep coming and you think 'I can't stand up under this much longer'. Well, that's his tactic: to go in hard.

Don't allow him to wear you down. In 1 Cor 10:13 Paul says 'No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.' So when these things come at you, look for the way of escape. And remember, to stand is always harder than to give in but that's no reason to give in.

3. Attack When Weak: In v2 Luke says Jesus 'ate nothing during those [forty] days. And when they were ended he was hungry'. And I bet he was. Mark and I share an office, and we can barely go 40 minutes without snacking on something. Jesus has gone 40 days without food: he's weak, he's hungry, his body is telling him: you need food; his physical reserves are on empty. And the devil comes for him. Peter tells us in 1 Peter 5:8 'Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.' Listen Peter says, satan's like a lion waiting for the gazelle who gets separated from the

herd, who lags behind because he's sick or injured. Now for Jesus that was physical hunger, for you it might be tiredness or loneliness or stress. And that's your uniquely vulnerable time. If you see that kind of a pattern in your life, expect and pre-empt temptation, take steps to guard your heart, and pray that God would keep you strong.

4. Undermine the Truth: it's said that termites can destroy a building by eating away at its foundations until it's got nothing left to stand on. And the enemy will try and do the same with your faith. That's what he tries with Jesus: v3 – 'if you are the Son of God...' v9 'If you are the Son of God...' Now what has God the Father just told Jesus? 'You are my beloved Son' and here is satan eating away at that, trying to get Jesus to question the truth of what God has just said. It's the same line of attack he used against Adam and Eve in the garden. 'Did God actually say, 'you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?' And he will try and destroy your foundation by questioning the truth of God's word, especially of His love for you, especially when times are hard. And what he's trying to do is get you to take your eyes off of God's absolute faithfulness and truthfulness and get you to turn your gaze in on yourself. It's his attempt to make you doubt God and trust your own inner turmoil, and you become introspective, instead of looking with deep gratitude at the God who is faithful and true whatever you're going through.

5. Offer them an unbelievably good deal: In Jesus second temptation Satan makes Jesus an offer that's difficult to refuse. All the kingdoms of the world are shown to Him and the devil says in v6 'To you I will give all this authority and their glory.' And for Jesus there's nothing wrong with that as a prize. It's the inheritance God the Father offers His Son in Psalm 2:7 - "The Lord said to me, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession." The problem is that when satan makes you an unbelievably good offer, there's a sting in the tail. The bait looks nice and juicy, but it's bait all the same, and there's a hook buried inside it. And the devil says to Jesus in v7 "If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." And there's the hook, to reel Jesus in on. For you it might be the offer of success or promotion or some relationship or friendship or maybe even marriage. It's an unbelievably good offer, and there's nothing intrinsically wrong with the prize, but there's this small cost, this little piece of small print about selling your soul or compromising your integrity, or denying your saviour, or sacrificing your family, and he will attempt to get you to overlook the cost by focusing your gaze on 'all this will be yours.' And once you bite, you're on the line and he will start reeling you in. Jesus didn't take the bait.

6. Twist scripture. Now the devil's doctrine is impeccable – he knows the truth, but he twists it, and when he takes Jesus to the temple and tells him to throw himself down he quotes Psalm 91 at him. He takes a Psalm that glories in God's protection and care of His people and he twists it to his own ends; and he will attempt the same with you. Whether by taking some scripture out of context, or by some one misapplying it for you, the devil will use whatever means he can, even the Bible to get you to believe things that are wrong. And the great antidote to that is to stay rooted in community, in a church, in a home group where you

can check what you're hearing and reading and thinking and learning against others and not be led down some blind alley.

7. Lie in wait: At the end of these temptations, Luke says in v13 that the devil 'departed from [Jesus] until an opportune time.' The enemy withdraws and disengages, but only for a time. That's what satan does with Jesus and he'll try the same with you, waiting until you drop your guard, you're relaxed, you've grown a bit careless, you're not expecting anything, and he comes, seemingly out of the blue. That's why, when Paul talks about resisting the forces of darkness he says in Ephesians 6:18, 'keep alert with all perseverance.' Don't drop your guard, stay awake, the battle is never over.

Before we look at how Jesus rebuffs satan's attacks, let's look briefly at each of these specific temptations.

Satan's temptations

With the voice from heaven Jesus has heard God affirm Him as His beloved Son. And satan comes and says, 'really? well, prove it'. Prove it by changing this stone into bread, prove it by taking on worldly kingdoms, prove it by a spectacular act. And Jesus faces the choice at the start of His ministry: is it going to be one where He uses His powers to please Himself, or to gain powers for Himself, or to do spectacular but dubious miracles to promote himself?

The first temptation Jesus faces here is to turn a stone into bread. He's hungry, His body longs for something to eat and the devil comes to Him and says 'well, do something about it. You're God's son, but He doesn't seem to be caring for you very well, so take things into your own hands'. And at the root of this is for Jesus to question God's care and provision. And if He had fallen for this, it would have meant that meeting His own legitimate physical needs would have taken priority over obeying and trusting and depending on God. And you may face the same temptation: things aren't going well in whatever area and you feel this need, this lack and it doesn't seem like God is showing up, and the temptation comes, well, turn your back on Him and sort it out yourself. But Jesus replies to the devil v4 'Man shall not live by bread alone.' There is something more important than my needs, and that is trusting and obeying God.

In the second temptation the devil offers Jesus the world. And at this point Jesus has nothing. He's hungry, He's in a desert, He has no disciples, no financial support, no prayer warriors backing him up, and no website to promote Himself and the devil offers Him everything: the power and the glory. *And* He can get there by an easier route than the one His Heavenly Father wants to take Him on. He just has to worship satan. And that temptation to compromise, to take the easy path, to avoid the pain, for the lure of success and power, to gain it or hold on to it at the cost of trashing your relationship with God, is one many of you will face. So decide now how you're going to respond before the offer comes. Listen to how Jesus responds in v8 - 'It is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.' I'm not going to give my life for, or worship any other god, no matter how good the offer.

The third temptation comes as the devil takes Jesus to the temple and again he questions what the Father has said to Jesus about Him being His Son, and he suggests Jesus throw Himself down, and prove His Sonship to Jesus Himself by having God rescue Him. Someone has said it's the ultimate 'let go and let God.' And if Jesus had done it, this wouldn't have been a sign of His faith, it would have been a sign of His unbelief: God's word, His affirmation of Him wasn't sufficient, He needed a sign. But Jesus doesn't need any more proof, He would rather trust His Father's word from heaven than anything else. So He responds with Deuteronomy 6:16 'you shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'

And there will be times when you are tempted to test God. This seed of doubt is sown in your mind, does God really care for me, does He really love me? well if He does He needs to come up with the goods, he needs to do this or that to prove it – rather than taking Him at His word. And Jesus refuses to go down that road.

Well, those are the tactics and the temptations the enemy deployed on Jesus, how does Jesus respond, how does He repel these attacks?

Christ's Triumph

Well firstly I want you to see again that Jesus was tempted. And you can be reeling under waves of assault from the enemy to do this or that, and you're struggling to stay clean and fighting not to sin and you feel slimed by the whole thing. Listen, don't despair. Temptation is not the same as sin and Jesus was tempted. And if you are facing a battle for purity and godliness take courage, because it means you're on the right side and Jesus knows what it feels like.

But secondly I want you to see that Jesus resists the devil. Now that may sound obvious, but Jesus puts up a fight here. So let me ask you, do you? When temptation comes, do you just cave in or do you fight? In James 4:7 James says "resist the devil and he will flee from you". If you want Him to flee, you have to resist Him, and that's what Jesus does.

Thirdly, Jesus doesn't use any special means. He doesn't use supernatural powers, He doesn't unleash a legion of angels, He faces Satan as Adam faced him, as a man, as a man full of the Spirit and led by the Spirit and the means He uses to repel these attacks, we can use.

And the consistent means that Jesus used was the word of God. He fights back by taking what Paul calls in Ephesians 6:17 'the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God' and He pulls it from its scabbard and three times he runs the serpent through with it. Filled with the Holy Spirit, led by the Spirit, He fights with the word of God, He's not going to be pushed around by the enemy into believing this or that about God or about Himself, He's going to live and fight by this word. And every verse Jesus quotes is from Deuteronomy, not the book highest up on your list of favourite books of the Bible I suspect, but Jesus can use these truths and bring them out of His heart because at some time in the past He's put them in there. And if you want to wield this sword like Jesus did, start putting the word in your heart. Read it, but also memorise it, and to help you do that every week we put a key verse in the bulletin, verses for life I call them.

Well, use them, memorise them, get them into your heart. If you did that, at the end of the year you would know 52 verses by heart to help you live and fight like Jesus.

But with Jesus it's not *just* some kind of intellectual assent to the word, because even satan knew the bible and could quote it. It's got to go deeper than that. Jesus takes this word of God and He believes it, He puts his trust in it, He pins His life on it. It's what Paul calls 'the shield of faith, [faith in God and His word] with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one' (Eph 6:16). And Jesus takes up the sword and the shield – the word and faith - together. And for you and me that will be believing what God says about Himself and trusting what He says about us and His care and protection and provision for us, even when it doesn't seem like it, and building our lives on that and obeying Him in that.

But there's something else here as well that marks out Jesus' response to satan's assaults. And that is His attitude of heart. What must have become clear to satan and should be clear to us who read this, is that Jesus has not come to serve Himself, or to live for His own ends or to pursue His own goals. A Man – a Second Adam - has come on the scene who is single-minded in putting His faith in God; who is single-minded in His obedience and will not give way on what His heart will worship. The enemy who has turned the garden of Eden into a wilderness has finally met his match.

And yet this isn't Jesus' final victory over satan. That will come at the cross. The moment which satan thinks is his greatest victory, the slaughter of the Son of God becomes his greatest defeat, as the curse of sin and death is broken as Jesus makes a public spectacle of the powers of darkness, triumphing over them in the cross and through the resurrection. That's the final victory, and your and my ultimate victory over satan does not come by us engaging in hand to hand combat with the devil, though we have got to fight, but by putting our trust in what Jesus has done for us: our victory is His victory. But here in the desert, notice has been served on satan: 'Jesus has arrived and he intends to destroy your works'.