

EXPOSED: Temptations Big Lie

Luke 4:1-13

*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.***

1 Corinthians 10:13

Introduction: Several years ago, my dad inherited several hundred shares of stock from his father that at one point was worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. However, because the price of the stock was based in no small part to lies, deceptive accounting, and overall fraud, the stock went from over \$90 a share to pennies. The company's name was Enron, and on December 2, 2001 it filed the largest corporate bankruptcy cases in U.S. history (until WorldCom the next year).

No one likes being lied to, and deception shatters our ability to trust. Sin is always based on a lie, and temptation to sin is always based on the deception that sin will deliver something that it cannot. Sin cannot deliver contentment, happiness in the long term, fulfillment, or joy. However, it can offer and deliver something close enough to make it enticing to us and cause us to run back to it over and over.

This morning we want to take a look at the scheme of temptation and how it must be exposed as a lie in order for us to see it clearly and resist. As we head into the New Year, we have clear goals as a church that we will lay out next week. But all of those goals are meaningless and fruitless if we are a group of people who continue to walk in the deception of sin. We want to look at how Jesus was tempted, and yet did not sin, not only to validate His messianic credentials, but give us an example of how to resist the temptation we will face daily.

I. Temptation never tips its hand (4:1-2)

Luke 4:1-2 *And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness ² for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry.*

Why did Jesus go to the wilderness in the first place?

This section holds intrigue from the outset. Why in the world would Jesus START His ministry this way? It seems odd and out of place to allow oneself to be exposed to this type of pain. Wasn't there another way to make a public announcement? If there was training needed, how about a class on leadership or teaching? No, there was a proactive reason why Jesus prepped for 40 days in the wilderness, and the first two verses explain why.

- **Messianic Credentials Validated**

Jesus' baptism gave Jesus public validation, verbally and presently giving credence to Jesus as the Messiah, and His genealogy gave Him positional validation, showing that He was the Son of God AND the Son of Man. His temptation in the wilderness showed His power over sin and evil, and He was willing to go **toe to toe** with the devil himself, take every shot, and prove that the devil's powers are limited.

- **Led by the Holy Spirit**

The first observation from the text is the fact that Jesus was led **by the Spirit** to the wilderness for 40 full days. This shows that Jesus functioned in **submission and humility** to the Godhead, and followed the lead of the Holy Spirit, entrusting Himself to His strength. This also shows that while God does not

tempt anyone, He absolutely was in control of this situation, allowing His Son to BE tempted, with this testing done to prove and validate messianic credentials.

- **Tempted fully as a man**

Jesus was tempted not as God (superman), nor as someone acting like God (Clark Kent), but as someone who was fully human, someone who knew hunger, pain, and exhaustion. This was actually the core of the temptation, for Jesus to stop trusting the plan of God and the power of the Holy Spirit and take matters into His own divine hands. It is important to note that Jesus withstanding temptation as a man not only provides us with a sacrifice, it provides us with an **example to follow** when we are tempted.

NOTE: Could Jesus have sinned (even if He wanted to?)

Jesus is the divine Son of God and in His deity, He could not be tempted (James 1:13 – for God cannot be tempted by evil). But Jesus is also the Son of Adam, being fully human, and could be tempted as a man. It is true that He knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21), committed no sin (1 Pet. 2:22), and in Him there was no sin (1 John 3:5; Heb. 4:15; 7:26). But the question we often wonder about: *could He sin?* And if He could not, would it have been a real temptation. But if He *could*, doesn't that make Him less than God? Wayne Grudem's summary is helpful here:

*"If Jesus as a person had sinned, involving both his human and divine natures in sin, then God Himself would have sinned, and He would have ceased to be God. Yet that is clearly impossible because of the infinite holiness of God's nature. Therefore if we are asking if it was **actually** possible for Jesus to have sinned, it seems that we must conclude that it was not possible. The union of His human and divine nature in one person prevented it."¹*

If this is the case (and I believe it is), does this invalidate Jesus' temptation, or in other words, was the temptation REAL? The answer is, it was not only real, it was more intense than anyone has ever faced as a human. When does the pressure of temptation end for us? When we give into it. Jesus never gave in and withstood the full force of it every time, even to the point that His body reacted physiologically by sweating great drops of blood before heading to the cross (Luke 22:44). Jesus was tempted in every way, and yet, He withstood it every time, making Him not only qualified as Messiah, but also qualified as our sympathetic High Priest.

- **Parallels and redeems OT failures**

Israel's failure in the wilderness

Jesus temptation happened in the wilderness (think Mojave Desert or any other wasteland you've been to), the same type of wilderness that Israel was made to wander in for 40 years, until the faithless and disobedient generation had died off. Jesus redeemed that time in the wilderness by showing His faith and trust in the Father's plan perfectly, paving the way to actually redeem those who had failed.

Adam's failure in the Garden

Adam was faced with similar temptations as Jesus: he was face to face with Satan, He was perfect humanity, and he represented the human race. Adam had everything going for him: comfort, communion with God, no fear, pain, or anxiety, and simple commands to obey (be fruitful and multiply;

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 538-39.

subdue the earth; eat from all the trees BUT NOT THAT ONE!). Adam failed when tested under the best conditions, unwilling to step in and stop the sin of his wife and instead participating in the evil act. Jesus had all the cards stacked against Him: 40 days of no food (think how long it takes you to get grumpy and ornery without food), a wilderness that was barren and dead, and He was alone. Jesus redeemed mankind by withstanding the worst possible scenario of temptation and did it faithfully without sin.

A. Temptation is not looking for a fair fight

At the beginning of verse 3, we are introduced to the one who would do the actual tempting, and he is almost nonchalantly introduced simply as **the devil**. He is described Biblically as a liar and murderer (John 8:44), a dragon (Rev. 12:3-17), a snake (Gen. 3:1; Rev. 12:9; 20:2), the accuser (Rev. 12:10), the evil one (John 17:15), the god of this world (John 12:31), the one who blinds the unbelieving (2 Cor. 4:4), the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2), a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8), and the tempter (1 Thess. 3:5). He is a schemer (Eph. 6:11) who is always looking to take advantage of weak moments, and he is always looking to stack the deck in his favor. We must be aware of this. In his conversation with God about the man Job, Satan wanted God to take all the good things away from Job, including those things most precious to him, during his temptation. We understand that he is not looking to trip us up only when we are doing well, but *especially* when we are at our weakest and most susceptible. He fights dirty because that is his nature. He is the boxer who put weight in his gloves, the hitter who corks his bat, and he definitely is willing to use steroids to enhance performance. But though he fights dirty, he is also limited by the sovereign hand of God, who actually makes all the rules.

B. Temptation yields to God's sovereign hand

- **Shows the extent of Satan's power**

As in the story of Job, Satan could wield much power (over nature, disaster, physical ailments), but he is always limited to what God will allow him to do. With Job, God set the boundaries at Job's life, and Satan could never cross those. With Jesus, Satan could offer real things, but limited things. Satan's true power is that of a **lie, a deception**, and though there is always some truth in his statement, it all has foundations of lies. Remember, Satan can do only that which God has delegated authority for Him to do. He can affect us physically, tempt us constantly, control the world around us, use those who have yielded to him, BUT HE CANNOT SEPARATE US FROM GOD, HIS LOVE, NOR HIS SALVATION. If the worst he can do is take our life, we withstand that knowing that our life is hidden with Christ, and nothing takes that away.

- **Shows the extent of Satan's pride**

The other question that we must ask at this point: **if Jesus could not sin, why did Satan go through the motions?** Satan is actually better versed in Scripture than anyone, and he knows the end. His pride, which is his ultimate downfall, forces him to believe his own lie. He was hopeful that if he could thwart the line of redemption, then all would be lost and he would win. But there is more audacity to how he works. Even if he KNOWS he cannot win, he is willing to inflict the most pain, suffering, and damage to people and this world as he can. If he knows he is going down, he is willing to take as many pounds of flesh as he can on the way out. That is the height of pride, and that enemy is radically dangerous, because he continues to fight dirty even after he's lost.

II. **Temptation masks foolishness as wisdom (4:3-12)**

Satan tempted Jesus for 40 days (and also for 30 years before), but at the culmination of this ultimate fast, Satan ramped up the intensity. These temptations each had a smidgen of truth and validity, yet each were against the design and glory of God, and each was intended to lead Jesus into a path of sin. It also should be noted that these were specific to Christ, but these are the same strategies he uses against us today. Finally, the "if" clauses he uses here are not questioning Jesus identity, it was tempting Him to act on His divinity. It is better to think of this as "since" these things are true, shouldn't you act accordingly. We want to look at three major strategies He used with Jesus and still uses today, and how Jesus counteracted each one.

A. Tempts us to doubt the love of God (4:3-4)

The devil said to him, *"If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."*⁴ And Jesus answered him, *"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'"*

1. The plot

The first temptation was tied directly to the circumstances of the fast in the wilderness. Jesus was willing to have "both hands tied behind His back", and whittled His humanity down so that His physical strength was gone. The devil's plot was simple. It was not about indulgence, since He simply told Jesus to curb His hunger by turning stones into bread. This was not only possible, it was reasonable. So what made this a temptation to sin? **He was trying to get Jesus to distrust God's love and provision for Him.** Had God abandoned Him? Did God not care anymore? Had God failed Him? This was not the first, nor the last time Satan used this kind of plot. Do you remember Satan with Eve in the Garden? He deceived Eve into questioning what God had said, and His love in giving commandments, even going so far as to say He commanded them so they couldn't be like Him. Eve decided to trust herself and the devil, not God and plunged into sin.

2. The plot exposed

Jesus showed us the power of walking by the Spirit, but also the practical implications of walking in the Word. Jesus quoted each time from the OT, and used each quote to not only resist the devil, but to counteract the wrong thinking He proposed. Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3, which is a rich text in trusting the Lord. The point of the passage He quoted from was to remind OT Israel that they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, and depended on the Lord for manna each day, so that they would be humbled, obedient, and dependant on everything the Lord provided. Jesus knew that short term comfort and gain would yield long term loss and consequence.

Lesson Learned: The nature of sin's deception is questioning God's love for us, that He really does not know or want what is best for us, and that we would be happier taking matters into our own hands. This is the nature of any **sexual sin**. We are tempted to take a gift of the Lord, and to distrust that God has our best in mind, and to go outside the bounds of what God has given us. We are convinced that **waiting on the Lord is not best for us**, and we compare ourselves with *everyone else* who seems to be doing something. Instead of fighting for the goodness of the design, we try to justify and strategize how we can go outside of it. This is what Satan did with Eve, Jesus, and with us. It begins with **how we think about life, about God, and about ourselves**, remembering that we live not by finding pleasure in the gifts of God alone, but by and through the gift giver.

B. Tempts us to doubt the plan of God (4:5-8)

And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time,⁶ and said to him, *"To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to*

*whom I will. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."⁸ And Jesus answered him, "It is written,
 "'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'"*

1. The plot

The second main temptation had to do with questioning God's plan, including His plan of redemption and glory. Satan understood the plan very well, that God would glorify Himself by sending His Son, the second Person of the Godhead, to live, suffer, die, and rise again to redeem a people who would worship Him forever. This would allow God to be both the Just and the Justifier of those called to worship. Satan offered Jesus the nations of the world, and worship from these, **without the pain**. He offered Jesus a **shortcut around the cross**. Jesus could have all that He set out to do, but with Satan's plan, He wouldn't needlessly suffer. This was the offer of the magic pill, the path of least resistance, and a life of ease.

2. The plot exposed

Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 6:13, which called God's people to fear God, serve, and swear by His name alone. He affirmed that He trusted God's plan, that His whole goal and purpose was to serve and worship Him in faith, and He was not looking for shortcuts. This meant that Jesus was willing to endure the cross, to despise the shame, and to suffer loss of life in this world to redeem those for the next. That is how we need to expose the same plot:

Lesson learned: God's plan is always the best, but His plan is never the easiest. This temptation is subtle because it has all the marks of truth. We could still worship. We could do some good things. We could feel good. What Satan offers is that we can still be "**good people**", even "**good Christians**", but we don't have to be TOTAL CHRISTIANS. We don't have to follow Christ when it hurts. We don't have to obey when it puts us out of step with culture. We don't have to give sacrificially. We don't have to be guilty to give less than our best at work (especially since our boss is a jerk and ALL the other employees are lazy). We don't have to obey everything God says, just the parts we like or that seem reasonable to us in the 21st century. We must expose this temptation, because worshipping God alone means that we sell out, yielding completely to Him, which will cause discomfort, pain, and loss in this life. We must expose the subtlety of this temptation, because it is so prevalent (at least in my heart).

C. Tempts us to doubt the goodness of God (4:9-12)

And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "*If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here,* ¹⁰ *for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,'* ¹¹ *and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone."* ¹² And Jesus answered him, "*It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'*"

1. The plot

Finally, Satan tempted Jesus and His resolve to know Scripture clearly and whether He was willing to act presumptuously. He took Jesus up to the top of the Temple Mount (which would have been at least 35 feet up), to hurl Himself off, and to trust the angels to save Him. He even quoted from Psalm 91 as precedence for Jesus to do this. This would be putting God to the test, to force God's hand, and to make Him prove Himself to us. In doing this, Satan would get Jesus to do what Israel did in Exodus 17, to question God's faithfulness and grumbled over whether He would provide water or not. This was after He miraculously brought them out of Egypt.

2. The plot exposed

Jesus quoted once again from Deuteronomy 6:16, and said, "you shall not put the Lord your God to the test." He exposed the true foundation of Satan's plot, that He would presume on God and test His goodness.

Lesson Learned: This temptation is the most subtle, thus the most dangerous. This type of temptation misuses Scripture and misunderstands the nature of God. It uses Scripture to gain our own advantage, instead of yielding ourselves to God's will. This type of use makes mankind sovereign, and leads to "name it and claim it" type of living. It takes Scripture out of context to prove what we want (God wants me to be happy, so divorce is ok; If I give more money, He will give me more; if I do good things, good things will happen to me; I don't need to be a part of a church; etc). It makes Scripture into merely a self-help book that gives us what we want, not a Revelation on how to follow God. It also turns God into a utilitarian genie, a cosmic butler who is there to serve our whims. If God is good, He would do _____. This affects the way we pray, not praying according to or for God's will, but calling out God to do something miraculous because WE THINK it best, rather than yielding ourselves to the One who truly knows best. We are not to put God to the test, but to place ourselves under His authority.

III. **Temptation never rests, so we can't either (13)**

And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Satan left Jesus at that point, but He did not leave Him alone. He continued to afflict the disciples, especially Peter. He entered Judas to get him to sell Jesus for silver. He is still active today. He is looking to tempt us, to deceive, confuse, and lead us astray. What we learned from Jesus is true today:

- **We must stay watchful** - He doesn't fight fair and he's looking for the time when we are at our weakest and least aware
- **We must stay prayerful** - We must pray for the right things, seeking the face of God, and yielding ourselves to His will
- **We must keep Scripture as a weapon** - Scripture clears up our thinking when we are tempted to think wrongly, letting our mind lead our heard astray. The Holy Spirit empowers us and leads us through the truth of Scripture.

Jesus not only proved His credentials in withstanding the best the devil could offer, He also gave us the game plan to follow.

Concluding thoughts and questions:

- Where are areas that you are tempted in life? Are there areas that you struggle with more than others? Why do you think these are so strong?
- How do you battle temptation? Of the three weapons we have: watchfulness, prayer, and Scripture, which is your weakest area?
- What role should we have in each others life when it comes to temptation?
- Since temptation is based on *some truth* and on twisting God's Word, what does this tell you about our personal intake and our commitment to a church?