

To Seek and To Save the Lost

The Temptation of Jesus

Luke 4:1-13

Rev. Freddy Fritz

March 10, 2013

The Temptation of Jesus

Scripture

Jesus began his public ministry when he was about thirty years of age (Luke 3:23). One of the most significant events in the life of Jesus took place immediately following his baptism, namely his being tempted by the devil. Luke tells us about the temptation of Jesus at the beginning of chapter 4.

Let's read about the temptation of Jesus in Luke 4:1-13:

¹And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness ²for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. ³The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." ⁴And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" ⁵And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, ⁶and 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. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸And Jesus answered him, "It is written,

**" 'You shall worship the Lord your God,
and him only shall you serve.' "**

⁹And 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, ¹⁰for it is written,

**" 'He will command his angels concerning you,
to guard you,'**

¹¹and

**“ ‘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.’ ” ¹³ And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time. (Luke 4:1-13)

Introduction

Throughout world history there have been many epic battles. One can think of World War I, World War II, the Civil War (or, as some say, the War Between the States), and so on. There have also been some epic battles between individuals, such as David and Goliath. I am sure you can name many other epic battles as well.

However, all of these battles pale in significance to the supreme epic battle between Jesus and Satan.

Satan, who is also called “the devil” in the Bible, was a holy angel created by God. However, he rebelled against God because he wanted to make himself like the Most High God (Isaiah 14:14). As a result of his sin, Satan was cast out of heaven, along with one third of the angels, who had joined Satan in his rebellion against God (Revelation 12:4).

Some time after God created Adam and Eve, Satan succeeded in tempting them to sin against God. The result of Adam’s fall is that all of his descendants—with the exception of Jesus—come now into this world in slavery to sin and Satan.

However, God determined to save a multitude of sinners. His plan was to send his Son, Jesus, to save sinners by means of his perfect obedience to God. But Satan was determined to thwart God’s plan of salvation. So he tempted Jesus to sin. And apart from the epic battle between Jesus and Satan during the passion week leading up to his crucifixion, there is no other battle as epic as the temptation of Jesus in Luke 4:1-13.

So, let's examine the temptation of Jesus in Luke 4:1-13.

Lesson

An analysis of the temptation of Jesus in Luke 4:1-13 will show us how to respond to temptation.

I. The Setting (4:1-2)

First, let's look at the setting of the temptation.

Luke recorded the baptism of Jesus in Luke 3:21-22, which took place in the Jordan River. During his baptism God the Father publically voiced his approval of Jesus and said, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (3:22).

Then, immediately following his baptism, **Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness** (4:1).

Now, it is extremely important to keep in mind the nature of Jesus' incarnation. Jesus was fully God and fully man. He had two natures (one divine and one human) in one body. However, during his incarnation "he placed the exercise of his divine knowledge and power under the discretion of God the Father (cf. Philippians 2:5-11)."¹ Jesus had to obey God as a *man* in order to secure salvation for sinners. If he obeyed his Father as *God*, which of course he could not do otherwise, he would not by that means have secured salvation for sinners.

As a man Jesus was completely obedient to God and his will. Jesus' moment-by-moment desire was to obey his Father. So, Luke said that Jesus was **full of the Holy Spirit** and **was led by the Spirit**. And the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness.

Many commentators believe that **the wilderness** was in Judea and "was the most barren, desolate region in all of Israel.

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 131.

Scarred by precipitous cliffs, deep ravines, and tumbled boulders, it was a region so barren that animals could not be pastured in it. In this remote, largely uninhabited area, Jesus might be more alone than anywhere else in Israel.”²

The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness **for forty days**, during which time **he ate nothing during those days. And when** those forty days **were ended, he was hungry** (4:2).

Luke also told us that during those forty days Jesus was **tempted by the devil** (4:2). In fact, it seems that this was the reason the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness. At Jesus’ baptism, which was his first public appearance as an adult, the Father publically affirmed his approval of Jesus’ upcoming mission, which was to seek and to save the lost. Then, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to face the devil to commence publically his epic battle of securing salvation for sinners.

R. C. Sproul captures the essence of this epic battle. He said in his commentary on Luke’s Gospel, “In the history of the world two men have been placed on probation to pass a test at the hands of God: Adam and Jesus of Nazareth.”³

You remember that after God created Adam and put him in the Garden of Eden he said to him, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:16–17). Then God created Eve as a helper fit for Adam (Genesis 2:18).

Later the devil came to Eve and said to her, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?”

And Eve said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall

² John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Luke 1–5*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 254.

³ R. C. Sproul, *A Walk With God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 61.

you touch it, lest you die.’ ”

But the devil said to her, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:1-5).

So Eve ate the fruit and gave some to Adam, who also ate the fruit. By eating the fruit, Adam disobeyed God, failed the test, and plunged all humanity into slavery to sin and Satan.

That is why God sent Jesus to this world: to secure salvation for sinners. Jesus had to face a similar test to the one that Adam faced. So, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness.

Pastor John MacArthur does a good job of noting the differences between the tests faced by Adam and by Jesus:

Comparing Adam’s temptation with that of Jesus reveals some obvious differences and makes Jesus’ victory over his temptation all the more remarkable. Adam faced temptation in the best possible surroundings, the Garden of Eden. Jesus faced temptation in the worst imaginable setting—the wasteland of the Judean desert. Adam lived in the sinless perfection of the pre-fallen world. Jesus lived in a sinful, fallen world. No overwhelming buildup of temptation lured Adam into sin, because he yielded to the first temptation he faced. Jesus, on the other hand, faced repeated temptations over the first thirty years of his life (Hebrews 4:15), and intense temptation during the forty days before the final three recorded here. Adam feasted on all the lush provisions the garden had to offer. Jesus was weakened by forty days of fasting. In the best of circumstances, Adam fell; in the worst imaginable circumstances, Jesus did not. The consequences of Adam’s fall to temptation were lethal to the human race; the consequences of Jesus’ triumph over temptation were life-giving.⁴

II. The First Temptation (4:3-4)

Second, notice the first temptation that Jesus faced.

⁴ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Luke 1–5*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 253.

The first of three temptations came after forty days of testing. **The devil said to Jesus, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread” (4:3).**

Jesus had been fasting for almost six weeks. Commentator Kent Hughes says that six weeks is “a characteristic time of crisis for such fasts. [Jesus] felt like he was sinking, even dying, and a ravishing hunger convulsed him. Furthermore, because he was the Son of God and could invoke supernatural powers, the temptation was mighty. None of us has ever been tempted to turn stones into bread, because for us it is impossible. But Jesus could have done it in an instant, and his hunger screamed, ‘Do it!’ ”⁵

Now, it is at this point that I think that R. C. Sproul is so good in helping us understand what is really going on. He says:

On the surface, we see that Jesus was tempted to eat bread and to a frivolous use of miraculous powers. Virtually every commentator you read on this passage argues that Satan was trying to force Jesus to misuse his powers. Well, that is part of it, but if we examine this text carefully we see that the issue confronting Jesus was deeper than that, more basic, more foundational. In fact, it is exactly the same temptation that was brought before Adam and Eve. Satan is defined in the early chapters of Genesis as the most subtle of all of the beasts of the field, and we will see the subtlety of the temptation as we examine the tests.⁶

Remember that devil came to Eve and asked, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of *any* tree in the garden?’” That was patently false. God placed a restriction on only *one* tree.

Eve corrected the devil’s statement, and said that God told them that if they ate of the *one* tree they would surely die.

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 133.

⁶ R. C. Sproul, *A Walk With God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 62-63.

Then Satan said, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it, you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

What was going on in the Garden of Eden? Satan said, “If you eat of it, you will *not* die.” But God had said, “If you eat of it, you *will* die.” Who is telling the truth? Satan, who is “a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44)? Or God, who is the very essence of truth?

Well, we know what happened. Adam and Eve did not believe God. Instead, they believed Satan. And so they fell into sin, with catastrophic results for all humanity. Here is the point of Satan’s temptation: Satan’s successful temptation of Adam and Eve was an attack on the integrity of God and his word.

So, what does this have to do with the temptation of Jesus? Jesus was the new Adam, the second federal representative sent by God to save sinners. Satan wanted Jesus to disobey God and fail in his mission, just as Adam did.

So, **the devil said to Jesus, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread”** (4:3). **If** is better translated as **since**. Satan began by acknowledging that Jesus was in fact **the Son of God**. In other words, Satan said, “Look, Jesus, I know that you are God’s Son, and you have come to reverse Adam’s failure. But you are hungry. Now, you don’t have to prove anything to me. Just turn this stone to bread and eat.”

Again, R. C. Sproul isolates the point of the temptation. He said, “What is under attack here is not really the identity of Jesus, so much as the trustworthiness of the word of God.”⁷

You see the Father had not told Jesus that he should turn a stone to bread. And though he was famished, Jesus would not do anything that God did not say in his word.

And so **Jesus answered Satan, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone’ ”** (4:4). In Matthew’s Gospel, he gave

⁷ R. C. Sproul, *A Walk With God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 65.

an extended version of Jesus' answer, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). In other words, Jesus said, "Look, Satan, I am not going to turn this stone into bread, because I do not need bread as much as I need the word of God. I live by the word of God. I trust the word of God. I may be famished now but my Father has not told me to turn this bread to stone. I will believe God, not you."

And by responding in this way, Jesus did what Adam and Eve failed to do: he believed God and his word, and he did not fall to Satan's temptation to doubt God and his word.

Briefly, let's look at the second and third temptations.

III. The Second Temptation (4:5-8)

Third, look at the second temptation that Jesus faced.

The devil took Jesus up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, 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. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours" (4:5-7).

How did Jesus respond? He **answered** the devil, **"It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve' "** (8:8).

Jesus again responded by quoting God's word to Satan. He affirmed that we are to worship and serve only God. To worship and serve anyone else is to disobey God and his written word.

IV. The Third Temptation (4:9-12)

Fourth, notice the third temptation that Jesus faced.

Then the devil **took Jesus 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, for it is written, “‘He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone’ ” (4:9-11).

Notice the incredible subtlety of Satan. Jesus responded to Satan’s temptations by quoting God’s word to him. So, Satan now quoted God’s word to Jesus (from Psalm 91:11-12). But Jesus immediately knew that Satan’s hermeneutic of Scripture was flawed. Satan twisted Scripture against itself.

So Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test’ ” (9:12).

In other words, Jesus said to Satan, “I am not allowed to put God to the test. Instead, God is testing me. He wants to see me pass the test where Adam failed.”

V. The Epilogue (4:13)

And finally, don’t miss the epilogue to this narrative.

Luke said that **when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time (4:13).**

Throughout the rest of Jesus’ ministry Satan appeared from time to time to tempt Jesus not to believe God and his word. This battle between Satan and Jesus eventually climaxed at the cross, and we will look at that epic struggle at that time.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the temptation of Jesus in Luke 4:1-13, we must believe God.

So, what is the most important difference between Adam and Jesus? At the point of testing, Adam did not believe God and his word, but Jesus did believe God and his word.

Let me quote R. C. Sproul one final time:

Let me say it again. It is not simply that Jesus believed *in* God, but he *believed* God. He believed the word of God, and in the midst of this crisis, he trusted the truth of God's word. What happens when we are put to the test? More often than not we follow the example of Adam rather than the example of Christ. One of the greatest crises in the church today is the crisis of unbelief in the word of God. It is one thing to believe *in* God, it is another thing to *believe* God. Christ triumphed over Satan because he believed God. He trusted God, he put his life in the hands of God, and he was victorious.⁸

There is a sense in which what Jesus did was unique. He was, after all, the second Adam, the federal representative of the elect. By believing and obeying God and his word completely, not only during these temptations, but also throughout his entire life, he was able to secure salvation for sinners like us.

Nevertheless, his example is instructive for every one of us. Jesus was able to combat the temptations of Satan by knowing, believing, and applying the word of God to each temptation. Jesus knew the word of God so well that even when Satan quoted Scripture to him, Jesus was able to rightly interpret God's word and not fall into sin.

So, how well do you know God's word? Are you reading it? Are you memorizing it? Are you able to apply it?

Each one of us needs to know, believe, and apply God's word to every area of our lives each day. Because, if you do not know God's word, how can you believe God when temptations come your way?

⁸ R. C. Sproul, *A Walk With God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 66.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp
3. www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=FredFritz

Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org

PRAYER:

Our Father, the temptation of Jesus is so instructive to us. Although Satan tempted Jesus in different ways, the heart of each temptation was an attack on the integrity of your word and your truth.

Help each one of us to put our lives, our very eternal destiny into your hands by believing and living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!