

The Battle of the Princes

The Gospels

Luke 4:1-13

Introduction

Temptation has been defined as “an act of enticement to sin by promising pleasure or gain.”

We are tempted every day, are we not, to do certain things that would violate the honor and character of God? We are tempted to gossip. We are tempted to steal. We are tempted to desire popularity. We are tempted, especially in this season of Thanksgiving and Christmas, to overeat. We are tempted to be lazy; to take revenge; to cheat; to fight. Every day there is an opportunity to be tempted and, with that opportunity, comes the promise of something to gain by giving in to that sin. This is what we refer to as temptation.

There is no way that you and I can insulate ourselves against temptation. I read of one pietist who, many years ago, decided that the problem was his society. So, according to the record, he moved away from his town and from all of the visual stimuli that were confronting him. He began dwelling in a cave. His needs were simple and he grew his own food. However, he wrote in his diary, which we still have today, “Even there, all alone, I was tempted with thoughts of great pride. Worldly advancement still knocked at my door. There, in a cave, temptation found me.”

Those of us living in this kind of society, need God’s word, now more than ever, to unmask the ugly characteristics of temptation. We need to be shown by its writings that we can overcome temptation and become victorious. We need the Bible to address this issue.

Before us today, is much more than just an addressing of this issue. We have a beautiful illustration of Christ Himself, facing head-on the tempter and overcoming him in Luke, chapter 4.

There is no reason, in our own Christian lives, that we need to follow the dictates of the cynic that you may be know of, Oscar Wilde. His words on this topic would be rather humorous, I think, because they are so true. He wrote, “I can resist everything but temptation.”

Wilde went on to say the immortal words, “The only way I know to get rid of temptation is to yield to it.”

We do not need to live this way, but how can we live in the opposite arena? How can we resist and overcome temptation? The answer lies in the person and the example of Jesus Christ.

The Temptation of Christ

Turn to Luke 4:1.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness

The word, “wilderness,” in this verse, referred to “the Jeshimon,” which was 1200 miles of dessert region stretching from Judea to the Dead Sea. It was a place that writers referred to as a place of intense heat; a place that burned like an oven. One historical writer, living during the first century, said that the rocks were jagged and the sound of horse hooves made the ground seem hollow. It was a terrible place. It had been nicknamed, “the Devastation” or “the Jeshimon”. It was to this place that Jesus, being full of the Holy Spirit, was led.

Notice the two environments in this verse – “in the Spirit” and “in the wilderness”. We do not typically put these two together, do we? If someone is full of the Spirit, then certainly they will not be in the wilderness. If they are full of the Spirit, then surely they will not be facing the tempter. We do not tend to think of these in the same arena and yet, these two coexist at this moment in the person and life of Jesus Christ. He was “full of the Holy Spirit,” yet facing temptation.

The Bible goes on to tell us, in Luke 4:2, what happened during this time.

for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry.

Now we are going to unmask the three temptations of Christ and look at the way in which Jesus Christ overcame them.

1. The first temptation is “tell this stone to become bread.”

Look at Luke 4:3.

And the devil said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”

The devil is saying, “Jesus, You’re hungry. Do You see those stones? Turn them into bread.”

Now, there is a subtle underlying facet behind this temptation. Jesus was told by Satan, as the clause could be translated, “Since You are the Son of God, why be hungry? *You*, the Son of God, are going *without*? How ridiculous! Snap Your fingers and spread this wilderness into a feasting table. You are, are You not, the Son of God?”

I imagine, had we gone back into the invisible world of the spirit realm, we would have seen, perhaps, the whole party of the underworld and the chieftains of Satan observing the historic moment when Jesus was baptized. It was there that Jesus was immersed by John the Baptist and the words came from heaven,

“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” (Matthew 3:17b)

You had better believe that there was a myriad of underworldlings listening in. So Satan says, “Hey, I heard what was said. God the Father said You are the Son of God. What is the Son of God doing being hungry? Meet Your needs. Fulfill Your desire. It is ridiculous that someone of Your divine attributes would go hungry. Snap Your fingers and turn these stones into bread.”

I think this temptation implies something other than just this, however – something more deceptive. Satan is tempting the loyalty of Christ Jesus to His Father. He is suggesting that a loving Father would not bring His Son into a wilderness region to go hungry. He is implying that, if Jesus is indeed the Son, surely the Father would not bring Him to such a desolate place – a place where He has been without food. Would not the Father Himself, feed Him?

It is this basic implication that confronts you and me today – that our Father cannot be trusted.

This is the basic lie – “You’re the son; you’re the daughter of God the Father and you are without; you are suffering; you are in the wilderness? How ridiculous that is for a child of God. It’s time to take the reigns back.”

This lie goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden where the accuser whispered into the ear of Eve, “Listen, Eve, the only reason God doesn’t want you to eat that fruit is because He knows that if you do, you’ll be as wise as Him. You see, you can’t trust Him. Don’t turn your back on Him. He’s holding out on you.”

This same lie is echoed in the Jeshimon, “Jesus, Your Father is holding out on You. You really can’t trust Him.”

Satan sows the seeds of mistrust then and now. He accomplishes his work of driving a wedge between the believer and the believer’s Father by getting us to believe that we cannot really trust Him.

A great preacher, John Claypool, who recently went home to be with the Lord, told the story of twin brothers who inherited a store from their father. When their father passed away, they began carrying on the business. These brothers enjoyed running the store and worked very well together in joyful collaboration. However, one incident occurred that almost completely destroyed their relationship.

A man came into the store and purchased an item that cost a dollar. He placed the dollar on top of the cash register. The brother who was working on the store floor at that particular point in time, because he knew this customer, walked with him to the door and talked briefly. Then, the man left the store. When the brother went back to the cash register, the dollar was gone.

He called his twin brother to the register and said, “There was a dollar lying on this register. Did you take it?”

His twin brother said, “No. I didn’t know anything about it.”

Nothing more was said until an hour later, when the brother brought it up again, saying, “Are you sure you didn’t take that dollar? Surely it was there. I know he put it right on top of the cash register.”

Once again, his twin responded, “No. I told you, I didn’t take that dollar. Do you distrust me?”

This began, in a sense, a feud that eventually culminated with the twin brothers building a partition down the middle of their store and creating, not one, but two stores.

Claypool told that the brothers rarely talked for the next twenty years. Finally, one day, a man pulled up outside of the two stores, got out of his car, and walked into the store on the left. He saw one of the

men there – an old man – and said, “Are you the one who runs this store?”

The fellow said, “Yes, I’ve been running it now for about twenty years.”

The man said, “Good, you’re the one I guess I need to talk to. Twenty years ago, I was a vagabond; I was a bum who was following the trains and riding the boxcars from city to city. I got off the boxcar in this town. I was walking by your store one day and saw a transaction made between you and an individual who put a dollar bill on the register. I slipped into the store while you were talking to him and put that dollar in my pocket. I left through a side door without you ever knowing. I wanted to now, make it right.”

The brother said through tears, “Would you mind telling my brother the same story?”

The man did – he went next door and shared the same story. Finally, the two brothers, who had allowed a mistrust to destroy their relationship, hugged in reconciliation.

When I heard that story, it reminded me of Satan, who, like a thief, comes along into the believer’s life and takes something that we think is rightfully ours or does something that drives a wedge and causes distrust. In so doing, he causes you and me to say, “God, if You are my Father, why did You take that from me? Why did You take my health? Why did You take my security? Why did You take my house? Why did You take my job? Why did You take my loved one? They belong to me. Those are mine.”

The subtle implication is in the whispering of Satan as he says, “That’s right. You can’t trust God the Father.”

Jesus responds to the first temptation

Jesus’ answer is classic. Look at Luke 4:4.

. . . ***“It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’”***

In this answer, Jesus basically says, “There is much more to My life than physical needs. There is much more to My life than what we see. There is a spiritual relationship that is much more important than physical things.”

Jesus was saying to Satan, “It is better for Me to be hungry in the will of God than to be full outside of the will of God. This is where the Father has led Me. God means more to Me than what He gives to Me. What He does for Me is far less critical than what He

is making of Me. There is a spiritual arena that is far more significant than the physical. There is much more to man than a piece of bread. A relationship with God the Father is essential.”

2. The second temptation is “worship me and the kingdoms will be Yours.”

Look at Luke 4:5-7.

And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.

And the devil said to Him, “I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.

“Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours.”

In Luke 4:5, the word “world” is from an original word that is transliterated “economy,” from which we get our thought of economies. Satan literally shows Jesus Christ, through some supernatural visualization that only they could experience, all that exists today. He showed all of the economies of the world – the splendor of these kingdoms and their greatness – in a moment of time.

I stumbled across some interesting rabbinical teachings as I was researching this passage of scripture. Would you believe that the rabbis were debating how long a moment of time this took? One would think these men did not have anything better to do! They decided that it was a 58,888 part of an hour. This is basically saying that it took approximately the amount of time it takes me to snap my fingers.

In a snap of a moment of time, which is a sermon in itself, Jesus Christ observed all of the glory of all of the kingdoms of the world, including those that were not even known by Judea. He not only saw the kingdoms of that day – Rome, Greece, Persia – but also, undiscovered America, the Orient, the Chinese kingdom – all of these. Jesus was shown by Satan, all of the economies and it only took a snap of a moment of time.

Ephesians tells us that it will take all of eternity for God to show us the glories of His grace. But in just a split second, Jesus was shown all the glory of the world. What a statement this is to you and me.

If you are living for money, do you know how long the pleasure of that lasts in light of eternity? Snap your fingers. If you are living for popularity or

fame, do you know how long, in light of eternity, these last? Snap! If you are living for things, do you know how long, in the light of eternity, they last? Snap!

In that brief amount of time, Jesus Christ saw all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

Now, after saying this, it is obvious that this would not be much of a temptation for Jesus, would it? However, there is a more subtle temptation in this. I believe Satan is offering Jesus a shortcut to the kingdom that he knows Jesus has come to establish.

Satan is asking Jesus to fall down and worship him, using a word that is referring to the prostration before great human lords or to the great reverence and awe of God our Father as we worship Him. Satan says, in other words, “Jesus, You fall down and worship me just one time; just kneel for one second; for one moment of time and I will give You the kingdom without the cross. You will have the glory without the suffering. You will have what You have come to establish and You will have it now (snap).”

Satan was causing Jesus, not to just distrust, but to doubt the Father’s divine plan. The Father’s will involved the cross; the Father’s will involved suffering, shame, and rejection. Satan says, “Jesus, You can avoid all of that. Just fall down once before me and I’ll give it to You.”

Jesus responds to the second temptation

Jesus responded in Luke 4:8.

“It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God . . .’”

Jesus was quoting from Deuteronomy 6:13.

Had we been there as Jesus was saying this, and I wish we had, I think we would have noticed a little gleam come into His eye and perhaps a little smirk. The reason I think this, is because He adds some words to Deuteronomy – words that are not found there, but words that unmask the deceiver. We read these words in the last part of Luke 4:8.

“ . . . and serve Him only.”

In other words, Jesus was saying to Satan, “You’re saying all I have to do is fall down and worship you in one moment, in one act. I’ve got news for you – I happen to know that the individual you worship, you will serve.”

Worship always results in service. Whatever you worship, you are the slave to that thing. To whatever or whomever you give your allegiance, you are the

servant of that thing, activity, ambition, objective, or person.

Jesus just rips the mask off, as He says, “Worship is not the issue. I’m not going to serve you – if I kneel to you, I will become your slave.”

What a lesson for us that worship always results in service. This reminds me of the Sunday school teacher who was teaching Senior High boys and gave a simple story with a very profound truth. He said, “Boys, when you’re driving your car down the street, if you see Satan on the side of the road, don’t dare stop. Don’t dare open the door and let him in. If you do, in no time at all, he’ll want to drive.”

3. The third temptation is “throw Yourself off the temple pinnacle.”

Satan comes back with another temptation. He gets cleverer with each temptation.

He says, “Okay, Jesus,” he would not call Him Lord, “You want to quote scripture at me? Okay, I’ll give you two verses myself. I’ve memorized these. Here they are.”

Look at Luke 4:10-11,

“for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning You to guard You,’

“and ‘On their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.’”

Look back to Luke 4:9, where we read,

And he led Him [Jesus] to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If [since] You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here;”

Basically Satan has taken the Lord to the pinnacle of the temple – perhaps over Solomon’s porch, which was the highest portion of the temple. There, they would be overlooking a valley and an almost 450 foot plunge.

There is something a lot more subtle in this temptation. The people would be coming through the gates and worshipping in this region. The rabbis were teaching the people, during the time of Christ, that when the Messiah came, He would stand on the pinnacle of the temple and announce His Messiahship.

The stage is completely set here. So, Satan is saying, “Why not do two things at one time?”

This is clever. Satan is saying, “We’re going to handle two things in one swift move. Jesus, You can

prove that the word of God is true by jumping off. God said He'll bear You up, so Your foot won't dash against a stone. Do You believe that's true? Why don't You prove it to be true. Jump off. And, in that jumping, You will be announcing to a nation that awaits a Messiah from the pinnacle of the temple that You are, in fact, Him. The people won't deny You then; they won't reject You then, because they will have absolute proof. The rabbis are teaching it. So jump! Prove God's word and announce You are the Messiah."

This was pretty clever.

We know from history that there were several false messiahs who had tried to announce their Messiahship. I read of Theudas, who told the Jews that he could part the waters of the Jordan River. Quite a following came after him. He and his followers went to the Jordan River and, after giving a sermon, he took his rod and smacked the water. Nothing happened. He smacked it again. Nothing happened. After a few more tries, the people left. Theudas, in disgrace, went into exile and disappeared.

There was another man from Egypt who claimed to be the Messiah. He was an interesting fellow who promised to lay flat the walls of Jerusalem. He also gained quite a following. History records that he and his followers went outside the city walls one day, and this man commanded the walls to fall. They did not fall. After a while, the people left and this false messiah was in disgrace, as well.

Simon the magician, mentioned in Acts chapter 8, according to tradition, went to the pinnacle at this very spot in the same temple and jumped off, claiming to be the Messiah and quoting this verse. That took care of him too.

Satan said, "Well, Jesus, why don't You, right now, just prove it – prove that the word of God is true. Test God. See if His word is true. Tempt Him. Jump! Then, when You float down and stand before the worshipers, they will lift You on their shoulders and announce, 'The Messiah is here!' You can't lose."

Jesus responds to the third temptation

The answer of Jesus comes, however, and basically says that to put God to the test is to distrust Him. He is saying, "I believe the word of God is true simply because it is written."

Look at Luke 4:12. Jesus' answer is simple.

And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

In other words, "You don't doubt God's word. You don't demand an experience to prove it. You believe it. To not believe is to test Him – and to test Him is to distrust Him. I believe the verse stands because the verse is simply written. It is written."

Application

Let us review these three temptations:

- The first temptation was to distrust God's care.
- The second temptation was to deviate from God's plan; that is, the cross, the suffering, and then the kingdom.
- The third temptation was to doubt God's word.

Misconceptions about temptation

Go back to the first verses of Luke 4 and let me give two popular misconceptions about temptation and ways they apply to our lives.

1. The first misconception is that being filled with the Spirit decreases the temptation to sin.

Look at Luke 4:1-2a again.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. . . .

It says that Jesus, being full of the Spirit, was led into the wilderness for a time of great testing. We tend to believe that if a person is filled with the Spirit, temptation will diminish. We think Satan will say, "That person is filled with the Spirit. I'm going to leave that person alone. That person is overwhelmed by the will of God. I'll stay away from him."

This will not happen. Do you want to face temptation? Then say, "God, I want to live a holy life. Father, I want to live a pure life. I want to live in a way that is pleasing to You."

When we say these words, we are asking for temptation. It is like a battle cry to hell to come and attack, saying, "There's a person who desires to live a

holy life. There's a person who demands from his own character, purity. Let's attack."

Perhaps this is the reason we do not say these words more often.

Being filled with the Spirit; telling God we want the life of Christ reproduced in ours will not diminish the potential of temptation – it will increase it.

2. The second misconception is that the longer we live a Spirit-filled life, the less likely we are to be tempted with sin.

If this is the case, then why tempt Jesus? He had just finished thirty years of perfect living. There was not a sin on His record. We never reach the point, this side of heaven, where we can hang up our armor and say, "I'm home free. I put in my five years, or my fifteen years, or my twenty years, or my thirty years – I've got it mastered. I can hang up this particular piece of armor – I won't need it. It didn't really fit me too well anyway."

We never get to the point at which we can think we have lived long enough for Jesus Christ that the tempter will begin to fear us. In fact, I think Luke 4:13 tells us the exact opposite of this misconception. Notice that verse.

When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him . . .

Does this verse say, "When the devil had finished every possible temptation, he left Jesus forever? No. Continue to the last phrase of Luke 4:13.

. . . until an opportune time.

In the life of Christ, Satan is trailing Him – watching and waiting for an opportune time; watching every possible move.

Does Satan leave Jesus alone? Jesus conquered Satan in the wilderness. Satan tried three temptations and received three strikes. We would think the devil was out, but absolutely not. Satan trailed Jesus like a hound dog – waiting and watching – just as he will us, who desire to live a godly and pure life.

Thoughts about temptation

Let me give three thoughts about temptation that I think we can glean from this passage.

1. Number one, temptation is predictable.

We can plan on it. When we get out of bed in the morning and look in the mirror, the first thing we

should say to ourselves is, "Self, you're going to be tempted today. It's going to come."

One man told me, several years ago, something I have never forgotten. We face two tests every day: an integrity test and an obedience test.

We can depend on this. Whether you are in middle school, high school, or college; whether you are an adult; whether you are an executive, or whatever you may be, you will face tests every day.

Are we men and women of integrity? We will have an opportunity to show it.

Are we men and women of obedience? We will have an opportunity to show it.

When we get out of bed, if we are going to live a pure and holy life for God, we can plan on these tests. We will face them – they are predictable.

2. Number two, temptation is never prejudiced.

I think we have made this point. Whether we are mature in the Lord or young in the Lord; whether we are a preacher or a carpenter, temptation does not care.

3. Number three, temptation is personally designed.

This is the mastery behind temptation. Satan and the underworld know exactly the buttons to push in our lives. They know exactly the things needed to rattle our cages; to get us moving in the wrong direction. The temptations are designed and have our individual names written all over them.

This is like the little boy who got caught taking a cookie from the cookie jar. His mother came in the kitchen and there he was, eating one of the cookies. He said to his mother, as an explanation, "Well, I just climbed up there to see how many there were and one got stuck on my tooth."

Sometimes we are just as foolish in explaining to God when something occurs in our lives.

Temptation is:

- predictable;
- never prejudiced;
- personally designed.

How to overcome temptation

So what can we do to overcome temptation? We can do the same things as Jesus Christ. Let me give two words to remember.

1. The first thing to do to overcome temptation is to resist.

Resist temptation by appealing to scripture. Jesus Christ was tempted three times and every time He quoted a verse from a book we can barely find in the Old Testament – the book of Deuteronomy.

What if God had given us only Deuteronomy and we were to fight the accuser? We would say, “Let’s see, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, . . . – there it is.”

We can resist temptation by appealing to scripture. It is the sword of the Spirit and it is the most feared weapon of the enemy. It worked in Jesus’ day and it works now.

2. The second thing to do to overcome temptation is to remember.

Remember the victory of Jesus Christ – every time He was tempted. His temptations would grow in severity. They grew so severe that in the garden of Gethsemane, He would be tempted to deviate again from the will of His Father. That attack was so intense that He sweated drops of blood.

Jesus won the victory, however, and He lives within you and me. His victory is ours because as we live in and through Jesus Christ, we face the confrontation; the attack; the temptation to do evil; to sin against God. We look at the promise of gain or pleasure; we look it in the eye and we appeal to scripture and we remember that Christ overcame. He, through us, can cause us to win the battle for the cause and glory of the Prince of Heaven over the Prince of Hell.

Satan attacked Jesus and promised the kingdoms to Him. This causes me to think of the passage of scripture in Revelation 11:15 that says,

. . . The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He [Christ] will reign forever and ever.