



# Central Peninsula Church

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Luke 4:1-13  
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## When Temptation Strikes

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

In his classic book, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis writes about temptation: "A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you find out the strength of the German army by fighting against it, not by giving in. You find out the strength of a wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside of us until we try to fight it; and Christ, because he was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is the only man who knows to the full what temptation means—the only complete realist."

Last week we saw Jesus at what must have been a high point for him. It was his "coming out" party. His public ordination, if you will. As he is baptized by John, the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit fell on him like a dove, and the Father's voice thundered, "You are my beloved Son, in you I am well-pleased." With an endorsement like that, we might wonder how such a man could understand the full force of temptation, as we do. But it's no mistake that the next thing on the agenda for Jesus was a confrontation with evil, a tsunami-like experience of temptation that would have swiftly smothered and drowned the average person. Look at Luke 4.

**"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" (Luke 4:1-2a).**

Before we look at HOW the devil tempted Jesus, I want you to notice that there are several assumptions made in this story. *First, the story assumes the reality of a real person called the devil.* Sometimes he is called Satan or Lucifer. There are no pitchforks, red tights or horns, but he's real. We know from Scripture that he's a fallen angel who leads a host of other fallen angels, called demons. Together they oppose all that is good and right, aligning against God's people. Peter said he's like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Jesus said he is both a liar and a murderer. Certainly as believers we can become overly preoccupied with our enemy, but to be ignorant of him is the height of stupidity.

The second thing this story assumes is that *there is a very close relationship between temptation and testing.* While the devil is tempting Jesus, God is testing him. Notice it was the Spirit of God who led Jesus out into the wilderness. But we know that God doesn't lead us into temptation. It's no mistake that the

Greek word that is used here for "tempt" can also mean "test." The same word can be used in a negative or positive way. When Satan tempts us, he's trying to get us to disobey God and sin. But when God tests us he's trying to prove and strengthen our faith.

I think of a young woman who brings her boyfriend home to meet her father. She's in love with this guy. She can't wait for her dad to meet him. She knows he can be hard on guys, but she's confident he will shine under pressure. So she brings him home and the father takes him into his study and starts to grill him: "Why do you want to date my daughter? What is your background? Where do you work?" He goes on and on, putting the poor boy through a grueling test. While the father wants to expose the boy's weaknesses, the daughter wants to expose his strengths. That's what's going on here. For God, this is a test which will prove his Son's integrity, but from Satan's standpoint, he's trying to bring him down. It's the same for us. It's hard to distinguish between what is a test and what is a temptation in our own experience, but most of the time, both dynamics are at work. While God is refining us and proving us, Satan is trying to bring us down.

This leads me to a third assumption: *temptation in and of itself is not sin.* We know that Jesus was a real man who really was tempted "in every way as we are, yet without sin." It's hard to understand how Jesus could have been tempted since he was perfect and didn't inherit a sin nature like us. But somehow it's possible to have no sin nature but still experience temptation from the outside. In other words, there was a real struggle going on in Jesus, as there will be for us. This was not just a staged event; this was a real battle. But the battle itself does not constitute sin. You and I will encounter temptation for the rest of our earthly lives. We cannot avoid temptation, but we can avoid sin.

A fourth assumption in this story is *that we're aware of another story that comes out of the OT.* The story is from the wilderness experience of Israel. Just like Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness, so Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness. It's no mistake that all of Jesus' answers to Satan comes out of the book of Deuteronomy, where that story is recounted. You may recall that Israel failed the test, but Jesus succeeds where Israel failed.

You see, Jesus' victory over Satan in the wilderness not only proves that he's an obedient Son like no one else, but it also paves the way for our own victory.

## I. The temptation to provide for ourselves independent of God.

Look at the first temptation.

**“And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. And the devil said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE””** (Luke 4:2b-4).

What’s this temptation about? It’s about provision. Jesus goes out into the wilderness and doesn’t eat for 40 days. As a result, he’s hungry. No surprise there! We think of Israel out in the wilderness for 40 years, and how they too lacked food. In both cases, God led them to a place where there was no food to eat. From God’s standpoint, it was a test. But it also became an opportunity for the devil. He says, “If indeed you are the Son of God, as we all just heard at your baptism, then you should use your God-given powers to take care of your hunger. Why should you go hungry? You of all people, especially when God has given you the ability to do something about it?”

On the one hand, we might wonder why it would be so wrong. There is nothing wrong or sinful about hunger or bread. This is a valid, God-given need. It’s not even wrong to take the initiative to provide food for ourselves. After all, doesn’t God harvest the crops for us? Food doesn’t just magically drop onto our dinner tables. So what would be so wrong about using your God-given gift to turn a stone into a little bread?

But the issue is not about food, but about trust. Satan is saying, “How could your Father allow YOU of all people to starve out here in the desert?” The tempter wants Jesus to distrust God’s goodness and care. He’s saying, “Look Jesus, perhaps your Father is not all he’s cracked up to be. Look how he’s mistreating you out here. How can he treat you like this? You had better take care of yourself. After all, God helps those who help themselves!” Do you see the issue? If Jesus would have turned stones into bread, he would have been motivated by distrust of God, using his power to serve himself, apart from God.

Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever found yourself in some kind of wilderness situation where some need of yours isn’t being met? You’re not there because of sin, and the need is a legitimate one. You begin to wonder why God has allowed you into this mess. You wonder if he really has your best interest in mind. You think you may have to look out for yourself; take matters into your own hands. Maybe you’re stuck in a job that you hate, or a marriage where your needs aren’t being met. Maybe you’re single and not getting any younger, and all you’ve really ever wanted is to get married and have a family. Each of one of those situations deals with God-given needs. But Satan wants us to move away from depending on God to meet those needs. But how do we know that we’re

doing that? There are two things to ask yourself: *First, does God’s word say anything about the way I’m trying to meet this need?* For instance, God’s word has some things to say about marriage and divorce. If you’re single, God’s word has some things to say about what kind of person you should marry. If you’ve made a commitment in a job, God has some things to say about keeping your word. The second thing to ask yourself is a bit more difficult to answer: *As I seek to meet this need, am I acting out of faith and trust in God, or out of unbelief.* A case in point: a single Christian decides to use an online dating service to look for a Christian mate. Is that wrong? Well, last time I looked God’s word doesn’t say it’s wrong. But what’s driving them? Is it faith in God’s provision, or is it unbelief? Only they can answer that question, but it’s a question we should always ask.

How do you deal with the temptation to act apart from dependence on God? Jesus quotes Deut. 8:3 where Moses said, **“Man shall not live by bread alone...”** Moses told Israel that one of the things God was teaching them out there in the wilderness was that they were dependent on God for life and not bread. Although they needed bread to survive physically, it was God who provided the bread. And if they acted in either disobedience or distrust of God to secure bread, they were cutting themselves off from the source of their survival. Jesus resists Satan because he knows that to turn that stone into bread would be both an act of distrust and disobedience, which would cut him off from the very source of life—God. It’s all about what we think we need to live: Is it God or is it food? Is it God or is it marital happiness? Is it God or is it a fulfilling career? If the answer is God, then I won’t move away from Him to secure any of those things, even if they’re legitimate needs. Bottom line: trust God, not yourself.

## II. The temptation to obtain power through idolatry.

The second temptation is far less subtle, but at the same time it must have been more powerful. Look at vv. 5-8.

**“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.’ Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD AND SERVE HIM ONLY.””**

In Matthew’s gospel this temptation is last, but for some reason Luke places it second. The first temptation dealt with the issue of provision; this one deals with power. Satan takes Jesus up to a place where he could have a split second vision of all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. What a show! Imagine seeing not just all the kingdoms of his own day but all of those that had already passed and all of those to come. The kingdoms of Persia, Babylon, Greece, Rome, and then on into the modern day. Far spreading, glorious kingdoms rich in natural resources and untold wealth. It must have been intoxicating.

Satan says, “You can have it all. You can rule over all of it. You can enjoy all the glory and beauty of those places. I can give it to you. It’s all been handed over to me. Just bow down

right here and worship me.” Satan isn’t saying Jesus had to do this his whole life through. He’s just asking for one isolated act. “Just this once. You don’t even have to mean it. Just pretend to worship me for ten seconds, and it’s all yours.”

We have to ask the question, does the devil really own all these kingdoms? Are they really his to give away? Yes and no. In one sense, this really is Satan’s domain. 1Jn.5:19 says, “**the whole world is in the power of the evil one.**” In the gospel of John, Jesus calls Satan “**the ruler of this world**” (Jn.14:30). But in another sense, in an ultimate sense, it’s NOT true. When Christ came, he came to establish a kingdom. Col.1:13 says that when you and I come to Christ, we’re “**delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of his beloved Son.**” So we don’t live under his rule any more, though those who reject him still do. But for the time being, with God’s permission, he still rules over this world. But his reign is doomed. The day will come when Christ will pick him up by the scruff of his neck and throw him into the lake of fire.

Meanwhile Satan is on the loose and he’s crafty. He knows that Jesus might have thought, “You know, it’s all going to be mine one day anyway. It’s my destiny to rule over all the nations. Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that I am Lord.” Jesus may have thought further, “Not only is it mine, but if I had it now I could do so much good. I could prevent so much of the wrong that will take place. We wouldn’t have to have a Hitler in Germany or a Pol Pot in Cambodia. No wars. No hunger. No crime.” Then it may have struck him, “Here is a rather attractive short cut. In my Father’s plan I will have to die on the cross. But here I can have all this the easy way.”

You and I experience this temptation as well. It’s called worldliness. It’s the temptation to love and live for the things of this world; things like fame, fortune, power and pleasure. It’s buying into a set of values that says, “To get these things I’m willing to compromise my standards. I’m willing to fudge a little in telling the truth. I’m willing to give up making worshipping God a priority.” Satan couches his offer in terms that really don’t seem all that bad. “Just a small compromise. God knows your heart. He knows that’s not who you really are. After all, look how much good you could do with all of that. And you could avoid so much suffering and pain. And you deserve it.”

There is only one way to respond to that temptation: “**You shall worship the Lord your God and serve him only.**” This came from the book of Deuteronomy and was a prohibition against idolatry. Jesus calls it what it is, and so must we.

### **III. The temptation to put God to the test to prove his protection.**

The first temptation dealt with provision. The second one dealt with power. The third one deals with protection. Look at vv. 9-12.

**“And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand 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, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.”’ And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘It is said, “YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.”’”**

Satan takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem for a reason. The holy city and the holy temple were places associated with God’s protection. This is where God’s people would run for sanctuary in times of trouble.

Why would this temptation have been attractive to Jesus? For several reasons. *First of all, he uses Scripture to back up his challenge.* Did you notice that? He had seen Jesus use Scripture, so he decides to try and beat him at his own game. He quotes from Ps. 91, but he takes those verses out of context. If used wrongly, the Bible can be quoted to justify almost anything. Beware of wolves in sheep’s clothing, who use the Bible, but in using it, abuse it. *Second, this temptation would have been attractive because Jesus really desired to please his Father.* Satan uses rationale that makes it seem that to jump would have an act of faith. Remember, Jesus had just demonstrated great faith by refusing to turn the stones into bread. So Satan picks up on that and entices Jesus into what on the surface looks like a spectacular display of faith. “Take a bold step of faith, Jesus. Throw yourself down and watch God send his angels to carry you down unharmed.” *Third, this would have been attractive because it offered Jesus the possibility of immediate assurance.* Jesus was still out in the wilderness and he was still hungry. It would have been easy for Jesus to wonder if something was wrong in his relationship with his Father. He could easily have thought that he should do something to force the Father’s hand to act in such a way that would assure him that everything was still all right.

But Jesus sees through this and again he quotes Scripture. He goes back to Deut. 8, “**You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.**” The Israelites had done just that in the wilderness when they grumbled against God and demanded that He prove his love for them by sending them water. Here, Jesus sees that he’s being tempted to create a situation where God would be forced to act to prove his love. Jesus says, “Why should I jump? The only reason I would do that is that I question God’s love and care for me because of my present circumstances. But I don’t need to do that, because I trust that God loves me and has my best interest in mind.”

Years ago Lynn and I struggled with the problem of infertility. One of the things we experienced during that time was the whole question of how far we should go in getting medical help to have a baby. I mean, there are endless avenues a couple can go down in this area. Once in a while we would run across someone who would tell us that to take

advantage of any of these things would be a faithless thing to do. "If you really had faith," they're reasoning went, "you would forget all of that and just trust the Lord. If he really cares for you, he'll give you a child." On the surface that sounds really good, but I've come to see that as a form of putting the Lord to the test, especially if the rationale behind it is one of challenging God to prove his care for us.

We do this in other ways. Under the guise of faith, we step out and do something stupid and challenge God to act if he really cares for us. But that's not faith, that's presumption. Faith is responding to God's word. It's trusting him when we can't see him. That's risky enough; we don't need to create our own risks! How many of us would be pleased if one of our children decided to run out into the middle of the street just to show that they really trusted us to rescue them? Or how would you feel if one night your child chose not to come to the dinner table because she preferred a more spectacular display of your provision, like snapping your fingers and having food appear right in front of her as she sat in her room playing on the computer! Jesus once said, "An evil and adulterous generation looks for a sign." We don't need a sign. The only sign we need is the cross. What more could we possibly need as proof of his love and care?

## CONCLUSION

Luke wraps this scene up with these words, **"When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time"** (Luke 4:13).

It's clear who won this battle. Why is that so important? If the devil could have gotten Jesus to sin then he would have been immediately disqualified to serve as our Savior. You and I would have no chance at knowing God and eternal life. To be an acceptable sacrifice for our sins, Jesus had to be sinless. In a very real sense, Jesus did something for us here that none of us could do for ourselves. He resisted Satan and began the work of defeating him which would culminate on the cross.

But on another level this story is crucial for us because it teaches us about our own temptations; it paves the way for our own victory. We see in this story some helpful things about how the Enemy works in our lives and most importantly how to resist him.

Notice three things:

*First, notice the Enemy's timing.* He hits when we are most vulnerable. Jesus was hungry and alone. When are you most vulnerable? Joni Eareckson Tada, who for three decades has been paralyzed from the neck down writes, "I was in my late 20's, single, and with every prospect of remaining so. Sometimes lust or a bit of fantasizing would seem so inviting—and so easy to justify. After all, hadn't I already given up more than most Christians just by being disabled? Didn't my wheelchair entitle me to a little slack now and then?" Joni asks her readers, "When God allows you to suffer, do you have a tendency to use your very trials as an excuse for sinning? Or do you feel that since you've given God a little extra lately by taking such abuse, he owes you a day off?" What timing!

*Second, notice his strategy.* He's no fool. He's crafty. He often operates in half-truths. He even uses Scripture. He doesn't tempt us with what is obviously wrong. He makes what is wrong seem right. In Eden, the tempter didn't say to Eve, "Do you wish to be like the devil?" He said, "Do you wish to be like God?" No self-respecting devil would come right out and approach a person with the possibility of ruining his life. That's the small print at the bottom of the temptation. So we have to be wise. We have to see through his schemes. We have to be able not just to quote a few verses of Scripture, but to really understand the word and what it means for our lives.

*Finally, notice his retreat.* Why did he depart from Jesus until another opportunity came? Because he knew he was defeated. Scripture says, **"Resist the devil and he will flee from you"** (Jms 4:7). We really can resist him. And the way we resist him is by drawing near to Jesus in our time of need. Hebrews says, **"For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need."**

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