

The Temptations of Jesus

Luke 4:1-13

Key Verse: 4:4

"Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man does not live on bread alone.'"

In this passage Jesus confronts the temptations of the devil in the desert. It was like a three round heavyweight championship boxing match, or a series of three presidential debates. However, it was much more serious. At stake were the eternal destinies of men's souls. As we will see, Jesus defeats the devil. Let's learn the deep meaning of Jesus' victory. Then we can have victory in our own spiritual struggles.

I. The meaning of Jesus' temptation (1-2a)

Look at verse 1. "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert...." Luke emphasizes that Jesus was led by the Spirit to face the devil's temptations. For most men, they are led into temptation by their own evil desires (Ja 1:14). But Jesus was different. Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit. So Jesus was doing precisely what God wanted him to do first. Why did God send Jesus to the desert? God wanted Jesus to crush the devil's head, as promised in Genesis 3:15. God wanted Jesus to succeed where Adam failed, and thus vindicate

God's honor and win victory for all mankind. In all of human history, Adam and Jesus are unique in that they are the only men without a sinful nature. Both of them faced the devil's temptation with a real chance to succeed. In that respect, they are regarded as the two ancestors of the human race (Ro 5:14). And they are representatives of all mankind in respect to the devil's temptation. When Adam failed, all of mankind fell with him. When Jesus won the victory, it was on behalf of all who believe in him. Romans 5:19 says, "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous."

The story of Adam's temptation is in Genesis 3. It happened in Eden, the most exotic garden paradise. There was plenty of water, good food, and a beautiful landscape. Adam was surrounded by friendly animals and united with his suitable helper. However, when temptation came, Adam failed to keep God's command. Adam listened to his wife and ate the forbidden fruit. Through this one act of disobedience, he lost everything and all of his descendants suffered with him. On the other hand, Jesus was tempted in the desert. Most likely, it was the Desert of Judea (2; Mt 3:1), also known as Jeshimon (1 Sa 23:24), which means "the devastation." It was a stretch of utter wilderness, sloping down from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea. William Barclay says, "The hills were like dust heaps; the limestone looked blistered and peeling; the rocks were

bare and jagged; it glowed with heat like a vast furnace." It was unbearably hot. There was no food, little water, and no place for Jesus to lay his head. Jesus was all alone.

Jesus had to go through this as a man, in the same way we do--except that Jesus is without sin. Two times Luke says that "the devil led" Jesus (5,9). As a man, Jesus had to be subjected to the devil's power for a time. God does not tempt anyone; the devil is the tempter (Ja 1:13). But God allows the devil to tempt people. God does this for his own divine purposes, as the story of Job teaches us. And God limits the devil's power to tempt. Nevertheless, this was a real test to Jesus, and one that Jesus must pass with a perfect score. Otherwise, Jesus would be disqualified as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Yet Jesus does not fail. Jesus wins the victory. Now, let's see how Jesus defeated the devil.

II. Jesus defeated the devil's temptation with the word of God (2b-13)

First, "man does not live on bread alone" (2b-4). Jesus had been struggling with all his heart, soul, and strength for forty days. On the one hand, he had God's word resounding in his heart: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Jesus treasured these words. He meditated deeply on their meaning, and set the course of his life and ministry. On the other hand, according to verse 2, Jesus was tempted by

the devil for forty days. His spiritual struggle was so consuming that he did not eat anything in order to intensify his prayer. Now Jesus was hungry. This kind of hunger, which comes after an extended fast, may be sudden and powerful. Jesus really wanted to eat, and he might have remembered his mother Mary's tasty home-cooked dinners. The delicious food, combined with her tender love, had refreshed and strengthened him many a time. Yet now, there was no one around him, and he was hungry and lonely. In that situation, anyone would have felt sorrowful. Jesus, too, was vulnerable in his body, and in his humanity.

At that time, the devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." The devil suggested that Jesus use his Messianic power to satisfy his hunger. It was true that Jesus needed bread. And Jesus did have the power to turn rocks into bread. But if Jesus used his power in this way, he would be following the devil's word and not God's word. At issue was how Jesus would exercise his divine power. In John 5:19 Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing...." Jesus used his power only according to God's will and leading. Jesus never used his miraculous power to satisfy his own appetites. This would not have pleased the Father. It would have violated the principle of incarnation. To hungry human Jesus, it was a real temptation to make bread and eat. Jesus experienced this temptation just as we do.

It is true that we human beings need bread to survive. The temptation is to seek bread as of first importance. Then, we virtually abandon God in the pursuit of bread. We can think of bread or money interchangeably. In fact, one nickname for money is "bread." In our society, there is a constant pressure to earn money for security. In 1943 sociologist Abraham Maslow developed his famous hierarchy of needs. He proposed that mankind has five sets of needs: physiological, safety, love or belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. He further proposed that these needs must be met in order: physical things such as food, water, shelter and clothing first, and then the higher things step by step. His theory has been taught for decades in marketing classes of business schools throughout the United States. It has fostered consumer driven advertising, such as, "obey your thirst," and "eat this hamburger or you will die." Under the pressure to make money to survive, people become anxious and desperate. Some people have become workaholics who ignore their families and their own health in order to pursue money. In some families both parents work to earn money, even though they could survive on one salary. Some students have no time for anything except study so they can get good grades, and a good job, and then make money for a secure future. Living in this way, people develop many kinds of mental and physical disorders. Even though they have plenty of money

and food, they never feel satisfied. In reality, all who live in this way have succumbed to the devil's temptation and are under his power.

How did Jesus answer the devil? Look at verse 4. "Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man does not live on bread alone."' " Jesus spoke as a man under the authority of the word of God by simply quoting the word of God. The word of God was Jesus' powerful weapon in dealing with the devil's temptation. "Man does not live on bread alone." This is God's truth that man is not just a physical being, but a spiritual being. When God made man, he formed him from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being (Gen 2:7). God made man body and soul as a being who is in relationship with God. More than anything else, man needs God, and man needs the word of God. Jesus said in Matthew 4:4, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." When man is right with God, God supplies all of his needs. Matthew 6:33 says, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." When we believe this promise we can serve God in holiness and righteousness without fear or anxiety.

About a year after Deborah and I married, when our oldest daughter Sarah was just a small baby, we were in a situation in which we struggled financially. Our refrigerator was empty and Sarah had no milk

to drink. One day, as I pulled weeds in the center parking lot garden, my heart was broken because my family members were hungry, and I was hungry, and I began to shed a tear. At that moment, Matthew 6:33 came into my heart deeply. Immediately I realized that God loved us and would provide for us. The peace of God came into my heart. I was free to serve God wholeheartedly without any anxiety about the future. In this way, I could freely assist Dr. Samuel Lee day and night for 18 years. God has faithfully provided for my family ever since. Now Sarah is entering medical school debt free. Still, I must depend on God every day and pray, "Give us this day our daily bread."

Look again at verse 4. "Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man does not live on bread alone.'" This is a partial quote of Deuteronomy 8:3, which says in full, "He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." It seems that Jesus was meditating on God's training of the Israelites for forty years in the wilderness. This was their preparation to enter the promised land to live under God's blessing. By meditating on this word of God, Jesus knew the meaning of his temptation in the desert. He received it as God's humbleness training. It was the time to learn to depend totally on God in carrying out his Messianic ministry. Jesus' humble attitude toward the word of God was

the source of his victory over the devil. This is all the more amazing in light of the fact that Jesus had just received God's recognition that he was the Son of God. Yet this did not make Jesus proud or complacent. Rather, Jesus was ready to receive God's training in the desert, enduring the anguish. Like Jesus, those who want to serve God need a time of prayer in the desert. It is the time to formulate our spiritual principles in serving God, and to set the direction of our ministry.

We know well that America has been in an economic recession for over a year. The stock market has lost one-third of its value. Houses in this area have decreased 20% in value. Recently, the CEO of General Motors, the number one ranking automaker in the world since 1947, announced that they are on the verge of bankruptcy. Many people who are willing and able to work are unemployed. It is clear that we cannot trust in the American economy or the power of money for our security. But we should not become fearful and anxious, either. We must seek God's kingdom first, and trust God to provide. The early American Pilgrims show us a good example. They immigrated from Europe to Colonial America in order to worship God freely. However, they had a hard time adjusting to the new environment. The first winter, among the 102 original members, 47 died from various causes. William Bradford, who lost his wife at this time, said that the Lord was testing the quality of their faith. Only three families did not experience a death in the

family. Still, the Pilgrims kept loving God with all their hearts. The highlight of their week was Sunday worship service, when they gathered to hear William Brewster's powerful messages and to repent of their sins before God. They proved that they sought God's kingdom and righteousness first. Then God began to bless them by sending a native American Samoset, who spoke perfect English, and taught them the wisdom of survival. Within a few years, the colony prospered greatly. Jesus said, "Man does not live on bread alone." Our currency says, "In God we trust." It is time to seek God with all our hearts. Then God will provide for us.

Second, worship God only (5-8). The devil did not give up easily. He fought back with a second temptation. The devil showed Jesus a powerful image of all the kingdoms of the world in an instant. We can only imagine what flashed before Jesus, but we can be sure it was the most alluring, powerful and amazing image the devil could manage. Then the devil claimed that the world belonged to him and that he could give it to anyone he wanted. And he said, "So if you worship me, it will all be yours" (7).

We must notice here that the devil is a liar (Jn 8:44). While it is true that he has some authority over the world, he boasted beyond the truth. He has some authority, but it is limited. Jesus called the devil, "the prince of

this world" (Jn 12:31). The devil has authority over rebellious men (Eph 2:2) and fallen angels (Mt 25:41; Rev 12:9). Therefore, since God gave man the right to rule the world, the devil has some authority to rule the world through man. We see his power exercised when government officials act wickedly. However, fundamentally, the earth is the Lord's (Ex 9:29; Ps 24:1; 1 Cor 10:26). God alone is almighty. The time is coming when the devil will be thrown into the lake of burning sulfur to be tormented day and night forever (Rev 20:10). Though this devil makes big promises, saying, "it will all be yours," he cannot keep them. He wants to be worshiped in the place of God. But what he delivers in return is misery, ruin and eternal judgment.

Nevertheless, there was a certain appeal in this temptation. It is, in fact, a temptation to compromise. Jesus had come to establish God's kingdom by rescuing men from the power of the devil. To do so meant going the way of the cross. It was a painful way. The devil was proposing that Jesus take an easier way. The devil would yield his claim to the world if Jesus just worshiped him. The devil made it sound painless. But it was utter deception. If Jesus bowed to the devil, he would have lost everything. There have been many people who have fallen into this temptation to compromise. They want to do something good, but they realize it requires power. So they reason that the ends justify the means and compromise their integrity to get a position of power. However, then

they lose the ability to do good. The early Christians had no earthly power in the beginning. Their only clout was prayer and the word of God. They lived pure and humble lives, sometimes in holes in the ground, or in caves. They loved Jesus wholeheartedly and did their best to witness to Jesus. Christian faith spread rapidly throughout the whole Roman Empire. Then Constantine recognized Christianity as the state religion of Rome. Christians gained tremendous power in the Empire. Beautiful church buildings were constructed, subsidized by government funds. Those who were considered heretical became enemies of the state. Attendance at Sunday worship service was enforced by the sword. Yet the message of the cross began to be lost. Christianity lost its vitality. We should learn from this. There are many today who think the Christian church needs political power. But the work of God is never done through political power. The work of God is done through the way of the cross.

How did Jesus answer the devil? Look at verse 8. "Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"" Once again Jesus quoted the word of God from Deuteronomy chapter 6. Jesus summarized the most fundamental and basic teaching in the Bible about man's duty to God. It is to worship God alone with all one's heart, soul, mind and strength. It is to accept God's sovereignty, and to believe his love and goodness, and to commit oneself to obedience and service to

him without compromise, wherever he may lead. Jesus knew that this meant taking up his cross and shedding his blood for the sins of the world. But Jesus was willing to do so. In verse 8, Jesus proclaimed that God was worthy of his life sacrifice. Jesus was willing to give everything to God without reservation or calculation or hesitation. In this way Jesus overcame the devil's temptation to compromise.

Third, do not put the Lord to the test (9-13). Though knocked down twice by Jesus, the devil came back a third time. This time the devil led Jesus to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. Then he said, "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 carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone'" (9-11). The devil figured out that Jesus was only speaking based on the word of God. So the devil tried to use this. The devil pressed Jesus to claim God's promise of protection, and to jump off the temple, thus forcing God to keep his promise in a dramatic way. This is called "testing God." It is demanding God to prove his character or faithfulness. There are many people who test God. They try to force God to keep his promise immediately, according to their demand. Some demand healing. Others demand money from heaven. Some students demand an A on their exam, even though they wasted all of their study time uselessly. Instead of humbly standing under the

authority of God's word, they want to command God to do what they want.

How did Jesus answer this time? Look at verse 12. "Jesus answered, 'It says: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."' Jesus did not test God. Jesus obeyed God from his heart. Jesus understood God's heart and God's intention in giving his word. Jesus did not try to use the word of God in his own way. Jesus humbly obeyed the word of God.

Look at verse 13. "When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time." The devil had done his best to get Jesus to disobey God's word. But he failed. The time allowed for tempting passed and Jesus won the victory. There would be further encounters in the future. But Jesus would win the final victory over them all.

In this passage we learn that Jesus defeated the devil's temptation by standing on the absolute word of God: "It is written." Jesus won this victory as our champion. Jesus shares his victory with us when we ask him in prayer. By ourselves, we have no strength to defeat the devil's temptations. The devil has seven heads and ten horns (Rev 12:3). We have one head and no horns. We are totally outmatched. But Jesus gives us the victory when we depend on him. Hebrews 4:15,16 says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our

weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Let's come to Jesus and ask him to share his victory with us.