

“Tempted” (Luke 4:1–13)

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“Sin and “temptation” are very religious words. We hear them in church. We read them in the Bible and in Christian books. But outside of religious circles, we don’t hear those words a lot. When we do hear them, they are used in trivial ways. People may talk about “sinfully decadent” desserts. “Oh, that chocolate cake was sinfully decadent.” And people often talk of temptation only in the context of diets. “I’ve been on a diet since the start of the year, but I was really tempted by that sinfully decadent cake.”

In general, our culture doesn’t have a serious view of sin and temptation.

But every once in a while, we all see sin for what it is. Over the last several months, many victims of sexual abuse have been coming forward. And there has been a great outrage in the public. Those who have been accused are ostracized, cast out of society. It’s like a witch hunt, and people seem to demand that the abusers be burned at the stake, even without trials. In all of this, we see the devastating power of sin. Sin hurts all of us. It affects all of life. It corrupts that which God originally made good. The victims of sexual abuse clearly carry the scars of the sins of others. But the fact is that all of us carry scars from sin—our sin, the sins of others, and the corruption that has entered into a fallen world because of sin of the first human beings.

While many people are pointing out the sins of sexual abusers, very few people talk about the underlying factors and causes that lead certain people to commit sexual abuse. And fewer people still talk about what kind of society would help people deal with sexual temptation. Because we all have sinful natures, many of us will experience sexual temptation. Some of us will feel very strong urges to do things that are against God’s design for sex. How do we deal with these temptations?

That question should lead us to think about the problem of sin and the answer to that problem. Sin is ultimately a rebellion against God. No, not all of us have committed sexual abuse. But we have all failed to live for God. We have all done wrong. We’ve ignored the very reason we live, move, and have our being. We were made in God’s image and likeness, which means that we were meant to reflect God’s glory, to represent him, to worship him, to love him, and to obey him. And we don’t do that, at least not all the time. And if we’re being honest, we all feel the pull to do things that are wrong, things that are selfish, things that are destructive.

What is the answer to this problem? Well, the good old Sunday school answer remains the same: “Jesus!” Jesus is the answer to our sin. As I said last week, Jesus is our champion. He wins the battles that we can’t win, the battles that we have lost. We have all been tempted, and we have given into temptation. Jesus, as the true Son of God and the true image of God, never sinned, even though he was tempted. Part of his mission was to resist temptation and to defeat the Tempter, the devil.

Today, we’re going to look at Luke 4:1–13. Last week, we saw that Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River. Right after being baptized, while Jesus was praying, the Holy Spirit came upon him and God the Father announced that Jesus is his beloved Son. After that episode, Luke presents to us a genealogy that moves in reverse order, connecting Jesus to the first man, Adam. Adam is called “the son of God” (Luke 3:38), but Adam wasn’t a perfect son, because he failed to obey God. A perfectly loving son would perfectly obey a perfect Father. Adam failed. After Adam had failed, God created a people out of an old man, Abraham, and his once-barren wife, Sarah. And when Israel had multiplied in Egypt, they were called God’s “son” (Exod. 4:22). Yet Israel repeatedly sinned.

God wants to relate to a people. God makes covenants with these people. Covenants are like binding pacts, treaties, if you will. They include promises but also establish expectations. All the covenant partners of the Old Testament failed: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, King David. Jesus comes to be the perfect covenant partner, the perfect human being who fulfills God’s plans and expectations for mankind. That’s why Jesus’ obedience matters so much.

So, with all of that in mind, let’s read through today’s passage. After we read the passage, I’ll make a few points about what we see in this passage, and then I’ll discuss several ways that it applies to our lives. Here is Luke 4:1–13:

¹ 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. ³ 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.’”

⁵ 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.’”

⁹ 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.’” ¹³ And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.¹

I want to make several observations about what we see in this passage. First, we see that Jesus is full of the Holy Spirit and he is led by the Holy Spirit. In other words, he is exactly where God wants him. Of course, Jesus is divine. He is the God-man. He has always existed as the Son of God, with an eternal, divine nature. But over two thousand years ago he added a second nature, a human nature. And he lived his life on earth primarily as a man. Much of Jesus’ strength in his ministry comes from the power of the Holy Spirit.

Second, this scene takes place in the wilderness. And he was there for forty days, while fasting. All of that reminds us of Israel. During the time of Moses, the Israelites were enslaved under the Pharaoh in Egypt. God rescued them out of slavery through many miracles, including the ten plagues, the last of which was the Passover. He led them through the Red Sea and to Mount Sinai, where he gave them his law, including the Ten Commandments, and he made a covenant with them. And then he led them through the wilderness for forty years (Num. 14:33; 32:13). Forty days also reminds us of the time when Moses was on Mount Sinai, receiving the law (Exod. 24:18). Like Jesus, Israel was also led by the Holy Spirit (Neh. 9:20; Isa. 63:11.) Their time in the wilderness was a time of testing (Deut. 8:2). And they failed that test, repeatedly sinning.

Third, Jesus was fasting for forty days, just as the prophets Moses and Elijah had done (Exod. 34:28; 1 Kgs. 19:8). This is apparently as long as a human can possibly fast.² Fasting is

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

² Alan D. Lieberman, “How Long Can a Person Survive without Food?” *Scientific American*, November 8, 2004, <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-long-can-a-person-sur/> (accessed January 12, 2015).

often associated with having a special focus on God, relying on his strength and provision in the place of food. Jesus is clearly relying on God throughout this whole passage.

Fourth, Jesus was tempted by the devil, Satan. This tempting apparently lasted the entire time of the forty days. It's likely that the three temptations we see here were either representative of Satan's temptations or they were the final temptations Jesus faced, after he had been fasting for about forty days.

The word "devil" is based on a Greek word (διάβολος) that means "slanderer." And the word "Satan" is based on a Hebrew word (שָׂטָן) that means "adversary." That tells us a lot about who the devil is. Luke hardly explains who the devil is. And, really, he's not mentioned a lot in the Old Testament. But there are a few important times when he appears. We know from the end of the Bible, the book of Revelation, that Satan is the serpent who tempted Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden (Rev. 12:9). He got them to doubt God's goodness. Quite famously, he questioned whether God had actually given a commandment. He said, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of the any tree in the garden'?" (Gen. 3:1). When Eve said that yes, God had given that commandment and that if they disobeyed, they would die, Satan said, "You will not surely die" (Gen. 3:2-4). And he led Eve to believe that God had given this commandment in order to keep them from having their eyes opened and becoming like God (Gen. 3:5). Adam and Eve gave into this temptation and ate the forbidden fruit. They trusted Satan's words more than they trusted God's. And because of that, the world came under a curse and they were kicked out of the garden, a paradise, and into the wilderness.

Satan also appears in the book of Job, which I preached through last year.³ There, Satan appears as an angel in heaven. He seems intent on showing that Job, a righteous man, worshiped God only because God had given Job a good life, including wealth and a large family. God allowed Satan to take that wealth, that family, and even good health away from Job. But Satan was wrong. Job didn't curse God. Job wrestled with God in his suffering, but he never lost his faith.

We also see Satan in a vision in the book of Zechariah. In Zechariah 3, Satan appears as an accuser. He points out the sin of the high priest, Joshua. Yet God removes Joshua's filthy

³ You can find all those sermons at <https://wbcommunity.org/job>.

garments and replaces them with pure, clean clothing (Zech. 3:1–5). Though Joshua was a sinner, God made him clean.

And we're told that Satan "incited" King David to make a census, in order to number the people of Israel (1 Chron. 21:1). It seems that Satan caused David to trust in numbers and to become proud, instead of relying on God and his power.

So, what does Satan do? He tempts. He lies. He wants to create a division between God and his people. He accuses God's people, delighting to point out their sin. It seems Satan wanted nothing more than to derail Jesus' mission, to get him to doubt God and his goodness and to get him to follow him instead of the words of his Father in heaven.

Fifth, Satan tempts Jesus. He begins with these words, "If you are the Son of God." It's almost as if Satan is trying to create doubt in Jesus' mind. This reminds me of Satan's words to Eve: "Did God really say . . . ?" Jesus knows he's the Son of God. God told him so (Luke 3:22). But here he is, in the wilderness, being harassed by Satan and he's also very, very hungry. Perhaps Satan was trying to get Jesus to question the goodness of his own Father. At any rate, Satan tells Jesus to turn stone into bread so he can eat.

It's important to note this about Jesus and his temptations. Jesus' temptations are unique. Most of us are tempted by bad desires within us. But that's not true of Jesus. Jesus, even as a man, did not have a fallen, sinful nature. But we do. James, Jesus' brother, writes this in his letter:

¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death (James 1:13–15).

Jesus wasn't tempted by anything bad within himself. It's no sin to eat when you're hungry. But Jesus would have been using his supernatural powers to serve his own will, not the Father's, and he would have been doubting his Father's love and provision for him, the way the Israelites doubted God in the wilderness. Jesus said, in John 6:38, "I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me." His mission was to fulfill his Father's will, not his own. So, he answers Satan with Scripture, quoting a passage from Israel's wilderness wanderings. He uses Deuteronomy 8:3. He says, "It is written: 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" The Scriptures, God's Word, were his food. In John 4:34, Jesus says, "My food is

to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.” Jesus trusted God so much that he knew God would get him through this period of fasting. He didn’t need to listen to Satan. He trusted his Father and his Father’s words.

Satan’s second temptation begins in verse 5. He somehow shows Jesus all the kingdoms in the world, probably in some kind of vision, and he says that all of these can belong to Jesus if only he will do one thing: worship the devil. That sounds like a bad hard rock song, but Satan would love to have Jesus worship anyone or anything other than God the Father.

I don’t know that Satan was telling the truth here. Yes, Satan is called “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31) and the “god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4). I suppose that’s because the “world” often means the whole system of sinful humanity that is opposed to God. But God is the true ruler of the world. It’s his world (Ps. 24:1). Satan can only have power because God allows it, for mysterious purposes that somehow bring about his plans. Satan often tells half-truths. He told some half-truths to Eve. He said that when she ate the forbidden fruit, she wouldn’t die. It’s true she didn’t physically die that very day. But Adam and Eve’s sin did lead to death. At any rate, it seems like Satan is probably overselling here. He’s offering Jesus authority and glory, which is something that only God can give.

In fact, Daniel prophesied that the “Ancient of Days” (God the Father) would give “dominion and glory and a kingdom” to the “Son of Man,” Jesus (Dan. 7:14). But before Jesus receives that power, he must first suffer. Satan offers Jesus a path to glory without suffering. He’s offering Jesus a kingdom without a cross. Jesus didn’t come the first time to be a political ruler. He didn’t come to be rich and famous. He came “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). And he saves by identifying with sinful human beings, by living in a world of violence and pain, and by suffering on the cross, dying a criminal’s death to save sinners. Without that suffering, there is no salvation. Without that suffering, we couldn’t be reconciled to God and forgiven of our sins. Without that suffering, Jesus couldn’t be a King, because in the end he wouldn’t have any subjects. All sinners would be condemned, and there would be no one to dwell with Jesus forever.

Jesus’ own disciple, Peter, once tried to persuade Jesus not to suffer and die. And how did Jesus respond? He said, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man” (Matt. 16:23). Jesus knew he came to die in the place of sinners, and nothing could stop him.

That's why Jesus responds to Satan, again using a passage from Deuteronomy. This time he quotes Deuteronomy 6:13 and says, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve." Only God deserves worship. If we worship anything other than God, we're sinning. How many people will get more excited about the Super Bowl next Sunday than about church? When we put our love, our hope, our money, and our emotions into anything more than worshipping God, that reveals our true object of worship. Whatever we love, trust, and obey the most is our god. If we look to anything other than God to find our ultimate security, meaning, acceptance, happiness, and identity, we're worshipping a false god, an idol. We have all done this in some way or another, even if we don't think of it as worship. But Jesus never failed to love, obey, and worship his Father in heaven.

The third temptation that Satan offers to Jesus begins in verse 9. We're told he brought him to the top of the temple in Jerusalem. This was probably on the southeast corner of the temple complex, high above the Kidron Valley below. From the top of the temple to the bottom of the valley was about 450 feet.⁴ This time, Satan wants Jesus to test God. Again, the idea is that God's Son shouldn't suffer. So, once again, Satan says, "If you are the Son of God . . ." And this time, Satan quotes Scripture. He uses Psalm 91:11–12, which promises that God will deliver his people through angels. In fact, the whole Psalm promises deliverance. The fact that Satan quotes this Psalm shows that even Satan knows Scripture. He probably has more head knowledge about God than we do. According to John Piper, "Indeed the devil thinks more true thoughts about God in one day than a saint does in a lifetime, and God is not honored by it. The problem with the devil is not his theology, but his desires."⁵ False teachers often use Scripture today, but they use only bits of it, and often out of context. If you take something out of context, you can make it say almost anything you want. But while God does promise deliverance in the Bible, it doesn't mean it will come automatically. The Bible promises ultimate deliverance. When Jesus returns, there will be a final day of judgment and salvation, and God's people will be delivered from sin, death, and a corrupt world. They will live in paradise forever with God. But before then, God's people will get sick and die. They will feel pain and sorrow and suffering.

⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 379. For a description of this height, see Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 15.11.5.

⁵ John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 30-31. This reminds me of some lyrics from Tom Waits's song, "Misery's the River of the World": "The devil knows the Bible like the back of his hand."

Jesus knew that his path would include suffering. It's no sin not to want to be hurt. But Jesus knew that the kind of stunt Satan was asking him to perform wasn't really a sign of trust in God. It was testing God. If we really trust God, we don't need him to show us he cares for us by providing miracles for us. It would be like one of us saying, "God, if you really are a God who saves, catch me after I jump off this bridge." If you need that kind of sign from God, you don't have faith, you have doubt. Jesus knew this. So, once again, he quoted Scripture, this time using Deuteronomy 6:16: "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."

Here's the sixth observation I want to make about this passage before we move on to thinking about how it applies to our lives. When Jesus withstands the devil's temptations, the devil leaves. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says, "Be gone, Satan!" (Matt. 4:10). Here, we're simply told Satan departed. But then we're given an ominous note: "he departed from him until an opportune time." Though Satan knew he couldn't tempt Jesus, he wasn't finished. In fact, I think you can make a good argument that he carried on his work through the various Jewish religious authorities who came to Jesus in order to test him and trap him (for example, see Luke 10:25; 11:16). People who didn't believe Jesus was indeed the Son of God falsely accused him. They did the work of Satan by telling lies against him.

Later, Satan would influence one of Jesus' followers to betray him. Luke says that "Satan entered into Judas," who arranged to have Jesus arrested away from the crowds (Luke 22:3-6). And when Jesus was being crucified, people who passed by mocked him, echoing Satan's words, "*If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross*" (Matt. 27:40).

And though Jesus' temptations at this time came to an end, he wasn't done being tempted. On the night before he died, he was tempted in a garden, just like Adam. This time, he was tempted about food. No, he was tempted not to face God's wrath against sin. Again, it's no sin not to want to suffer and die. And it's no sin to not want to feel the absence of God's love. Jesus had experienced unbroken fellowship with God the Father forever, and now he was facing the possibility of experiencing his Father's wrath. This was the Son of God's plan, too, but it's one thing to know a plan in advance; it's quite another thing to experience something in the present. So, Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me" (Luke 22:42). Jesus was in agony. Luke says, "his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). Yet Jesus loved the Father so much he did his will. He said, "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). Jesus' divine

will caused him to want to die for sinners. Jesus' human will didn't want to suffer such wrath, but he loved the Father so much he was willing to submit to the Father's plan.

Even though Satan tried to stop Jesus, he couldn't. Nothing could stop Jesus from succeeding where Adam failed, where Israel failed, and where you and I fail.

Now that we've gone through this passage, let's think about how it applies to our lives. How should we respond to this passage?

The first thing we should do is to be thankful that Jesus is our champion. We should again be thankful that God sent his only, beloved Son into the world to save us from sin, to do what we don't and can't do. In this case, he successfully resisted temptation. Like I said last week, we don't just want to think of Jesus as an example. Yes, he's an example. But he's more than that. He fights the ultimate war of sin and death against Satan for those who trust in him. If you are united to Jesus because you have faith in him, he has resisted temptation for you, and he has won.

Second, if you don't know Jesus personally as your Lord and Savior, the time to trust in his victory is now. We must admit that we have all given in to temptation. We have all failed to do what is right. We have failed to put God first in our lives, and that's why we exist. Jesus came to save failures from sin and condemnation. But in order to be reconciled to God, to be forgiven, you must first acknowledge your failure. And then you must turn to Jesus.

Third, Jesus is an example of how to fight against temptation. How did he do that? He used things that are available to all of us. He was led by the Holy Spirit. If you're truly a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit living inside of you. Don't forget that. Ask God to give you the strength to resist temptation.

The greatest tool that Jesus used to resist temptation was Scripture. He used God's word to turn back Satan. In fact, Jesus' greatest representative, the apostle Paul, calls the word of God "the sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:17). It's a weapon. When we're under pressure, considering whether to do the right thing or not, we can think back to what is true. But we can only use that tool if we've been training to use it. You can't use God's word if you don't know it. Jesus spent years learning and memorizing Scripture. Remember that passage in chapter 2 of Luke that describes the 12-year-old Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem, listening to and questioning the teachers (Luke 2:41-52)? I suppose Luke gave us that story in part to show that Jesus spent his time as a youth learning the Bible. Yes, in his divine nature he knows everything, including the

content of the Bible. But, strange as it may seem, he lived primarily as a man, setting aside his divine powers and using his human nature. So, in his human nature, he had to learn. And he learned Scripture.

Do we know Scripture that way? Can we think about what God says about sex and money and honesty when we're tempted to cheat, steal, and gratify our urges? Part of why we should read the Bible multiple times is to drill God's word into our minds and hearts, so that we're trained to live righteous lives.

Also, Jesus simply obeyed. Not only did he have the Spirit and the Scriptures, but he had a heart to obey God. Obedience comes not out of duty, but out of love. If we love and trust God, we will want to obey him. We will know that his word is true and that his commands are for our benefit. If we love God, we will want to obey. We will want to know his word.

Here's a fourth, related point. Learning to live righteously and to resist temptation takes training. Jesus began his public ministry after he turned thirty. He might have been about 32 or 33 years old. He needed time to learn, time to practice living rightly and resisting smaller temptations before taking on Satan in the wilderness. Resisting temptation takes training. We begin to learn how to resist temptations by starting with small things.

In his great book *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis writes,

Good and evil both increase at compound interest. That is why the little decisions you and I make every day are of such infinite importance. The smallest good act today is the capture of a strategic point from which, a few months later, you may be able to go on to victories you never dreamed of. An apparently trivial indulgence in lust or anger today is the loss of a ridge or railway line or bridgehead from which the enemy may launch an attack otherwise impossible.⁶

If Jesus has fought the war against sin for us, that doesn't mean we're not engaged in a battle, a battle that we must fight. And each choice we make is a small tactical maneuver that will help us win or lose that battle. Each choice matters. We need to make the right choices in little things in order to condition our moral reflexes to do the right thing.

This past week, I watched a video that's part of a new series about Tom Brady. It's only available on Facebook, and the series is called *Tom vs. Time*. In that first episode, Brady says, "What are you willing to do and what are you willing to give up to be the best you can be? You only have so much energy, and the clock's ticking on all of us. And when you say yes to

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 132.

something, it means you gotta say no to something else.” He then says his life is focused around football. If you’re a Christian, your life should be focused on God and you should desire to be the best Christian you can be. If you say yes to Jesus, that means you say no to a lot of other things. You may be tempted to stay home on a Sunday morning. But the Bible says that forsaking worship together is a sin (Heb. 10:24–25). We may be tempted to watch television and not read the Bible and pray, but God tells us that our food is God’s word (Deut. 8:3). Start training with the small things and you’ll be ready to fight the battle.

Fifth, and this is just an observation, Jesus was tempted because he was doing God’s will. He was where God wanted him to be, doing what God wanted him to do. Satan doesn’t bother tempting those who are doing a fine job of sinning. A lot of people are already happy to give in to temptation. They don’t need his “help.” Satan attacks us hardest when we’re doing what God wants us to do. So, don’t be surprised to come under Satan’s attacks when you’re actually obeying. Satan doesn’t want you to follow Jesus. He can’t separate you from Christ, but he’ll do what he can to hurt you and confuse you.

Sixth and finally, we don’t want to be part of Satan’s attacks. Satan lies, often dealing with half-truths. He is “the accuser of our brothers” (Rev. 12:10). He tempts. We shouldn’t be part of telling lies, or even half-truths. Someone once said that when a half-truth is presented as a whole truth, it’s not the truth at all. We shouldn’t accuse each other, pointing fingers. We shouldn’t tempt each other. Now, I want to be very clear. There may be a temptation right now in this church to talk about things you don’t really know about. There may be a temptation to think you know what happened when you don’t. There may be a temptation to gossip, to jump to conclusions, to imagine things that aren’t true. Don’t do it. If you don’t know the whole truth about something, it’s best not to talk about it. And tell others not to. We want to fight against Satan, not be his instruments.

Let us thank Jesus for fighting against temptation for us. Let us thank him for dying on the cross to pay for our sins. Let us trust that victory on our behalf. Let’s follow in the footsteps of Jesus, resisting the devil by the power of the Spirit and by using God’s word. And let’s help each other fight that battle.