

“TEMPTING JESUS”
Luke 4:1-13
February 4, 2018
Holiday Island Presbyterian Church

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” ⁴Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”

⁵Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.”

⁸Jesus answered him, “It is written,
‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

⁹Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written,

‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’
¹¹and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”

¹²Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

INTRODUCTION:

**As Luke recalls and records the life of Jesus,
what we are looking at today
is the first thing that happened following Jesus’ baptism.**

**Again, we must admire Luke's ability to dramatize things –
the link between Jesus being tempted for 40 days
and the 40 years Israel wandered in the desert
is too strong to ignore.**

**It sets the stage perfectly for what is about to happen to Jesus.
And causes us to look more closely at “temptation”
and the three kinds of “temptations.”**

**This examination is cradled in the three temptations
that Jesus underwent in the wilderness.**

**And Luke leads us to examine
three very important theological questions.**

SATAN:

**The first decision we must make is
what is the source of evil?
And is there really a being called “Satan?”**

**The simplest definition of evil
is anything that defies God's will.**

**God is the creator of all that exists
therefore, the rules are God's rules;
the law is God's law.**

**Anything that challenges, circumvents
or rebels against God and/or God's laws is evil.**

**Murder, armed robbery, terrorism –
we would all agree these are evil things.**

Poverty and ignorance . . . a little harder to call evil,

but rest assured these are counter to God's will.

How about gossip?

How about gluttony?

How about egocentric self-serving?

Anything that runs counter to God's will – ANYTHING – is evil.

From the smallest infraction to the most heinous act.

**Circumvent or defy those rules or break one of the laws
and it is an act of evil.**

So where does this "evil" come from?

We know that God does not cause evil;

for to do so would be to violate God's own laws.

And God cannot do that.

So, we must look elsewhere for the source of evil.

At this point, we must make a decision:

**either evil emanates from an outside force – Satan –
or it comes from our own misuse of free will.**

Either there is some supernatural being out there

who somehow unleashes evil in our lives –

or it is a product of our own fallen nature.

I choose to believe that Satan is the author of all evil.

A wise old theology professor once told me

there are three things I need to know as a preacher.

1. Satan is real

2. Satan is really bad

3. You really don't want to mess with him!

**If you believe that God created angels,
you must then believe that God gave the angels free will
and that some of the angels – 1/3 we are told in Revelation
used their free will to rebel against God.**

Satan was the leader of that rebellion.

**And since the very creation of humanity,
Satan has been tempting us.**

**And the most used tool in Satan's bag of tricks
can be summarized with one little word: doubt.**

COULD JESUS BE TEMPTED:

In the Garden of Eden –

**whether you believe it actually existed or it is an allegory –
Satan tempted Eve by introducing doubt.**

“Did God really say . . .”

Luke tells us that for forty days,

Satan bombarded Jesus with questions to cause Jesus to doubt.

“IF” you are the Son of God . . .”

See how that tiny little word

can cause a hairline crack in our faith?

**A crack into which doubt can be wedged –
which then can morph into unbelief?**

**Because Jesus was fully human, as well as fully divine,
we must believe that Jesus could be tempted.**

**Otherwise, Satan would not have wasted his time
trying to get Jesus to doubt.**

So, Satan chooses to assault Jesus with the first temptation.

**“IF” you are the Son of God, then turn the stones to bread
and satisfy your hunger.”**

Would that actually be against God’s will?

Maybe not.

**It is not the same as a sinful person
doing a self-serving act against God’s will.**

If you are hungry, would it be “evil” to produce food?

Not necessarily.

Unless you stole it.

Or accepted it as a bribe.

**But . . . for Jesus to use His power to serve Himself
is a step in the wrong direction
that could eventually lead to straying
from the path of righteousness.**

**That first step – to allow Satan to convince us to do something -
that is a misuse of our power
causes the crack in our faith to widen –
and opens the way to more and greater sin.**

**People on diets and people working their way out of addiction
know that the first step away from their program
is the most disastrous.**

**One bite, one drink, one small step
and we then rationalize that since we have already failed
we might as well scrap the whole program.**

**How many times has Satan used our hunger –
physical hunger, emotional hunger, spiritual hunger –
to tempt us to disregard God’s laws?!?**

We've all been there – and we've *hopefully* asked for forgiveness.

In order to stand firm in His belief,

Jesus relies on scripture to rebut Satan:

“It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”

SECOND TEMPTATION:

The second temptation comes in the form of a quest for power.

Satan tries to tempt Jesus with the promise of power.

In His state of hunger and loneliness,

Jesus would have been susceptible to temptation.

I can just hear Satan's quiet hiss in Jesus' ear:

“If you are to be the Messiah, you will need power.

**I can give you the power you will need
to be an effective Messiah.**

Do you *really* want to save your people, Jesus?

**I can give you the power you need to free your people
from Roman oppression.”**

Satan claims to possess the power to give to Jesus;

and Jesus neither disputes that

nor does He acknowledge it.

What kind of “power” does Satan offer us?

How about the power to get ahead in the corporate world?

How about the power to tilt an election in our favor?

How about the power to rise above others?

and look down on those we despise?

There is a well-known saying:

Power corrupts . . . and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Satan claims to be able to give that power to Jesus.

The offer would have been very tempting.

**Accepting this immediate power
would have allowed Jesus to avoid the Cross.**

But, the cost of accepting this offer was too great.

**If Jesus had accepted the offer,
then He would have sinned
and His sacrifice would have been meaningless
and we would be without hope of forgiveness.**

**Notice: Jesus does not challenge Satan's claim to have that power –
nor does Jesus acknowledge it.**

**Jesus recognizes that to change the course of His life
could have disastrous consequences.**

**Jesus has come to us for a specific reason
and He will not be persuaded to abandon that cause.**

**So, Satan's effort to shift Jesus' loyalty from God to himself
fails – it doesn't work.**

Again, Jesus rebuts Satan with scripture:

**“It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only
God.’”**

THE THIRD TEMPTATION:

At this point, Luke raises a very important theological point.

Look at how fully and completely

Satan understands the human condition,

**our wants, needs and desires
and how he uses that knowledge to tempt us.**

**Whether you believe there is an actual Satan –
or you believe that evil is just a product of our own making –
you must recognize the awesome power of evil!**

I have quoted Paul many times in this Church.

¹⁵ I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. Romans 7:15-20

Simply paraphrased, Paul is saying:

“I know what it is I am to do; and what I am not to do. But, the sin that dwells in me causes me to make the wrong choices.”

Look at it this way:

If Jesus could be tempted . . . how are we to escape temptation?

Having rebutted twice with scripture,

Satan now wraps his third temptation in scripture:

“IF [there’s that terrible little word again]

IF you are the Son of God,

throw yourself down from here,

for it is written,

**‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’
and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”**

In other words, Satan is inviting Jesus to test God.

What I am about to say to you is *opinion*.

My opinion that comes from my study and my experience.

You need to be very, very careful if you decide to test God.

That is something you do not want to undertake lightly.

In all the scripture I read,

it is always God who *tests* us . . .

. . . not the other way around.

God does not *tempt* us . . .

**but the Bible is filled – from cover to cover –
with examples of how God tests us.**

We are invited to test ourselves, what we think of as spirits:

**Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see
whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone
out into the world. 1 John 4:1**

We can – and do – test each other.

But think hard and long before testing God.

Jesus knew this, and it is evident in His reply to Satan:

Jesus answered him,

“It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

SATAN’S TENACITY:

Now, I want to shift our focus just a bit.

Jesus has successfully withstood Satan’s temptations.

Jesus has been tested and found faithful and strong.

The battle *seems* to be over.

However . . .

look at the sentence that Luke concludes with:

¹³ When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him *until an opportune time*

“Until an opportune time”

**If those words don’t strike fear into our hearts,
we must have been sleeping.**

Satan knew what might tempt Jesus the most –

- the temptation to satisfy his physical appetite**
- the temptation to satisfy his thirst for power**
- the temptation to tempt God**

Nothing worked.

YET!!!

Jesus work here on earth was not finished

until He announced it from the Cross.

We are not told how many times Jesus was tempted along the way.

We do know that in the Garden of Gethsemane

Jesus was tempted to avoid the Cross.

“He threw himself on the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.” Matthew 26:39

We also know that Jesus resisted the very human temptation

to avoid the pain, suffering and death that awaited Him.

We read in 1 Peter 5:8 –

Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.

We are constantly bombarded by temptations – large ones and small ones.

The good news is we do not have to face those temptations alone. We have a Savior that has undergone those same temptations. He *knows* what we face.

And He promised to send a Holy Comforter to lead us through those temptations.

Pray – pray often – and remain strong in your faith.

God loves you – and so do I.

PRAYER

Almighty and Eternal God, we thank You for Your love and protection from the evils of this world. We thank You that Jesus remained faithful and paid the price for our sins that we could not pay. We ask that You keep us strong and faithful. Shield us from temptation. When temptation comes our way, give us the strength to overcome it. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen