# First Sunday in Lent March 10, 2019

***The THREE TEMPTATIONS of CHRIST***

**(LUKE 4:1-13)**

 1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

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

5 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. 7 So if you worship me, it will all be yours."

8 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

9 The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. 10 For it is written:

"'He will command his angels concerning

you to guard you carefully;

11 they will lift you up in their hands,

so that you will not strike your foot

against a stone.'"

12 Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

**Introduction**: Unfortunately, you and I are all too familiar with the topic of today’s Gospel reading  temptation. Temptation takes all sorts of forms, shapes, and sizes. It affects the very young and the very old. For example, you may have heard of one three-year-old’s explanation for being in the kitchen atop a chair, eating cookies: “I just climbed up to smell them, and my tooth got caught.” [Taken from *1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, p. 370]

It is even a temptation for us to avoid this uncomfortable subject. For example, I remember talking to an elderly woman who said she was so old that she couldn’t be tempted! Well, maybe not with some hormones she once had, but there is plenty more that the archenemy of our faith can do to pull her away from God’s will and ways.

Here is something surprising  Our Lord Jesus was tempted! Let us consider His three temptations in Luke, and then see what lessons we can learn for our own lives.

**I. The Setting (4:1-2)**

4:1 – **“Desert”** (*erēmos*) is better translated as “wilderness,” here referring to the uninhabited and uncultivated land west of the Dead Sea and Jordan River.

It was God’s will that Jesus be tempted, because He **“was led by the Spirit.”**

4:2 – **“Forty days”** is also the length of time … that Moses spent on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 24:18), the flood (Genesis 7:4, 12), and Elijah spent wandering through the wilderness to Mt. Horeb (1 Kings 19:8). However, the most probable background reference here is to the forty day scouting trip of twelve Jewish men (one from each tribe) which later led to Israel’s rebellion against God and its resulting forty year period of judgment in the wilderness (Numbers 13-14).

**“He was tempted”** over the entire forty day period. The three temptations in 4:3-12, then, are probably the culmination of this entire time of testing.  **“Tempted”** (*peirazō*) may also be translated by the more neutral term “tested.” However, since **“the devil”** is the source and seeks to see Jesus fail and fall, it is better to give *peirazō* this negative connotation of **“tempted.”**

**“He ate nothing”** refers to the practice of fasting. Fasting is to go without food and/or drink for an extended period of time. In the Old Testament, the major purposes of fasting include repentance of sin, to show intense grief and sorrow, and to express a deep sense of need of God and His assistance. Israel had failed to trust God Almighty in Numbers 13-14 and in the wilderness, but Jesus truly obeys His will. He fasts, not because of His own sins, but as a symbol of His dependence upon God and grieving intercession for lost humanity.

**II. Temptation #1: Stone to Bread [Pleasure] (4:3-4)**

4:3 – **“If you are the Son of God”** does not mean that the devil doubts that Jesus is God’s Son. In fact, he assumes Jesus’ Sonship for the sake of argument.

4:4 – **“The Son of God”** was also mentioned in 3:38 and **“Son”** in 3:22, tying in this temptation narrative with Jesus’ baptism and genealogy.

This is a quotation from Deuteronomy 8:3 which occurs during Israel’s forty year period of wandering in the wilderness due to unbelief (see Numbers 13-14).

**QUESTION**: Why would it have been wrong for Jesus to turn a stone into bread (4:3)?

**ANSWER**: There is definitely nothing wrong with Jesus eating bread. However, to turn a stone into bread is the devil’s attempt to get Jesus to miraculously provide for Himself rather than depending upon God, as the quotation from Deuteronomy explains. In essence, then, Jesus was being tempted to use His own powers to serve Himself with sense gratification [pleasure] instead of serving mankind as a Savior truly surrendered to God’s will and plan.

**** Satan can even take something necessary and good, like food [bread], and twist it for an evil purpose. Here is good advice: Don’t let the good become the enemy of the best.

**III. Temptation #2: World for Worship [Power] (4:5-8)**

4:5 – **“In an instant”** suggests that this is a vision.

4:5-6 – **“All the kingdoms ... all their authority and splendor”** is an allusion made to the Messianic promises made in Psalm 2:8 and Daniel 7:14.

4:6 – **“For it has been given to me”** is true in that the devil does have a limited authority in this world (see John 12:31; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2; 1 John 5:19), but it is false in that God is the ultimate ruler of the entire universe (see Psalms 83:18; 89:11; Romans 11:36). This is the worst kind of deception, since it contains truth mixed with error.

4:8 – This is a quotation from Deuteronomy 6:13.

**** The devil offers so much to humanity but eventually all pleasures of sin destroy, as is here:

Joe Gutierrez tells five stories from his 42 years as a steelworker in the book *The Heat: Steelworkers' Lives and Legends.* In one story, called "Snow Danced in August," he describes a scene of silvery dust flakes that frequently floated to the floor in an area of the mill where steel strips rolled over pads in a tall cooling tower. For years, workers and visitors alike flocked to the sight, which was especially picturesque at night.

Then they discovered the dust was asbestos. "Everybody breathed it," wrote Gutierrez. He now suffers from the slow, choking grip of asbestosis, as do many plant workers.

"Who am I? I'm everybody. Can't walk too far now. I get tired real fast and it hurts when I breathe, sometimes. And to think we used to fight over that job."

How many things in our culture resemble the silver flakes in that steel mill? Enchanting but deadly. [Taken from *More Perfect Illustrations*, p. 312]

**IV. Temptation #3: Jumping from the Temple [Prestige] (4:9-12)**

4:9 – The precise location of **“the highest point of the temple”** is not known, though there is a much later Jewish tradition which holds that the Messiah would reveal himself on the roof of the temple (with no thought of jumping off, however).

4:10-11 – This is a quotation from Psalm 91:11-12 which is drastically taken out of context. First of all, Psalm 91:9 says, “If you make the Most High your dwelling – even the Lord who is my refuge.” Second, the devil omits the words “in all your ways” after “guard you carefully.” In other words, Psalm 91:11-12 is God’s promise to guide and protect the person who trusts in Him and walks in His ways.

4:12 – This is a quotation from Deuteronomy 6:12.

**“Put to the test”** (*ekpeirazō*) is better translated as “tempt,” since this is the same basic term used for “tempt” in 4:2, 13.

**QUESTION**: How could the third temptation be at all appealing to Jesus, since in seems so obviously foolish to jump off the temple (4:9).

**ANSWER**: The devil was daring Jesus to miraculously prove Himself to be God’s Son. In other words, the devil was trying to get Jesus to show the world in a flashy, sensational way that He was God’s Son and the Messiah. Satan is seeking to alter Jesus’ true ministry as the Suffering Servant/Messiah with glamour and sensationalism. As the Messiah, He could have instant success by ushering in His rule over “all the kingdoms” being offered to Him. Also, what a tremendous feat to jump off the highest point of the temple and live! News of Jesus’ miraculous powers would have spread far and wide immediately. Even though Jesus does later perform miracles, His destiny is to die on a cross.

**** The deceptiveness and trickery of temptation and sin is illustrated from a news article dated April 1, 2001, in which a nursery employee played a dangerous practical joke:

A British Columbia-based nursery is trying to track down people who bought poisonous plants that were incorrectly labeled "tasty in soup."

Valleybrook Gardens, which distributed the plants, has worked with government officials to locate the buyers of 17 improperly labeled perennials sold at stores in British Columbia and Ontario from April 18 to 25. Only eight of the plants had been accounted for by Sunday.

The label should have read, "All parts of this plant are toxic," but an employee changed it to, "All parts of this plant are tasty in soup," said Michel Benoit, the nursery's general manager. "The employee was making a practical joke and thought it would be caught by a horticulturist," said Benoit.

The devil has done the same to us. God put a warning label on sin that declared, "Do not eat from this for you shall surely die." But our enemy switched labels. The label he attached to sin reads, "Looks good. Tastes great. Is desirable to make one wise." [Taken from *More Perfect Illustrations*, pp. 282-283]

**V. More Temptations to Come (4:13)**

4:13 – Jesus was tempted more than just these three times, because **“the devil”** departed until a later **“opportune time.”**

**** Satan will use anything to keep people from trusting God, even something as despicable as this:

Self-pity weeps on the devil’s shoulder, turning to Satan for comfort. His invitation is: “Come unto me all you that are grieved, peeved, misused, and disgruntled, and I will spread on the sympathy. You will find me a never-failing source of the meanest attitudes and the most selfish sort of misery. At my altar you may feel free to fail and fall, and there to sigh and fret. There I will feed your soul on fears, and indulge your ego with envy and jealousy, bitterness and spite. There I will excuse you from every cross, duty, and hardship, and permit you to yield unto temptation.” [*1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, p. 326]

**Personal Application**

You have heard the statement that only two things are certain in this life: death and taxes. True, but we can be sure that our enemy, the god of this world, the master deceiver, will continue to harass us and attempt to lure us away from the arms of a loving God. If he went after Jesus, the Son of God, who are we to think that he will leave us alone?

However, there is also another assured truth that is so much more important to realize than this spiritual opposition  the victory of God’s Son over all the wiles of Satan. Jesus is able “to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). He not only understands our spiritual plight, but He has done something about it: “He too shared in their humanity so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14). In fact, “the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work” (1 John 3:8). Through His death and resurrection we have forgiveness, meaning, and victory. Though it is a day-by-day struggle, He is there for us.

Trusting God because of Jesus’ triumph over temptation through the cross,

Pastor Steve Waterman