

# Overcoming temptation

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[ 0 : 00 ] I'd like you to turn with me now to Luke chapter 4. Luke chapter 4, the passage we read together. And I'd like to deal with the whole passage.

We've been going through Luke's gospel since before the beginning of the year. And those of you who were with us at our desk here last Sunday evening will recall that we considered then the subject of the baptism of Jesus.

And under this heading we asked the question, why was Jesus baptized? And the reasons suggested to that question were that first of all he was baptized to identify himself with those for whom he had come.

Those who may have come to save. Sinners. His baptism at that point was a baptism of repentance. He was to be the sin bearer of his people.

And so he identified with them. Secondly, he was baptized to subject himself to the will of his father. We learn in the Hebrew lecture that he learned obedience by the things which he suffered.

[ 1 : 27 ] And one of the things which he suffered at that moment was being put in the place of a sinner. Though he himself had no sin. He did it because the father wanted him to do it.

And the third reason suggested to why Jesus was baptized was that this was a sign that he was now entering upon his own ministry as the Christ.

John said that the sign given to him to recognize the Christ was the sign of the Holy Spirit descending and alighting upon him in the form of a dove.

And this happened immediately after Jesus had been baptized with water. He was then immediately baptized, anointed with the Holy Spirit.

And he was thus equipped at that moment for what he was going to face next. And we need not doubt at all that that anointing which he received at that moment was not in any sense redundant.

[ 2 : 35 ] It was for a reason. Jesus, though he was God, was also man. And he was now entering upon his ministry and he needed that anointing of the Spirit as much as any human being needs the empowering of the Holy Spirit to serve God.

And what was he going to face next? It was this in chapter 4. This temptation. This period of temptation to sin.

And when we stand on this ground, we are dealing with something with which we are all too familiar. We are facing ourselves with this thing called temptation every day.

The Christian especially knows what temptation is. Because Satan does not give up that which is his own easily or with equanimity.

He seeks to bring the Christian down at every hand turn. But something I'd like us to notice about temptation is that at the very outset, temptation is not sin.

[ 3 : 48 ] This may be something you've heard many times. But it needs to be said when we consider the subject. Temptation is something distinct from sin. Sin is involved with succumbing to temptation.

But the temptation itself is not sin. It is the attack. It is the provocation. It is the impulsion towards sin.

But it itself is distinct from it. And as we say, Jesus was about to face this temptation at the commencement of his ministry. His public ministry.

And just we notice in passing here that John, his forerunner, had come out of the wilderness to the Jordan to complete his ministry.

Now Jesus goes from the Jordan into the wilderness in order to commence his ministry with a period of temptation.

[ 4 : 50 ] And he went straight into this, what we could call the crucible of a hostile environment without any life support system. And why did he do this?

Why did Jesus go into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil? Well, there's one answer and only one answer which we can give to that.

That is that he acted in accordance with and in obedience to the will of his father. God wanted him to do it. Just as God wanted him to give up time.

Jesus was led by the spirit into the wilderness. His conviction of, his sense of obedience and the sense of the necessity to submit to the will of God is emphasized so much by Mark in his gospel. He says that the spirit drove him into the wilderness. He was led by the spirit. That's the most important point. And those who have truly received God's spirit.

[ 6 : 04 ] And speaking about all Christians at this point. Those who have truly received God's spirit will show it by the way that they obey God's will.

Those who have truly received God's will. And in Romans 8 verse 14 we read that those who are led by the spirit of God are sons of God. The children of God.

And so Jesus here, the son of God in the supreme sense. The one after whom all the rest. The one after whom all the rest. You and I ought to copy.

Ought to pattern our own lives on. He demonstrated his sonship by obedience to the father's will. And that is, I would say, the key concept to grasp in the whole of the temptation episode. The importance of obeying God's will.

[ 7 : 03 ] Let's just now consider under these headings the circumstances of the temptation. The crux of the temptation. And the character of the temptation.

I should say the temptation plural because they were plural. We read in verse 13 when the devil had ended every temptation. There were several of them. But whilst there were several of them. I want to emphasize this point as well. That they all combined towards one end. To make Christ disobey the father's will.

Firstly, what were the circumstances of these temptations? The circumstances were these. First of all, Satan attacked Jesus after a time of great blessing.

He had just received the Holy Spirit in that sense which is spoken of in Isaiah 61. Jesus later quotes this.

[ 8 : 05 ] That the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to teach the gospel to the poor. He just received that anointing of the Spirit.

Who came down on him in bodily form like a dung. He received a great blessing from his father in hearing the voice of his father granting to him that wonderful confirmation of his sonship.

A time of great blessing. And after that he was tempted for 40 days. And that's how it can so often happen with you and with me.

It can so often be after a time of great blessing. That we can be attacked by Satan. A time when we may be taken off guard. Least expecting his onslaught.

And we have to be on our guard. No matter if we do feel spiritually high. We've got to be on our guard. Especially we might say at such times. Some of you may be feeling today a sense of great victory.

[ 9 : 12 ] Now understand and this is purely coincidental to the theme of my sermon this morning. Understand that your theme at the conference is on the winning side. And you may go home from Kilrock thinking.

Yeah it's great isn't it. We're on the winning side. We've got it all sewn up. This thing called victory over Satan. Victory over sin. Victory over self.

And it's exactly that sort of moment. That Satan can get in and pull you down. And it's exactly when we can be most assured of our sonship before God.

That Satan can come in and try and throw mud. Say, ah, you think you're a child of God, eh? Just look at that action, eh? Just consider that thought which just passed through your mind and so on. So, Satan can attack us after a time of great blessing. Secondly, Satan's fiercest attacks of Jesus came after an exhausting experience.

[ 10 : 21 ] He was very hungry indeed. Very tired. He'd been without food for 40 days. Almost six weeks. And his body was extremely weak.

And when we're physically weak, it can act upon our psychology, which can act upon our spiritual condition. He was, you might say, almost, eh, peculiarly susceptible to negative thoughts at this

point.

And Satan came in after tempting him, notice, for 40 days. He'd been tempted already when these three temptations were presented to him here. This wasn't the beginning of it.

Turn these stones into bread. That was the culmination of it all. So he was very, he was exhausted. And we've got to be aware of the same thing as well.

That when we're tired, when we're low and exhausted, the thing to do at that point is to trust, as you've never trusted before, in the will of your Father and in the goodness of your Father.

[ 11 : 34 ] When negative thoughts could come into your mind and supplant spiritual thoughts, at that point you've got to tell yourself, no matter how I'm feeling, my feelings are not important as regards the promises of God.

They don't affect God's promises in the slightest. My God is a good God. I love him. And I know he loves me. And although I'm feeling so negative just now, depressed, cast down, nevertheless I know, as we could say in the words of the psalmist, I know that I shall praise him yet whose countenance is my age.

So Jesus was hungry and he was tempted, even by his condition alone, to think negatively and to mistrust the goodness of God.

But he didn't fall. And yet in that condition, Satan comes with his spirit attack. These were the circumstances of the temptation. Secondly, what was the crux, as I put it, of the temptation? we could ask that another way. What was Satan trying to achieve in all of this? Well, who was Jesus?

[ 12 : 59 ] Jesus? Jesus was the Son of God. He was the Son of God. And one thing which Satan was trying to achieve was to make him doubt his sonship.

Or make him have to prove it. But while saying that he was the Son of God, we must also remember he was the Son of Man. And as the Son of Man, he was what the Bible calls the Second Adam.

He was standing in the place where only one previously had stood as man. And that was Adam. Adam was placed into the world through the goodness of God in an environment in which he was equipped to enjoy God's goodness and to glorify him forever.

He was the representative man. He was the the federal head, if you like, from whom all men would derive their being and their character concerning their relationship with God.

But we know that that man fell. We know that he didn't maintain that position before God. That through sin he failed in the test that God put to him.

[ 14 : 21 ] That God allowed to be put to him through the tempter. And now where the first Adam had failed and was defeated. The second Adam stood in order to be tested.

And we can say this that in the second Adam Christ the race had a new representative. And if he prevailed over Satan then the race could be restored in him.

But if he failed what if he failed? Satan was trying to achieve Christ's disobedience to the will of his father.

If he succeeded in doing that then it would have meant the destruction of God's Redeemer. It would have meant the destruction of God's Redeemer because the wages of sin is death.

That we can say for a certainty. To go beyond this into speculation in what would have happened concerning the existence and subsistence of the Godhead is unwarranted because we have no guidance whatever on that particular subject.

[ 15 : 48 ] We are purely speculating on a philosophical level if we try to answer that question. But certainly Satan was trying to bring about Christ's disobedience and thus Christ's destruction.

This Redeemer whom God had sent. What we can say is that the stakes were high. the stakes had never been higher.

That was the crux of the temptation to cause Christ to disobey the will of his father. Thirdly, what was the character of these temptations?

As I said, there was, well, first of all, there was one overall temptation. I've said it already. The one overall temptation was to tempt Christ to step out of his father's will for his life.

God's plan and will for Christ's life. Christ said so often, particularly in John's gospel, if you look it up, that he did not reserve to himself, as a human being, a will.

[ 16 : 59 ] He did not derive from himself the will which he was to carry out. He said, I do the father's will. I do not do my own will.

And that was what Satan was trying to achieve here. To turn that on its head and to make Christ do his own will, not the father's will. That's the first thing we can say about the character of these temptations.

Secondly, we can say this, these temptations were real. Real in everything. There are those who would have us believe that this all happened in some kind of hallucination in the wilderness after 40 days fast.

Now, we're not saying that it would be impossible to have a hallucination after fasting for so long. We could even go so far as to say that it may even be probable that something of the kind would happen.

We're worried of men seeing mirages in the desert in terms of weather and great thirst and so on. But the point is that the language of scripture does not lead us along that line. It tells us that which happened as fact.

[18:16] Some even go so far as to say that there wasn't even a personal devil. That this was just a war within Jesus in terms of his emotions and psychology. Well, I can say this.

We can say this with absolute certainty. That if today you are doubting the existence of a personal devil, then you are also doubting the existence of a personal God.

And by doing so, if that is so, as a believer is so, then it places a big question mark over your relationship to the God whose existence you are doubting.

there was a real devil. I would say from a pragmatic point of view, if you want to know whether there's a devil in the world, just look.

Look at the wars. Look at the famines. Look at the greed and the selfishness and the hatred of man. And I would ask you again, now do you say that there's not a devil?

[19:17] So, everything in the narrative was real. It took place. The language is there. If you're the son of God, command a stone to be made bread.

So, the stones were really there. And in fact, there is, some would tell us that there are some stones which lie about in that wilderness of Judea, which do look like bread.

And with bits crumbled off and those crumbly bits look like crumbs of bread. I'm not just saying this out of mere speculation. These things are actually called by the people in that locality breadstone.

That's the name given to them. Breadstone. And so, we could say that it might form a particular allurement to someone who's really hungry. The stones were really there.

Jesus was really taken up on a mountain. The devil took him up on a high mountain. Matthew says an exceedingly high mountain which emphasizes what could be seen, how many kingdoms could be seen from the top of that mountain.

[20:31] And then we also read that he brought him to Jerusalem and set him on the highest point of the temple. These things really happen. Also, Jesus really felt the power and force of these things.

things. Now, some people say that it was not possible for Christ to sin because of his godhood.

Now, that sounds good, theologically, and I would agree with it, theologically.

But, you cannot argue, you can't bring that argument into the experience of Christ at this point. God, because he was a human being, as we say again.

He was really tempted as a human being. We know that he was God also, but these temptations were impinging upon the point of his obedience as a human being to the will of God his Father.

We're not dividing his personality. He is one person, but he's two natures in one person forever. And there was a real temptation which was felt within that humanity.

[21:49] He was tempted, the word says it, he was tempted by the devil. He was put to the test for 40 days. And the Hebrews 4 tells us he was tempted, he was put to the test in all things according to our likeness.

Tempted in all points just like we are, yet without sin. So they were really forceful and powerful upon his psychology, these temptations.

Let's consider now, considering the character of the temptations, let's consider the temptations themselves and how Jesus countered them. they were in keeping with his nature.

Now I'm saying that because when we are tempted as human beings, the devil comes to us all differently. We're not all tempted by the same things or in the same ways.

He tempts us in accordance with our own nature. And that's exactly how he dealt with Jesus. he says to him, command this stone to become bread.

[ 23 : 04 ] Now that temptation, that would be no temptation for us because we don't have the power to make stone into bread anyway. No temptation there for us.

Just like between any two of you, you'd be tempted in different ways by Satan. temptation. But this temptation relied upon who Jesus was as the Son of God.

Command this stone to become bread if indeed you are the Son of God. He did have that power and he could have used it.

He could have used it. But only by stepping out of the Father's will. That was the point. how did he come to this temptation?

Well he must have been really sore pressed. Really sore pressed. I'm sure that much of the force of the temptation came from the fact that he was hungry.

[ 24 : 05 ] But also because he was being challenged here to prove his identity as the Son of the Father. But instead of relying upon that super nature of his he relied upon scripture.

He jolted himself back to a position of obedience by remembering that he was also man. And as a man he was in a position of dependence upon God.

Just exactly in the same position that you and I are in as Christians. Position of dependence.

Depending upon the maintenance and fellowship of fellowship with God for the continuance of his life.

That's what Adam depended upon in Eden. The maintenance of fellowship with God for the continuance of his life. But in the day he disobeyed that was the day he began to die.

And Jesus quoted that scripture. Man shall not live by bread alone. But by every word of God. We need the things which God alone can give us for the continuance of our lives.

[ 25 : 22 ] And if we forget him, if we forget his will and our dependence upon him or obedience to that will in order to gain temporary relief in any matter it's just sheer folly.

And the principle at work here is this. That no matter what your body or your being is crying out for, no matter how important it makes itself seem to be, the will of God should come first.

That was the first temptation. The second temptation relied upon the authority which Satan claimed to have. Now to what extent Satan was actually telling the truth here is not the issue but he is known to be a deceiver before.

Certainly he was and is a powerful being. In Revelation 13 verse 2 we read that in John's vision John sees a dragon meaning Satan giving the political beast his power his throne and great authority.

And that either has happened or is going to happen yet in the history of the world Satan has had power which he has given to others and he is yet going to give power to others who are his emissaries.

[ 26 : 49 ] He says to Jesus all this authority I will give you and their glory if you will worship me then everything will be yours. As I say undoubtedly there have been and still power governments bodies organisations in this world which are inspired by Satan and maintained by his power.

There are also organisations and secret societies which have Satan as their ultimate head and power and membership of these societies can help men and women to get on in the world.

And these things are a great temptation to anyone particularly when he appears as an angel of light and tries to convince men and women that they're actually good things to be involved with.

And to be very careful about what kind of opportunities we take up in the world because they're not all of God. But what was the force of this temptation to Jesus?

well he knew fully why he had been born into the world. The wise men had asked where is he who is born king of the Jews?

[ 28 : 17 ] And he knew that being king of the Jews was ultimately in God's will to be the king over all creation. king. And here Satan seems to be offering him the glory for which he was born.

All these things and their glory but without the cross. Satan seems to be saying you can have a kingdom.

You want a kingdom? I'll give you a kingdom. You don't need to go to a cross. again there is the overall temptation of stepping out of the father's will.

That force of stepping out of the father's will in order to avoid the cross was returned again in Gethsemane with a if not greater force. So Jesus was being tempted once more to step out of God's will into Satan and Satan promised him this dominion which he claimed was his at that time.

All it took was just a simple act of bowing down to Satan. Or did it? It meant acknowledging Satan, truth be told, acknowledging Satan as the ultimate authority in the universe.

[ 29 : 49 ] As I say although we must never say that Jesus had two personalities he certainly had two natures one of those natures made him God.

And if he bowed down it would have been the God-man bowing down before the evil one. The creator before a creature. But Jesus knew the commandments so well.

So well. Jehovah alone was the Lord of all. and he could not do other at that point than serve Jehovah.

The word came to him, you shall worship the Lord your God, Jehovah your God, and him only you shall serve. But it was a temptation to claim all these things, to receive all these things for which he was born.

Jesus replied, out of my sight Satan. It's written, you will worship Jehovah your God alone, and serve only him.

[ 30 : 58 ] Thirdly, third temptation relied upon the promises of God, and whether or not Jesus was really prepared to trust them. Now Satan becomes much more subtle at this point, because Satan starts using scripture himself.

Jesus has been using scripture to counter Satan up to this point. Now Satan uses scripture to counter attack himself. If you are the son of God, then throw yourself down from here.

For is it not written that he will give his angels charge over you to keep you, and in their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your feet against a stone? Now some people think that there was here an opportunity for Jesus to gain instant popularity as one kind of way of advancing his work.

As if he could throw himself down and everyone would think what a great person he was. Well we don't know anything about that because we have no idea who was there at the time anyway. But one thing we do know is that this scripture which Satan quoted is a scripture which refers to God's faithfulness towards his people and his protection of them.

And it does apply to Messiah as the head of his people. So Satan is saying are you going to trust this scripture or not?

[ 32 : 22 ] This scripture is given here for you above all to trust. Do you really trust it? Go on prove it. Prove that you're trusting that promise of God.

That was the subtlety of it. Are you trusting God's promises or not? Now that's really subtle. But the first thing which we notice about it is that it was misquoted.

Satan didn't quote it in full. He shall give his angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways. In all your ways is the fullness of that verse.

And what does that mean? Well what ways was the psalmist speaking of? What ways are under consideration at that point in that psalm?

They are these. The ways of dwelling in the secret place of the Most High. The ways of abiding under the shadow of the Almighty. Making the Lord Jehovah your refuge.

[ 33 : 27 ] Those are the ways. And as long as Messiah and all of his people obey Jehovah and walk in those ways, yes, then the promises will stand.

Then indeed he'll give his angels charge over you to keep you. If you are seeking his will and making him your refuge. But outside of that, it's sheer presumption to think that we can do what we like.

It's sheer presumption to think that God is going to take care of us if we have not acknowledged our dependence upon him and his lordship over us. That's sheer folly.

So it was misquoted. Secondly, it wasn't really a challenge to trust God at all. It was a challenge to put God to the test.

And that was something which Israel knew a lot about because they'd done it for 40 years in the wilderness. We're singing in Psalm 95 of that. For 40 years your father's tested me in the wilderness.

[ 34 : 34 ] and because of that on oath I said out they will never enter my rest. You see there was no command from God anywhere for Jesus to obey.

No command from God to jump off the temple. But there was a command not to put Jehovah your God to the test.

And if Jesus had complied with this challenge he would have been stepping off those ways of the Lord and thus stepping outside his father's will. So you see it's still the same temptation to step

outside God's will into an area of disobedience.

And that is why Satan preferred not to quote this psalm in full to keep you in all your ways. The psalms the ways of the Christian are set off against the ways of the unbeliever.

The way of the righteous man shall be established. The way of the wicked shall perish. And so to sum up what did Jesus try to do?

[ 35 : 45 ] What did Satan try to make Jesus do? It was to step outside of God's will and plan for his life. he was being tempted to put self before God the needs of his body before what God required him to do.

He was tempted to gain a victory without the cross. He was tempted to test God instead of trust God. So what were Jesus' weapons just in conclusion?

What were his weapons here? The word of God. God. The word of God. And we noticed that he three times quoted Deuteronomy. Twice from chapter 6 and once from chapter 8.

And very interestingly it is in Deuteronomy chapter 8 that we read of how God dealt with the people of Israel. Where God says you will remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these 40 years in the wilderness to humble you and to test you to know what was in your heart whether you would keep his commandment or not.

That was the test that Israel was put to. That was the test that Israel failed all that generation. And they didn't enter God's land because of it. Jesus was in exactly the same position and that was one main reason why it was in the wilderness that he was tempted because he was put in the place of his people once more.

[ 37 : 19 ] He was not only recovering what Adam had lost. He was also recovering the position that Israel had lost. And that was why he quoted Deuteronomy three times.

We could argue that because of that Deuteronomy is perhaps Jesus' most favorite book. But it wasn't that. It was that this was the scripture which fitted best with his situation.

And that is why we need to be most relevant with our use of scripture when we are combating the wiles and devices of Satan too. Scripture itself, having a Bible at your bedside or in your handbag or whatever, is no good whatsoever.

It's not a lucky charm. It's not like some kind of amulet. You've got to know it. You've got to know how to use it relevantly in order to combat the evil one. And the second weapon that Jesus had was the Holy Spirit.

he had been anointed by God. And that was one main reason why it was just before that, at the point of his baptism, Jesus had been assured, you are my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.

[ 38 : 30 ] And the Spirit had given him that great assurance of this. He could think of that at every point in these temptations, if you are the son of God, if you are the son of God, he would know.

And the Spirit would again bring that to his remembrance. the Spirit witnessing with his Spirit that he was the son of God. And the Spirit will witness also with your spirit that you are a son or daughter of God, if you rely upon him to do so.

If you turn to him instead of turning to your own preferences in temptation. So Jesus gained the victory. For whom did he gain it?

He gained it for you and for me. If he had failed we would have been lost. But through his gaining of that victory we can enter into it in exactly the same way as he did.

Using the same means, the word of God and the spirit of power. And we can share by that means in his victory for us. Yes we are indeed as you are probably hearing this weekend.

[ 39 : 37 ] We are on the winning side. But we'll only stay on the winning side as we trust God's will for our lives and as we seek implicitly and explicitly to remain within the sphere of that will.

Let's do so for Jesus' sake. Amen. Let's pray. Gracious Lord we ask that we would know thy blessing in our lives.

Then thy strength empower us by thy spirit to know thy word and to use it relevantly. In situations where Satan would try to get the better of us.

Help us to know that Jesus having gained the victory for us that if we resist the devil in his strength then the devil will flee from us. We thank thee now for thy great goodness towards us.

help us all each one to make the Lord God our refuge and to walk in all thy ways in order that thy ways would become our ways.

[ 40 : 47 ] In Jesus' name. Amen.