

I invite you now, to open your Bibles to this morning's scripture text, which can be found in the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 4, verses 1-13. This can be found on page _____ in your pew Bibles. Scripture reveals the 40 days of Jesus temptation.

Our Fathers Word

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, 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.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.' "

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

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

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

The Word of God for the people of God

In the last message of the Made for Mission series, we concluded the series with the final interaction of Jesus and His disciples before He returned to heaven. His final ministry moment. Which as you recall detailed the Great Commission to us, His followers to GO! Baptize, and teach, making disciples. Today, we are going to take a look at Jesus' first ministry moment. The moment that comes immediately following the Baptismal covenant. Not only after Jesus's baptism, but ours as well. The *sacrament* of baptism, which is the *defining moment* that adopts us into God's family as ministers, marking the beginning of our ministry, just as it did with our Lord Jesus.

This Wednesday we arrive on the first day of Lent, a forty-day time, excluding Sundays, for *reflection* and *repentance*. These 40 days commemorate the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness where He would be tempted three times by Satan. Lent is an empowering time where believers fast from anything that potentially stands in the way of a healthy relationship between you and God. Not just some food, but *activities* as well, how we spend our time. Fasting from *anything* that can get between *you* and *your maker*. This is a time of renewal intended to be spent fervently in prayer and reflection.

All the spiritual disciplines we can practice are only a pale shadow of Jesus's deprivation in the wilderness. And there were no off-days for Him. Fortunately for us, Lent, as it is observed now, gives us Sundays off.

One problem with Lent is that people tend to indulge themselves prior to Lent. The day before Lent is known here as "Fat Tuesday" (Shrove Tuesday) in which fattening food is indulged.

Mardi Gras, otherwise known as “Carnival” is a celebration where all sorts of fleshly appetites are indulged for several days. The word itself means “farewell to the flesh.” You can’t help but wonder whether we would be better off observing neither Mardi Gras nor Lent than to observe both. The Christian life is a marathon and not a sprint. Consistent service is to be prized.

The Christian Calendar also divides the previous passage in Luke, which is the baptism of Christ and the temptation of Christ. So when we look at this passage, we need to put the two events back together. The baptism of Jesus serves as the dividing line in Jesus’ life. It separated some thirty years of preparation and mostly private life from a life of public ministry. Pentecost serves a similar dividing line for the church. The wilderness temptation is the first event in Jesus’ ministry.

There are three accounts of the Temptation. Mark is the shortest, but provides two details which are not in Matthew and Luke. The first is that Mark uses the word “ekballo”(driven out) which gives the idea of a forceful thrusting of Jesus into the wilderness in comparison to Luke who uses a softer verb meaning “was led.” The other is that Mark mentions that Jesus was with the wild beasts. The thought here is that Nero and later emperors during the time of persecution threw Christians to the wild beasts in the arena. This note would remind the Christians who faced this threat that Jesus knew the situation they faced. Although this is interesting, Mark was actually written prior to Nero’s persecution of the Christians.

Let us picture the scene here, namely, the wilderness. The inhabited part of Judea stood on the central plateau which was the backbone of southern Palestine. Between it and the dead sea stretched a terrible wilderness, thirty-five by fifteen miles.

It was called Jeshimmon, which means “The devastation.” The hills were like dust heaps; the limestone looked blistered and peeling; the rocks were bare and jagged; the ground sounded hollow to the horses’ hooves; it glowed with heat like a vast furnace and ran out to the precipices, 1,200 feet high, which swooped down to the dead sea. It was in that awesome devastation Jesus was tempted.

We must not think that these three temptations came and went like scenes in a play. Rather, we must think of Jesus deliberately retiring to this lonely place for forty days wrestling with the problem of how he could win men. It was a long battle which never ceased until the cross and the story ends by saying that the tempter left Jesus – for a season.

The Gospel of Luke says that Jesus in His return into the land of Israel from His baptism was led into the Judean wilderness where He went without food for forty days. Israel had been in the wilderness outside the Land of Israel for 40 years, and we can view these forty days, as Jesus reliving Israel’s stay in the wilderness. Israel had been tempted many times and failed. They constantly murmured and failed to believe God’s word. They accused the LORD of taking them out of Egypt to kill them with hunger and thirst in the wilderness, God became very angry as a result of their unbelief.

Some theologians see Jesus as reliving the period of Israel’s temptation in the wilderness, *this time* choosing to *believe* and *obey*. This reliving of Israel’s history has been assigned the fancy theological title of “recapitulation.” There is probably some symbolic value in the number 40 here, such as *probation*. In Biblical numeric the association of *40 and probation* is established.

Moses was in the wilderness for 40 years, Israel's 40 years in the wilderness, Jesus here again, into the wilderness 40 days. But it could also be literally rendered, that *40 days without food* is at the very extremity of what can be survived by the human body. At this point, if the person had not already died, they would be at a time of extreme weakness and would be utterly craving food. Jesus would have been at the verge of starvation, and His human body and nature would be at the point of desperation.

The book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus was tempted in every way we are tempted. This is best understood that He suffered the absolute extreme of temptation, more than anyone else has ever been tempted. His vulnerability was a true vulnerability. It is at this point the temptation begins.

Temptation is not sin. We know this because Eve was tempted before she fell and Jesus was tempted, "yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Temptation is a disorienting, defiling experience when evil is presented to us as good. Destruction comes dressed up to look like happiness. Sin only occurs when we believe that the destructive lie can actually grant happiness.

The devil comes to Jesus and sees His depleted condition. The English uses the word "if" in the translation. "If" is usually treated as a conditional word. Translated this way, Satan was trying to get Jesus to doubt who He was. The idea here would be: "**If** you are really the Son of God, command these stones to become bread." However, conditional statements like this are usually translated "since." The idea here is: "**Since** you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread." I think this is how we should understand it.

Jesus was perfectly aware of His divine nature. He knew that He could speak the word and end this hunger at once. But Jesus quotes Scripture back at Him. Here it is rendered: It is written: 'Not by bread alone shall man live.' Matthew adds "But by every word of God" which make things a little clearer. The children of Israel in the Wilderness had not believed God's word and had complained for bread to full their bellies. Instead, they should have trusted the LORD for food. The LORD knew His people were starving, although probably not to the extent His Son was. They should have waited patiently for this provision rather than complain.

The second and third temptations are reversed in order in Matthew and Luke. Here it says that He took Jesus to a high mountain and showed Jesus all the kingdoms on the inhabited earth in a moment of time. Satan says: "To you I will give you authority over all of them and their glory of them," then he adds "To ME they have been delivered, and to whoever I will, I will give it." "All you have to do is worship me, and they shall be yours."

When we look at this, we can see several lies. The big lie is that all the kingdoms of this world are his to give. He is emphatic about this. But Psalm 24:1 emphatically states "The earth is Yahweh's and the fullness thereof." Satan is trying to give to Jesus what Jesus as Son of God already owns.

Adam had been given dominion over the earth by Yahweh. When Adam sinned, he signed over his right to Satan. But Adam had a derived right of rule and not an absolute one. In the same way, Satan's rights are derived. We even see this in the beginning of Job where He has to ask God for permission to smite Job. What this temptation tried to do was to separate Jesus' human nature from His divine nature and absolute right to rule.

Jesus could have answered Satan and reminded him that he was speaking to the one who already had title to all by right as the Son of God. But it was necessary for Jesus to live a humanly perfect life, so He responds again by quoting Scripture. “It is written: ‘Yahweh, your God shall you worship, and to Him alone shall you offer sacred service.’”

Jesus did not avail Himself of His own authority, but by the authority of Scripture, the very Word of God. By doing this, He was availing Himself of the same resource any human being could use. When we consider that we do not have a divine nature, we have to rely on the resources God has given us, namely the Word of God, Jesus sets the example for the proper human response to temptation. Only Yahweh is to be worshiped and not creation.

The third temptation was the sneakiest of all. Satan leads Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple and tells Him to throw himself off. He knows Jesus had quoted Scripture in response to the first two temptations, so Satan quotes Scripture. Throw yourself down. Doesn’t the 91st Psalm promise that Yahweh will guard you with His angels lest you dash your foot against the stone?”

Many see this as the temptation to live life dangerously and carelessly. After all, if you are God’s child, He will certainly protect you. Although we should not presume God’s care as a pretext for stupidity, there is actually more here. By throwing himself down, observers would see Jesus descending from heaven. When he landed on the ground safely, the observers would see that He was the Messiah.

The problem is that the popular conception of the Messiah and His mission was not at all the Messiah that Jesus came to be. The idea to be the Messiah on the world's terms rather than God's precluded suffering and the cross. They would see His kingship and kingdom in the way the world sees it.

Jesus simply responds with: "It is written: 'You shall not tempt Yahweh your God.'" This is understandable in its normal sense. We should not tempt God like the Children of Israel did in the wilderness. But Satan was actually trying to tempt Yahweh as well.

After all, Jesus is the Yahweh of the Old Testament in His Divine nature as Son of God. It could in this sense be read "stop tempting me!" and the temptations ended.

In today's text, Luke adds that the Devil left until a more convenient time. Many see the Gospel of Luke as using an ancient literary device called "chiasm." In this structure, everything is arranged around a midpoint. Each side of the midpoint is paired in theme. The center of Luke is the Transfiguration, which by the way, is in the passage from the Sunday before Lent. This makes the glorified Jesus being revealed in power as being the center theme of Luke. Lord of lords and King of kings. From the middle, everything works out.

We see Jesus being wrapped in strips of cloth and being laid in in a stone feeding trough. This is paired with Jesus being wrapped in strips of cloth and laid in a stone tomb. If we follow this structure, the more convenient time of temptation is the one in the Garden of Gethsemane. So, we should read this passage against the final temptation of Jesus there, where He is tempted not to follow the Father's plan to die on the cross and to walk away.

He was so weak as a human facing the terrible death, that His sweat was mingled with blood. This would be the more opportune time which is mentioned in today's scripture text. But Jesus drank the cup of the Father's wrath and went to the cross. This is something we should truly be thankful for.

Expect temptation. God made you to want to be happy and the devil's lies promise you happiness. So of course, your emotions, which have responded to the initial deceptive vision, will want the happiness. They will feel demanding, but denying them won't kill you. In this case, gratifying them just might kill you. Don't allow your passions to be your dictators (Romans 6:12). Remember, emotions are gauges, not guides. They are to be directed, not to be directors.

To be tempted is not a sin. To yield to temptation is sin. Temptations are never truly as strong as they feel. Their power lies solely in the false hope they produce in us. Remember, it is hope that is powerful. God created us to hope in him (Psalm 43:5).

We don't handle temptation any better than the Children of Israel did in the wilderness. We complain and grumble far too much. We are not educated in Scripture, so we cannot even throw it in Satan's face. All the fasting and mortification of our bodies in Lent fails to improve the deficit of faith.

Perhaps we would be better served in Lent in keeping in memory that the Lord of our salvation was made perfect through suffering. He made all the right choices in our behalf. He suffered in our place. He did not just relive the history of Israel. He has relived our lives as well. God sees us in the responses Jesus made to temptation rather than ours. Our only hope is that we are united to Jesus by faith. Left to ourselves, we are most hopeless.

Thinking of what Jesus has done for us, and believing that He did these things for us is what should occupy our thoughts during Lent. These thoughts will cleanse our lives and souls far more than our vows and rules.

Let us Pray

God, heavenly Father,
look upon us and hear our prayer during this holy Season of Lent.
By the good works You inspire, help us to discipline our body
and to be renewed in spirit. Without You we can do nothing.
By Your Spirit help us to know what is right and to be eager in doing Your will.
Teach us to find new life through penance.
Keep us from sin, and help us live by Your commandment of love.
God of love, bring us back to You.
Send Your Spirit to make us strong in faith and active in good works.
May our acts of penance bring us Your forgiveness, open our hearts to Your love,
and prepare us for the coming feast of the Resurrection of Jesus.
Lord, during this Lenten Season, nourish us with Your Word of life
and make us one with You in love and prayer.
Fill our hearts with Your love and keep us faithful to the Gospel of Christ.
Give us the grace to rise above our human weakness.
Give us new life by Your Sacraments.
Father, our source of life, We reach out with joy to grasp Your hand;
let us walk more readily in Your ways.
Guide us in Your gentle mercy, for left to ourselves we cannot do Your Will.
Father of love, source of all blessings, help us to pass from our old life of sin
to the new life of grace. Prepare us for the glory of Your Kingdom.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
Who lives and reigns with You
and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever.

AMEN