

Luke 4:1-13 Jesus Temptation - What Happened? (1)

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Date: 11 September 2016

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[0 : 00] Well, today we are going to focus on what is known widely as the temptations of Jesus.

We read about these in Luke chapter 4 and we can just read again from verse 1. And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for 40 days being tempted by the devil.

Now this is a well known event in the life of Jesus and it's a really, really important event. And for that reason we're going to spend probably two or three weeks looking at this incident.

It's a really fascinating incident and it's got so much to teach us both about Jesus, both about our own experience as Christians, but also about really the big message and the big goal of Scripture. So there's many, many exciting and fascinating things to see from this temptation. And as we are looking at it, we're basically going to ask two questions.

[1 : 10] We're going to ask what happened and we're going to ask why did this happen? Now my plan had been that this week we would look at the question what happened and next week we would look at the question why does it happen?

But I'm not very confident that we're going to get through the first question today. So we will probably, we'll see how far we get today, but we may have to take things forward into next week in terms of our first question and then we'll move on into the next question.

But that's basically what we're doing. We're going to ask what happened and we're going to ask why did this happen? And as we do so, my hope is that we will learn more about Jesus and that we will learn lessons for our own experience to help us as Christians and that we will see more about the amazing work that God has done right through the pages of Scripture for our salvation.

So first question is this, what happened? And in order to get our bearings, we're going to just walk through the verses together and we're going to just see what took place.

And it's very, very good to do that. When you're reading the Bible, if you're anything like me, you can so often be tempted to just read through it really, really quickly. And sometimes it's good to read through a book quickly.

[2 : 33] It can give you a good grasp of the overall events that are taking place. But sometimes it's worth stopping and going through things slowly and seeing if you can spot the details of what is taking place.

So we'll just go through verses one to 13 together for a moment just now. So verse one tells us, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness. Now, if you look at that verse, you'll see that it's emphasizing two important things. It's saying, first of all, that Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit and then it's saying that he was led by the Holy Spirit. You can see that, full of the Holy Spirit, led by the Spirit. Now, when it says that he was full of the Holy Spirit, it's pointing us backwards because if you go back into chapter three, we read about the baptism of Jesus.

And of course, at that baptism, the Holy Spirit descended down onto Jesus and filled him. So when it says that Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit, it's kind of pointing us backwards to what just took place and the fact that the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus in a special and remarkable way after his baptism.

[3 : 50] So that's pointing us backwards. But then when it says that he was led by the Spirit, it's pointing us forwards. It's basically setting the scene for something that's going to happen.

Yes, he's full of the Spirit, but now the Holy Spirit is leading Jesus onwards to something new. But the mention of the Holy Spirit reminds us of the fact that in all of this, God was in control.

And even though the temptation, as we will see, was a very, in a sense, negative experience for Jesus, it was still part of God's plan. The Holy Spirit led him into this.

And verse one also teaches us a couple of important lessons to note in passing. It tells us something that's happened in terms of geography. It says that Jesus has returned from the Jordan and has going into the wilderness.

You can imagine Jesus traveling from the River Jordan and into the wilderness. But that's also telling us something. It's giving us information in terms of Jesus's social situation there, because at the Jordan there were crowds of people, weren't there?

[5 : 04] Loads of people coming to hear John. But in the wilderness, Jesus was on his own. So geographically, verse one tells us that Jesus goes from the Jordan to the wilderness.

Socially, Jesus has gone from being in the crowds to being isolated. And then we come to verse two, which says, for 40 days being tempted by the devil, and he ate nothing during those days.

And when they were ended, he was hungry. And so this is in a way giving us a bit of, if you like, background information. It tells us how long Jesus spent in the wilderness, 40 days.

And it tells us what he did, or rather what he didn't do. He ate nothing. And so we are being told that this is an extended period of isolation and fasting.

And not surprisingly, by the end of it, Jesus was hungry, just as you and I would be if we went that period of time without food.

[6 : 04] And then we are given the details of what took place. The devil said to him, if you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.

And so we see this moment where the devil launches his attack on Jesus. The devil is coming to confront Jesus. He is coming to oppose him. And here is the moment when he begins his attack.

And what is it that the devil does to attack Jesus? He speaks. The devil said to him.

And so the temptations are by means of speech. It is a verbal attack. Now that's really, really interesting, I think, because you could probably imagine all sorts of ways that you would expect the devil to oppose Jesus.

If you think back to when Jesus was born, you remember how Herod tried to wipe out all the children under two years of age. That was like a physical attack in many ways, which no doubt had a satanic origin.

[7 : 12] But here the devil is just speaking. But of course, that is the reason for that is because words can be incredibly, incredibly powerful.

Some of you will have heard a quote that, well, it's often attributed to Karl Marx, but sometimes it's attributed to Benjamin Franklin. Sometimes you get these quotations and you never quite know who said it originally.

But the quotation is quite interesting. We'll say it was Karl Marx, but it might not have been. The quotation was, give me 26 soldiers of lead and I will conquer the world.

He said, give me 26 soldiers and I will conquer the world. Now, what are the 26 soldiers? Well, they are the 26 letters of the alphabet.

And the emphasis is that I can conquer the world through what I say. Now, it would be interesting if it was Karl Marx because in many ways his ideology didn't conquer the world, but it conquered a few parts of it.

[8 : 16] So the devil launches the attack in terms of speech. And as he speaks to Jesus, he attempts to do two things. First of all, he challenges Jesus to prove himself.

That's what we see with that little word, if you are the son of God. It's like a challenge. Prove yourself, prove that you are the son of God.

Yes, you've just had the baptism. Yes, God said you are my beloved son, but you have got to prove it if you are the son of God. And so he's challenging him in that sense.

But then we see that the devil deliberately aims for Jesus' point of weakness. Because in verse two, we were just told that Jesus was hungry.

In verse three, the devil tempts him with food. And so you can see the devil is trying to exploit Jesus' weakness, trying to attack him where he is at his most vulnerable.

[9 : 20] Jesus was hungry. And the devil is saying, just change that to bread. Just eat. But Jesus responds in verse four and he says, it says, Jesus answered him, it is written, man shall not live by bread alone.

One of the most important things in that verse are the first three words that Jesus says. He responds with this phrase, it is written. And that's telling us that Jesus is not thinking of his own ideas.

He is not trying to respond on his own strength. He is using the words of scripture. He's going back to God's word, to the Old Testament.

And he quotes the second half of Deuteronomy chapter eight, verse three, man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

And if you look at Matthew's record of this, we see that Jesus did in fact quote both the whole of that, that second half of the verse. And the point that has been emphasized is that Jesus knows where true nourishment comes from.

[10 : 34] Jesus knows that bread is not the most important thing that he needs. Bread is not the source, the main source of real nourishment.

And that's something that's really, really important for us to remember. Yes, we depend on food, but life does not depend wholly on food.

Eternal life depends on much, much more. And we should really remember that yes, every day we are feeding our bodies to keep them alive, but we are feeding dying bodies.

All of our bodies are going in one direction. And even though we're feeding them, we are just nourishing bodies that are dying.

Man does not live by bread alone. So Jesus responds to that temptation, but the devil immediately launches another one. The devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.

[11 : 43] And again, if you look to Matthew's account, you'll see that this took place in a mountaintop. And we don't know exactly how that took place, but I would imagine that it was some sort of visionary experience that the devil presented before Jesus, where you see this vast array of the kingdoms of the world.

And then the devil gives Jesus an offer. He says to him, to you, I will give all this authority and their glory, for it's been delivered to me and I give it to whom I will.

Now, look how interesting this is. In the first temptation, the devil is trying to exploit Jesus's weakness. In this temptation, he's trying to exploit Jesus's strength, because Jesus is the Son of God and Jesus does have authority over all the kingdoms of the world.

And Jesus has every right to sit on the throne of heaven and earth. And so the devil is trying to appeal to something that in many ways is totally legitimate.

Jesus has a right to authority over the world. The devil is trying to say, you can have it.

[13 : 03] This is yours. You're meant to have this. But he adds a catch. If you then will worship me, it will all be yours.

And so the devil's offer comes with a condition. And of course, as we know, this although it sounds so simple, to do that would be to break the very first of the 10 commandments.

And so Jesus again responds. And if you look, you see again, he starts with exactly the same three words. It is written. And then this time he quotes, Deuteronomy 6.13, you shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.

And it's really interesting to see that Jesus is emphasizing a point that God's people had to hear again and again and again and again throughout the Old Testament. If you look back to the Old Testament, you'll see that the people constantly turned away from God.

They turned after other gods. They followed false gods. They abandoned God. They mixed up God, believing in God with believing other things. They kept on doing what this command is warning against.

[14 : 14] You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve. Now I want to just pause for two minutes here and notice the two verbs that are in the word, the statement that Jesus made.

The two verbs are worship and serve. You shall worship the Lord your God and him only you shall serve.

And what we have to remember is that these two go hand in hand, worship and service.

And the point, the reason I want to mention this is a lot of people think that you can choose one or other of these. People think to themselves, yes, I worship God.

I believe in God. I think God exists. I believe in him. I go to church each week and yeah, I would worship God.

[15:10] But I'm not really willing to serve him. I'm not really willing for him to have any impact in my life. And I do my own thing. Yeah, God is God, but I do my own thing.

I don't need to follow his commands. A lot of people think like that. A lot of people think I don't need to worship God, but I'm not going to serve him. Other people do it the other way around.

And they say to themselves that I serve God, but I don't necessarily worship him. It's amazing how often you see this. You see people who are going through life and they're doing stuff that they think is good.

And they are good things. They're involved in charity work. They're involved in helping people.

They're involved in being kind to one another. They're shading things. They're supporting people.

They're doing all sorts of things that we would absolutely 100% commend. And they say, I'm doing all this. But I don't really need to worship God. I'm doing all these things that please him, but I don't need to bow down before him.

[16:10] I don't need to go to church. I don't need to be a part of a church. I don't need to openly say that I'm a Christian, but I do these good things. So some people pick the worship, but not the service.

And some people pick the service and not the worship. We can't do that. We mustn't do that.

Worship and service belong together.

We come to God today and we say, Lord, we worship you and we praise you for all that you are.

And then we go into tomorrow and we say, Lord, I want to live for you.

I want to obey you. I want to serve you in my life. Worship the Lord your God and serve him and him alone.

And so Jesus again responds to the devil's temptation, but the devil does not give up yet. And we read in verse nine that 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.

[17:16] For it is written, he will command his angels concerning you to guard you. And on their hands, they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.

So in this temptation, the devil takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple. I don't actually know how high that was, but if you even imagine it was our own building, if you were standing up on the the bell free there, it's high and dangerous.

It was probably much higher, but we can imagine what that would have been like. But do you see what the devil says? What's the first three words that the devil says?

If you look up there in verse 10, it's not the first three words, sorry, but look at the three words he says. It is written.

And so if you look, Jesus has responded to the first two temptations by saying, it is written and the devil has caught on to this and now he is trying to use scripture to tempt Jesus.

[18:16] And he quotes from Psalm 91 verses 11 and 12 and he's saying, that's what the Bible says. It's written. And in saying it, he is attempting to test God.

And again, it's the same challenge that he's posing. If you are the son of God, throw yourself down from here. And he's trying to get Jesus to prove that God is faithful, to prove that God will protect his son, to prove that God will look after him.

Again, remember what we said at the baptism just shortly before this, God had said, you are my beloved son and the devil is saying to Jesus, get him to prove it.

Get God to prove it. But once again, Jesus responds and he does so in the same way. The Lord and Jesus said to him, it is said, you shall not put the Lord your God to the test.

And here he is quoting Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 16. And again, again, Jesus is able to use scripture to counter the devil's attacks.

[19:24] And that takes us to the end of this scene where we read in verse 13, that when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

For now, Satan backs off, but it's not over. And very, very soon the devil will come looking for an opportune time.

And isn't it interesting how if you read on through the Gospels, you instantly very quickly see that demons are opposing Jesus. The devil is trying a different tactic.

And I think these verses are amazing, incredibly interesting and fascinating to see what happened. And I hope you could see that there are lots of recurring themes that come up again and again and again.

There's the same challenge from the devil. If you are the Son of God, there's the same method of attack. It's constantly by speech. It's a conversation. There's the repeated phrase, it is written, it is written, it is written, pointing us back to the Old Testament.

[20 : 27] What's also significant is that the attacks are incredibly personal. If you go home and read these verses again, look how many times it has the word you, you, you, you.

The devil is mounting a personal and vicious attack on Jesus. But the key point is that Jesus never gives in. Jesus never, ever gives in.

Now that's a quick overview of what happened. And I hope that we see some of the interesting details that arise out of that.

I want us to just spend five more minutes, hopefully just now and a bit of time next week, looking at some practical lessons that arise out of this. Because before we move on to asking the question, why does this happen, I want us just to focus on some practical lessons that these verses highlight. I'm going to mention three things, but we're only going to do one of them today because time is running away with us. There's, I think, three vital lessons that arise from this, but we'll just look at the first one of these together.

[21 : 44] When you look at the temptation, you learn about the tactics that the devil uses. Now this is a really, really important thing to think about.

We don't spend much time necessarily thinking about the devil and we don't particularly want to, at the same time, we must at times, and especially when God's word is speaking about this issue.

And we have to know a little bit about how the devil behaves. And the temptations are a fantastic means of learning about the devil's tactics.

And if we know about these, then we hope that it will equip us better for facing our own confrontations with Satan.

If you look at the three temptations, each one of them is very carefully and very deliberately targeted. As we said, the first temptation was aimed straight for Jesus' point of weakness.

[22 : 44] The devil went for Jesus' point of weakness. And he is, in many ways, coming to Jesus with a temptation that would be so satisfying.

Imagine how much Jesus wanted to eat after 40 days of fasting. It would have been so satisfying to turn those stones into bread.

And so the devil is targeting the weakest point. And that's exactly what he'll do with us. In the second temptation, the devil is trying to deceive Jesus with a legitimate goal, isn't he?

Something that's legitimate, you deserve to be in charge of all the kingdoms. He's trying to trick him, trying to make him fall by presenting a legitimate goal.

He's trying to get Jesus to do the wrong thing for the right reason. He's appealing to what is, in some ways, a legitimate goal. I hope you can see how crafty that is.

[23 : 48] And then in the third temptation, he gets even more crafty and he tries to use scripture to deceive Jesus, to trick Jesus. And he is questioning the care of God the Father.

And you can see him trying to drive a wedge between God the Father and God the Son. As we said back at the baptism, God had said, I love my son.

The devil is trying to drive a wedge between that relationship. So the devil's attacks are subtle, they're deceptive, they're targeted. They are ruthless.

And the devil attacks us in exactly the same way. And we must remember that.

We must, must remember and be careful about that. And in many ways, this is telling us that we must remember how vicious and how ruthless the devil is.

[24 : 46] It's sometimes tempting to soften our view of the devil, isn't it? It's sometimes tempting to think, well, he can't be that bad.

But these temptations are reminding us just how ruthless the devil is. Paul talks about standing against the schemes of the devil.

And we have to be so alert to these schemes. Because at times, the devil, just like he did with Jesus, will try to exploit our weaknesses.

Peter gives a really interesting illustration, which we read at the beginning of the service. He says, be sober-minded, be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking

someone to devour it.

He's giving us the image of a lion prowling round us. Now, if you watch a nature programme on telly and you look at a lion or a tiger or whatever, out hunting, and you see them coming to a herd of gazelles or of wildebeests or whatever it is that they're hunting, if you watch them, the lion will prowl around and will look and will assess the herd.

[26 : 02] And when he looks at the herd, he is not looking for the strongest animal. He's looking for the weakest. He's looking for a young one, or looking for one who is lame.

It's looking for one who is an easy target. And yes, it's quite, it is amazing to see these nature programmes, but when you think about it, it's absolutely ruthless.

That lion is looking for the easiest target, for the weakest point. And so, when Peter talks about the devil like that, it's reminding us that the devil is a heartless enemy, trying to attack us at our point of weakness.

At other times, the devil will try to deceive us. The Bible speaks to the devil as the father of lies, as a murderer from the beginning, as the deceiver of the whole world.

And one of the things that the devil is incredibly good at is he's incredibly good at making something wrong seem right. That's what he tried to do with Jesus in the Second Temptation, he tried to make something wrong seem right.

[27 : 17] And he does exactly the same thing today. Has the thought ever gone into your mind, or have you ever heard somebody say, you don't need church, it's just between you and God.

Or you don't need to pray, because God knows anyway. Or you don't need to keep God's law, because you're forgiven. Or it doesn't really matter what you do, because love makes everything okay.

All of these things are making a wrong thing sound right. And it is a tactic that the devil employs all the time. And it can seem so legitimate.

And you can see that the devil is having a field day in our nation, because he is making wrong things look right. And the results can be disastrous.

And that's why we have to be so careful. Peter says, be sober-minded, be watchful. In other words, keep thinking, keep watching, be very, very careful.

[28 : 25] And so the devil will try to deceive us, just like in the Second Temptation. And just like in the Third Temptation, the devil will try and spoil our relationship with God, our Father. The devil wants us to doubt that God cares for us.

The devil wants you to doubt that. And that's what leaves so many people asking the question, how could God have let this happen in my life?

So many people think that. And for so many people, that's a massive stumbling block. How could God let that happen? And that's the devil wanting us to doubt God's care.

And that's why we have to remember the words that we read at the very start, that we can cast our cares upon God because he cares for us.

But the devil can throw the seeds of doubt in so many different ways. And the devil can say to you that God won't look after you. That God won't make everything okay.

[29 : 31] And it can leave you scared to do something. You think, I can't go to the prayer meeting. I can't go there because I don't know what will happen. I can't go forward at the communion because I don't know what it will be like.

I don't know if I'll cope. I don't know if it'll be okay. I don't know what people will say. Or I can't follow God's calling in my life because I just don't know how it's going to be.

Aren't these the thoughts that we think so easily? I can't go to the prayer meeting. What if this happens? What if that happens? That's the kind of doubt that the devil is constantly trying to sow in our minds.

He's trying to get us to question whether God cares for us. And you must, must, must not listen because God cares.

And God will care for you. Please never doubt the fact that God will care for you. Never doubt the fact that God will look after you.

[30 : 36] Never doubt the fact that God will be with you every step of the way. Don't listen to the devil's deceiving lies when he tries to sow a seed of doubt in your mind as to whether God will care for you.

All of this is reminding us that evil is not a plaything. And the devil is not a plaything. And in many ways I feel it's a difficult thing for us to talk about.

And in many ways it's a very solemn thing to talk about. But we must, must talk about it because the world today thinks that sin is a plaything. The world today thinks you can dip your toe into sin or you can paddle into sin or you can wander into sin and you can wander back out any time that it will be just fine.

The world thinks that sin is something that we can play with. You look at our media, you look at the TV programs that are incredibly popular, you look at the kind of films that we watch, you look at all of these things.

They are treating evil as a plaything. The devil is not a plaything.

[32 : 06] The devil is out to destroy us. It's a horrible enemy. That's why if you go to the book of Revelation you will see the devil described as a dragon and a serpent, as somebody utterly, utterly horrible.

We see how vicious he was in his attacks on Jesus and we see the fact that he will try and attack us in the same way.

But I want to close by reminding you that Jesus resisted the devil in his temptations.

But Jesus didn't stop there. Jesus went to the cross and he crushed the devil. And he destroyed his kingdom and he obliterated his power.

And that is why Jesus is now exalted at the right hand of God, ruling over all. Jesus has conquered the devil.

[33 : 26] And if you trust in him, then you are on Jesus' side. You are under his protection and the devil cannot get you.

That's why we have so many amazing phrases in the Bible, so many amazing verses which say that we are more than conquerors through Jesus. That nothing can separate us from the love of God and that no one can snatch us out of the Father's hand.

The devil is a brutally strong enemy, but Jesus is an even stronger saviour.

And we all need to make sure that our trust is in him. Amen. Let us pray.