

Luke 4:1-13
First Sunday in Lent
Sermon Series: Seriously.
We Need To Take Temptation Seriously

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
Winchester, VA
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February 7, 2016

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, 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 shall 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; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. ⁷ 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 is said: ‘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.

The Old Testament books of I and II Samuel give us the account of how God established a kingdom in Israel, setting up a line of kings that would, in greater and lesser degrees, point the way to the coming reign of Jesus. Before that kingdom could be established though, the Israelites had to drive out the nations that were already living in that land.

I Samuel 17 gives us the account of one of the battles that took place between the Israelites and the nation of Philistia.

Rather than see hundreds or even thousands of soldiers die, the Philistine army suggested that the battle should be fought between two champions. The side whose champion lost would be subjected into slavery to the victors. The man whom the Philistines sent forward was an absolute giant. From head to toe he was well over nine feet tall and his name, as you may already know, was Goliath. Not one man from Israel’s army dared step forward to challenge Goliath until finally, a young shepherd boy named David arrived at the scene. Do you remember what David took with him into that battle? With all the weapons and armory of King Saul at his disposal, David chose to go with his leather sling and five small stones that he took from a streambed. It didn’t seem like much, but with God on his side, it was all he needed to win the battle.

In our Gospel lesson this morning, we read about another battle. This one too, was a fight between champions. It was the ultimate battle of Good versus Evil: the old evil foe facing off against the Son of Man while the fate of humankind hung in the balance. It almost seems trite to sensationalize the temptation of Jesus that way, but that really was the case. At any point, had Jesus failed to resist temptation, had He bowed, or jumped, or even simply made some bread, all would have been lost. But our Champion won the battle: Jesus holds the field and the kingdom is ours forever. As we look at this

account, we see how serious Jesus was when He was faced with temptation and we'll see how We Need To Take Temptation Seriously as well.

After Jesus was baptized by John, the Holy Spirit led Him out into the wilderness for forty days. Luke tells us that during those forty days Jesus was fasting. He didn't eat anything. Not surprisingly, Luke adds that at the end of those forty days, Jesus was hungry. That's when the devil came and presented that first temptation. **"If you are the Son of God, he said, tell this stone to become bread."** Satan plays off of the very words that God the Father had just spoken at Jesus' baptism: **You are my beloved Son** (Lk 3:22). It's as though He's suggesting that if Jesus didn't turn the stone into bread then that meant He wasn't the Son of God. More importantly though, Satan was tempting Jesus to use His divine power to serve Himself, rather than to carry out His Father's will.

You'll find that Satan often tries to tempt us in much the same way. He starts with what God has said, but then suggests that serving ourselves would actually be better. Why is it that we commit almost all of the sins that we do? Because we've convinced ourselves that it is going to be good and beneficial to us, despite what God has told us in His Word. That's been his strategy ever since he tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and it's a strategy he still uses today, so we need to take those temptations as seriously as Jesus did.

Jesus saw through the devil's scheme. And we might find what He did next a little surprising. With the full arsenal of all the divine power of heaven at His command, what weapon did He choose to combat the devil? He chose the Law of Moses, the Scriptures God have given to His people here on earth. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3: **Man shall not live on bread alone.**

The devil wasn't going to give up that easily though, **[he] led [Jesus] 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."** But Jesus answered him, quoting from Deuteronomy 6, **It is written: "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only."**

This time, rather than targeting Jesus' hunger, the devil presented Jesus with an opportunity to seize the "crown of glory," so to speak, without having to carry out the mission He was setting out on—without ever having to endure the cross. But what Satan was offering Jesus wasn't even his to give. It was a lie. And so we might ask, "If Jesus knew that what the devil said was true, then was this even a real temptation?" There's no one better to ask than ourselves.

How often aren't we tempted into sin by the promise of "rewards" that don't really exist? Just cheat on this test; it's the easiest way to get ahead. Take your anger out on your kids or on your spouse; it'll make your stress melt away. Go ahead and look at those dirty pictures; it's a perfectly healthy way to satisfy your sexual needs. Just have one or two more drinks, what's the worst that could happen? It'll make you feel great! When we see those cheap, easy rewards dangling in front of us, we often don't care how fake or deceitful it is. We go for it anyway because, once again, that's what we want, it what seems best "for me." We need, like Jesus did, to take those temptations seriously. Jesus was not having any of that. "It is not about me," He said, "it is about worshiping my heavenly Father and serving Him only."

Foiled again, the devil still wasn't ready to quit. He took Jesus up to the highest point of the temple in Jerusalem and said, **"If you are the Son of God, 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 the devil, once again, using a passage from Deuteronomy. **It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'** Jesus showed from Scripture that the devil was quoting God's Word out of context. Jesus knew the devil's proposal had nothing to do with trusting in God's divine providential care that He promises in that passage from Psalm 91. Instead, the devil wanted him to test God by deliberately putting Himself in harm's way just to see if the Father would "come through."

We need to be serious about temptations to test God as well. When we pray to God to bless us with good health, but then continue to eat whatever we feel like eating and stay as far away from exercise as possible that's putting God to the test, isn't it? When we ask God to make our faith stronger but then neglect faithful use of His means of grace such as study of the Word and use of the sacraments, or neglect to making a habit of regular attendance in public worship or putting our lives to use for the benefit of others, then we are testing God. Parents who pray for the spiritual welfare of their children but do not take the time to train and instruct them in God's Word are putting God to the test.

It may seem a little surprising at first to find the devil himself in that third temptation quoting God's Word. It shouldn't really surprise us though. Ever since sin entered into this world, using or rather abusing God's Word has been one of the devil's favorite tactics. He gets us to question God's Word and His motives. Sometimes he flat out denies it. And sometimes as he does here with Jesus, he uses pieces of God's Word out of context to try to lead us astray.

Even Satan is able to make the Bible say what he wants if he takes certain passages out of the framework of Scripture and interprets them however he sees fit. There is only one way to defend ourselves against that. We need to become champions of the Bible. We need to know what God tells us in His Word. God promises us that He will not allow us to be tested beyond what we can bear. And when we are tempted, He promises to provide us with a way out so that we can stand up under that temptation (1 Co 10:13). That "way out" is the encouragement that He gives us in His Word. And the more we fill ourselves with God's Word the better able we'll be to stand up against temptation. If we make ourselves champions of Scripture, then we will be able as Jesus was to clarify Scripture with Scripture and to see through Satan's tricks and deceptions.

Jesus is the Son of God. He had a tremendous amount of power at His disposal with which He could have defeated the devil that day in the wilderness, but again and again, He used the same weapon which He has now armed us with: the sword of the Spirit, God's unchanging Word. Jesus didn't unroll the scroll of Deuteronomy and read those passages off to Satan. He had them committed to memory so that wherever He was when temptation came along, He was equipped to contest it. We would do well to emulate Him in that.

But even as we make such a tremendous understanding of God's Word our goal, we are still going to fail. When we look at these temptations Jesus was faced with, we can see how we have already failed so many times when faced with similar tests of our own. That is *why* Jesus was there in the wilderness those forty days. That is why He was here in this world. He came so that He could be tested in every way just as you and I have been but with one very important distinction. Jesus never once gave in to those temptations. Jesus never once committed any sin. He lived a perfect life, and He did that not for Himself, but for you and for me. Jesus resisted those temptations because He knew that we would not—that we have not. He knew that we would hand ourselves over to sin and that we would need a Savior.

Jesus came to be that Savior, and to be that Savior He had to be perfect, living His life in perfect obedience to God's will. So when the time came for Him to give up His life, He was not only able to take the punishment of our sins on Himself, but also to transfer His holy and perfect life to you in that marvelous great exchange—the guilt of our sins for His righteousness and perfection.

Through hearing the message of that amazing gift which Jesus won for us, the Holy Spirit has created faith in your hearts which clings to that forgiveness and salvation. And as we continue to hear and to study that message, the Spirit is at work in our hearts strengthening us with the encouragement we need to take temptation seriously. And above all, He fills us with the confidence that we have a Savior who took temptation seriously, who lived a perfect life, and died an innocent death in order that we might have forgiveness from our sins. Our champion held the field and won the battle. And now the kingdom is ours forever.

Amen.