

Luke 4:1-13 Temptations of Jesus

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Hello I would like to add my welcome to the ones already given. Before we look at this passage I want to ask you a question, but don't worry I am not expecting you to write your answers on the back of a postcard.

What sort of child are you?

Personally speaking I was fortunate enough to grow up in a home where I knew both of my parents loved me. And generally speaking I was fairly well behaved. However, there were occasions when I disobeyed my parents. This usually involved playing some form of sport indoors and as a result the odd item of crockery ended up getting smashed beyond repair. Perhaps the naughtiest thing I did was to my older brother, when I managed to wrap a leather dog lead around two of his incisors and yank them out. Don't worry they were only milk teeth and his teeth grew back. I honestly can't remember how much trouble I got into for that, but it probably wasn't as much as I deserved as my parents were slightly in shock by the whole thing given how much blood was pouring from my brothers mouth.

Well why, you may ask, is this relevant to the passage? It's because up to this point in Luke's account of the life of Jesus he has been trying to make sure we understand that Jesus is God's son. In chapter 1 Mary is told even before Jesus was born that Jesus would be called 'Son of the Most High', in chapter 2 when Jesus is just 12 years old he goes

to the temple and when his parents find him Jesus tells them he is in his Father's house. And in chapter 3 just after Jesus is baptised, God speaks from heaven and declares, 'This is my Son with whom I am well pleased'.

Jesus is God's son and now as Jesus is about to start his ministry we are meant to be thinking, 'What sort of son will Jesus turn out to be?'

Now to you and me, that might not sound like such a big deal, but to the people living in Jerusalem at that time it was a very important question. Why?

Because Jesus was not the first 'son' that God had had. And this passage wants us to make a comparison between Jesus and the previous son.

So who was the other son? Well it wasn't an individual, but rather it was a nation. God chose the nation of Israel to be His son, some 2000 years before Jesus walked on this planet. And these verses point us to a particular time in the Jewish history books, when they had been rescued out of slavery in Egypt and were just about to enter the land that God had promised to give them to settle in. There are several clues in the passage, the first is the number of days Jesus spends in the desert. He went for 40 days and the Israelites wandered for 40 years in the desert. The second and biggest clue is that all of Jesus' responses to the temptations thrown at him, come from the book of Deuteronomy, which is set at that exact point in history with Moses reminding the Israelites of what has just happened for the past 40 years and how they should respond, as they begin the mission God has chosen them to do.

And that mission was to be a visible demonstration of what God is like to the surrounding nations so that they too, could know the God who made and rules everything. As God's 'son' they were meant to be His representatives here on Earth. That imagery is perhaps best illustrated by looking at the way the Royal family function as representatives of the Queen and this country when they go abroad to visit the leaders of other nations.

So what sort of son is Jesus? And how does he compare to God's previous son?

Well just as the Israelites were tested in the desert, so too is Jesus. And Jesus is tempted directly by the Devil himself. He is a created spiritual being who has rebelled against God and now tries to make others do the same. Christians believe that the visible world is not all that there is, rather there is a spiritual realm filled with angels and daemons and other creatures that we cannot normally perceive. Now I don't know whether the Devil had a physical body that Jesus could see when he was being tempted or whether the Devil was just a voice whispering in his ear. Either way, Jesus faced 40 days of the most intense temptation.

Now I don't think Luke has recorded the entire time Jesus spent in the desert, or all the various ways in which the Devil tried to tempt Jesus. Rather I think these three temptations are the culmination of all the temptations Jesus faced and represent three temptations common to everyone, although not exactly in the same way as it applied to Jesus.

So what are the temptations?

Well the first I have called 'The cravings of the flesh'.

Now at this point in the story Jesus has been without food for 40 days so when Luke writes 'he (Jesus) was hungry' it is the understatement of the century. After 40 days of fasting Jesus would have used up his body's fat reserves and probably a fair bit of muscle too. He would be very thin and quite weak. Jesus was probably close to starvation, dying from lack of nutrients and energy. And so the Devil suggests that Jesus, if he is God's son, could just turn a few of the stones lying nearby into loaves of bread to feed himself. No big deal, no one would know. It's not like the Devil is asking Jesus to start a 'feed the world campaign' by changing granite to granary.

So what is this temptation all about?

I think Jesus' answer help us to understand it. He quotes from a passage in Deuteronomy, let me read it to you along with some of the surrounding verses. So if you want to follow along it's Deuteronomy chapter 8 verses 1 to 5.

'Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the LORD promised on oath to your ancestors. Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna,

which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that **man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.** Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.'

Jesus knows that his hunger is a test to see if he desires food for his stomach more than God and His word. Does Jesus believe that God will let him die of hunger in the desert? Does Jesus take matters into his own hands and feed himself miraculously? Does Jesus think to himself I am not prepared to be hungry even if it is part of God's will for me?

No

Jesus trusts that God has a plan for him and that if God does want Jesus to die in the desert, so be it, but he refuses to serve the desires of his own flesh above God. Jesus knew that God had fed the Israelites in the desert and he knew that God would also sustain him during this time.

I have to say I struggle with this myself. My wife can probably recall many occasions when I have let simple craving get the better of me and act in ways that are selfish and self serving. I don't like being hungry and I will often try and manipulate my situation to bring me in to contact with something tasty.

Now don't get me wrong, getting hungry is part of being human and it is not wrong to eat when you are hungry.

Equally it is not wrong to buy food for the fridge and freezer to eat in the future. What is wrong, if the desire for food means you act in ways that are selfish and display a lack of trust in God to provide. And I don't think this just applies to food, but any of our cravings, whether it is for a place to sleep, a way to keep warm or perhaps sexual intimacy and companionship. None of these things are wrong to seek out, and they are things that we are created to need and enjoy. But we should never treasure these things above God. Sadly the only time many of realise what we desire the most is when they are removed from us.

I can guarantee that many people affected by natural disasters such as the flooding in Australia and Pakistan, or the Earthquake in Chile or even the snow we had a month ago will grumble and complain. They will say, 'How can God love me and let me struggle without the basic needs of life, such as food and shelter?' They will curse God because of their hardships and not trust Him despite them.

But the devil doesn't stop there and for the next temptation he leads Jesus up to a very high point and shows him all the kingdoms of the world and promises that Jesus will be ruler over all of them, if he just bows the knee to the devil and worships him instead of God.

And this temptation I have called, 'The lust of the eyes'.

So why did the Devil try and tempt Jesus in this way? Well in chapter 1 of Luke's gospel Mary, Jesus' mum, is told that Jesus will one day be the king of God's people and that his kingdom will never end. So it was God's plan for Jesus to make him the king over nations and to have honour and

splendour and power. But first, God had a mission for Jesus which involved dishonour, weakness and suffering. So here Jesus is presented with the choice between trusting that God will one day make him king even if it means hardship now, or trusting the devil to make him king now and bypass all the difficult stuff that he would otherwise have had to endure.

Again Jesus' reply is to the point, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.' Notice that Jesus doesn't tell the Devil that he is lying and can't fulfil his promise, I guess the assumption is that the Devil does have a real power he can exert here on earth. But, Jesus knows that God will deliver on His promises and he is prepared to wait for them and even suffer before receiving them.

Now the Israelites who were first given that command ignored it. They entered into the land that God promised to give them, but when they started finding that life was still difficult, they started to worship the gods of the surrounding nations. They sought blessing and prosperity from false idols. They trusted things other than God to deliver on God's promises to them.

And this still goes on today. We seek the blessings that God has promised now, instead of trusting that we will get them in the future. We try and make heaven on earth, by following other religions and ideologies and ignore the God who created us. We believe the Devil can provide the blessings of God.

In it's most obvious form this is witchcraft, Satanism and other religions where so called, 'black magic' is performed.

But most people, at least in our corner of the world, don't believe or practice such things. However, many people think that dedicating their lives to a particular career will bring them honour and happiness. Others think that investing all your time and energy into your children and family, will bring you that sense of achievement and peace that you are searching for. Don't get me wrong, having a job you enjoy or being blessed with a family is not sinful, but we can put these things before God and serve them rather than the one who provides these things. We will try and avoid the difficulties of life and seek the easiest route to getting what we believe we are entitled to, what will give us meaning and purpose, recognition and respect. I know this is a temptation I face and have often succumb to it, I wonder if you fair any better?

Well let's look at the third and final temptation, the one I have called, 'The boasting of the heart'.

The Devil now takes Jesus to the highest point of the temple in Jerusalem and dares Jesus to jump off. Not as a way to try and kill himself, but rather to prove that he is God's son. The Devil quotes from Psalm 91, a passage from Jewish literature that seems to promise supernatural divine protection for the one who trusts God. And the Devil is challenging Jesus to demonstrate that he really does trust in God by leaping from this building and then having Angels catch him before he hits the floor. I think the place is also significant, because the chances are the temple would be filled with people hoping for God's rescuer to come, and what a way it would have been for Jesus to start his ministry. He would have instant fame and acceptance. No-one could doubt that he didn't trust God and that God

loved him. I imagine he would have had a huge following from the very start and everyone would have had to take what he said seriously.

Now if this was me I might not have jumped, not because I was resisting temptation, but because I would doubt if God really would catch me. Jesus doesn't say that though. He knows that if he jumps, God would send angels to catch him. Instead Jesus quotes more of the Scriptures back to the Devil and states that it is wrong to put God to the test. The quote is from Deuteronomy 6 verse 16 and the whole verse goes : 'Do not put the LORD your God to the test as you did at Massah.'

This is a reference to an earlier story in the book of Exodus where the Israelites were wandering in the desert and they had no water, so they tested God and quarrelled against Him. Let me read the last few verses of that story from Exodus chapter 17:

'The LORD answered Moses, "Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel.⁷ And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"'

Is the LORD among us or not?

Do you see what the Devil was trying to make Jesus

think? He was wanting Jesus to question whether God was really with him. Is Jesus mission really one approved by God or is it just the delusions of a tired and hungry man. Is he really God's son? Surely a bit of physical proof would help Jesus to carry on in the task before him, help him to trust in God all the more.

I know I have given in to thoughts like that. If you are really there God then do X, Y or Z for me and then I'll believe in you. If you exist then heal my Mum, if you love me then let me get this promotion. If you really have a plan for me God, then help me get a husband or wife or child. If you want me to trust you then help me not fall asleep while writing this piece of course work I have left until the night before it is due.

Now asking God for things is what he commands us to do, but never in such a way as that if God doesn't do what we want, then we will trust Him less. We test God all the time by the things we say and think. My heart wants to be able to boast in the special provision that God has shown to me to demonstrate that He does care for me. I want physical proof that the God who sits in heaven is looking out for me and that I'm not just following my own misguided beliefs.

But Jesus isn't like me. He refuses to test God by seeking any special provision or miracle. He has faith that God is with him, even in the desert when he is tired and lonely and hungry.

Can I go back to the question I asked at the start, 'What sort of child are you?'

I know I am a rebellious child, especially when it comes to God. I don't trust Him as I should. I want to satisfy the craving of my flesh, I want to obtain the lusts of my eyes and I want to be able to boast in my heart of how special I am, because God does what I want Him to. How about you?

But has Luke included this in his account of Jesus life because he wants us to despair, because we are not the children we should be?

No

This passage is about hope.

Because Jesus is the perfect son. Luke wants us to understand that Jesus is not just a wise teacher, or a mystic prophet or even a good man who's example we should follow.

No, Luke wants us to realise that Jesus is the perfect son. The son that you and I could never be. The son who does what his Father in Heaven commanded him to do, without fault and without failing.

But why should this give us hope? Well let me read to you from 2 Corinthians 5, it is a letter written to one of the early churches encouraging them to keep trusting in God. This is what it says: 'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.'

The perfect son became the perfect substitute for you and

for me. The story of Luke climaxes when Jesus is hung on a cross to die. He didn't deserve to die, he lived a perfect life. But he died and took the punishment that we deserve so that we can become righteous, perfect, blameless in God's eyes. So through Jesus we can become perfect sons too.

So if you know you are a rebellious child, a child who deserves punishment for the things you have done. Can I encourage you to trust that Jesus took that punishment for you, so you can call God your Father and He will answer you.

And if you consider yourself to be a Christian already, one of God's family. Don't be like the Israelites who stopped trusting God and started listening to the Devil. You and I won't resist the Devil by quoting verses from Deuteronomy at him. We will resist the Devil if we keep on trusting that Jesus has already taken the punishment that we deserve and that because of Jesus we will have all the blessings that God has promised.