

03/09/25 - Luke 4:1-13 - "Passing the Test"

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[0 : 0 0] Will you turn with me to Luke chapter 4, verses 1 through 13. And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil.

And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. The devil said to him, If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.

And Jesus answered him, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone. And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time and said to him, To you, I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I will give it to whom I will.

If you then will worship me, it will be yours. And Jesus answered him, It is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.

And 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, 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.

[1 : 3 1] And Jesus answered him, It is said, You shall not put the Lord your God to the test. And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen. Well, it's good to be back preaching after a few months away.

I think the last time I preached was in 2024, so it's been a bit. But it's a blessing and honor to proclaim God's word today.

Today, as we continue our time through the book of Luke and move into Luke chapter 4, I want to remind you a little bit of what we've seen in the last few weeks in Luke chapter 3, as we saw last week Jesus' baptism and the proclamation of the Father that this is the Son of God in whom he is well pleased, and then the lengthy list of names, 77 names, generations, all the way back to Adam and to God himself.

And so, as Brent shared last week, Jesus is in fact the Son of God, as both heaven and nature declare. As we move into chapter 4, we see that Jesus' identity as the Son of God is going to be put to the test by the devil, or the deceiver, as his name could be translated.

[3 : 1 8] As we move into these verses, we see that, first, Jesus is full of the Holy Spirit, and he's led across the Jordan into the wilderness, where he's going to spend 40 days without food.

And so, I think perhaps the image that came to my mind when I read these verses was when Israel crossed into the wilderness and spent not 40 days, but 40 years being tested before they crossed the Jordan into the promised land.

And I think the symbolism is intentional. I think that is what is meant to be brought to mind is that Jesus is facing a similar test to what the Israelites faced during their 40 years in the wilderness.

And we know in these 40 years that there was seasons where they were without food, they were without water, and they were wandering through the wilderness and wondering if perhaps it would have been better to stay in Egypt or maybe to go back to Egypt rather than to die of hunger or thirst in the wilderness.

I like the account in Leviticus they're daydreaming of, and it says cucumbers and melons and onions and garlic and all of the sweet and savory foods that they had in Egypt.

[4 : 40] But I think this shows how quickly they had forgotten in Egypt they were also in slavery. They were also put to hard labor, but they seemed to remember more the food that they had than the hard work that they did.

And so, we know that they put God to the test, right? Not only did God test them, but they were tested. They were testing God to see if he could truly provide for what was likely over a million people in the middle of the wilderness.

To us, it doesn't really make sense why they would test God, right? He had delivered them from Egypt. He had parted the Red Sea. They had seen his miracles.

Certainly, it wouldn't have been difficult for them to provide, but nonetheless, they quickly turned to grumbling. They turned to complaining, and they begin to test God.

And I think as we look back on this from the New Testament, we obviously have a different perspective, and it's easy to judge them for their failings. But Paul reflects on this in 1 Corinthians 10, 1 through 13, and he says that many of them were overthrown by the temptations or the testing in the wilderness.

[5 : 57] Some were destroyed by idolatry, some by sexual immorality, and some by putting God to the test. And Paul concludes what I think is important, that the Exodus was an example for us.

It was written down for our instruction. This is Paul's words from 1 Corinthians 10. And he says that we must not like them. We must not put God to the test.

He says that no temptation has overtaken us that is not common to man. All of these temptations are common to all of mankind. But God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability.

God will never tempt you to the point of sin. With the temptation, he always provides a way of escape that you may endure it. So we can never blame God for our sin.

It is us who gives in to the temptation. As we move back into Luke 4, we see that Jesus is going to face three specific temptations that are common to all mankind.

[7 : 04] And maybe as they were read, you didn't see the connection. It took me a while of study and some helpful resources to point this out to my eyes. But these temptations, they align with 1 John 2.16.

The temptations could be broken down into the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eye, and the pride of life, as John says in 1 John 2.16, which are the ways of the world that tempt us away from the ways of God.

But it's important to realize that these temptations, as Jesus faces them, he's not alone, right? He is full of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit is with him on his journey and strengthens him.

And so I think as we read these verses and we talk about temptation, the question comes to mind, how do you battle temptation in your personal walk with Christ?

How do you battle temptation? And I think this is a critical question, and I'm not going to answer it right now. But it's important to remember, as we read these verses, that the point is not to put ourselves into the place of Jesus, to walk in his shoes, and to say that we might battle temptation exactly the same way that he did.

[8 : 3 6] To think, if I follow his example, I too can overcome every temptation by quoting Scripture back to the devil. I don't think that's the point Luke wants to make.

I don't think, first of all, that that's the point of the story. I think the point of the story is, as we ended Luke 3 last week, that Jesus is the Son of God.

This is an account of Jesus being empowered by the Holy Spirit overcoming the ultimate temptations, temptations we will never face, although we face similar temptations.

And third, and I want to clarify this because it's often gotten very wrong in our culture in churches today, we have no reason to speak to the devil.

Movies and TV make it seem as though we do, but we have zero reason to speak to the devil. Jude 9 instructs, we call upon the Lord, and the Lord rebukes the devil.

[9 : 3 4] We resist the devil, and he flees from us, as James 4, 7 says, but we never speak with him. If you have been, stop, get some help.

Hopefully that's clear. That being said, there is wisdom in these verses when it comes to resisting temptation, and I want to clarify these as we navigate the text.

But before we do, I want to put the main point before your eyes so that you can think on it as we navigate these verses. The main point, I think, is that Jesus is the sinless Son of God, and that this is great news for all who face temptation.

And so I've broken my sermon into three parts, three temptations, if you will, and I've titled them True Bread, True Authority, and True Faithfulness.

And I want to take them one at a time. But before we do, I want to pray that the Holy Spirit would guide us through these words and give us wisdom to learn from them. So let's pray.

[10 : 5 1] Holy Spirit, we do thank you for these words, for preserving them and bringing them before us today, that we may learn from them. We thank you, Lord, for how Jesus faced these every temptation and overcame them, that he is our substitute, that through his sinlessness we become righteousness.

And I pray that we would see this and behold it and wonder at it as we move through these words. In your holy name we pray. Amen. Amen. First point or first temptation, true bread.

I want to look at Luke 4, 1 through 4. Noticing again in the first verses, Luke 4, 1 through 2, Luke tells us that Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit.

He returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. And for 40 days, being tempted by the devil, he ate nothing during those days.

And when they were ended, he was hungry. So we notice in these verses that Jesus went without food for 40 days. And so I'd ask, have you ever fasted for a day or maybe more?

[12 : 1 1] I know at the men's retreat it's quite difficult just making it through one day with the smell of meat smoking in the background, trying to keep focused on the task at hand, thinking about food.

And you really only need to go one meal without food to notice how weak we can be without it. And that really is the point of fasting, to reveal our utter dependence on God for his providence in all things, even the simple things like food.

Now, fasting also requires a great deal of willpower or self-control to overcome the natural desire for food. This willpower or self-control, I found an interesting definition of it in an article by the American Psychological Association.

I was curious to know, does being hungry decrease our willpower? It seems intuitive that it does, but what does the science say? But the American Psychological Association says or defines willpower as the ability to delay gratification, resisting short-term temptations in order to meet long-term goals.

Kind of funny that they borrow the word temptations there for their definition. But it's essentially the ability or capacity to override impulse.

[13 : 38] And interestingly, hunger does not decrease willpower. In fact, being hungry increases willpower because it is our desire to survive. And so if you decide to fast for three or seven days and you do so carefully, you can find the willpower to endure.

It is possible. In fact, I believe the world record fast is 383 days, living only on whey nutrients.

You can make it over a year and lose 165 pounds. You can look it up. It's an interesting story. But back to the point, willpower is often a limited resource.

What the studies show is that when we use willpower for one task, it consumes the sugars from our brain and decreases our willpower for other things.

So if we focus our willpower on fasting, our willpower for other things will be diminished. The reason I bring this up is because fasting for 40 days would be for most of us impossible without some supplemental nutrients, but it would also leave you entirely drained of willpower to resist other temptations.

[15 : 00] And I want you to know the state that Jesus would have been in at the end of this 40 days. And I think this is part of what Luke wants us to have in our mind in these first few verses.

We know as at the end of Luke chapter 3 that Jesus was the son of Adam. As a son of Adam, he was fully man, and he faced every temptation that is common to mankind.

Being that he was a son of man, we also see that he did not find this willpower to endure by the natural man alone. We know that he was full of the Holy Spirit, and it was the Holy Spirit that strengthened him.

We know also that according to Galatians 5.23, self-control or willpower is a fruit of the Spirit. It is the Spirit that gives us and grows in us self-control.

And so Jesus, being full of the Holy Spirit, finds power from the Spirit to have strength to resist temptation even in a weakened state of body and mind.

[16 : 14] But Jesus is not only a son of Adam. As we saw last week, he is the son of God. And as the son of God, he is fully God.

And therefore, even among these temptations, he remained sinless. Having resisted temptations for 40 days, we can only imagine what the devil put before him, before these three specific temptations.

But we know that he resisted every temptation in the most extreme of circumstances. And this should give us confidence that he resisted temptation in every circumstance, that he did, in fact, remain sinless.

As we move into chapter, or rather, verse 3 of chapter 4, we see that the devil said to him, if you are the son of God, command this stone to become bread.

The first temptation, or first specific temptation, that Jesus faces after the 40 days is the desires of the flesh.

[17 : 22] Surely he would have been hungry. Now the temptation here, I think, is a little bit subtle. He says, if you are the son of God, turn this stone into bread. So first of all, he puts his identity as the son of God into question.

And second of all, he says, if that's in fact true, surely you can turn this stone into bread and feed yourself. Now would it have been sin for Jesus to turn stone into bread?

Probably not, right? He certainly turned one loaf of bread into many. He found coins in fish, right? He performed various miracles.

It wouldn't have been difficult for him to speak to the stone and it become bread. He was the son of God. So then, what was the temptation? What was the devil tempting or testing him to do?

Well, it was, I think, to give in to the desires of his flesh and to use his status as the son of God to meet his own needs rather than continuing in obedience and faith, relying on self instead of relying on God.

[18 : 38] bread. And that's why I think he turns to Deuteronomy 8.3 when he answers the devil. He says, man shall not live by bread alone.

In the account in Matthew 4 and also if you go back to Deuteronomy 8.3, you'll find that the verse continues, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

Lord. Yes, Jesus needed bread. He will need to eat at some point. But it's the word of God that sustains him. Moreover, as Jesus says in John 4.34, my food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.

In other words, it's not only the word of God, the literal scriptures that sustain him, but literally obeying the will of God that sustains him.

God has promised and he will provide food, but to obey the Lord is more important in this moment than food. Giving into the desires of the flesh at the expense of doing God's will would have been sin, and Jesus resisted.

[19 : 57] He committed no sin. Instead, he trusted that at the right time, God will provide, just as he provided manna for his people in the wilderness. He will always provide.

How might we respond to such temptations when we face them? I think we too resist the desires of the flesh by finding satisfaction in the word of God and by obeying his will.

When we're tempted to gratify short-term temptations like consuming excess social media, excess food or alcohol, giving in to temptations for drugs or porn or sexual immorality, in those moments, I think the promises of God that we know in that moment must be more beautiful to us than the desires of the flesh or we will surely fall.

God's plan of salvation is good. He promises pleasures and fullness of joy at his right hand. We must not trade eternal goodness of God for temporary satisfaction.

Find strength in the truth of his word, be empowered by his Holy Spirit so that even in your moments of greatest weakness, Christ might be more beautiful than any sinful desire the devil can conceive.

[21 : 25] As we move into the second point, I want to look at Jesus' second temptation in Luke 4, 5, through 8 and I've titled this point True Authority.

I'll start again with another question. Do you desire to have more time, maybe more money, maybe more power? I think these desires are common to all of humankind.

We don't all face the same desires to the same degree, but we all certainly desire something. Now in Luke 4, 5, the devil takes Jesus up and shows him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.

Not sure where he was flying through the stratosphere, but from his perspective, he sees the Roman Empire and the Han Dynasty, the Mayan and Aztec civilizations, among countless others in the entire world.

And in this moment of time, I'm sure he saw more than just those that were in his day. He likely also saw the Mongol and Ottoman empires. He probably saw the Spanish and British empires, how they extended across the world.

[22 : 43] He saw the United States and the USSR and China, all that have been or that will be. But in Luke 4, 6-7, the devil tempted Jesus with authority and glory in all the kingdoms of the world, if Jesus will simply worship him.

He tempts him with all the power and glory the eye could possibly desire. But Jesus is not so easily deceived.

who is it in Luke 4, 6, that delivered authority to the devil? Where did he get his supposed authority?

Jesus sees through his deception because he knows where true authority, power, and glory come from. And so he quotes in Luke 4, 8, from Deuteronomy 6, 13, it is the Lord your God you shall fear, him you shall serve.

Jesus knows that nothing in creation can or will take the place of God as the center of worship. The devil's temptation was empty.

[23 : 59] There was nothing to it because Jesus knew and believed the truth that the devil has no real or lasting authority or glory to give. Instead, all authority on earth belongs to God, and he alone gives it to whomever he wills.

It was never the devil's to give. And as we know from our perspective in redemptive history, all authority in earth and in heaven will be given to the Son of God.

We do not worship the prince of the power of the air, lowercase p. Instead, we worship the king, capital K, who is far above all rule, authority, power, and dominion for now and all eternity.

So how might we respond to such temptation? We resist the desires of the eyes, we resist idolatry by seeing God as the only one, the only thing worthy of our worship.

And so when you're tempted to put anything, including family or friends, your career, your success, the way you're perceived by others, anything else at the center of your worship, God himself must be more glorious in that moment than the desires of your eyes or you will surely be overcome.

[25 : 30] Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all that you rightly desire will be added to you. That is all we need. As we move into point three, we see that Jesus will face his third and final temptation.

And I've titled this point True Faithfulness and I want to look at Luke 4, 9 through 13. I'm going to start with another question. Do you desire to be seen?

Do you desire to be respected? Do you desire the approval of others? maybe to be proven right? These are common desires again to all of mankind.

We don't all desire them to the same degree at the same time, but in one way or another we desire these things. As we move into Luke 4, 9, we see that the devil takes Jesus from the wilderness and brings him up to the pinnacle of the temple.

We can't go back and see the temple, but we know from history that at this point the pinnacle of the temple, probably the southwest corner, was more than 150 feet tall.

[26 : 52] And so he would be standing on this pinnacle 150 feet above the ground. That's about three times the height of this ceiling to give you some perspective, maybe four times the height of this ceiling. And he would be looking down on the courtyard below where being the center of cultural and religious significance in Israel, there would be many hundreds of people wandering about their daily lives.

They likely wouldn't have seen him way up there, he'd just be an ant from their perspective. But the devil again questions Jesus' identity as the Son of God, and this time being the deceiver that he is, he turns to Scripture to tempt Jesus with the truth.

And so in Luke 4.10, the devil says, 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.

This quote is from Psalm 91, 11 through 12. Now you guys know the devil's ways from Genesis 3.

Do you think that this quote is accurate? He twisted Scripture in the past, would he have done it again? Likely, but his temptation is more subtle this time.

[28 : 20] And so the quote is accurate, but instead it's the application that is false. The point of Psalm 91, of trusting that the Lord will guard him and will not let him strike his foot against a stone, but will send angels, the point is not to test God's promises by putting himself in harm's way.

And so at the root of this temptation I think is the pride of life. First, to test the Lord and see if he will keep his word and preserve him, the son of man, the son of God, from harm, even if that is self-inflicted harm.

And second, to be presumptuous, to abuse his privilege as the son of God while going against the will of God with a grand audience of witnesses to see his great act.

Either way, to fall for this temptation would be to deny God's faithfulness and to disobey his will. A.W.

Tozer said, self-will is a close relative of pride. Going about things his own way by his own will and not the will of the Father would be pride in himself rather than trust in the Father.

[29 : 46] And so Jesus responds in Luke 4.12, it is said, you shall not put the Lord your God to the test. Again, he quotes from Deuteronomy chapter 6, this time verse 16, you shall not put the Lord your God to the test.

For context, this quote from Deuteronomy, Moses is looking back on Exodus 17 and that time when the Israelites tested God in the wilderness when they were without water.

And rather than trusting in God that he would deliver them, as he had already done, they quarreled among themselves, they grumbled against Moses, and they doubted God.

Psalm 78 reflects on this time and makes a clear statement in verse 22. The people did not believe in God, and they did not trust in his saving power.

They put him to the test because they did not believe in him, and they did not trust in his saving power. Jumping from the pinnacle of the temple, it might sound like a leap of faith, jumping into the unknown and trusting God to deliver.

[31 : 08] But Jesus, he knows better. He knows that true trust or faith in God meant trusting in his plan, in his promises, in his past faithfulness, and also his unchanging character.

God promised to guard his children in Psalm 91, and there is no need for God to prove himself. He does not need again to prove himself. Further, Jesus knows that his ministry is not founded on self-will or the approval of others by doing a grand spectacle before them.

The Father has a plan for Jesus' name to go out through all the surrounding country, and he doesn't need the devil's help to prove that he is the Son of God. As we'll see in verse 14 of Luke chapter 4, when Jesus returns in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, a report about him went through all the surrounding country, and he taught in their synagogues being glorified by all.

Even though he was in the wilderness alone, there were no witnesses to his temptation. The moment he returns, a report goes out about him, and people come to listen, and he is glorified without the devil's help, but according to God's will.

And so finally, in Luke 4, 13, the devil gives up on tempting him. The devil gives up and departs until an opportune time, when through Judas Iscariot he might betray Jesus into the hands of those who would kill him.

[32 : 50] But for now, the temptations cease. How might we respond to such temptations towards the pride of life?

I think we also resist the pride of life by trusting in the proven faithfulness of God and in his plan for our salvation. If we're tempted to put God to the test, if we're tempted to make an ultimatum to see if he will deliver, or if we're tempted to seek salvation by some other way so that we might gain the approval of others, we must instead find the proven faithfulness of God, his approval alone, to be more convincing in that moment than any act of self-reliance, or again, we will be overcome.

The people of God were reminded back in Luke 3.8 not to presume that God will grant them special privileges because they are children of Abraham.

And so we, being children of God, must not presume and live as though being his children gives us special privileges to test him, to live by our own will, or to practice sin.

As children of God, we've been raised to newness of life that we may follow Jesus' example, overcome temptation, and flee from sin. That is his way.

[34 : 24] In closing, I want to clarify the implication of Jesus' testing in the wilderness. to draw out the theological reality of this testing.

We saw in Luke 4 that the devil set out to discredit Jesus' identity, but in spite of the devil's best efforts, the temptation only served to prove that Jesus was in fact the Son of God.

Notice also that Jesus faced similar temptations in the wilderness to those of Adam and Eve in the garden. If you go back and look at Genesis 3.6, we see that the fruit was good for food, a delight to the eyes, and to be desired to make one wise.

This fruit, the tree of life, it promised to satisfy the desires of the flesh, to satisfy the desires of the eyes, and to satisfy the pride of life by making one wise through self-will rather than reliance on God.

God. As a son of Adam, Jesus was tempted in the same way, but as a son of God, he triumphed over every temptation where all others have failed.

[35 : 42] The theological implication of this reality is central to the gospel message. Jesus lived an entirely sinless life and died on the cross as a propitiation for our sins.

As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5.16, and I think Brent quoted it last week, for our sake, God made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Literally, our sin at the cross was imputed or accounted to Jesus. such that he became sin for our sake.

But in that same moment, his sinlessness was imputed to all who became and become the righteousness of God.

Apart from his sinlessness, there is no righteousness. As in Hebrews 4.15, Jesus is able to sympathize with our weakness and has been tempted in every respect as we have, yet without sin.

[37 : 01] Luke 4.1-13, it's not a prescription for us to become sinless. It's a record of how Jesus remained sinless where we never could.

His death and resurrection broke once for all the power of sin and death. sinless and sin. We continue to face sin every day, but it no longer has dominion over us.

Instead, we put sin to death, the deeds of the body to death, and we live by the Spirit of God. God. By faith in God's plan of salvation, by rejecting our self-will and accepting His grace, we become righteous through His sinlessness.

Therefore, we live each day by faith, resisting the desires of the flesh, by finding satisfaction in the Word of God, by resisting the desires of the eyes, by seeing God as the only one worthy of our worship.

By resisting the pride of life and idolatry, by trusting in the proven faithfulness of God and His plan for our salvation.

[38 : 19] Let's pray.