

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert,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 does 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, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.⁷ So 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 says: ‘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. (Luke 4:1-13)*

Jesus Conquered Temptation for Us!

“I just couldn’t resist the temptation.” Have you ever said that? I have. Now, when I’ve said it, it usually was a joke. Maybe I just let loose a zinger at a kid in confirmation class and so I said, “I just couldn’t resist the temptation.” Doesn’t that sum up the way we look at temptation today? Quite often, it’s a joke rather than something serious. Chocolate cake is a temptation. Evening soap operas become “guilty pleasures” – they’re temptations that are just too good to resist. In our society, temptation just isn’t a big deal anymore. The Bible never treats temptation like that. In the word of God before us this morning, we see the devil as the agent of temptations that Jesus faced and you can be sure that if Satan spent this much time and effort trying to get Jesus to sin, he didn’t have anything good for us in mind. Temptation can be the grease that speeds us down the tracks to death and hell. Every single one of us faces it. And all of us lose the battle sometimes. No matter how hard we try to laugh it off, those defeats endanger our very souls.

I.

But **Jesus conquered temptation for us. He faced what we face.** We see that this morning in this famous confrontation Jesus had with the devil. Now, before Jesus faced any of the three temptations that are spelled out here, Luke tells us that devil tempted him for forty days in the wilderness. And at the end of the confrontation, Luke says that the devil left Jesus **“until an opportune time.”** These weren’t the only temptations Jesus faced. Like us, he faced temptation every day of his life. But these were the most famous temptations our Lord endured.

Every temptation tries to make us sin. The first temptation that God shares with us in this chapter came at the end of those forty days. During that whole time, Jesus did not eat. If you didn’t eat for forty days, how would you feel? Hungry, right? So the devil said, **“If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”** Did you catch the taunt there? “Prove that you’re the Son of God.” Jesus would’ve been ravenous. And he was the Son of God, so why would it have been wrong for him to prove it by making stones into bread? The devil didn’t tell him to gorge himself on fancy French cooking. He didn’t tell him to eat until he threw up. He told him to make bread. What was the problem?

Selfishness. Jesus did not come here to serve himself. He came here to serve us. Not once in the gospels do you ever see Jesus do a miracle to make his life easier. He had to live the life we live. And when we’re hungry, we can’t change stones into bread. So even though it would’ve easy for him to do, Jesus had to resist the temptation. So he said, **“It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone.’”** God originally said

that to Moses. His point was that God made Israel face hunger in the wilderness to teach them to value his word and his promises above their physical needs. Jesus heard God's call and he obeyed it.

The next temptation that Luke tells us about was a little different. The devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the earth in an instant. Then he offered to give them to Jesus if only Jesus would bow down and worship the devil. Worshipping the devil is obviously a sin. Why would anyone do it? The temptation was in the power and glory of ruling the world. The devil was trying to get Jesus to lust after power. Remember, Jesus lived a very humble existence in this world. He owned no property. He had to depend on donations from other people to feed himself and his disciples. Almost everyone who mattered in Israel rejected and opposed him. The devil offered to change all that. Again, he failed. Jesus knew that he had greater power and glory waiting for him in heaven. So he said, "**It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'**"

The last temptation that Luke recorded takes a different tack. This time, the devil quoted one of the Bible's promises: that God would send his angels to protect Jesus. But he quoted it from the top of the highest part of the temple and he told Jesus to prove that he trusted in God by throwing himself down. Didn't God promise to protect him? At first, this might seem like the most ridiculous attack the devil launched. Who would do that? But at its heart was a very human way of thinking: God promises to take care of us, so we should never suffer anything at all. God promises to take care of us, so we can take any risk, go to any place and do anything, and expect that God to make it work out for us. And if he doesn't, well, then we can demand to know why not. Do you see the error in that temptation? Jesus, of course, did. He said, "**It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'**" We don't have the right to place ourselves in a ridiculous situation and then whine when God lets us suffer the consequences.

Now what do all three of these famous temptations have in common? You could probably come up with more than one thing. But consider this: they all attacked Jesus' human nature. The devil did not dare to attack him as the Son of God. Instead, his attack was based totally on that fact that Jesus is a real human being. Even the temptation to do a miracle and make bread out of stones was based on the physical hunger of a body that hadn't eaten in more than a month. The devil attacked Jesus as one of us. Why did he do that? Because Jesus was one of us. He had to be perfect as a human being to save us human beings. If the devil could get Jesus to sin, then his mission would be over and we would all belong to the devil forever. Because his mission was to save us human beings, Jesus faced the devil as one of us. He faced him and he won.

II.

Jesus won. He stood where you and I stand day after day and he didn't make jokes to excuse his failures. He didn't make excuses for being weak. He didn't treat temptation like it was no big deal. Instead **Jesus conquered temptation for us. He stood on God's Word for us.** Every time the devil tried to trick Jesus into disobeying God, Jesus simply stood on what God said.

Now, let's be a little careful here. God's Word is divided into two great doctrines: the law and the gospel. We need them both. But which one gives us the ability to obey God, the law or the gospel? You might think it's the law. That's often how we deal with our children, isn't it? When they're being disobedient, we repeat what we've told them. We add threats. We may even make them repeat back to us what they're supposed to do. But you know what? The law does not give anyone the ability to obey, not even our children. There is a role for repeating those commands to make sure they know what's right and what's wrong. But standing over them with a threat will only keep them from disobeying while you're standing there. It won't make them want to obey you. It won't keep them from disobeying if they think they can get away with it.

What gives us the power to obey God is the gospel. The message that God knows what we deserve for our sins but he sent his Son to pay that price changes who we are. It makes us want to serve God – and not because we feel guilty that Jesus had to suffer all that. But rather because we appreciate the gift God gave us and we want to give a gift that shows our gratitude. We want to obey because we're new people and we want to live as God's children.

But Jesus did not appeal to the gospel when the devil tempted him. He just quoted the commands that God gave – the law – and then he obeyed. Why? Because Jesus did not have a sinful heart. He was perfect. And he obeyed in our place. Jesus had to be what you and I are not: he had to be the perfect human being that God's law commands us to be. So when he stood before the devil, he wasn't quoting the commands – the law – for strength, but rather for guidance. "This is what God wants from me. Because my heart is perfect, this is what I am going to give God."

Jesus fulfilled God's law for us – and not just on this one occasion. All through those forty days when he was in the desert and the devil kept attacking him. All through the three years of his ministry when the devil and his enemies and even his friends constantly tried to get him to do something different from what God had sent him to do. All through his life on this earth, from the time he was conceived in his mother's womb to the moment he gave up his spirit on the cross and died, Jesus was perfect in obedience in our place. Today, God counts that obedience as ours.

And God counts all that obeying him cost Jesus as ours, too. It cost him in the desert, but nowhere did it cost him more than on the cross. There, Jesus suffered hell itself for all that we've done. He died there, all to pay for every time we failed to resist the devil's temptations. Then he rose and declared that every one of our sins – every sin of every sinner – is gone forever.

That is the point! The devil tried to get Jesus to use his power to serve himself because that works on us. If we could turn stones into bread, we would. And we'd never work again! How many times don't we use the gifts God has given us for our own selfish purposes? How many times don't you have to justify buying that electronic toy or that expensive article of clothing to your spouse? How often didn't you buy it just because you wanted it? Just to be selfish? How often don't kids take what isn't theirs just because they can? Serving ourselves is the heart of our sin. Jesus never served himself. Jesus died for our selfishness. Jesus rose and the self-serving pride in our hearts is paid for. The time you gave into it yesterday is paid for. And the time before that and that time before that and the time before that.

The devil tried to get Jesus to bow down before him to get a reward. That's what we do every time we sin. Every time we ignore God's command to speak the truth in love and tell a lie because it's easier, we're bowing down to the devil hoping he will preserve our personal comfort. Every time we ignore God's command to be faithful workers and we take it easy at work, we're stealing from our employer and we're bowing down to the devil hoping that he will satisfy that craving. Jesus never did that. Jesus died for all the ways we worship the devil and hope he rewards us. He rose and each of those sins is paid for. The heart that wants to sin like that is paid for.

The devil tried to get Jesus to misuse God's Word to justify sinful notions of what God should have said. He tried to get Jesus to make God say that nothing bad would ever happen to us here. Every time we rage at God for being unfair when he sends hardship or difficulty, we're turning God's Word upside down. But Jesus didn't. He died because we do. He rose. And that sin is forgiven.

All our sin is forgiven, once and for all. Now God calls us to change our lives. Now God calls us to model our lives on the perfect life of Christ. We can only do that because Jesus did all this in our place. But God does call us to do it. God does call us to change. To stop putting ourselves first in all that we do. To stop worshipping sin and the devil by giving in to temptation. To stop twisting God's Word to justify our sins. God calls to live a new and holy life because he has come to us with the gospel and forgiven us.

And by his power, we can. We do need the law to teach us what God wants from us. But the power to live like that comes from the gospel. God comes to us each time he tells us that Jesus has taken our sin away. He gives us the power to live for him. We won't be perfect in this life. But we will fight the good fight of faith. That matters, because temptation is not a joke. Temptation threatens to destroy our faith and send us to hell. But Jesus came and defeated temptation for us with his perfect life. And he freed us from its power with his death and his resurrection. My friends, as children of God, beloved, bought and paid for, fight against temptation. Amen.