

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 Defeated Temptation

“I am sorely tempted to ...” whatever. Have you ever said something like that? “I’m tempted to just take away the car.” “I’m tempted to tell that guy what I really think.” “I’m tempted to just quit this job and find something else.” What do we mean by *tempted* in that kind of situation? Usually, don’t we mean that there’s something we’d like to do, but we know it’s not be the best idea? In the long term, we’d probably regret doing it. But right now, we really want to. Is that what temptation means? Not really – unless the thing we’re thinking of doing is sinful. Sin is the key to God’s concept of temptation. Adam and Eve were tempted in the Garden of Eden when the devil tried to get them to disobey the one commandment God had given them. Of course, he was successful. All of our scripture lessons for today deal with temptation – with situations in which someone is being lured to sin. In our gospel lesson, the person is Jesus. The devil worked overtime to try and get Jesus to disobey what God had commanded. You all know how that ended. But the ending still matters, both for our lives here and for our lives to come. **Jesus defeated temptation.**

I.

That was the whole reason Jesus went out into the desert. Luke tells us, “**Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.**” This was right after his baptism. The Holy Spirit sent Jesus out into the desert to face the devil and be tempted for forty days. Now, the three temptations that are shown to us don’t come until the end of those forty days. God doesn’t tell us what else the devil did or said to Jesus. The temptations that God shows us are all situations that we can understand. God doesn’t show us some supernatural battle that took place on another plane of existence. God shows us Jesus, true man, facing the devil in the world that you and I know.

Of the three temptations that the devil brought, for me at least, the first one is the hardest one to understand. Luke tells us that Jesus fasted for those forty days. He didn’t eat anything. Then the devil came to Jesus and said, “**If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.**” Why would it have been so wrong for Jesus to turn a stone into bread? He certainly could’ve done that. And there is no commandment that we have to fast when we’re being tempted. So why would this be sin? Because it would have been selfish. Jesus humbled himself when he came into this world. He set aside the full and constant use of his power and glory as God. That was part of the plan. Certainly, every time Jesus did a miracle, he showed he still had that power and glory. But search through gospels. Examine every miracle that Jesus did. You know what you’ll find? Every single one of them was for someone else’s benefit. Jesus never did a miracle to satisfy his own

physical needs. He never did a miracle because he was lonely or tired or sad. His love was totally focused on the needs of the people around him and the devil tempted him to turn that focus back on himself.

My friends, isn't that the most common temptation that you and I face? How many arguments with your spouse have been about what you want versus what he or she wants? How many times have we parents lost our temper and made discipline about how angry we are because those children dared to disobey us, instead of making it about teaching them the right way to live? God is love. True love always seeks the good of the people who are loved. But our sinful hearts constantly make love first of all about me and what I want and what I need and what I am owed. That is sin – sin Jesus did not fall into.

The second temptation that Luke records has inspired endless imitations in movies and fiction. The devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in an instant and said, **“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. So if you worship me, it will all be yours.”** Now, I don't know how often it really happens that the devil offers to give us whatever we want if we sell him our soul – that's the way this is usually picked in movies and literature. But he does tempt us with success here. He does tempt us with wealth and power and popularity here. If we just play along with the unbelieving world, we'll get ahead. If we just make a little compromise of our values – tell a little white lie, skip a few Sunday morning church services so we can work, be one of the guys and drink and swear and tell dirty jokes – we can have the reward. And we tell ourselves that we'll be sorry afterwards. We won't let it go so far that we'll lose our faith. No one will get hurt and we'll get ahead, so after we repent we can have our cake and eat it, too. But the devil himself makes it clear that all that is idolatry. It's worshipping him so we can have the benefits of this life. Jesus knew that. He reminded us that we are to worship the Lord and serve him only. He defeated a real temptation that we face and quite frankly fail against on an almost daily basis.

So Luke moved on to the last temptation. The devil put Jesus on the highest point of the temple and told him to throw himself down because God promises to take care of us. He even quoted a Bible passage that promises that! Now how is this a temptation we face? Sometimes, young Christians or new Christians might wonder if they could do exactly what the devil suggests. But I think more often, it's when we take foolish risks in life and we expect God to bail us out. We drink just a little too much when we go out to dinner and then we drive our family home and expect God to keep us from having an accident. We spend and spend because we want all the good things of this life that everybody else has. We spend so much that we have very little left for church. And we expect God to provide for us and enable us to keep up with the Joneses. We engage in dangerous and sinful behavior that could ruin our marriage or destroy our career, and we expect God to keep the consequences away. Jesus knew better. He told the devil, **“Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”** God does promise to protect us and take care of us, and if living for him means putting ourselves in danger of this world's wrath, God is there. But sinning and expecting God to bail us out and keep away the natural consequences is like daring God to keep his promises. That, too, is a sin that's easy for us to fall into. Jesus didn't.

That makes him the Savior we need. I don't know what other temptations the devil threw at Jesus during the forty days that went before this and Luke tells more came later – he says, **“When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.”** But what I do know is that the devil attacked Jesus as a man, as a human being. He would never have spoken this way to Jesus in his glory as the Son of God. Look how he deals with him – “if you are the Son of God,” placing him on the pinnacle of the temple, showing him the kingdoms of this world. He tried to dazzle Jesus and impress him and get him to doubt himself while looking up to the devil's power and wisdom. That's how Satan tempts us. Jesus was standing in our place when he did all these things. **Jesus defeated temptation. He faced what we face.**

II.

That really is the point of this whole account. Jesus did all this to rescue us sinners and also to help us in our lives down here. Our epistle lesson says, **“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.”** During Lent we focus on our sin to remind ourselves that we need to repent. But all the focus on our sin means nothing if we lose sight of how God solved that problem: he sent Jesus to take our sin away.

Sometimes, when I make a big deal of that in a sermon, I worry that you're thinking, “Yeah, we've heard all this before.” You certainly have. But the reality that I continually encounter both as a pastor and as Christian who is trying to make his way through this life, is that sin beats us. And then we beat ourselves up.

Guilt tortures us and if we don't find a way to heal it, the consequences can be tragic. How do we heal it? That's a really good question, right? The whole therapy industry is built around trying to find ways to resolve guilt. But finally, there is one and only one real and perfect solution: Jesus. He stood in our place. That means that he faced our temptations and he was perfect for us. God commanded that we humans be perfect. Temptation has been beating us ever since the Garden of Eden. So God became man – the one perfect man whose life and heart count for all of us. That's what we see in this account. Jesus facing the temptations we face and defeating them.

Sometimes, you hear pastors using this account as an example of what to do when you're tempted. "Do what Jesus did. Answer the devil with scripture!" I can understand that. We're all looking for a "how to" guide to beating the devil, so we turn to Jesus as an example. But that's not really the point of this lesson. Jesus is more than an example. He is our replacement. God has this record of our lives, including our thoughts and desires, and it documents every time we faced temptation and sinned. So Jesus faced the temptations we face. Three years after this incident, Jesus went to the cross and shed his blood and suffered the payment for all our sins. He died and then he rose. Because he rose, God has written a new verdict in the record of our lives: innocent, even righteous. So now, I can forgive you for all your sins. I forgive you for all the times you loved yourself first of all, and for all the times you worshipped the benefits of this life, and for all the times you tested God. I forgive you in Jesus' name.

So is there nothing here to help us when we face temptation? Yes, there is. When the devil wants us to lose our temper or be unfaithful to our spouse or tell a lie, remembering that God says those things are sins is important. It at least puts a brake on our rush to sin. But the problem is that the law doesn't give us sinners any power to resist. It merely tells us what God says and condemns us. So Jesus' example only helps us so far. So what good is this lesson then? The epistle lesson helps us to see. After saying that Jesus faced everything we face and still didn't sin, it says, **"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."**

In our time of need, Jesus helps us. Wrestling with temptation is absolutely a time of need. So go to the throne of grace for help – Jesus wants to give it. He wants to give us mercy. He knows how hard it is to face temptation. He understands how much it hurts when we fail. Because he loves us, he helps us. How? First by giving us strength. Every time he tells us that he loves and that he has forgiven us, he is pumping strength into our hearts to fight temptation. But Jesus knows that on this side of heaven, we are never going to completely defeat sin and temptation. So every time we fail, he picks us up again. He forgives us. And he gives us peace so we don't have to keep beating ourselves up. And he gives us the desire to try again. Every day, we get to start over with Jesus. Yesterday's failures are erased. We have a clean slate. And we have all the power of the risen Christ on our side. Day by day, as we strive to live for Jesus, as we apply his forgiveness to our failures, as we rejoice in the peace that only he can give and then in the victories he gives us, we grow. We get stronger. It's not a straight line. We zig zag back and forth between success and failure. But he keeps building us up until we get home where we will never be tempted again. Until that day comes, he is there, on the throne of grace, answering our prayers for help. My friends, **Jesus defeated sin. He won so we can win.** Amen.