**Temptation**

Luke 4

Wasn’t it great to have ***Pastor Mike Gibbons*** with us last week? Thanks for welcoming him and hosting him so graciously. We are very blessed to have a good relationship with our daughter church, Candlewood, and that they were willing to share their pastor with us for a Sunday! He is like a commercial for Red Bull, isn’t he? Mike has been a wonderful encourager for me as I’ve gotten to know him. His passion for Jesus is contagious!

Thanks for praying for us on our trip - it was great to get away for a little while and to catch up with family up north as well as some dear friends. It was even better to come home to palm trees and sunshine! Good to be back here with our Oakwood family as we open the Bible together.

So we have turned the page ***from the Old Testament to the New!*** From now through the end of the year we will complete our journey through the whole Bible with some of the most important passages and themes of the New Testament. Here is a quick preview of what is coming:

**Open the Bible in the NT:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Born  Tempted  Transfigured | Crucified  Risen  Ascended | Father  Son  Spirit |

For August and September we will be in Luke and John, then we will finish the year in the letters of Paul, Peter and John that make up the rest of the New Testament.

Last week we saw **proof for the identity of Jesus** from his birth account. This was our theme verse for July - *“The word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we have seen His glory, glory as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14). The great mystery of the gospel is that the eternal Son of God through whom all things were made became fully human. God the Father, through the Holy Spirit, knit the divine DNA of God the Son into a baby in Mary’s womb - and so Jesus was conceived and born of a virgin - ***“God with us.”*** He came to dwell among us so that we could see His glory and so that He could become the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

It was not enough for Jesus to come. It was not even enough for Jesus to die. ***First He had to satisfy the righteous requirements of God’s Law***. **He had to succeed** at every point that Israel had failed. As the God-Man Jesus had the POTENTIAL to become a worthy sacrifice for sinners. But if he ever once sinned he would be disqualified and become unworthy. The devil knew this and therefore worked hard to derail Jesus.

And so we come to the temptation account.

“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.” Luke 4:1-2

***Why the wilderness?*** Why forty days? Details in the Bible are never random - they are all there for a reason. Israel spent forty years in the wilderness as a punishment for their lack of faith and obedience. So Jesus went straight to the place that represented Israel’s sin to demonstrate **His righteousness**.

So that’s what we’ll do today: we will look at how Jesus succeeded where Israel (and all of us) have failed. We’ll see the three temptations from the devil’s playbook and how Jesus responded to each one.

First, the devil tempted Jesus to complain but Jesus was ***CONTENT with the Father’s provision***.

1. **Be Content with the Father’s Provision**

* Don’t Complain

Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’” Luke 4:3-4

For forty days Jesus had eaten nothing. Verse two includes the very understated observation that “he was hungry.” We know Jesus was the Son of God - fully divine and therefore almighty in His own power. But this shows us that ***he was also fully human***. This was not a fake hunger - this was real, physical hunger - just as his suffering was real, his death was a real, physical death and his return will be a real, physical return in his still human but now glorified body.

***Israel was God’s son*** in the sense of being chosen and blessed and invested in by God the Father throughout the Old Testament. But Israel was a rebellious and disrespectful son. Here we see Jesus, descended from Abraham in a clear line of succession through both his mother and his father. **He was a TRUE ISRAELITE**. But this Son of Abraham and son of God did not rebel against His Father in heaven.

Israel didn’t make it three days into the wilderness before they started to complain about a lack of food and water. Every time they needed something God provided it for them but they refused to trust in His provision and consistently complained about His lack of provision - or His failure to provide the necessities in a timely manner.

***Can we all relate to this?*** Is it easy for you to be content in any and every situation - whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want? Do you relate more to that statement from the apostle Paul or more to the Israelites who started complaining after the first or second hunger pang…? Personally ***I have a very low tolerance for pain or discomfort*** of any kind. Some of you - even some in my own family - have a tremendously high tolerance for pain. Not me. I have been congested now for a few weeks and it turned into an **ear infection** while we were away and I’ve been a total baby about it.

It is easy and natural to complain. This is the default setting of the human condition and is the ***natural tendency of CHILDREN.*** Kids complain when they don’t get what they want right when they want it. We established a policy when our boys were small that **“FUSSERS GET NOTHING.”** In my two years of preaching now that might be my most helpful quote. “Fussers get nothing.” The correlary to that line is “We don’t negotiate with terrorists.”

***Kids complain.*** They fuss. You have to train that behavior out of them. You have to teach them to trust you that you have a plan and they’ll get what they need - but that they are not in charge of what they get and when they get it. “You get what you get and you don’t pitch a fit.”

***Are we like children who constantly complain to our Father in heaven?*** Or have we learned, like Jesus, to be CONTENT with the Father’s provision…? Think about the verse Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 8: *“Man does not live by bread alone.”* The rest of that line in Deuteronomy is “Man does not live by bread alone but ***by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord***.” We literally **LIVE ON the Word of God**. It is our food.

Jesus taught his disciples this later in his ministry - “I have food that you know nothing about.” They thought someone had brought him bread. But he said, ***“My food is to do the will of the Father.”*** So that completes the principle: all we really need in this life is to know and do the will of God. Just having this book we should be the most satisfied and joyful people on the planet. We KNOW the will of God and we HAVE the power to obey it. **This is our food.** This is our strength. This is God’s BEST provision for us.

Oh, ***how our eyes wander to all the other kinds of food***, all the other offers of satisfaction and happiness. But there is only **ONE THING we need** and we can be content. The Word of God. To hear the voice of God is to know God, to be near Him.

Think of what ***the voice of a loved one*** means to you. When you are separated from your husband or wife or your son or daughter have moved away… To see their name come up on your phone, to hear their voice on the line. **It means RELATIONSHIP**. It means LOVE. It means connection. This is why our trip was so special - being able to sit down with Kristin’s sister and her family, Kristin’s brother and his family, my parents, my sister and her boys - to see the face of a loved one, to hear their voice, to BE WITH THEM is the food of life.

For Jesus, ***that connection with the Father was his bread.*** It was his life. It was everything. Forty days without bread - his body was utterly exhausted, totally depleted. But still he would not abuse his power, he would not force his will. He would not complain. He did not waver through unbelief. He trusted the Father completely and was fully committed to the Father’s timing and plan.

He was perfectly ***content with what the Father had given him RIGHT THEN***. And right then what He had was an empty belly but a full heart. He had experienced deep, personal communion with the Father in that **40 day retreat.** We often focus on the temptation that followed his retreat but this was ***a fueling station for Jesus***. He had spent 30 years waiting for the “go” from the Father. He got that at his baptism in the Jordan River and was excited to begin. But hist first stop was not Jerusalem, it was the wilderness; not fame and great crowds but total isolation; not a feast of meat and potatoes but a fast in the desert.

***Are you content with a season of isolation?*** Are you content with a season of quietness and rest? Are you content with a time of unemployment or under-employment? Are you content with a season of singleness? Are you using your extra time to connect with the Lord? Or are you chasing other forms of bread…

It’s so ***easy for us to complain***. And complaining about God’s provision leads us to compromise our priorities. This was the second temptation, the devil took Jesus to a high place where he could see the kingdoms of the world, saying:

**2. Be Committed to the Father’s Praise**

* Don’t Compromise your devotion

“To you I will give all this authority and their glory… if you, then, will worship me… Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.” Luke 4:6-7

The temptations all represent **shortcuts**. There was nothing wrong with eating bread - the problem was the way Jesus got the bread and when. It’s the same with this second one - ***the authority and glory of the nations is precisely Jesus’ inheritance.*** Of course He is the One who created the world and is the sovereign ruler over all the kingdoms of men. But his public ministry had not yet begun and the acknowledgement of His identity as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords would begin after his resurrection and would take 300 and more years to gain real prominence in the Roman Empire.

***So this is a TIMING issue.*** The devil was tempting Jesus with **a shorter and easier path** to reach the kingdoms of men. He was offering a quick an easy way - no need for suffering, service or sacrifice. Just bow. Just make a little compromise.

Of course, worshiping the devil is ***no little compromise***. For Jesus to bow to the devil would have been a universe shaking cataclysm - it would have literally turned the cosmos upside down.

**Do you remember the story of satan?** He was Lucifer, the chief angel in heaven - the most glorious of God’s celestial servants. But he wasn’t content as merely a servant. He coveted power and glory and being subservient to God became unacceptable to him - so he attempted a coup and, of course, was cast down, taking his army of fallen angels with him.

***The devil rejected the path of service in submission*** to the Lord and took matters into his own hands. There in the wilderness he tempted Jesus to do the same thing: turn away from the path of service and submission to the Father and set out on the path of self-exaltation.

***How are you tempted to compromise*** the pure worship of the Lord? Where does the devil come after you? What are your shortcuts? Remember, God has promised all believers in Jesus eternal **GLORY, HONOR and PEACE**. But it’s a glory and recognition from HIM **after we die** or Jesus comes back. It’s ***treasure in HEAVEN*** not here on earth. The devil tempts us to seek glory NOW, honor HERE and peace on our own terms.

* It’s easy to make little compromises with **money** - finding a good bit of our security and happiness in a bank account and the many things money can buy.
* It’s easy to compromise our **time** - neglecting God just a little today, always saying we’ll make up for it later.
* It’s easy to compromise with our **relationships** - taking more from our loved ones than we give, investing too much of our happiness in family, children.
* Conversely we can compromise with **work** - sacrificing family and church and God and everything else on the altar of achievement, promotion, recognition or, again, just money.

Again Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy - this time chapter 6 instead of 8. But listen to the context of the verse Jesus quoted:

“When the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers… with great, good cities that you did not build and houses full of all good things that you did not fill… then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” Deuteronomy 6:10-12

**2. Be Committed to the Father’s Praise**

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“It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve… You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you.” Deuteronomy 6:13

The danger for the Israelites, which did cause them to fail, was **COMFORT.** Once they had houses and land and possessions and safety, they forgot about the Lord who had given them all of that. They abandoned their first love. ***They compromised their worship.*** Instead of remaining committed to the God who had given them EVERYTHING, they set Him aside, moved Him to the back burner.

***Comfort and success are grave dangers***. You’ve probably heard about Joshua Harris’s announcement last week. The famous pastor and speaker who wrote *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* 20 years ago announced recently that he and his wife were getting divorced and that he was no longer a Christian. By every standard Josh Harris was successful - leading a prominent church, having published books, being often invited to speak at conferences and events… But his success and comfort left him open to temptation - and he fell to this temptation to compromise his devotion. Instead of remaining steadfast with God and the Word, Joshua Harris turned away. The reasons are not yet clear but he serves as one more warning sign among many of the dangers of comfort and success - taking a shortcut to popularity and fame...

***The devil tempted Jesus with instant success***; instant fame and glory. But Jesus knew that His glory and success would come in a totally different way. It could not be quick and easy and painless. Jesus would not gain glory by becoming rich, comfortable and successful. He would win by losing. He would succeed by dying. He would take the other path to victory through sacrifice.

**Jesus’ way did lead to His glory in the end**. But it was first downward. This is the upside down nature of the kingdom of God. If you want to be exalted, you must first humble yourself. If you want to go up to heaven you must first get down on your knees. If you want to be great you must become a servant to all. That is the way of Jesus.

The devil took the opposite path - exalting himself. And look where it got him.

And the devil tempts all of us to take the short and easy way - avoiding sacrifice and suffering - because he knows it will land us right there with him in eternal misery and regret.

***But Jesus shows us the better way.*** He shows us the only way: the small door, the narrow path that leads to LIFE. This is the path of true worship - of total devotion to the glory of God alone, the glory of God above all things.

To glorify God in all things we must consistently ***reject the paths that would lead to our own glory***. We must choose to become less so that Jesus can become greater. The devil will keep pointing out side trails, making all kinds of false promises. But we must resist these temptations to compromise our priorities and stand firm in our commitment to praise God alone. “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.” Just a few verses before this one in Deuteronomy 6 is the greatest commandment: to Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

That is what committed, sincere worship looks like: **total devotion; 100%**, undiluted, untarnished love. Have you noticed that ***wives don’t like to share their husbands with other women*** - even just digital women? Have you noticed that men don’t like to share their wives with other men - even on the pages of a romance novel? **Jealousy** is built into our hearts because it is built into God’s heart. God wants our exclusive devotion just like we want in our marriages. Any other love is intolerable. Any competing allegiance is heartbreaking.

May we refuse to compromise our wholehearted love for the Lord! May we stand firm not only in our commitment to love God but in our DELIGHT to love God and be with Him. Your wife doesn’t want your soulless commitment, she wants your ENJOYMENT. Your husband doesn’t want your lifeless presence, he wants you to THRILL to be with him, to be excited again just to hold his hand. This is how God feels. ***He doesn’t want our empty words - He wants our full hearts.*** He doesn’t want us going through the motions of coming to church and giving a few dollars - He wants us to love Him with all we are, allowing no competitors of any kind.

One more temptation and response.

**3. Be Confident in the Father’s Plan**

* Don’t Question His Love

“***If you are*** the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written…” And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.” Luke 4:9-12

It is no accident that the devil starts temptation 1 and 3 with the taunt “IF YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD.” Central to his strategy was to get Jesus to **question His own identity**. Think of what happens if the devil can get you to question YOUR IDENTITY.

The Bible consistently calls us ***children of God*** as believers in Jesus. This is our identity - chosen, adopted sons and daughters of the king with direct access through Jesus to our Father in heaven. This is who we ARE in Christ.

But what if the devil could get you to **believe instead**:

* You are **worthless**, useless.
* You are no child of God, you are a wretched **slave** to sin.
* God has no interest in you. He doesn’t care about you. You are **alone**, forgotten, abandoned by God.
* You have no purpose in life, **no value**, nothing to contribute...

Do you see how essential it is that we clearly ***understand who we are in Christ?*** This is where our confidence comes from, this is the essence of our joy - to know that we are blood bought children of the King!

* You are not worthless, you are **precious!**
* You are not forgotten, God had specific plans just for you before He even created the world. You are **chosen!**
* You are not abandoned. God sent Jesus to seek and save you when you were lost! You are **sought after**!
* You are not alone - Jesus sent His Spirit to be with you every moment of every day! You are **loved**!
* You are not aimless - Jesus gave you important spiritual gifts and a world-changing mission! You are **sent**!

All of these truths comes from knowing your IDENTITY.

* You are not a worthless blob of chemicals, you are a **unique creation of God!**
* You are not a slave to sin, you are a **servant of Jesus**!
* You are not alone, wandering aimlessly in this broken world, you are a **beloved child of the King!**

“If you are the Son of God.” Imagine. The devil was trying to confuse Jesus about His identity. And in His humanity He must have felt a degree of doubt, a degree of struggle. These temptations were not insignificant for Jesus - they were difficult challenges that tested him to the enth degree.

C.S. Lewis points out in Mere Christianity that ***none of us know the full strength of any temptation*** because we always give in at some point. As soon as you give in you don’t know how much stronger it could have gotten. The only way to know the full strength of a temptation you have to resist it all the way, every time. Only someone who does THAT has experienced the full force of the devil’s attacks. So only JESUS knows what ultimate temptation feels like because only Jesus endured every temptation we face without giving in once, without slipping a single inch.

***How did Jesus stand firm through all of these temptations?*** He was supremely confident in the Father’s plan and the Father’s goodness and love. Jesus was perfectly secure in His own identity as the Beloved Son of the Father.

Right before the temptation account was **Jesus’ baptism**. Again, details matter. The order of things matters. Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, just as Israel crossed the Jordan to conquer the Promised Land. When Jesus came up from the water the Holy Spirit came upon Him in the form of a dove and a voice from heaven said,

**3. Be Confident in the Father’s Plan**

* Don’t Question His Love

“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” Luke 3:22

Brother, sister, ***hear these words from the Lord.*** “YOU are my beloved son. YOU are my beloved daughter. With YOU I am well pleased.” If you belong to Jesus by faith then just as God the Father said these words to Jesus, so He says these words to you, right now.

Some of you are questioning in your hearts, thinking these were just words to Jesus and they don’t apply to you. Hold on. LISTEN to the Word of the Lord:

“To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” John 1:12

“You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received the spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” Rom. 8:15

“Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons…” Eph. 1:4-5

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of Go; and so we are.” 1 John 3:1

I could go on and on. Jesus was CONFIDENT in His relationship with the Father. This was the basis of His strength, His purpose and the source of His power. Jesus was secure in His identity, established in and centered on His relationship with the Father. Are we? Are you? Is this the essence of your identity?

Because only when you are secure in your relationship with God as your Father will you become confident in His good plans for you. Do you really trust God as a good and loving Father? Do you believe that He sees every detail of your life - that He knows every single thing going on in your life, in your heart and in your mind? He knows. He cares. He is right there with you. And He DOES have a PLAN.

“All things work together for good, for those who love God and are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). Everything in your life is happening for a reason, even if you can’t see it or understand it now. The temptation is to QUESTION the plan, which is really questioning the Father.

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“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written…” And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.” Luke 4:9-12

And Jesus responds - again from Deut. 6 - you shall not put the Lord your God to the test. Do you know ***what it means to TEST GOD?*** It is to give Him **an ultimatum** - to issue a demand and say, If you don’t do this for me then I won’t serve you.

***Do you like ultimatums?*** Especially from your kids? Do you like to be tested by your grandkids? Do you like demands? Neither does God.

The story of Israel is there to instruct us and remind us NOT TO TEST GOD but instead to TRUST GOD. God promised a good land, flowing with milk and honey. The whole reason Israel had to wander for 40 years in the wilderness was because they REFUSED TO TRUST and obey God. They rejected His plan and decided to turn back to Egypt instead of following Joshua and Caleb into the promised land.

***What is the Lord leading you into right now?*** What is your test of faith? It is totally appropriate for God to test us - just as teachers test their students but not the other way around. God knows what we need. He knows precisely how much we can handle. He pushes us to help us grow just as parents do with their kids and coaches do with their players. WIthout tests, without challenges, we stagnate and don’t improve.

For Jesus, throwing Himself down from the temple wasn’t about the magic trick of being caught by angels - it was about ***revealing His divine power in the wrong way, at the wrong time***. Like the other temptations, **it was a shortcut**. It was not THE PLAN. Jesus could have done any number of things to prove His divinity and make a spectacle of His power. But over and over Jesus did things quietly, in secret, testing people and pushing them to trust and listen and follow Him.

* Yes, he fed 5,000 but then he sent them away saying, “You have to eat my flesh.”
* Yes, he healed thousands who came to him, but he always taught them about the kingdom and called them to take some kind of step of faith - some did, but most didn’t, so they missed the bigger miracle.
* Yes, he cast out demons, but he silenced them to keep them from revealing his identity too soon.

Have you ever wondered ***why Jesus kept hushing people up?*** It’s called “the Messianic Secret,” because Jesus was committed to the Father’s plan and the Father’s timeline. He said, “Don’t tell anyone about this - just go to the priest.” Of course, nobody listened to this kind of instruction. But it showed Jesus’ faith and perfect obedience. He would not take the shortcuts. He would not deviate from the predetermined plan.

What is your shortcut? What is your temptation to take matters into your own hands instead of trusting the Father’s plan? Brothers and sisters:

* Let’s be content with the Father’s provision. Don’t complain about what God has NOT given you, but rejoice that you have heard the WORD OF GOD and your relationship with Him is the bread your soul most desperately needs.
* Let’s be committed to the Father’s praise, above all. Don’t compromise your priorities and let other things become idols in your heart. Worship the Lord God and serve ONLY HIM.
* And all of this comes from confidence in the Father’s plan. Don’t question His plan or goodness or timing. Trust in your good and loving heavenly Father.

Above all, God’s plan was to send His only Son to live the life we could not live so He could die the death we should have died. It would not have been enough for Jesus just to swoop down from heaven to die on a cross. He first had to live a life of perfect righteousness. He had to succeed at every point that Israel failed. He had to satisfy the righteous requirements of the Law. Only then would He be a worthy sacrifice. Only then could He have a righteousness to give to us so the Father could be “just and the JUSTIFIER of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

But because Jesus was the righteous and obedient Son, He was the perfect, all sufficient sacrifice for our sins. And if you have put your faith in Jesus, then God looks at you and says, “YOU are my beloved son. YOU are my beloved daughter. With you I am well pleased.” Amen. Thank you Jesus!