

## **Luke 4: 1-15 Lent 1 Jesus tempted in the wilderness 9<sup>th</sup> March 2025**

How do you think you would fare after 40 days without food? Do you think you might be ready for something to eat? Would you be in your right mind, feeling strong and able to withstand temptation? I have fasted for a maximum of about 3 days, I can't imagine 40. We might be feeling a bit weak at this stage, but it seems that after 40 days in the wilderness Jesus was steadfast and strong and able to defeat the devil and his wily ways. He did not give in to temptation – even though he could easily have done all the things the devil suggested! How did Jesus do it? I imagine he *dwelt in the shadow of the Most High*, finding refuge under the wings of his Father God in whom he put his trust, as we heard in Psalm 91.

The devil may have been the one asking Jesus the questions out there in the desert, but this testing was all part of God's plan. The beginning of the passage says Jesus was *led by the spirit into the wilderness...* This happened after he had been baptized and was full of the Holy Spirit. And once he emerged victorious from this period of testing, he went on to begin his public ministry. He was then ready to walk the road of obedience to the cross, to follow the will of the Father and not give in to the easy road offered by the devil. His road was the one of the suffering King.

This passage shows us Jesus' humanity – for he did feel hunger, he did feel temptation and yet he did not sin. Remember that passage from Hebrews 4? *He was tempted in every way as we are, yet he did not sin...he is able to sympathize with our weaknesses.* Thanks be to God he did not give in to sin, rather he went to the cross so that we can know his great mercy and grace and our sins may be forgiven.

It's interesting that Luke tells us of the baptism and genealogy of Jesus just prior to his 40 days in the wilderness. At his baptism he reports that a voice came from heaven pronouncing Jesus to be God's son and then the genealogy shows Jesus descended from Adam.

Jesus is fully God and fully human. He comes as the second Adam to put things right. The first Adam gave into the deceptive whispers and lies of the devil in the garden which set the whole of mankind on the wrong track. Now comes Jesus who can face the tempter, he can stare him down and

unwaveringly remain totally obedient and righteous, never losing relationship with his Father God.

As well as the echoes of Genesis in this passage are echoes of the Israelites in the desert where they wandered and were tested for 40 years. Again, where they did not succeed Jesus did. They too were hungry but they grumbled and complained against God. They had to learn that God would provide for all their needs, and indeed he did by sending quail and manna. Jesus could easily have turned many a stone into bread, but he trusted on God to supply his needs. And so, when the devil tempts him to serve himself and fill his empty tummy he responds with scripture from Deuteronomy 8; *man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*

Once Jesus began his public ministry he did in fact use his supernatural powers to feed 5000 people, but he wasn't going to give in the temptation to feed himself. He came to serve.

Secondly the devil tries to tempt him to have authority over the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would bow down and worship him. I often wondered what sort of a temptation this was given that Jesus is in fact the ruler of all. But until he returns Satan continues to be the Prince of the world...in fact that is what Jesus calls him in John's gospel...in John 14 he says this; *I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.*

Jesus could have chosen to be a different kind of Messiah, one that many of the Israelites wanted – someone to take authority over the Romans, to make their lives better now, but that would have only been a temporary fix. God sent Jesus to defeat the greater enemy – the devil and death itself.

Jesus was not going to give in to a temptation of having worldly power, nor was he going to bow down to Satan. Again, he responds with scripture from Deuteronomy for the Israelites were frequently tempted to worship other idols and had to learn God's command; *to worship the Lord your God and serve him only.* Jesus affirms his loyalty to God alone. He was to take the lowly path to the cross not seeking a crown and earthly glory.

Thirdly we read that the devil led him to Jerusalem and tries to goad Jesus into proving that he is the Son of God by throwing himself off the highest point of the temple. The devil even uses scripture himself quoting psalm 91 that God would command his angels to rescue him. This one seems such a pointless temptation...what would it achieve? But the temptation is there nonetheless...prove yourself – *If you are the Son of God*. This temptation will come again and again to Jesus, especially as he later hangs on the cross...

Jesus did not have to prove that he was the Son of God. He had heard his Father's voice at his baptism, he knew who he was. He knew he had divine powers but they were not to be used for pointless spectacular side shows. This temptation could also be an allusion back to the Israelites in the desert when they wanted Moses to strike the rock for water, and he says to them *why do you put the Lord to the test?* They seem to have forgotten that the Lord had shown his great might and power when he parted the red sea and rescued them from the Egyptians...they want more...prove yourself God!

Jesus responds to the devil with scripture from Deuteronomy again...*It is said; 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'*

After this the devil left him until another opportune time.

Jesus had won this round, and he would continue to stand firm as he begins his ministry in the power of the Spirit, God as his strength and refuge.

Notice he did not try and argue with the devil, he just responded with words from scripture.

We don't have a picture of an actual bodily devil here, not like the serpent in the garden of Eden. I imagine they were whispers of temptation in Jesus' mind. That is the way the devil likes to tempt us...just putting little thoughts in our minds. CS Lewis wrote a wonderful book illustrating this in *Screwtape Letters*. The devil is cunning and subtle and will want us to interact...but it is always best not to enter into conversation or argument...just be firm from the beginning and use scripture. The word of God is powerful.

However, as we see in this passage the devil knows and will quote scripture also, so we need to not only know scripture, but we must read it in light of God's will for his people, not twisting it for our own purposes. Jesus knew that

God called for him to be obedient, we are to follow and seek God's will not our own. His calling is often a difficult path, whereas the devil will tempt us to take the easy path.

I wonder, what are your temptations? Is it self-indulgence, is it pride? I know pride often gets in my way... Is it giving allegiance and putting faith in idols instead of God? Wealth, gambling, health, social clubs, religious practices...could even be good things like family. God wants us to worship him alone and put him first.

Do we put God to the test? Do we trust God to keep his promises, do we believe that he is faithful, or do we try and manipulate situations ourselves?

The devil may be the one who tempts, but it is up to us to choose to resist. I think a major temptation for us is choosing to do things *our* way, to look after our own interests...after all that is what the world of advertising tells us to do. As one of the L'Oréal skin product ad's use to say...after all 'you're worth it!'. Look after no. 1...you.

Fortunately, Jesus did not give in to the devil's temptations, he did remain totally obedient to God, rather than looking after his own needs, keeping himself safe from harm. He kept his eye on the big picture, God's big plan which was for Jesus to go to the cross in our place, to take on our sin, so that we could have a restored relationship with him. A relationship that had been mucked up in the beginning when Adam gave in to temptation, rather than following God's instructions. Jesus the second Adam, came to restore us, so that we could have eternal life. He went to the cross because God said – we were worth it. For God so loved us.

Jesus defeated the devil in the wilderness and he continued to defeat him. The devil did try again to tempt him, but Jesus held firm. He kept his eyes on God and trusted him to know what was best. Sometimes we think we know better than God.

Jesus struggled in the garden of Gethsemane...but continued on the path to the cross...*not my will but yours* he said. And on the cross...people jeered...*If you are the Son of God then get down from the cross.*

His testing in the desert was all part of the preparation for what was to come. Jesus defeated the devil then, and he went on to defeat him through his death on the cross and rising to life. He proved once and for all that he was indeed the Son of God. He was the one we could trust to offer us abundant, eternal life – much better than cheap, short term, materialistic life.

Jesus calls us to follow him, and to be obedient to him. We won't be tempted in the same way he was...but we will be tempted to live the way of the world and put ourselves first instead of God. We need to learn to discern the devils' whispers and lies and listen only to the voice of God and rebut the lies with God's truth, his word. We can do this if like Jesus our love and loyalty is to God alone. Jesus is God's beloved son and through him we are now God's beloved children. He offers us true happiness, true fulfilment...which neither the world, the flesh or the devil can offer. When you are tempted, call upon the one who has been tempted, but did not sin...call on the one who knows our weaknesses, the who can strengthen us with the power of the Holy Spirit to follow where he leads, which may even include a season of testing in the wilderness!

And if you're inspired to fast during lent, perhaps consider the ideas I have put in the pew sheet this week...

*Fast from judging others; Feast on Christ dwelling in them. Fast from fear of illness; Feast on the healing power of God. Fast from words that pollute; Feast on speech that purifies. Fast from discontent; Feast on gratitude. Fast from anger; Feast on patience. Fast from pessimism; Feast on hope. Fast from negatives; Feast on encouragement. Fast from bitterness; Feast on forgiveness. Fast from self-concern; Feast on compassion. Fast from suspicion; Feast on truth. Fast from gossip; Feast on purposeful silence. Fast from problems that overwhelm; Feast on prayer that sustains. Fast from anxiety; Feast on faith.*

Let's pray: Lord Jesus, we thank you for going to the cross for us. Strengthen us by your Holy Spirit to withstand the temptations of the devil, help us to fix our eyes always on you and strengthen ourselves in the power of your word. In the power of the Spirit may we continue your ministry here on earth. In your powerful name we pray, Amen