

WHEN TEMPTATIONS COME ON STRONG

The word “temptation” is found 8 times in the NT and is translated from the Greek word, *peirasmos*. That same word is also translated 8 times as trial or trials and 3 times as testing. It could possibly escape our notice that the two words are similar; they are certainly related. We might not think so, but they are, and that leads me to this observation: In every temptation there is a trial, and in every trial, there is a temptation.

Which leads us to the 4th chapter of Luke this morning as we begin to build on our New Testament Studies curriculum for this year. My plan is to coordinate my Sunday morning lessons each week with the assigned chapters we were to read and study that week. Thus, for the week we just completed and went over this past Wednesday evening and in this morning’s Bible classes, we covered Luke chapters 1-4. We also had two memory verses: **Luke 1:37**, “*For nothing will be impossible with God,*” and **4:4**, “*And Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone.’*” I want to encourage you to be working on those, would you? It will do you good to push yourself a bit. I know some of you say you can’t memorize anything; that you are doing good to remember where you put your keys, but people who are supposed to know things like this tell us that if we don’t use it, we lose it. So if you are worried about losing your ability to remember things, do yourself a favor and work on these memory verses. If you do that, by the end of the year you will have learned 104 really key verses of God’s word, and I think you will be glad you did.

And don’t neglect your opportunities to come to Bible class each Sunday morning and Wednesday evening. Some of you have not developed that practice, and it is to your detriment. Unless you are a heathen or a pagan, you surely want to know God’s Word better, and unless you are a walking Bible encyclopedia, you surely need to know God’s Word better, so make it your goal to come to class, will you? I know you will be better for it, and I believe you will be happier within yourself about your Christian faith and walk.

The “temptations of Jesus!” That’s what this section of scripture is often referred to—the temptations of Jesus—and it is a powerful passage that contains great lessons for us. What I want to do this morning is to look at what went before that experience, because I have learned that how a person handles a trial or a temptation, whichever it turns out to be, is pretty much based on what went on in that person’s life before the experience happened. You can’t wait until you are up to your necks in trouble to learn how to deal with it. These are things you prepare for by a careful spiritual analysis of things long before you are in the midst of a crisis.

And you can see that beginning to unfold in Jesus’ story as told by Luke beginning as early as chapter 1.

Think about the angel’s words to Mary, for example. About six months after appearing to Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, telling him that he and his wife would soon have a child, even though, as Luke tells us, they were well-advanced in years. Six months later, the same

angel appears to Mary, the young Jewish girl who will give birth to the baby Jesus. The angel says to her, beginning in **verse 31**: *“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32) He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33) and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”*

We know that some time later, after Mary’s pregnancy began to be obvious to everyone, that the angel appeared a third time to Joseph, the man to whom Mary had been engaged. He told him, as he had told Mary that she would have a child, and that they were to call him Jesus. **Matthew 1:21** tells us that he was to be named Jesus because *“he will save his people from their sins.”*

So what have we learned in just this little introduction? We have learned that the birth of Jesus was no accident. We learn his birth and life were the result of divine wisdom and purpose. No matter how it might have looked, this was God’s doing, His plan unfolding. **Ephesians 3:11** tells us that this was God’s eternal purpose beginning to unfold. For just a little while, Mary may have had her concerns; Joseph had his doubts, and for sure the tongues were wagging about this young Jewish girl being pregnant out of wedlock, but this was no accident. It was all a part of God’s design!

We also learn that Jesus’ birth and life were filled with purpose; that he was born with a destiny. The angel said he would be great; that He would be called the Son of the Most High, obviously a reference to Jehovah God. We learned that he would inherit the throne of David and that he was to reign over the house of Jacob, which is a way of referring to God’s people. We learned that his reign and His kingdom will never end. Furthermore, from Matthew we learn that he would save his people from their sins.

So think about that. What do you think it does for a person’s strength, even when put to the test, if they know that their birth is no accident, that there is a divine purpose behind it, and that one has an appointment with destiny in some way? What would those things mean to a person, especially someone who is facing a strong temptation or trial?

Or go on to the 2nd chapter. Those of you who got into our new curriculum will remember this. It’s the chapter that tells us of Jesus’ birth and the events surrounding it; as well as his being circumcised on the 8th day. Then 33 days later, when the 40 days of Mary’s purification were ended, they went to the temple to offer a sacrifice according to the Law. There they met two people; two old prophets, a man named Simeon, and a woman named Anna. Both of those had some interesting, prophetic things to say about Jesus, this Son of the Most High.

It had been revealed to Simeon earlier that he would not see death before he had seen the coming of the Lord’s Christ, and now God had fulfilled His word. Anna was 84 years old, and had been a widow for many years, and after her husband died after only seven years, she spent the rest of her life living in the Temple area, worshipping God with fasting. She also began praising God for the redemption of Israel.

But it is that last story related for us in the 2nd chapter that commands my attention. Luke is the only gospel writer who tells us of this event. It takes us to the time when Jesus had reached the age of 12; the age around which, according to custom, many parents began to involve their children in the observances of the Law, such as fasting, attending the three required feasts each year. So the family, at least Mary and Joseph and the young Jesus had gone up to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. After that observance was completed, you recall they began their return to Nazareth, a distance of more than 60 miles and thus a journey that would take several days. They leave Jerusalem with many others, assuming that Jesus was with them, but it wasn't until that evening that they discovered that in fact, he was not with them. Thus, the next day they had to make the return trip to Jerusalem and finally on the third day, they found him in the Temple. They found him discussing points of the Law with those who were considered to be teachers of the Law. Their first reaction was naturally one of embarrassment, and then anger and frustration. They said, "*Son, why have you done this to us, didn't you know that we would be worried about you?*" And in effect Jesus said, "Why were you worried about me, didn't you know I would be in my Father's house?" The KJV renders that, "*Did you not know that I had to be about my Father's business.*"

Okay, now what does that tell us about Jesus' thinking, even at that early age?

I believe it tells us again that he was well aware of the fact that he had a job to do; that he was here for a purpose. Do you see how that might make a tremendous difference in how one faces temptations or trials?

And if you go on to the third chapter, which is the chapter in which the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry is related. At the end of that section, beginning in verse 21, you read about Jesus himself coming to John to be baptized. Luke doesn't give us as much information about that as does Matthew but the essence is there. Jesus comes to John to be baptized. After John did so, the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove and a voice is heard from heaven, saying, "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*"

Now think about that: what was said, and who said it, and who was it said about?

That was the God of heaven speaking, wasn't it? And He was speaking about Jesus, and what He said was, "*This is my beloved Son.*" Not only that, but he also added, "*in whom I am well pleased.*" Now how would that make you feel, to know that the God of heaven had that kind of high opinion of you? If you heard that said about you, by the Lord that it would be easy to confuse you or deflect you from your life's purpose? Do you think it would be easy to deceive you and tempt you into doing things you shouldn't do?

Think about that because that is where Luke is directing us as we get into the 4th chapter. Look at the first couple of verses:

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness 2) for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry.

So, after all of these very positive experiences, after all of the affirmation that Jesus must have known about and heard with his own ears, Jesus is now being faced with faith-shattering trials, or temptations. Think about that. If you were the devil, how would you go about trying to bring Jesus down and stop Him? How would you go about trying to prevent him from succeeding in the mission and purpose for which he came? Might you not try to first of all try to get him to have doubts about himself, about who he is and what He is about? That's exactly what the devil does!

But first of all notice, Luke tells us that Jesus was "*full of the Holy Spirit*" and also that he was "*led by the Spirit.*" Mark says that he was driven by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness. So he finds himself out there in the wilderness—a desolate, unpopulated area, but whose idea was it? It was God's, wasn't it? He was led there by the Spirit. He was led there to be tested. Part of that testing was connected to his physical hunger. He went forty days without eating. Luke tells us that afterwards, he was hungry.

I don't have the time to get into that more, but suffice it to say, His experience corresponds precisely to what doctors know about the effects of starvation. You get hungry when you miss a meal, or when you don't eat for a day. If several days go by without food, at some point your body begins using up the stores of fat that it has been storing for many years. Your stomach reacts in such a way that it stops transmitting the sensation of hunger. But when all of the stores of fat within your body are used up, then you really become hungry.

So now Jesus is literally dying of hunger, and the devil comes along as says what to him, "*If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.*" Notice here, the temptation is not just to satisfying his now raging hunger, but to prove something that really needs no proof. Is there any question that Jesus is the Son of God? Didn't God himself just a little while earlier make that very declaration? That is why it is important to notice what Jesus said in response to that temptation. He said, "*It is written, man shall not live by bread alone,* and Matthew tells us that he went on to say, "*but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*" Well, what word had God given to Christ? "This IS MY SON!"

The second temptation Luke records for us is that the devil took Jesus upon a high mountain, and in a moment of time, showed him all the kingdoms of the world, Was that just of the kingdoms then, or for all time? I tend to think it was the latter, and if so, then Jesus saw us, He saw the United States of America and all of the other nations that have risen and fallen, and that ever will rise and fall. The devil said to him, "*I will give you authority over all of this, and all of their glory.*" But notice the devil lets something slip from his lips. He says, "*for it has been delivered to me and I give it to whomever I wish.* Had he momentarily forgotten that the famished looking man standing before him now was the one who had delivered all of those kingdoms into his hands?

What was the devil trying to do? Was he really wanting Jesus to worship him? Maybe so, but maybe he was trying to tempt Jesus into taking a different, easier path. It is important to keep in mind that sometimes the temptations we face are not to do the wrong thing, but to not do the right thing. In essence, the temptation the devil was offering Jesus was a shortcut. He could have the world at his feet if he would just do this one thing, and that is to worship Satan. There wouldn't have to be a conflict, a cruel death on the cross, just a painless bending of the knee, a simple lie coming from his lips. Jesus responded again, reminding the devil of something God had already said, that only God was to be worshipped, and if you subvert or compromise on that one principle, no goal, no objective would be worth having!.

So the devil tried yet another avenue. He takes Jesus to one of the high places of the Temple building in Jerusalem. He again plants the seed of doubt, saying, "*if you are the Son of God, cast yourself down from here, for as God has said, He will command his angels concerning you, to catch you and lift you up, lest you even strike your foot against a stone.*" Did you realize that the devil was actually quoting scripture to Jesus? He was quoting Psalm 22 but he was badly misconstruing its meaning. And of course that wasn't the first or the last time for someone to twist the scriptures to suit their purpose. To untwist scriptures that someone is using, the best solution is to use the scripture itself and that is what Jesus did in this case. He reminded the devil, that while Psalm 22 was correct, the scripture also says, "*You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.*"

Now again, what was the devil attempting to do there? Well he knew that the Jews had this belief that when the Messiah came, one of the ways in which he would identify himself, or prove who he was, was that he would jump off of the high part of the Temple and not be hurt. So he was tempting Jesus to again take a short cut. But that wasn't God's plan was it? In fact, what was God's plan to prove that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah? It was for him to die on the cross and then be raised on the third day. That's the argument that Peter makes there in Acts 2. But the devil didn't want Jesus going through with God's plan. Oh no, that wouldn't do at all, so he was making every effort to get Jesus to call off the program.

Remember his death just a moment. Matthew tells us that Pilate's wife came to him that day and begged her husband not to do anything to Jesus because, she said, "*I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.*" Perhaps you've always thought that God gave her those dreams, but maybe it wasn't God. Who wanted to keep Jesus from dying on the cross? Not God, but the devil. And then remember, even while he was on the cross. Some came by, almost with the same words of the devil here in Luke 4. They said, "*come down from the cross now and we will believe you.*"

No, the truth is, sometimes you are going to feel the devil breathing down your neck. You are going to find yourself being torn in every direction. You are going to be tempted and tried in ways that seem impossible to overcome, but be strong, be faithful. Your God knows you, and as **1 Corinthians 10:13** says, "*No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.*

God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

So keep this lesson in mind when those times come your way, when temptations come on strong. There's a trial in every temptation, and a temptation in every trial. Even so, when those times come, just remember these important facts:

1) Your birth and life was not an accident. You are not here simply because of blind forces at work within matter. You are the work of God. Years ago someone gave us a little placard that said in so many words, "What you are is God's gift to you; What you do with what you are is your gift to Him." Amen!

2) You too were born with a purpose. You too have a rendezvous with destiny. God has a work in mind for you. Discover what that is, and don't be surprised if it has nothing to do with what you do all day for a living. But for the person who knows that he or she is here as a result of God's purpose, if they know they have been sent to do a certain job, it is going to be hard for Satan to stop them. That knowledge, along with—as Jesus demonstrated—having a working knowledge of the Word of God will stand you in good stead when those trials and temptations come.

I love this story that we find here in Luke 4 and I love the way Luke brings us there through the things he relates in chapters 1, 2 and 3. And I love the way Jesus proves himself to be an example for me in every part of life. But Jesus didn't just come to be an example for us, even though He is that. He also wants to be our Savior, and that is what I want to stress at this time. Has he saved you? He isn't your Savior if you have not surrendered your life to him in every way. If you have not been buried with Him by baptism into his death so that his blood can wash away your every sin, past, present and future, you need to do and there is no better time than the present moment to get that done.

Invitation

21) Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, 22) And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.