

Quoting Deuteronomy to the Devil

Luke 4:1-13

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Read Luke 4:1-13

*"The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times."* (Psalm 12:6)

## Introduction

How many of you know the band Skillet? They've been a hard rocking Christian band since the mid-90s, changed their sound a few times. They didn't have a radio hit outside of Christian radio for their first decade of existence, but then unexpectedly got a lot of attention outside of the Christian music industry, in the wider music world. Suddenly their albums were charting high on Billboard, their songs were playing in sports arenas, they played on late night shows, and they were touring with huge bands like Creed and Papa Roach, even as they continued to play Christian festivals and shows. Their lead singer, John Cooper, tells the story of how in 2011, while on a tour, he was pulled aside by an agent and a promoter who said,

"We want to tell you the truth because no one else is going to say it: Your band could be the next biggest band in the world. You just need to strike. You've got the look, the sound you've got the right makeup of the band, plus you have this spiritual thing going on. People are beginning to like spiritualism and you guys have it, you don't have to fake it. Do you understand what we're telling you?" John replied, "I think so." "Let us just come out and say it like it is: You could be the biggest band in the world if you would just stop talking about Jesus. Disassociate from Christian music, don't say that you were ever part of Christian festivals, people don't like singing about Jesus. If you think about it, you could get your message out a lot more if you just talked about the social aspect of Christianity. Everybody loves Bono, do the Bono thing – talk about the poor, feed people in Africa, talk about goodness and light. Think about how much good you could do if you were rich and famous."

John Cooper's reflections on that conversation were that, while he respects what Bono has done and there is some truth in what these men said, he ultimately couldn't do it. He couldn't work with those guys and stop singing about Jesus. His ultimate comment on that experience was, "It's amazing how much the devil can make lies sound so much like the truth."<sup>1</sup>

Today's passage has that theme: the devil can make lies sound so much like the truth. Whatever form temptation takes for us, whether it's things we see in the world or on our computer screens, or the enticement of others, the pressure of peers and friends to subtly compromise things, or our own desire to launch into things that we know are wrong - resisting these things will take a great ability to separate truth and error, fact and fiction. Today's passage is about the temptations of the Man who has just been baptized and commissioned for public ministry. He is about to start gathering disciples, preaching, healing, and changing the world. First, He has to spend some time in the wilderness and pass a test. Just as you have to pass a test to drive a car, go to grad school or to become a doctor or a lawyer, so there was a test to pass before that public ministry could begin.

Before we read the three sections of the text again, let's talk about the devil for a minute: it's not a very enlightened, modern view to believe in a real devil. It's easy to laugh at the image of a red guy

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Alisa Childers on January 20, 2021, found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZeVE5JZyC0>

with horns, a tail, and a pitchfork that shows up to tempt you or to make a deal for your soul at the crossroads based on whether you can beat him in a fiddling contest. I've never seen the devil, it's easy to say that it's just a poetic way for the Bible to describe the incarnation of evil. But the problem with that view is that the Bible does not describe him metaphorically or poetically; it treats him as a very real creature. If you believe the Bible is the Word of God, which we do here at CenterPoint, you must consider his existence as truth. But keep in mind a few things about Satan: he is a spiritual creature but he does not have the same powers as God. We tend to think he's omniscient (all-knowing) or omnipresent (able to be present everywhere), but his knowledge is very limited and he can only be in one place at one time. You and others you know have probably never been tempted directly by him, but there are demonic forces under him that tempt us. Additionally, as the "Mighty Fortress" hymn says, "he knows his doom is sure" but he is so bent on evil that he will take as many with him as he can.

We can't go into a full theology of the devil, so let's jump back into the text and look at the first temptation, where Jesus was

### **I. Tempted By Provision: Meeting His Needs Apart from God (vv. 1-4)**

*<sup>1</sup> And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness <sup>2</sup> for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." <sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'"*

How many of you have attempted fasting before? That is a spiritual discipline that I am not good at. The longest fasting times I've participated in were part of a weekend that we used to run when I was a youth pastor. It was called the 30 Hour Famine weekend, and it was developed and promoted by World Vision, and has been used by churches for the past 30 years. The idea is that youth groups, or any group of believers, would participate in a 30 hour fast (water and juice only) and spend the time together learning about worldwide hunger problems. (This year's official Famine weekend is February 26-27 if anybody is interested – go to [30hourfamine.org](http://30hourfamine.org).) We would tell kids to make Friday breakfast be their last meal, skip lunch at school, and then they would all show up to the church after school for an overnight where we would keep them busy all evening. We would all suffer together, sometimes torturing each other by talking about what our favorite meals and snacks were. But usually the night went pretty well, but when we woke up on Saturday, we were famished, ready to eat anything in the vicinity. We had volunteers make us a huge lunch that would break our fast. None of us could imagine fasting any longer than that, though, we learned that as your stomach shrinks and gets used to not having food, your body would adjust and settle in. At times you wouldn't feel the hunger, at other times, it would be intense.

The Holy Spirit led Jesus to the wilderness to endure forty days of fasting and testing. Forty days! We have seen the Lord test His people before – remember God telling Abraham to take his son, Isaac, up on a mountain to sacrifice him as a test of his obedience. It's not a bad thing to remember that the Lord might lead us into a time of trials and difficulties, most likely not as dramatic as Abraham's or Jesus'. But if He did it to Jesus, He will do it to those of us who are trying to be Christ-like. This is not punishment, but a time to teach us and to refine us. And it's also good to remember that the Spirit goes with us, we are never alone in our trials.

Now, what do the wilderness and the number forty call to our minds from Biblical history? After God brought His people, the Israelites, out of Egypt in the Exodus, He led them into the wilderness for forty years before they were allowed to enter the Promised Land. In today's text, Jesus spends forty days in the wilderness before embarking on His public ministry. Coincidence? I don't think

so. The length of time draws our attention to the parallel, Jesus was tested and tried in the wilderness just like His people – will He pass the test?

I would say that it is a general truth of human nature that when we are tired and weak and hungry, we are probably more likely to fall to temptation and do things that we would not normally do. So, the devil picks the physically weakest time in Jesus' life to come to Him and tempt Him. Satan is no dummy – he knows that Jesus is the biggest threat to his power and plans. This first temptation to command a stone to become bread was essentially a temptation to stop trusting God. It sounds like Jesus is just being asked to show His strength/His powers, but actually turning a stone into bread would have been a sign of weakness. Not only of giving into His hunger, but to act independently of God's provision. If Jesus had done that, He would have shown that He did not trust that God would sustain Him during this time of fasting.

When we think back to the Israelites in the wilderness, what did they do when they got hungry and didn't see any food or drink close by? They panicked and grumbled and stopped trusting that God would provide for them. But Jesus stands strong, quoting part of Deuteronomy 8:3 – *“Man shall not live by bread alone.”* Do you know the rest of that verse? *“but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”* Nice try, Satan, but the word of the Father is more important than physical food. God will preserve my life as long as He wills, the test is whether I believe His Word and His promises or not. If Jesus could not pass this test, He could not teach things like Matthew 6:31-33, *“Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ... your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”*

Let's look at the second temptation,

## **II. Tempted By Power: Gaining the Whole World But Losing His Soul (vv. 5-8)**

*<sup>5</sup> And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, <sup>6</sup> and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. <sup>7</sup> If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” <sup>8</sup> And Jesus answered him, “It is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.”*

Imagine being able to see what verse 5 calls *“the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.”* I'm not sure what that looked like, apparently Satan was able to show Jesus a vision of that. But think of the halls of power, the kings on their thrones, the capital cities and their impressive structures. That must have been a breath-taking view. When Satan claimed to have authority over everything and being willing to share it, we'd call that a half-truth. He does have power on earth: Jesus would call Satan the “ruler of this world” three different times in the Gospel of John (12:31, 14:30, 16:11) and Paul called him the “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2) and the “god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4). So Satan had some claim to authority in this world.

So He could say, “Hey Jesus, how about a partnership? You do something for me, I'll do something for you. Your part is tiny, and then I'll reward you in a huge way.” The temptation to run everything, to have all power would have only tempted Jesus if He had forgotten who He was. And who this adversary speaking to Him was. I'm surprised that Jesus didn't laugh in his face and say, “You have ultimate authority over exactly nothing. You have been allowed to roam for a time, but that time will run out and you will see how little power you have. I have all power and authority, you are delusional.” But Jesus didn't explain all of that to him; He merely quoted another verse of Deuteronomy to him, 6:13, reminding Satan that only God should be worshipped.

In some ways, this was a subtle temptation because before Jesus would receive all the power and glory from God the Father, He would have to go through great suffering to get there. He would endure betrayal, arrest, torture, and death on the cross. The temptation here was to avoid the road of suffering and get all the glory and the rewards without the pain. It would just take one little compromise. Again, Jesus would not have been able to teach others, *“What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?”* (Matt. 16:26) if He had fallen here. We see another parallel to Israel when they built a Golden Calf and worshipped it, setting aside their trust that the Lord was providing for them. It was another test that they failed that Jesus passed.

The final temptation was

### **III. Tempted By Protection: Forcing God to Act (vv. 9-13)**

*9 And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, <sup>10</sup> for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’ <sup>11</sup> and “On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.” <sup>12</sup> And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” <sup>13</sup> And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.*

The text says that the devil took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple; we don’t know if they transported physically somehow or if this was a vision. The historian Josephus said that people who stood on the southeast corner of the temple in Jerusalem, called the Royal Porch, and looked down the 450 feet to the ground would get dizzy from the height.<sup>2</sup> Our building is 40 some feet high, so jumping from the roof might not kill you. But jumping from over 10 times that height surely would. You would definitely need an angel to intervene on your behalf.

This time the devil decides that quoting Scripture might work to his advantage. It’s hard to imagine the devil with a Bible, right? But he knew the Scriptures. These quotes are from Psalm 91. He didn’t even misquote them, he got them exactly right. “Hey Jesus, we all know these verse must be true, so why don’t you put your faith into action? Jump, God has to save you.” Dr. Frank Barker comments: “Notice how cunning Satan is. If he cannot get Jesus to distrust, he will try to get him to mistrust, to trust in a wrong way. That is fanaticism. If you deliberately place yourself in a position that God didn’t call you into where God has to intervene to protect you, that is not faith, that is fanaticism.”<sup>3</sup> And so Jesus came back with his third quote from Deuteronomy – do not put God to a test. Do not attempt to force God to act.

Twice in these three temptations, the devil starts with the phrase *“If you are the Son of God.”* Why would he say that? Well, the last thing that happened to Jesus is that during His baptism, God the Father had opened up the heavens and declared that Jesus was His beloved Son. So, Satan is following up on that, and it seems like it is a subtle dare: prove that you really are as powerful as you’re supposed to be by using your powers. The “if” in that statement is more of a question: are you really the Son of God? Of course, the devil’s goal was to have Jesus act independently of the Father, abusing His Sonship, making it a disobedient and rebellious Sonship.<sup>4</sup> But Jesus, of course, was confident in His identity without having to prove or show off His powers.

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<sup>2</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), p. 129.

<sup>3</sup> Frank Barker’s sermon “The Baptism and Temptation of Christ” from *The Gospel of Luke, Vol. 1* (self-published), p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 128.

## Conclusion

Do you realize the stakes here, how much was riding on Jesus' response to Satan's temptations? If He had given in at any point, His ministry was over. God's plan of redemption was done. Jesus had a nice long stroll on earth for thirty years, but no one would get healed, no one would hear the Sermon on the Mount, his disciples would have never been called away from their day jobs, and He would have never died on the cross for our sins. Kent Hughes describes it this way: "a split second of idolatry... would eternally thunder through the universe; a shallow, fleeting political salvation instead of eternal soul salvation. No atonement. No real forgiveness. No righteousness."<sup>5</sup> Satan threw everything he had at Him, but praise God that Jesus was faithful through it all. Because the opposite was true – if Jesus could withstand these intense temptations at the weakest physical part of His life, He would be faithful through everything else that would be thrown at Him the rest of His life and ministry.

So, what's the application that we can all put into practice from this story? Memorize the book of Deuteronomy and you'll never sin again! Bible memorization is a great thing – Psalm 119:11 says, "*I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you*" - but don't forget that the devil can recite Scripture as well. You have to believe it and conform your life to it for the Bible's power to be fully available to you. How about Hebrews 2:18, that says, "*Because He Himself (Jesus) has suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted*"? What a great reminder that we don't face temptations on our own: call on Jesus when you are tempted. Call on the power of the Holy Spirit inside of you to keep you from giving in to those temptations. When we are filled with God's Spirit, aided by Jesus, and have learned and kept God's word hidden in our hearts, temptations are a lot easier to pass up.

Let's look at the nature, or root, of these temptations. I alluded to it a little before, but I think that what's interesting about these temptations is that Jesus will accomplish all of the things that Satan tempted Him with, but at a later time. Jesus would produce bread for the hungry masses, He would be given authority over all the kingdoms of the world, He would command angels. So the temptation to do these things is a question of timing. Satan was trying to get Him to violate God's timing in His life. Several other times in the Gospels, Jesus responds to people who ask Him to do things with some version of "Not now. My time has not yet come." Many of the temptations in our lives are to do things in our own timing. Let's think about two areas: 1) The classic example I used in my youth ministry days a lot was that God designed sex for marriage. He wants you to have that gift, but in His timing and in His way. To seek it before marriage or outside of marriage is to reject His timing for your own. 2) Have you heard of the FIRE movement? Financial Independence Retire Early – where people work four jobs and sacrifice everything in life to retire at 35 or whatever crazy age. I'm all for financial sacrifice and responsible saving, but the idolatry of retiring young rejects the idea that God has set before us meaningful work to accomplish. It's treating work as a curse from the devil rather than a blessing from God. God has a calling on each of our lives, we are not to spend our days in idleness. Retirement will come someday, embrace the work God has for you now.

Another application area is that we want to take shortcuts to spirituality. We want things immediately, we're used to constant access to wi-fi, instant news, fast food, crash diets that shed the pounds quickly, access to every song and piece of entertainment ever produced. As Queen sang, "I want it all and I want it now." We don't want to work hard for things in life, and that's true of spiritual maturity - it's too difficult to be patient for the fruit that God will accomplish in our lives

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<sup>5</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), p. 137.

over a lifetime. We want instant spiritual growth and sanctification. Eugene Peterson defines sanctification/growing in our faith as “A long obedience in the same direction.” That sounds too hard for us these days, doesn’t it? I don’t want to have to study hard, learn and wrestle with the Scriptures, or implement spiritual disciplines. But authentic growth is never an instantaneous experience; spiritual growth is a commitment, a pilgrimage of a lifetime.

A woman once approached a man named John of the Cross, a priest in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and said, “Sir, I would give the world to know the Bible the way you do.” His response was, “That is exactly what it costs.” All good things in life take hard work, right? Our studies, our careers, our marriages, parenting, friendships. Recognize the times that you think your spiritual maturity should come easily, that it’s just a matter of checking off the box of going to church and throwing up a prayer every now and then. And then remind yourself that it’s going to take some work to grow in your faith. Commit to daily Bible reading, find challenging theology books to read, memorize Scripture, commit to prayer. And do these things in community with other believers. I don’t do all these things great. I have people who ask me how much I pray, because if nobody keeps me accountable, I tend to neglect it.

Ultimately, why did Jesus go into the wilderness? You could call it a rematch. Genesis 3 tells us that Satan had already come to tempt human beings who had not sinned. Unlike Jesus, who was alone and starving in the wilderness, Adam and Eve were in a garden paradise in a sinless world where all of their needs were provided for. But in that first contest of wills, Adam and Eve failed the test of the Devil’s temptation. Since we are their descendants, we call Adam our representative head, the one who was tested in our place. But he failed, and the world fell under the curse of sin, and we are all fallen because of his sin. But here in this passage, Satan came to tempt another human being who had not sinned. The Second Adam passed the test and stayed perfect. Jesus was the faithful Son who remained sinless when the first Son was unfaithful and fell. Jesus endured temptation in our place. Romans 5:17 – *“For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man (Adam), much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.”*

I challenged you to embrace spiritual disciplines earlier, but no amount of Bible reading or fasting will save you on their own. They are things to pursue after you are saved. Salvation comes through faith in the perfect Son of God. Christ’s obedience was key to His being able to die in our place, so that we would be forgiven in Him. If He was not sinless and had given in to temptation at any point in His life, His death would have only atoned for His own sins. But because He was the spotless Lamb sacrificed in our place, He could take on our sins. 1 Peter 1:18-19 – *“you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”* Praise God that Jesus stayed faithful and never gave into temptation so that He could atone for your sins. Amen, let’s pray.

#### Benediction

1 Peter 2:21 - *“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.”*