

Luke 4:1-13
The Temptation of Christ

While there are many aspects of the life of Christ which can be difficult to fathom, surely, this is an episode to which each of us can relate. Nothing is more common in our daily walk than temptation. Each of us could share a particular area in which we struggle - a particular aspect of our character in which we are most vulnerable: lust, lying, gossiping, complaining, etc. None of us are exempt, and none of us will be until we are glorified with our Father in heaven.

In this passage we see the first (not the last, by the way) showdown between Satan and Christ. Satan's strategies and Christ's responses are valuable lessons for us to understand and apply when we are tempted.

The Setting

It is impossible to consider this temptation without reflecting on the temptation of Adam in the Garden of Eden:

<u>Adam</u>	<u>Christ</u>
Paradise on earth	Judean desert
Pre-fallen world	Fallen world
Physical needs met	Forty-day fast

Jesus had been fasting in the wilderness. Like Moses meeting with God at Mount Horeb (Exodus 34:28), or Elijah several centuries later (1 Kings 19:8), or even Paul retreating into Arabia (Galatians 1:17), it is likely to think that Jesus used this time to prepare Himself for the test ahead. As a result of this preparation, Jesus continued to be "full of the Holy Spirit" (v.1). This filling is a common occurrence in Scripture, Luke has already told us of Zacharias, Elizabeth, and John the Baptist, and it ought to be the goal of every believer. Ephesians 5:18, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit." It is wonderful to think that Jesus spent His entire life completely submitted to the Spirit of God. He never wandered from God's will.

Satan, *diabolos*, is "the slanderer." Once a holy angel, Satan was expelled from heaven for his pride. Joined by one-third of the angels, he is variously described as a snake (Genesis 3:1), accuser (Revelation 12:10), evil one (John 17:15), liar (Revelation 12:9), roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8), tempter (1 Thessalonians 3:5), god of this world (John 12:31), and prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2).

We ought to remember that Satan is never more enraged against us than when we are close with God. In fact, it is worth considering that if we are being left alone by Satan, we are probably not a threat to his plans. Complacency can be as spiritually unhealthy as any sin. Yet, even in our spiritual high points we can be as vulnerable to temptation as in times of despair. Perhaps even more so to the sins of pride, boasting, and self-sufficiency.

The Temptations

The First Temptation

As Adam had succumbed to temptation by desiring food he should not have, so Satan begins his temptation of Christ with an offer of food. And this temptation was well timed, for Jesus had been fasting for forty days.

Satan begins with truth. “If you are the Son of God” (v.3) can also be translated as “since you are the Son of God,” and the context suggests that Satan was granting that particular point to make another. His real objective was not to persuade Jesus to doubt or try to prove His divinity, but rather to acknowledge that Jesus had the power to do what Satan asked, namely “tell this stone to become bread” (v.3). Clearly Jesus had the power to do that. He had created the world; He could make bread. Jesus also was hungry, and there is no indication that His fast was involuntary. That is, Jesus could have ceased His fast, turned the stone into bread, and eaten. There was nothing inherently sinful in the act itself.

The temptation, then, was to get Jesus to use His divine power independently of God’s will. He wanted Jesus to doubt God’s ability to provide. It was a matter of trusting His Father in a time of spiritual testing. Jesus, however, understood the larger picture. When His own disciples were concerned that He might be hungry at the end of a long day, “Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work’” (John 4:34).

Jesus did not take matters into His own hands, even though it was in His power to do so. He waited on the Lord. He trusted God in difficult times, and God provided. That “angels came and began to minister to Him,” Matthew 4:11, shows that His trusting was not in vain. We, too, are sons of God (by adoption) and ought to trust our Father.

The Second Temptation

Satan “led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment in time” (v.5). How this happened we do not know. Was it an experience of supernatural sight? Was it a vision of some kind? Understand, though, that even if it was a vision, it was still real.

Satan promised to give Jesus “all this domain and its glory” (v.6). Two points must be made here. First, this belonged to Christ already. God the Father had already promised this to His Son. “Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession” Psalm 2:8. In speaking of the coming of the Son of Man, Daniel writes,

“And to Him was given dominion,
Glory and a kingdom,
That all the peoples, nations and men of every language
Might serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
Which will not pass away;
And His kingdom is one
Which will not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:14).

Second, this world is not Satan’s to give. That Satan is referred to in Scripture as “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31), does not mean that he literally possesses it without restraint or contingency. Satan is not sovereign. God rules over men and nations.

“Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O LORD, and You exalt Yourself as head over all.” 1 Chronicles 29:11

“For the kingdoms is the LORD’S
And He rules over the nations.” Psalm 22:28

What was really at stake here was whether or not Jesus would follow God’s plan. Satan’s proposal was for Jesus to take the easy way; to have the inheritance He was promised without the shame and suffering of the cross. All Jesus need do was switch masters, “if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours” (v.7). It is amazing to consider the boldness of Satan - to ask the Creator to worship a creature. Satan offered Jesus the crown without the cross. It was not his to give, and Jesus rebuked him, “It is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God and serve Him only’” (v.8).

By way of foreshadowing, this is a temptation to which Satan will return. Matthew 26:39, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me” and Luke 12:50, “But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished” indicate that Satan returned to this temptation of Christ. Yet our Savior was strong and answered in Gethsemane, “yet not as I will but as Thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39).

It is easy for us to be tempted to lose faith in God’s plan when there seems an easier way. Our finite perspective often thinks it knows so much better.

The Third Temptation

This temptation is listed second by Matthew. His is the more chronologically correct, since Matthew uses terms “then” Matthew 4:5 and “again” Matthew 4:8. Jesus is taken (again whether in reality or in a vision we cannot know) to “the pinnacle of the temple” (v.9). Perhaps this is the corner of the temple overlooking the Kidron Valley several hundred feet below, but that is not possible to determine. Satan then uses Scripture to try to persuade Jesus to “throw Yourself down from here” (v.9). After all, Satan assures Jesus, God “will command His angels concerning You to guard You” (v.10). The twist in this particular temptation is that since Jesus will not disobey God’s plan, perhaps He can be convinced to have God fulfill His Word.

The temptation here is to the sin of presumption, and Jesus responds accordingly. “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘It is said, “you shall put the Lord your God to the test”’” (v.12). This is a very subtle form of temptation, because it can seem biblical. After all, we are showing faith in God. We are allowing God to do what He does so wonderfully, answer prayers and fulfill promises. But ours is not a “name it and claim it” faith. The invocation of the prayer of Jabez is a modern example. We ought not to presume upon God, nor ought we to do what is, perhaps, more common, to ask God to do for us what we ought to be trying to do for ourselves. We ought not impose upon God to guard our health if we neglect it ourselves. We ought not to pray for financial stability if we are not wise with our money. We ought not ask God to save others if we do not share the gospel.

“Until an Opportune Time” (v.13)

Satan defeated, left the field of battle. But not forever. Satan was constantly active during Christ’s ministry (Luke 8:27, 10:18, 11:14, 13:16 to name a few examples). We, too, ought to “resist the devil”

(James 4:7), but realize as well that his flight from us is only temporary. Therefore we ought always to be on our guard.

The Impeccability of Christ -- was Jesus able not to sin or not able to sin?

It is clear that Jesus did not sin

2 Corinthians 5:21, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

1 Peter 2:21-22, "²¹For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, ²²Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth."

1 John 3:5, "You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin."

It is clear that God cannot be tempted.

James 1:13, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God;' for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone."

It is clear that the temptations were real.

Luke 22:44, "And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground."

Jesus was fully human, as we have spoken of many times. He was also fully God. Jesus was genuinely tempted in His humanity, but the union of the two natures (human and divine) in one person means that though Jesus, in His humanity, was tempted as we are, He was not able to sin.

The Lesson

Satan looks for advantages in our circumstances to tempt us. These may be either high points when we feel invulnerable, or low points where we doubt. We ought always to be on our guard. Also, we must understand that Satan makes use of this world in his temptations. He will appear to offer us an easier way, a shorter path, the less troublesome road. But we must always remember that, "the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction" (Matthew 7:13).

Satan uses the same general strategies in tempting us. He wants us to doubt God, question His plan, and presume upon His grace. And he will make use of a distorted reading of the Bible to do it. Satan can appear with a Bible under his arm and a verse in his mouth, and the misapplication of Scripture is a powerful weapon for Satan.

Take Aways

We have assurance, James 4:7, "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

There is often an element of truth with temptation. Therefore, the best defense against Satan is a thorough knowledge of Scripture and a commitment to follow its teachings.