

JESUS V. THE DEVIL

Luke 4:1-13

First Sunday in Lent (Series C)

March 6, 2022

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

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The gospel lesson for the First Sunday in Lent comes from *The Gospel According to Luke*, chapter 4, verses 1 through 13. It is on page ____/727 of the pew Bible. In this gospel lesson, Jesus goes one on one with the devil. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Luke 4, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

¹ 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. ³ The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." ⁴ And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" ⁵ And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, ⁶ 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. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸ And Jesus answered him, "It is written,

" 'You shall worship the Lord your God,
and him only shall you serve.' "

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, ¹⁰ for it is written,

" 'He will command his angels concerning you,
to guard you,'

¹¹ and

" 'On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.' "

¹² And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.' "

¹³ And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's talk about temptation. We kind of like temptation. It might be a commercial for some fancy, decadent chocolate or a drive through the new car lot. It might be something you're not going to do anyway. You could be just fine with your cheap chocolate or your fourteen-year-old used car. But it's kind of fun to imagine, "What if?" We kind of enjoy the temptation. And those things are innocent enough. Fancy chocolate and new cars are not inherently sinful. Perhaps you have learned, though, that if you tempt yourself long enough, you get closer and closer to the thing until you finally decide to just go for it.

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So there's a bit of a First Commandment issue here. That's the one where the LORD says, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3; Deut. 5:7). It means that we should fear, love, and trust in the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, above all things. So when we fixate on other things, and they can be as innocent as chocolate and cars, we treat them like our gods. That is, we expect them to satisfy us in a way that only the one true God can.

This is why we enjoy temptation. We imagine the satisfaction that we think will be achieved by the object of our desire. So if you tempt yourself long enough, you get closer and closer to the thing until you finally decide to just go for it. And this applies, of course, not just to innocent things, like chocolate and cars, but also to sinful things. There are things of which God has said, "That's not for you." For our own protection, and for the protection of other people, God has drawn lines that we must not cross. But we might think to ourselves, *Okay, I won't cross the line. I'll just look, or I'll think about it and imagine how good it would feel to cross that line.* That is entertaining temptation, and it is sinful for at least two reasons. First, it breaks the First Commandment. It's looking to something else or someone else to satisfy us in a way that only God can. And second, entertaining temptation almost always leads to giving in to the temptation.

I'll try to illustrate this. Suppose you develop a deadly allergy to chocolate, but you really like chocolate. So you decide to replace eating chocolate with just thinking about chocolate or looking at chocolate and imagining how enjoyable it would be to eat it. Would thinking about chocolate help you resist it? What if you go and buy some chocolate, just so you can look at it and smell it? Would that help? What if you put the chocolate in a pan and heat it up so you can smell it even more? You might enjoy this temptation for as long as you can stand it. But then you will either give into the temptation and die of anaphylactic shock, or you will deprive yourself and be very angry. We might enjoy temptation, but it never ends well.

In this passage, Jesus goes head-to-head with the devil. Three specific temptations are mentioned, so we might think this was a quick three-round match. When we look a little closer we see that Jesus "was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil" (4:1-2). This was a forty-day endurance challenge, culminating with these three final temptations. And Jesus prevailed.

Jesus is a good example for us. We face temptations, and we often give into them. But Jesus withstood temptation, and he made it look easy. We would do well to look to this passage as an example of how to resist the devil's temptations.

I'm going to assume that you can all think of some instance, probably in the recent past, where you gave into temptation. And I don't mean some morally neutral temptation like chocolate or a new car. I mean a truly evil temptation, where you knew that a certain thought, word, or deed was evil, but you gave into the temptation anyway. If you can't think of a recent example, you might be suffering from memory loss. Or it could mean that you have a weak conscience. Or it could mean that you don't know God's Word very well.

If you can't think of anything, take Martin Luther's advice: "Consider yourself in light of the Ten Commandments" (*Small Catechism*, "Confession"). You can find them on page 95 of the hymnal, along with the Small Catechism's explanations, or in Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5.

Have you chased after other gods, knowing that money, power, fame, success, career, comfort, and whatever else your heart desires are powerless gods?

Have you misused the Name of LORD? Remember that neglect of his Name is also a misuse. And we neglect his Name when we do not pray for the things we need or thank him for the things he has given.

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Have you neglected his Word or the gathering of the saints for worship?

Have you disrespected or dishonored your parents or other superiors?

Have you wished or caused bodily harm on another person?

Have you committed adultery? This could be with your body, eyes, or mind.

Have you taken what is not yours, either blatantly or under some pretense of a legal right?

Have you spoken deceptively? Have you spoken words intended to harm or discredit another person?

Has your heart desired something or someone that is not rightly yours? And have you allowed your heart to persist in its coveting?

I'm going to assume that one or more of these Ten Commandments reminds you of something in the recent past where you entertained temptation and gave into it. And if you can't think of anything, you are either a perfect human, or you have a much bigger problem than you think.

We have an obvious problem with sin, which means we also have a problem with temptation, because sin doesn't just happen. It comes from temptation. And there are three basic sources of temptation: the devil, the world, and our own flesh. And of these three, our own flesh is probably our biggest tempter. Another name for it is "the sinful nature." Sin is not just the bad stuff we do. Sin is our nature as fallen human beings. Those bad actions flow from our sinful nature. Our hearts are corrupted to love what is evil, and then we act out in thought, word, and deed.

We are quite weak in the face of temptation. When we are tempted, the question isn't really whether or not we will give in, but how long it will take. The longer a temptation sits in front of us, the weaker our resolve becomes. And the more we think about the temptation, the more likely it becomes that our sinful hearts will rationalize it. If we let temptation linger, sooner or later, we will give in.

So Jesus is a good example for us. He did not allow temptation to linger. He did not entertain the devil's suggestions. He did not take time to consider them. His responses were swift and firm. Now, he was never going to give into them anyway, no matter how long they dangled in front of him, but even so, there's no point in letting them linger.

Part of the reason Jesus was able to dispense with them so quickly was because he knew God's Word. Jesus knew the Scriptures, so he had ready responses for each temptation. And in this way, Jesus provides the best example for us. Even Jesus, the Son of God in human flesh, used the Word of God to combat temptation.

Our greatest defense against temptation is the Word of God. Psalm 119:11 says,

"I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you."

Storing up God's Word in our hearts means more than just reading it once for information. It means meditating on it. It means seeking life and wisdom from the Word of God. "Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (Deut. 8:3).

So Jesus gives us an example for overcoming temptation. Let the Word of God train your conscience and strengthen your heart. And when temptation comes, don't let it linger, and don't entertain it. Dismiss it with the Word of God. Jesus is a good example of this.

But Jesus is more than our example. He is our Savior. If Christ were only an example to us, we would all be condemned for all eternity. We would see in him how we should live, but we would continue to fall short. Jesus, if he is just an example for us, would say to us, "I showed

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you what to do and how to do it. Then you didn't do it. What's wrong with you people?" The righteousness of Jesus would condemn us.

But Jesus is much more than an example. He does not merely demonstrate righteousness. He *is* our righteousness. We look to him as the one who resisted temptation on our behalf and gave his righteousness to us.

By his death at Calvary, he took away our sin. But our redemption is not merely about what he takes away. It is also about what he gives to us in place of our sin. This is the "blessed exchange" that Pastor Sletto talked about on Wednesday night. Jesus gives to us his very own perfect righteousness. His perfect obedience, from conception to death, is credited to us. The love he showed to his neighbors is credited to us. His steadfastness in the face of temptation is credited to us. Where we have failed, along with all of humanity, that guilt is laid on Jesus, and his innocence is given to us. Nature abhors a vacuum. Apparently God does too, because he is not content to simply remove our sin and leave us empty, but he gives us Jesus' righteousness to take its place. Jesus was tempted in our place. He succeeded where we fail, and he gives this obedience to us as a gift.

There are two Old Testament connections that prove this. One of them is the Exodus from Egypt, which is covered in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It's a story of God's people failing. Just like us, they fall into temptation. But Jesus succeeds where they had failed and where we continue to fail.

The circumstances of Jesus' temptation remind us of the Exodus. The forty days in the wilderness recalls the forty years Israel spent in the wilderness. And it follows immediately after Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan River, much like Israel's forty years followed immediately after crossing the Red Sea. Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, much like a pillar of cloud and fire led the people of Israel during the Exodus. And all three of Jesus' temptations replay temptations where Israel failed, but Jesus prevails over the devil.

The people of Israel grumbled against God and despaired of him when they had no bread (Ex. 16:2-3, 7). But Jesus refused to turn a stone into bread. The people of Israel rebelled and worshipped false gods, most notably a golden calf (Ex. 32). But Jesus refused to worship Satan. The people of Israel tested the LORD when they had no water (Ex. 17:1-7). But Jesus refused to test God. In each temptation, he stands firm and excels where Israel had failed.

All of this indicates that he has come to stand in the place of Israel and fulfill all righteousness on their behalf. But this is not only for Israel's benefit; it is for the whole world. They failed, because they were sinful like you and me. But Jesus triumphed in their place and for us. His righteous obedience is credited to us. That's the first Old Testament connection.

The other Old Testament connection goes back even farther. It's the fall into sin from Genesis 3. Jesus prevails where Adam and Eve failed.

The devil's temptations are similar. He starts with food again. He tempted Adam and Eve with fruit, and he tempts Jesus with bread. He wants man to look to him for life instead of God, but the devil only has death to offer.

He also questions God's Word. To Eve the serpent said, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" (Gen. 3:1). And with Jesus he also questions God's Word, both with the first and last temptations, when he says, "If you are the Son of God" (4:3, 9). At Jesus' baptism, God the Father spoke from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (3:22). The devil questions that Word of God and tempts Jesus to prove it.

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But when questioning God's Word doesn't work, the devil outright lies. To Eve he said, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:4-5). He also lies to Jesus when he says, "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. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." (4:6-7). The devil never possessed the kingdoms of the world. He wanted them, and he pretended to have them, but God never handed them over.

But Jesus doesn't argue with the devil. He doesn't dispute the point. Unlike Eve in the Garden of Eden, Jesus doesn't engage. He simply invokes the Word of God, and the temptation is over. He doesn't flinch. He's not there to persuade the devil of anything. He's there to resist. Jesus knows he is the Son of God. He knows he possesses all authority. So Jesus doesn't have to prove anything to the devil.

The reason for this temptation is that the devil wants Jesus to bypass the cross. Jesus is on a path to the cross to redeem us. That is, to purchase us back. But it's not like we belong to the devil, so the devil can't give us to Jesus. We are in slavery to sin. We are not under the authority of Satan. We are under the wrath of God. So Jesus goes to the cross to redeem us out of slavery to sin.

The devil would like to blur this distinction and make Jesus think that he can hand us over to him. It's a temptation to bypass the suffering of the cross. But if Jesus were to worship the devil, he would not actually gain a kingdom, but would himself become a slave to sin. This is really the devil's attempt to gain the kingdom he never had. But Jesus knows this, so he doesn't flinch.

Finally, the devil tells Jesus to throw himself off the temple. This would be a great way for Jesus to prove to the devil that he really is the Son of God, but Jesus doesn't need to prove himself. They both know who Jesus is. So Jesus dismisses him with one final word: "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test" (4:12). Not only is this the reason Jesus won't give in to the temptation, it is also a rebuke of the devil, for this is what the devil had been doing to Jesus all along. He was testing God.

He was testing his God. The devil is not the free agent he wants to be. He still has a God, though he will never receive mercy from this God as we do. The devil is no free agent. He may be a devil, but he is God's devil, and he can do nothing that God does not allow.

The devil may wreak havoc, but God has set a limit to his evil. The devil may tempt us, but no more than God allows. We may even give into his temptations, for we are weak, but our Jesus is strong, and he is jealous for us. He will not allow the devil to take what is rightly his. He withstood temptation for our sake. He held to the path of suffering for our sake. He bore our sin. He endured the cross. And he gives us his perfect righteousness. So trust not in your own righteousness. Do not trust your own ability to overcome temptation. Trust in Christ's righteousness. When you are in the midst of temptation, seek help from him. When you give into temptation, and sometimes you will, flee to Christ, for he is your fortress and salvation. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.