

***“Who Was Jesus?—Tempted Like You and Me...”***

Today we continue this series of sermons we started last week. In this series we are trying to answer the question, “Who was Jesus?” To get at the heart of that question we’re looking at the Gospel of Luke and looking at portraits of Jesus that we see in there. You see, Luke wants us to see the truth about Jesus, a truth that Luke himself was willing to die for; a truth he wanted everybody to know. Last week we looked at the very beginning of Jesus’ life on earth and today we are going to look at the temptations that Jesus faced in the wilderness. The same sort of temptations you and I face.

Let’s start with some background information. If you brought your Bibles with you today please open them up to Luke chapter 3 verse 21. This is where we read about Jesus’ baptism. We need to remember that as Jesus grew up his mother, Mary, taught him that he was somebody special. Even though Mary didn’t completely understand who Jesus was until the very end, she did know that God had sent him for a special purpose. She knew that the Holy Spirit would be upon him. But it wasn’t until Jesus’ baptism that all that he had heard about himself really came together. He was about 30 years old and he went out to the Jordan River to be baptized. **[PICTURE: Jordan River]**

The man who was doing the baptizing that day in the Jordan River was John, Jesus’ cousin. They were the same age and John was a very special man of God. He was chosen by God to pave the way for Jesus. And John’s ministry was to invite people to come and recommit their lives to God. He saw that so many people called themselves Jews but they weren’t living out their faith. Just like a lot of people call themselves Christians today, but don’t do much about it. So John came to call people to repent of their sins and recommit their lives to God. His message was so powerful, and God’s presence was so tangible in him, that thousands of people flocked to him and responded to his preaching. It was while all these thousands of people were coming to hear John and be baptized that Jesus went to be baptized by John. When John saw him he said, “Jesus, I shouldn’t baptize you, you should be baptizing me!” But Jesus said, “No, let this happen.” So John baptizes him. **[PICTURE: Baptism of Jesus]**

This is important stuff, don’t miss this because in that baptism everything that Jesus had heard about himself growing up came together. As he was baptized in the water and brought up out of that water, what looked like a white bird came down from heaven onto him. That was the Holy Spirit of God entering into his life. He was filled with the Spirit of God in way that he had not experienced before. Then the voice of God spoke, something that we read about happening only one other time in Jesus ministry. The voice of God says, **[SLIDE SUPERIMPOSED OVER PREVIOUS PICTURE...]** **“You are my beloved Son and with you I am well pleased.”** It was through that event that things become clear to Jesus about his life.

Right after his baptism, after this profound spiritual experience, Jesus is led into the barren wasteland of that area to be tempted and tested by the devil. **[PICTURE: The Wilderness]** It’s important that we understand this, because the same thing will happen to you and me. I try to warn people about this when they give their lives to Christ or after some other deep experience. I say something like, “You can count on the fact that you’re going to walk out the door of this place and you’re going to feel yourself tempted and tested and you’re going starting wondering, ‘Is this thing really real?’”

Maybe some of you here today have experienced this. You went to church camp as a teenager and God did something and it was deep and profound and you knew something inside you changed. It was so profound that you cried and felt God’s presence. But you went home from Church Camp and all the same temptations were waiting for you and pulled you away from God. It happens to a lot of people who commit their lives to Christ and join the church. They are so excited about what God is doing, but within weeks they find themselves lured away from their commitment, lured away from their new relationship with God. It happens when people go through Alpha, and Bible Studies, and Camino. That’s the way the devil works; that’s what happened to Jesus. Immediately following the most profound spiritual experience, he’s led into the wilderness and tempted by the devil.

Let’s talk about the devil for a minute. Some people think the devil is real, some don’t. Take a look at this... **[VIDEO: Visual Reality, Volume 7, “The Devil” to 1:53]**

There's a lot of misinformation about there about the Devil that I think we need to clear up. In the Bible we see the devil mentioned many times. He's called Satan, the tempter, the accuser, the father of lies, the adversary. He is **not** Gabriel kicked out of heaven. He is very real in the scriptures and we see Jesus doing battle with Satan through out his ministry. Jesus casts demons out of people and sometimes they even talk to him before he cleans them out there.

But you know, when I went to seminary there was nothing taught about the devil. I don't remember a single time where any of my professors said, "Today we're going to talk about the devil and what you need to know about him." You see, the assumption was that there really wasn't a devil. The assumption was that the devil is just a representation of the evil that lurks in our hearts--just a name we give to our dark side. The belief was that when we read about demons in the Bible we're really just reading about people's psychological disorders. The understanding was that educated, thinking, reasonable people just don't really believe that the devil is real.

Honestly, I bought in to all of that. But in my years in ministry I've changed my mind. It's become clear to me that there really is a devil. You may or may not believe in the devil and that's OK, but my experiences have been that the devil is real. You won't here me talk about the devil much because I don't believe he has much power, but there have been times and places in my life when I have felt an evil presence that was frightening and very real to me. One woman who was involved in the occult for years and then became a Christian said, "You mean that there are actually people out there who don't believe in Satan. I have some stories I could tell them!" I've watched as the devil has grabbed a hold of peoples lives and tormented them, and blinded them to the truth, and bound them with addictions. I've talked with people and heard the stories of people who have this push inside them, this inaudible voice inside, that keeps telling them that life is not worth living.

C. S. Lewis once said that the most dangerous thing the devil ever did was convince people that he doesn't exist. That just gives him more power because we choose not to call him what he is.

So, on one side of the theological spectrum are those who say that the devil doesn't exist, but on the other side are those who to give the devil way too much credit and in the process they eliminate human responsibility. In other words, instead of saying, "Yes, I did this thing wrong and I'm responsible." They might say, "Well, the devil made me do it! And I'm **not** responsible." In some churches you hear Satan talked about in almost every sermon. Spiritual warfare is the common theme week after week, after week. I believe that there is a middle ground between these extremes that holds the truth.

You see, it's important that you understand what the Bible really teaches about Satan. You need to know that, he has nothing over you. You need to have a healthy respect and fear of him, but in comparison to the power of God, Satan is nothing! In Genesis God says that one of Adam and Eve's children will crush the devil under his foot. That child of course is Jesus who would crush Satan himself.

We see in other places in the Bible that Satan has no authority over anybody, but that God allows him some ability to challenge and test us. Peter says this in the Bible: **[SLIDE...]** **"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith..." (1 Pet 5:8-9, NIV).** The devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour, but James writes, **[SLIDE, add to previous...]** **Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7, NIV).** John says, **[SLIDE...add to previous]** **"The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).** In other words the devil is there and real, but your power over him is so much greater than his power over you because you have the power of God! You have nothing to be afraid of when Christ is in you.

I remember one dark night in my life when I felt that presence of evil around me. I wasn't being tempted, I was just frightened and scared. In those moments the whisper of God reminded that I am not my own. That inner voice of God was saying, "Aaron, don't be afraid, you gave your life to me and you are mine. I am your master. And if anything wants to get to you it has to go through me, and I won't let that happen as long as you rely on me." Those times when I feel harassed I say, "Back off! I know what you're doing. Get away from me Satan! In the name of Jesus leave me alone! Back off!" Some of you probably think I've lost

my mind, telling Satan to back off and get lost and leave me alone in the name of Jesus. But the scriptures tell us that we have the power to do that.

There's peace, real peace, in knowing that anything that wants to get to me has to go through the one who owns me. The witness of scripture is that Satan is defeated and he only has the power that God allows. Only Satan doesn't know how helpless he is, but God's people do.

So Jesus was led into the wilderness where he fasted for 40 days and during that time he was tempted by the devil. Jesus' temptation has profound implications for us today. His temptations happened 2000 years ago, but those same temptations are put in front of you and me every day! They haven't changed much. Let's talk about them. You see, Satan is tempting Jesus at his points of weakness. Jesus had gone without food for 40 days and he was hungry! He was famished! And that's where Satan began his attack. Now, I have to say this. Satan was not standing there next to Jesus wearing red spandex tights and a pitchfork and little horns coming out of his head! **[PICTURE: satan]** That's not how he attacks. If he showed up looking like that we'd all just laugh and there'd be no temptation at all. That's not how Satan tempts me, he's much more subtle.

Jesus was tempted not by Satan standing next to him. He was tempted like you are and I am. He was tempted by that voice whispering in his ear. That voice whispering, "Hey Jesus, you're hungry aren't you? You're very hungry, but if you're the Son of God you've got the power to take one these big stones lying on the ground and turn it into a loaf of bread! If you're really the Son of God you can do this! Satisfy the hunger in your belly! Come on. It's OK!"

What kind of temptation is this? **[SLIDE: "The Three Temptations of Jesus"]** I mean, would that have been such a bad thing for Jesus to take a stone and turn it into bread and eat it? **[PICTURE: "The first temptation"]** He certainly had the power to do it. You see Jesus was fully God **and** fully human. That meant that his hunger pangs were real! This temptation by the devil is simply showing us that the devil always goes for our weak spots. **[SLIDE, add to previous, "1. Give in to your weakness."]** "Come on Jesus, ordinary humans can't do this but you can. Turn stones into bread and dig in. Hey, I won't tell. Do it just this once. Nobody else is here to see it. It's just you and me. You can compromise this one time. Aren't you hungry!" The devil attacks at the weak spots. That's how any good strategist works. I mean if you're a football coach and the opposing team has a starting defensive back out, where are you going to throw those passes? You better believe that you're going to attack where there's a second or third string player back there. That's what the devil does in your life.

So what's your point of weakness? Is it lust? Is it alcohol? Is it drugs? Is it anger? Where is your point of weakness? You've got one. Do you know what it is? Because if you're not aware of your point of weakness, the devil is going to have a field day with you. "Come on, what's just one drink? You've gone six months without a drink, you deserve a drink today! Nobody will know, and how's one drink gonna hurt you?" Or, "Just one joint, or just one night with her—nobody will know, your wife won't find out. Just once." Do you ever hear that voice whispering in your ear? "Just once."

But Jesus knows how to deal with the devil. He says, "Listen, I know who you are. I know what you're trying to do. But in the scriptures it is written that one does not live by bread alone." In the other Gospels he adds, "But by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." "That's what it says...end of story."

You see Jesus teaches us something important here. He doesn't try to argue with the devil. He doesn't say, "Listen, Satan. Here's why I can't do that..." and then get into a big debate. You see if you get into an argument with the devil you will lose! He's an expert debater and great at rationalizing things. You can't defeat him on his terms like that. Jesus didn't debate Satan he just said, "it is written this way in the scriptures...therefore leave me alone."

That's why it's important that you know what the Bible says! That's why we put these study guides together every week. That's the last thing I do at the end of my week and sometimes I don't get them done until 10:00 at night on Thursday so they can be printed on Friday morning. They're important. That's why I talk about these every single week, because I want you to know what this book says so that when the tempter whispers in your ear you can say, "It is written...therefore, leave me alone!" There is power in the word of God.

But the devil doesn't give up easily and we see that he tempts Jesus a second time. Now he starts to attack on another front. He says, **[PICTURE: "The Second Temptation"]** "Hey Jesus, I control the wealth and power of entire kingdoms and nations. And if you just drop down and worship me, just for a minute, it can all be yours. Just give me a little R-E-S-P-E-C-T Jesus and I can take you a long way baby!" "Think about this realistically, Jesus. Look at yourself! You're a poor carpenter. You're a nobody. And do you know who listens to a nobody, Jesus? Nobody! But if you had some money, some do-re-me, then you could get some attention. Jesus I can give you power. I can give you the best this world has to offer."

Isn't interesting that one of the temptations that Jesus faced is the same temptation that so many of us wrestle with today? All he had to do was give the devil a little respect and compromise. **[SLIDE, add to previous "2. Compromise Your Soul"]** The devil will say anything.

How many of us have compromised our souls to go after the things of this world? How many of us have been faced with this temptation? All it takes is a little compromise...but in the end what we sacrificed were our values and things that were really important. Some of us have sacrificed our children or our spouses so we could have the things that the world considers valuable.

And here's the interesting thing about Satan is that he'll fulfill his promise. You want it all, wealth and power? He'll give it to you, but when you start to get the things that Satan promises they never fulfill. It's like eating cotton candy. **[PICTURE: cotton candy]** Cotton candy looks so good, so fulfilling, but when you go to take a bite it just disintegrates into nothing in your mouth. I mean you can make a big old ball of that stuff and put it in your mouth and it will disappear. There's nothing to it! That's what Satan's promises are like, you get the thing but it never satisfies.

But Jesus said, **[PICTURE AND SLIDE: Bread...]** "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35, NIV). He's the only thing that really satisfies. He says to the devil, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'" Jesus quotes the scriptures again. He's saying, "I don't need your stuff. I don't need your power. I don't need your money. Because I have something more." It's not an accident that Jesus preaches more about money than any other theme. Not because he's asking for offerings, not because he was in the midst of a capital funds drive. He preached about money because it's what we struggle with as human beings...wealth and power. We wrestle with these temptations. He said, "you can gain the whole world but lose your soul." He said you can't serve two masters. You'll always end up loving one and hating the other. You cannot serve both God and money. Jesus quoted the scriptures, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

That's the second temptation, but Satan isn't done yet. He comes back with his final shot. He takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple. **[PICTURE: "The third temptation"]** It would have been a 450 foot drop to the Kedron Valley down below. The devil says, "OK Jesus, here's the deal. If you are the Son of God, then jump from here." And then the devil quotes scripture. He quotes from Psalm 91 which says that God will send his angels so that you won't even stub your toe. Isn't it interesting that the devil can quote scripture too? "Test it out Jesus! See what happens, because if you're the Son of God, nothing will happen to you, but we won't know until you jump."

This temptation is for Jesus to be a sensation **[SLIDE: add to previous, "3. To be a sensation"]**. You see, thousands of people would have seen him jump and then land rather than hit the ground. Satan is saying, "That's how to make an impact! Impress them with theatrics! In fact you could probably do that instead of going to the cross! Think of all the people you'd impress, they'd be sure to follow you then and you wouldn't have to suffer that ugly crucifixion. Jump. See what happens."

The temptation for sensationalism is everywhere. We tend to believe that if somebody isn't sensational then they're really not worth looking at. And Jesus wasn't much to look at. He was a poor carpenter who didn't even have a home of his own. He didn't have wealth or material things. This was a temptation to impress people with a good show. But God isn't impressed with a good show, he doesn't want us to put on a circus, but instead to make a quiet journey to the cross. The real sensation for Jesus wasn't jumping off the temple and landing unhurt. The real sensation was being willing to go all the way to the cross and experience the pain of crucifixion. It wasn't a pretty show, but it was the way to nail the sins of the world to that cross with him.

The temptation was to be sensational instead of being faithful. But Jesus chose to be faithful and I, for one, am glad. Because if he had not chosen that cross, then there would be no way for me to be free of my sin.

Sensationalism is certainly a temptation for churches and preachers. To make every worship service an event, the next one bigger than the last. To try to impress people. Impress people with some acrobatics instead of with your willingness to go all the way to the cross. But God isn't impressed with sensationalism. Do you know what he's impressed with? Humble obedience. Don't make a show of your faith. Be willing to live out your faith in such a way that others see God in you and hear God's word from you. Don't show off **what** you know...instead point to **who** you know. Jesus resists this final temptation by quoting scripture again. He says, **[SLIDE...]** **“And so it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”**

When Jesus resists the devil for the third time the devil leaves him. The scriptures say, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” You've got to do your part by resisting. Jesus wrestled with the devil again, but it was nothing like that first time. Because at his very weakest he had defeated Satan at his very strongest.

Here's what I want you to remember about today. There was nobody there to witness these temptations of Jesus. The only way we have this story is that Jesus told his disciples. He told them, “I went into the wilderness and I wrestled with these things, and I was tempted by Satan and here is how I resisted.” He told his disciples this so that they could tell you. So that when you're tempted and tested you might remember that Jesus was tempted and tested in every way like we are, and yet he did not give in, you don't have to either.

You need to know this too. If you are being tempted and tested that's a good sign! It means that you are doing something right that Satan is trying to stop you! If you're not doing God's will then the devil doesn't need to do anything to stop you...you're already heading in his direction. The times of testing deepen your faith.

The next time you hear the devil whispering in your ear I want you to stop and say, “Is that the best you've got? Listen. It's written in the scripture...so leave me alone. In the name of Jesus be gone.” And he will. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*I thank Rev. Adam Hamilton, Sr. Pastor of The United Methodist Church of The Resurrection for his sermon series on this topic.*