

JESUS SAID, “IT IS WRITTEN...”

Luke 4:1-13

Key Verse: 4:8

“Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.”””

In today’s passage Jesus is tempted by the devil. Temptation is something everyone experiences, without exception (1Co 10:13a). **Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desires and enticed by the devil** (Ja 1:14). Jesus did not have a sinful nature, but he still underwent temptation by the devil in the wilderness. “Wilderness” has many meanings. In the case of John the Baptist, it was the place where he went to hear the word of God. There were no distractions—no cell phones or media devices; it was a quiet place where he could hear the word of God and meet God very personally. But at the same time, the wilderness is a vulnerable place. It is isolated and lonely; there are no friends to share conversation with. This kind of silence scares people. Moreover, there is always the danger of attack by evil forces. The wilderness reflects the reality we are living in. We are vulnerable to many kinds of temptations in our daily lives. Even though we live faithfully before God for many years, we are still vulnerable to the devil’s temptations. This is why some people stumble at the end of their lives, though they had achieved many good things. In order to live a victorious life to the end, we need to overcome the devil’s temptations. This is not something that we should do once or twice, but every day throughout our lifetimes. That is why Jesus teaches us to pray daily, **“And lead us not into temptation”** (Lk 11:4b).

In today’s passage, Jesus defeated the devil’s temptation. It was more than an example for us. Jesus demonstrated, as a representative of mankind, that he is able to help those who are being tempted (Heb 2:18). In the time of temptation, when we come to Jesus, he helps us. Do you really want to live a victorious life? Let’s come to Jesus.

In Luke’s gospel we can categorize the devil’s temptation in three ways: bread, worldly power and glory, and testing God.

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First, “man shall not live on bread alone” (1-4). Verses 1-2 tell us why and where Jesus was tempted, and what condition he was in. When Jesus was baptized by John, the Holy Spirit descended on him; the Father confirmed that Jesus is the Son of God (3:22). Now Jesus began his Messianic ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit. At this moment, the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness. In Genesis 3, the devil initiated the temptation of the first man. But here, the Holy Spirit initiated the confrontation. The Holy Spirit was sending Jesus, as the Second Adam, to confront the devil’s temptation and restore mankind from the failure of the first Adam. For forty days Jesus was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. As a human being, Jesus was in an extremely vulnerable condition. Everything looked like food. In such a situation, no one can resist the opportunity to obtain food by any means. Jean Valjean in “Les Miserables” stole a loaf of bread to feed his hungry child and was arrested and imprisoned for 20 years. We understand him. The bread problem is not a small matter; it is a very serious matter. At this moment, the devil said to Jesus, **“If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread”** (3). There were many stones in the wilderness and they all looked like bread. Jesus had the ability to turn them into delicious German bread, Dunkin Donuts, sourdough biscuits, bagels, garlic bread and the like. The devil’s suggestion was very attractive. But Jesus never used his power to meet his physical needs. Jesus used his power to serve suffering people with compassion.

How did Jesus respond to the devil’s suggestion? Verse 4 says, **“Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Man does not live on bread alone.””**” This is a quotation from Deuteronomy 8:3, which says, **“He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”** Here we need to understand the context of the passage Jesus quoted. God’s purpose in leading the Israelites into the wilderness was to train them to humble themselves and depend on him daily for their food, drink and clothing. These are basic needs of all human beings. God wanted them to realize that he is the one who provides daily necessities and trust him. Why did God train them in this way? If we do not trust God in the matter of daily provisions, we will be consumed by anxiety and the worries of this life. We easily lose faith and complain and doubt. Then we cannot

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have fellowship with God, hear his voice, or follow his guidance and serve him. So we need to learn how to trust God for our daily provisions. As we can see, Dr. James Joung is a very mature and exemplary man of God. But he was not born that way; he learned how to trust God in daily life. While in Korea, he received God’s call to come to America as a missionary. He was willing, but he began to be very anxious about how he would survive. So he went to God in prayer and spent the night praying about this matter. Then he heard God’s voice, **“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”** (Mt 6:33). He trusted in God and was free from anxiety. The next day he came to America with just a few dollars in his pocket and has since struggled to seek God first and trust God. God has provided for all his needs and enabled him to serve God with all his heart. There are many such stories among us. Let’s pray that God may raise many young people to trust him for their daily needs and to serve him with all their hearts.

In verse 4 Jesus teaches us about human identity and nature. Human beings are not just physical creatures like animals. We cannot be satisfied with only physical things. We need more; we need spiritual satisfaction. Of course, we have physical needs. Jesus was mindful of people’s physical needs. So Jesus taught us to pray, **“Give us each day our daily bread”** (Lk 11:3). When a crowd of five thousand men were hungry, Jesus fed them with great compassion. But when they experienced his provision, they became demanding and wanted to make him their king who would provide physical bread. Jesus was sorry to see them degenerate from having spiritual desire to seeking only bread. So Jesus said, **“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life”** (Jn 6:27). He also declared, **“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry...”** (Jn 6:35). Jesus wanted to give them eternal life, not just a meal. But they were disappointed and grumbled and left. Jesus’ disciples were different. They confessed, **“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life”** (Jn 6:68). They fed on God’s words as most essential. They later grew to be spiritual giants—blessings to the world. Human beings are not just physical, but spiritual—made in the image of God. So we need the words of God. When we have the words of God we become true human beings. Our lives are very meaningful, beautiful and fruitful. Jesus said, **“Man does not live on bread alone.”**

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Second, “worship the Lord your God and serve him only” (5-8). Jesus defeated the devil’s first temptation with the word of God. But the devil did not give up. He approached with a different temptation, related to power and glory. Human beings like to have authority over others. If one has authority over a big corporation, it seems great. How much more over one nation. So the presidential candidates are competing fiercely with one another. But consider the temptation Jesus faced. The devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and said, **“I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours”** (6-7). Here the key issue has to do with the source of authority, how is it obtained and how is it exercised.

The devil claimed that all the authority and splendor of the kingdoms of the world had been given to him and he could give it to anyone he wants to. This is a lie, but there is some truth in it. Jesus called Satan “the prince of this world” (Jn 12:31). Paul tells us several things about Satan: **he is the ruler of the kingdom of the air who works in those who are disobedient** (Eph 2:2); **he exercises the “secret power of lawlessness” to capture all those who refuse to love the truth and be saved** (2Th 2:7,9-10); **he reigns over “the dominion of darkness”** (Col 1:13). In brief, Satan has power over those who are disobedient, reject the truth and love the darkness. People think that they can be free if they follow their own sinful desires. But they become slaves of sin and most miserable (Jn 8:34). The author of Hebrews reminds us that the devil holds the power of death and keeps people in slavery all their lives through the fear of death (Heb 2:14-15). The devil’s power seems to rule over everyone. However, the devil was decisively defeated through Jesus’ death and resurrection (Jn 12:31). The truth is that all authority belongs to God and he gives it to whomever he pleases. Daniel 4:17 says, **“...the holy ones declare...that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of the people.”** The devil is a liar and the father of lies (Jn 8:44). So we should not be deceived. His offer is hollow; he cannot give what he promises. Through deception, the devil wanted to entice Jesus to worship him. If Jesus had done so, he would have broken the first commandment and become a slave of the devil, ruining God’s salvation plan.

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How did Jesus respond to the devil’s temptation? Let’s read verse 8. **“Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.””**” Jesus had no selfish ambition to obtain the power and glory that the devil gives. Rather, he had heart’s desire to worship God by obeying God’s will with all his being. That is why Jesus came into the world. Jesus knew that only God is the object of worship. In his answer, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:13, which says, **“Fear the Lord your God, serve him only....”** The context of Deuteronomy 6 was that Moses wanted to warn the people about their attitude toward God after obtaining the blessings of the Promised Land. They were tempted to indulge in the blessings and to forget to worship God. It was because they did not fear God. In Deuteronomy 6:13, the word “fear”¹ denotes the reverence which is expressed by a humble act of worship. Worship is more than a loving feeling. It contains a fear of God which recognizes God as God. It is expressed through humble submission that obeys God’s will, even if it means suffering and death. When Jesus said, **“Worship the Lord your God,”** he firmly decided to follow God’s will, whatever the cost. It is because God alone is worthy of one’s life devotion. Jesus also said, **“...and serve him only.”** Sometimes we think, “I can serve God and do many other things. Serving God is one of the things I do. I am able to multi-task.” But the Bible says, **“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money”** (Mt 6:24). What happened to Jesus, who worshiped God and served him only? In Matthew 28:18-19a, the Risen Christ said, **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations....”**

Worship is not just theoretical; it is very practical. Whatever one values most, loves most, and gives first priority to, is their object of worship. Any object of worship besides God is an idol. Most people would not say, “I worship idols.” But in reality, many do. It may not be obvious during ordinary times. But in times of crisis and challenge it becomes very clear what one loves most. For example, God challenged Abraham to offer his one and only son Isaac as a burnt offering. Abraham was willing to do

¹ Lenski, R. C. H. (1961). The Interpretation of St. Luke’s Gospel (p. 236). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.

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so, demonstrating that he loved God first, even more than Isaac. While doing so, he said, **“We will worship...”** (Gen 22:5). In order to worship God we need to hear his word, understand what God wants us to do, and obey wholeheartedly. This requires us to deny ourselves and sacrifice. For instance, when we hear Jesus’ words—to seek first his kingdom, to love one another, feed his sheep, and make disciples of all nations—in order to obey, we have to deny ourselves and take up our crosses and follow Jesus (Mk 8:34). Let’s worship the Lord and serve him only in our practical lives.

Third, “do not put the Lord your God to the test” (9-13). The devil had been defeated two times by Jesus, who depended on God’s word. The devil seemed to have learned something from this. Then he continued with a third attack which was shrewder. He led Jesus to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. Then he said, **“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone’”** (9-11). The devil tempted Jesus to demonstrate Messianic power in a quick and easy way. Jesus came into the world to solve the sin and death problem of mankind. It would require him to suffer much, die on the cross and rise again from the dead. Jesus should follow God’s time schedule and God’s way (Lk 24:44-46). The devil’s suggestion implies that God’s way was slow, ineffective and foolish. The devils says, “There is an easy way. You don’t need to take the way of the cross. Just jump. Then God will protect you as he promised. If you just show off your power one time, everyone will follow you. They will accept you as the Messiah.”

Jesus was aware of Satan’s implication. It would cause Jesus not to follow God’s plan at all. Instead of trusting God, Jesus would be putting God to the test. This was tantamount to assuming that God was not really in the plan at all. That was exactly the situation Moses wrote about in Deuteronomy 6:16, which Jesus quoted. When the people of Israel faced a water problem, though they had experienced God’s love and power, they fell into anxiety and fear and began to wonder whether God was really with them or not (Ex. 17:7). They did not trust God at all. But Jesus never doubted God’s love. Jesus trusted that God was with him and that the Father’s plan and timing were perfect. So Jesus answered, **“It is said: ‘Do**

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not put the Lord your God to the test” (12). Sometimes, we doubt God’s presence, power and love. It is hard to trust God. But we must realize that in all things God works for the good of those who love him and trust God (Ro 8:28). After the devil had finished all this tempting, he left Jesus—not permanently, but only until an opportune time came (13).

In this passage we learn that Jesus won the victory over the devil’s temptations as a man. He became our champion. Hebrews 4:15-16 says, **“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”** Jesus gives us victory over the devil’s temptations. We also learn from Jesus, who became our example. Each time he was tempted, Jesus said, **“It is written,”** or **“It is said.”** Jesus respected the Scripture as God’s word which has authority over the devil’s lies. We cannot defeat the devil’s temptation with human wisdom, such as psychology or philosophy, or by trusting our own experience. The word of God is the only spiritual weapon which is effective against Satan’s temptations. Let’s depend on Jesus and his word so that we may be able to overcome the devil’s temptations, win the spiritual victory, and render glory to God.