

“The Temptation Of Jesus”

The temptation of Jesus is one of the major events in the life of Jesus. It is the final preparatory event before his public ministry fully begins. It's intriguing in part because the experience of temptation is ancient, powerful, deceptive, destructive, and familiar to us all. In his temptation, Jesus shows himself to be so grounded in his trust in and obedience to God the Father that every temptation is rejected and overcome. The question for us this weekend is, what does this story say to us? What does God intend for it teach us? It is understandable, when looking at the temptation of Jesus, to immediately look for the practical help it might offer us in us in our temptations. It does offer helpful insights and principles. However, if you look at it in the larger story of the Bible and of Jesus, the first lesson is primarily about Jesus.

The story teaches us first of all that...

I. JESUS IS A SAVIOR WHO CONQUERS TEMPTATION FOR US.

Look at **verse 1**, *Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.* The words “*left the Jordan*” remind us that at the Jordan, John had identified Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes the way the sins of the world. At the Jordan, God said, “You are my beloved Son; with you, I am well pleased.” The Holy Spirit descended dramatically on him to empower him for his mission.

A. Temptation, for Jesus, is part of his mission as our Savior.

A German pastor named Helmut Thielicke wrote a little book on the temptation of Jesus and the temptability of man, which he published in 1938 when Hitler was consolidating his power and planning to begin WW2. Although the book made no direct mention of the Nazi party or the political situation, it was intended to strengthen the followers of Jesus in their resistance to the Nazi's and their worldview. The book was titled *Between God and Satan*. In the opening words, he says, “*Against the background of the desert, utterly isolated and infinitely remote, two figures are struggling for a huge stake.*” “*We know the reason for the conflict... these two are struggling for the earth and for man. And this earth is my world and yours. And this Man – is you and I. And those in conflict are God’s Son and Satan.*”¹ I love the fact that he so clearly places the temptation of Jesus in the context of a much larger battle. Jesus is not just an example. He is fighting for us.

B. Jesus is fighting for a new humanity - a new beginning.

1. Jesus is a new or second Adam. 1 Corinthians 15:22 says, *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.* In the same chapter in **verse 45**, he says, *“The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.* The first Adam stands as the representative human at the beginning of creation who gave into temptation and led all of humanity into sin, separation from God, and all the consequences of human evil and divine judgment. Jesus steps into our world as a second Adam. He is the representative human at the beginning of a new creation. Adam was confronted by the subtlety of Satan in a garden. He gave in to temptation. Jesus will be confronted by the tempter and his temptations in a desert, but he overcomes *for us*. Jesus succeeds where Adam failed. Jesus wins where Adam lost. He does this because He is the Savior.

2. Jesus embodies in himself what Israel was called to be but failed to be. The *“forty days”* in **verse 2** links Jesus to Israel’s forty years in the wilderness. In response to each temptation Jesus quotes Scripture from **Deuteronomy** ², which was written during those forty years in the desert. God called Israel to be his people and a light to the nations. When tested in the desert they grumbled and rebelled and failed to overcome temptation. Jesus in himself, alone will embody in himself what Israel was called to be but failed to be.

3. Jesus is the promised champion from the very beginning. In **Genesis 3:15** God said, *the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent.* Then as century after century unfolds, the lesson is brought home through one disappointment after another that no one seems to be able to stand up the tempter much less defeat and crush him. No one that is until Jesus. Jesus doesn’t face his conflict with Satan, simply as one more man fighting for his own integrity and purity. He comes as our Savior, our promised champion, our representative, who will reverse the curse for all who are *“in him.”*

C. Jesus will save everyone who is found “in Him”.

1. By birth, we are all “in Adam.” We are all related to him and represented by him, so when he sinned, we sinned in him and with him and suffered the consequences of his disobedience. I don't know if there is any modern analogy that is perfect, but one that comes to mind is that of a lawyer who represents you. If she wins the case, you win and reap the benefits regardless of your innocence or guilt.

If she loses the case, you lose and suffer the consequences regardless of your innocence or guilt. That helps with the idea of representation. There is also an idea of relationship. If you want to test the quality of water in a pond, you test a sample. You don't have to check every water molecule. A tested sample can reveal the quality of *all* of the water. We are by nature as human beings represented by Adam and related to Adam, and so, we have all sinned in him.

2. By faith in Jesus, we are placed "in Christ." We are related to him and represented by him through faith by grace. When we are in him, which happens the moment we trust in him as our Savior, his victory and his righteousness becomes our victory and our righteousness. We don't understand the temptation of Jesus unless we see it through this lens of the larger story of the gospel. He does battle with Satan and temptation as our champion. He will demonstrate his perfect righteousness in his victory over temptation.

On the cross, it is this righteous life that is offered up as a sacrifice for our sins. 2 Corinthians 5:21 For our sake, he (God) made him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him, we might become the righteousness of God. When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he said, Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. In ancient times in Israel, lambs were offered as a sacrifice for sin. When they were, they had to be tested because they had to be perfect.³ What we see when we look at the temptation of Jesus is the lamb of God tested to prove his blameless nature. Weakened by fasting, alone in the desert, he stands and wins where Adam, and Israel and all of humanity and you and I have not overcome and cannot overcome. He and he alone is the Savior. Is he your Savior?

A story is told of a wealthy Roman who had a son who broke his heart and a slave who had earned his admiration. He decided on his deathbed to disinherit his son and leave all of his wealth to his slave Marcellus. He drew up a will and called in his son to tell him what he had done. He said: "I have given everything to Marcellus. However, you may choose one thing, one gift from me for yourself." The son said: "I'll take Marcellus." The son knew that by choosing Marcellus, he would get, not what he had earned but what Marcellus earned. Everything that Marcellus had earned would be his because he choose Marcellus. I don't know how that story ended, but I do know that the story of God's grace and love is like that but better. In the Bible, the choice that you are given is to stand before God on the basis of your own life and goodness (which is to be *in Adam*) or to choose

Christ and receive with him, and *in* him all the love and the gifts of grace and goodness that Christ has earned for us. Choose Christ, trust Him, be sure you have done that. If you have, rest in him, live for him, worship him. Even his struggle in the desert was for you.

Jesus is a Savior who conquers temptation for us. Once we see that, we need to also see that...

II. JESUS IS A SAVIOR WHO SHOWS US HOW TO FACE TEMPTATION.

This, too, is part of the story. Four things stand out...

A. We have to be prepared for the inevitability of temptation.

Sometimes when Christians are tempted, they think if I were really good, I wouldn't have these problems, conflicts temptations. Well, look at **Luke 4:1-2** *Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.* Can you imagine being so pure, so good that you are perfectly pleasing to God the Father and you are totally filled with the Holy Spirit? How do you think you're life would go then? No temptation – right? No! Look at Jesus. Jesus shows you that you can be totally pleasing to God and filled with the Spirit and yet suffering and battling temptation because temptation is relentless and inevitable.

And...

B. We have to recognize the many faces of temptation.

1. Some things seem innocent when they are dangerous. Verses 3-4: The devil said to him, *“If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”*⁴ *Jesus answered, “It is written: “Man shall not live on bread alone.”* What's wrong with a hungry man meeting a legitimate need? It's bread! The devil doesn't say, “turn this stone into bread and these other stones into booze or babes – we'll get blasted!” Does it seem to you like the devil is an amateur at this temptation game? He doesn't really know how to bring a man, or a woman down? No. He's no amateur. He is shrewd and subtle. He reads the situation perfectly. Jesus points us to the real issue in this temptation in his response. In **verse 4**, he says, *“Man, shall not live on bread alone.”* You see, the issue is that Jesus' purpose is to live as a *man* a human being to serve and save humanity. He becomes one of us so that he can feel temptation *like us* and overcome it *for us*.

Hebrews 2:17-18, *Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation⁴ for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.* He could not do that if he conquered temptation like a God with miraculous powers instead of as a Spirit-filled man demonstrating trust and obedience. Imagine if you could nod your head, and every want is satisfied, every desire fulfilled, every need met. Would temptation be real? So bread, something innocent in itself, is sufficient to sabotage the purposes of God.

2. Some offers may seem worth it when they aren't. Verses 5-8.

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6, And he said to him, "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. 7 If you worship me, it will all be yours." 8 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" The devil is saying, "I've got the world in a death grip, but I will give it all up to you if you will worship me." Think of how practical that is. Don't you love this world, Jesus? Do you see the crooks that are in power now? Think of the suffering Jesus could alleviate, the good he could do, the wrongs he could right, the rights he could protect, the lives he could save. He doesn't have to walk the path of life-long obedience, conflict, injustice, and suffering. He can skip the cross and still get the crown. All he has to do is hold his nose and bow to the devil. God's work has to be accomplished! Yes, but God's work has to be done God's way. Some offers are not worth it.

3. Some reasoning might seem plausible when it's presumptuous. Verses 9-12.

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. 10 For it is written: " 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; 11 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' " 12 Jesus answered, "It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Jesus has been quoting Scripture. Here the devil shows he can quote Scripture too by quoting **Psalm 91**. The devil is a literalist when it comes to the Bible. He turns a beautiful promise into a something it was never intended to be and tempts Jesus to enact a presumptuous test of God's faithfulness. True faith trusts God and never tries to force his hand or demand that he prove himself on our terms.

We have to recognize the many faces of temptation. And...

C. We have to resist the deception of temptation through faith in the Word of God.

Jesus responds to each temptation by quoting Scripture. **Verse 4**, *Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"* **Verse 8**, *Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"* **Verse 11**, *Jesus answered, "It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"* Jesus knows the Scriptures. He trusts the Scriptures as God's word. He isn't just gritting his teeth and saying "no" to temptation. That's not the path for him or us. He is not just saying no to the temptation; he is saying, "Yes" to God. He is saying, *"Yes, I am the Son of God. I will not doubt my identity, nor will I be presumptuous about its privileges. Because I am the Son of God, I will trust God and obey him."* Later, when the apostle Peter talked about temptation, as one who had fallen into temptation repeatedly even though he deeply loved Jesus, he warned us to be sober-minded and watchful because the devil roams around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. He said, *resist him firm in your faith.* ⁵

We resist the deception of temptation through faith in the Word of God.

D. We find the strength to fight temptation through the one who was tempted for us.

Jesus was tempted for us. He will ultimately go to the cross and lay down his righteous life to save our souls from judgment and condemnation. He rose from the dead because His victory is complete. When you trust in him, his victory is your victory. God, the Father said to Jesus, you are my beloved Son with you; I am well pleased. When you trust in him, you are found *in him*, clothed in his perfect righteousness, you receive the blessing of the Father. In Christ, you are loved, accepted, forgiven, celebrated, and given the gift of the Holy Spirit. To the degree that you actively deeply believe in and treasure the love, beauty, and the blessings of the gospel, other things that can otherwise be so seductive lose some of their strength to trap you. The experience of temptation can even be the occasion to spark a more decisive, even desperate choice to turn to Christ and find life and strength in Him. The devil's primary strategy is not to create atheists but believers in God's existence who do not trust in God's goodness. What we see in Jesus is that God is good, and he came to suffer for us and save us by his grace. So trust and obey.

Amen

Prayer of Response

Lord help us to see more clearly the beauty of a Savior who fought and won the battle with temptation for us. Help us to see, in him, the champion who crushes the enemy of our souls under his feet. Teach us to remember his sufferings for us, to rest with faith in his faithful obedience and absolute victory. May we, imperfect as we are, so depend on your Holy Spirit that we fully rest in your goodness and grow more and more like our strong and gracious Savior Jesus. In his name we pray, Amen.

¹ *A Thielicke Trilogy*, Baker Book House, Page. 15

² Deuteronomy 6:13, 16, & 8:3

³ 1 Peter 1:18-20

⁴ “Propitiation” means “satisfaction”. By his sacrifice Jesus satisfies the righteous demands of God’s justice, law and wrath and thus saves his people from the judgment they deserve for their sins.

⁵ 1 Peter 5:6-11