

Temptations of Jesus Luke 4 v1-13

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3 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. (1 John 3v1-3)

Temptation

Oscar Wilde famously said, "I can resist everything, except temptation"

Our mind is the battle ground. It is where 'temptation', and its close cousin 'time wasting distraction' play their cards. Aren't most distractions just other ways of tempting you away from what you should be doing?

Battle of the Mind

You have put time aside for prayer, but you will just check today's weather first on the internet. Oh there's a message come in for me, just check that. Oh look 10 worst goalkeeping errors - click,. Now – why did I log on? Prayer time gone.

For a lot of our life, we have a job to be done, and we find it easier to focus on anything else except that job. Nowadays the internet and social media is cleverly designed to distract us from every angle, and take us down so many mental paths that we eventually forget why we logged on in the first place! Even in preparing this talk, I lost count of how many times I distracted myself from getting on with it, I even once found myself googling top ten tourist attractions in Libya? WHY??

The battle of your mind is real, and also a forum where a spiritual battle plays out, as the darkness looks for your weak area to exploit, to tempt and distract you into making decisions that are wrong for you, or equally as bad, prevent you from deciding and doing those things that God had always destined for you. He wants to come between you and God.

Living through nearly 18 months of global disaster, has included much fear and isolation for us, and the ability to win the battle of the mind seems to have been diminished for many. A speaker I heard last week said she felt like she had replaced her spiritual boots with slippers, but feels that **now** is the time to lace her boots back up again. So what can we learn from Jesus regarding this battle of the mind.

JESUS

Enter the Jordan

Jesus has spent his adult life as a skilled craftsman, probably living in Nazareth but working in nearby Sepphoris on its new buildings. One day he downed tools and left, perhaps ringing in his ears the

words ' I must be about my Fathers business', which was his response to his parents returned to Jerusalem to find their lost son, debating with scholars in the temple.

John is the superstar prophet. The first accepted Jewish prophet for hundreds of years. Everyone, of all walks of life, accepted him and went to him. He was born in to a priestly family with miracles happening at his birth. There were high expectations on this man of God.

Contrast the unknown Jesus. He would have been stereo-typed as a tradesman of lowly birth from a northern village.

But the first act of his new life is to go to John the Baptist.

When the carpenter arrives, the Prophetic Spirit in John cries out through him ' This is the lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world'. In other words, this man here is the Messiah, who I have come to make a way for.

Jesus persuades John to baptise him, and he does, at which point the voice of God himself is heard from the skies. This is my own beloved son, with whom I am well pleased'.

The Weak-point of Jesus

Wow. What an entry into ministry. Publicly, the great prophet John declared him messiah, and the voice of God declares him as the beloved Son of God.

These public declarations at the start of His ministry are important, because they give him permission to act above his status as a lowly born carpenter. Whilst it was important that Jesus was born in humble circumstances, in the eyes of the people, and the religious rulers in particular, this is his Achilles heal, the weak-point. He will be challenged on his credentials, and if shamed in public for acting above his station, no-one would then listen to him. Who are you to say this? Who gives you permission to act like that?

Yet these public declarations from John and from Father God, gave him the permission and confidence to take up his messianic ministry, to bring in the Kingdom of God, to be the lamb of God, to save the people.

Yet it will still be an area through-out his ministry which comes constantly under attack, right up to the end when Plate asks him 'Who are you?' Yet every time there is a challenge, he comes out on top.

The flow of Luke

Luke describes the baptism of Jesus, where God claims him publically as his Son. He then immediately gives the family tree of Jesus, taking back beyond Abraham, and concluding with the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God, to underline the point before going to the temptations where this relationship is under attack from the enemy. Then he narrates Jesus going to the synagogue at Nazareth where the relationship with God is under attack by his own townfolk. " Isn't he the son of Joseph? " (Luke 4v22).

At his written family tree Jesus is declared the Son of God. At his baptism, his Father in heaven declares Jesus his beloved son in whom he is well pleased. Yet Jesus himself needs to believe and be fully assured of himself, if he is going to be able to defend it against his accusers.

Jesus would have already felt a closeness to his Father God, but this public declaration, was something new. During the baptism the spirit of God came on him like a dove and empowered him.

This Spirit then leads him into the blistering heat of the unforgiving Judean desert for 40 days of prayer and fasting. Why?

Enter the wilderness

Lk 4 v1-2: 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. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

At the start of account of His temptations, we see Jesus doing some key things.

1. He is filled with the Holy Spirit. He is not starting from a bad place, He has been baptised, and he experienced God, but he needs to go deeper.
2. He listens to the internal voice, that of his Father's spirit within him. This implies he is already praying, and listening. When he hears that prompting, he knows what to do. He must go on a retreat. He must cut himself off from everyday distractions, by going not North West back to Nazareth, but in the opposite direction, into the wilderness.
3. He must pray and fast, and stick at it. Forty days is about as long as you can go without food before your stomach starts to digest itself.

Why is the Spirit leading him to do this?

Jesus, now publically declared both the Messiah and the Son of God, needs to work out with his Father God what this means. What is my purpose in this world? What does God really want me to do with my life? How will I know if I am going in the right direction or not?

For Jesus, he had known since a child that he had to be 'about his Father in heaven's business, John had declared that the Kingdom of God is now at hand, and that Jesus was the lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. He had placed the honorific role of messiah onto the shoulders of Jesus. This would have been the first time that this honour would have been spoken of him in public, and then came that confirmation from God of him being His beloved son. But there was still the question of what type of Messiah does he become? Exactly how is he going to bring in the Kingdom of God, and save people from their sins. He will thrash this out in prayer in the wilderness.

Enter the Enemy

The devil followed him into the wilderness to tempt him. Luke names the temptor as the devil (in Greek), or Satan (in Hebrew). Revelation gives both titles and also calls him the ancient serpent (reference to the garden of Eden) and the great dragon, defining him as a powerful arch-angel that fell from heaven to earth, after being defeated in a heavenly battle, taking all his angel followers with him. Isaiah gives him the name Lucifer (Is 14v12). However you choose to picture this adversary to God's purposes, this is the source of darkness in the world today, the source of lies and evil, and the root source of temptation against fulfilling God's purposes in our lives. I will simply refer to him as our enemy.

The Enemy had a strategy but his aim was to strike at the obedience of Jesus, and undermine the relationship between Jesus and his Father in heaven. He wants to cause a divide between them, at least in the eyes of the people, so that this claim of his special relationship with God the Father can be undermined.

Let the battle of the mind commence. Jesus seemed happy and ready to take it on.

The Battle Round 1 – Needs of the Flesh

³ 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. (Luke 4v3-4)

The Judean wilderness is punishing in its heat and desolation, and as the days `+past, his flesh is crying out for food. Into his mind, comes the enemy, the temptor, and makes a very reasonable argument. Jesus, come on now, you are the Son of God, you have his power available to you if you want to use it. You need food. You have the ability to change these rocks into bread rolls. Go on, show to yourself, you can do it, and take this awful hunger away. Surely that's what God wants for you. He doesn't want to suffer, does he?

Sounds plausible, doesn't it to give into the flesh in this extreme environment, and use Gods powers in this way. No ! Why, because I have checked in with God and it is not his will for me to do that Satan. If He had wanted me to do that, then he would have told me, and I would have done it. Jesus quotes scripture (Deut 8v3) to say to Satan, I can **not** live on bread alone, I need the spiritual as well, to be in tune with what Gods wants. The Will of my Father **is more important to me** than the urgings of my flesh.

The Battle Round 2 – Desire through the eyes.

⁵ The devil led him up to a high place & 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 splendour; 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. (Luke 4v5-8)

Jesus does not leave the wilderness. The battle is happening in his mind. Satan puts a vision into the mind of Jesus, and takes him to a high place where he can **see** the peoples of the world who he has come to save, those he wants to worship the Father through him. Here they all are.

Due to the disobedience of mankind to God, Satan exiled to Earth, has power and influence down here over many people. He has a very interesting proposal. He will, and he **is** able to do this, to turn the hearts of all these people towards Jesus, to live godly lives. In other words, he will stop lying to them, and leading them into sin and destruction, but instead point them all towards Jesus.

Look at all these people, these nations Jesus, everyone you can see can be yours. You can achieve everything you were sent her to do, without the effort, without the pain and suffering. Everything you see can be yours. Wow. There's an offer. Except of course there is a cost. He has to worship Satan, in fact give Satan what he always wanted, and that was the honour and glory that God the Father has.

Jesus goes back to scripture again. He calls out the temptor, and says get **behind** me Satan, because my Father is the one in front of me, and I am going to stand on scriptures again and '**only worship the Lord my God**' (Deut 6v5) .

The enemies offer may sound great but it also comes with limitations and an expiry date. The worship is just from this world, because that it where he has some influence, but not from the heavens. Also his 'license to kill', will be revoked one day soon, and he will be totally defeated.

The Battle Round 3 – Pride of the Heart

⁹ 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.”
(Luke 4v9-12)

For the third and final miracle, having been rebuffed twice by scriptures, the enemy changes strategy. Jesus wants to do his Fathers will, which Satan knows will include doing miracles that will draw crowds. So he appeals to Jesus to get on with it, and quotes scriptures himself to Jesus.

Again in a vision Jesus is taken to the Pinnacle of the temple high above the Kidron valley. Start your ministry here Jesus and jump off, because the scriptures say that his angels will come at catch you, and not even your feet will strike the stone below. Do this and the crowds will see you are full of your Fathers power, and will turn to you and follow you.

Again its very plausible. If I am as sure of Gods protection as Satan is for me, then he will indeed save me, and the crowds will be impressed and turn to God. But to do such an act without being told to be his Father, is the same as turning stones into bread in the first parable. However this temptation is not appealing to his flesh but to his pride. ‘Look at me everyone, look what God can do through me and for me’. And again like the second temptation it offers a short cut to gathering his followers, and bringing in the Kingdom of God.

However the devilish liar is misquoting a Psalm by leaving out the key phrase which in the amplified bible says that angels will guard and protect you, “ **in all your ways (of obedience and service)**” (Ps 91v11). It is in doing what the Father tells you to do that you are protected. He send you into battle, and will protect you in it. Go on your own say-so, then you could well be asking for trouble.

Jesus comes through victorious, and is stronger for facing his temptations and winning over them, than if he had not had this battle of the mind.

But what about me? What about you? We are not Jesus? How do we win the battle of our minds?

YOU AND ME

The battle was happening in the mind of Jesus, as it does in ours. We don’t carry out acts of disobedience to God, without our minds deciding it for us first. That is where we win or lose most of our battles. We have many and frequent battle to win in our minds. We need a strategy if we are going to triumph like Jesus did.

1. Know you are a child of God.
2. Know your weak point.
3. Recognise the temptation bells – of the flesh, of the eyes and of the heart
4. Find time to be with God
5. Embrace temptation and overcome it with Gods help.

Know you are a child of God

The attack on Jesus in the wilderness, was to undermine his belief in that he was the Son of God, and to drive a wedge between that relationship of Jesus and his heavenly Father. Jesus stood firm in the public declarations over him that he was the Messiah and the Son of God.

Through our faith in Jesus, you are adopted into that same heavenly family. You are children of God. His has declared that over you through the scriptures

Johns gospel, says **all who believe in His name, have the right to become children of God** (John 1v12). This is a bible truth, a promise you can hold onto if you have chosen to follow Jesus.

Paul goes onto say **The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God** (Romans 8v16). So you we can know this truth within you because the Holy Spirit in you confirms it to your own spirit.

Look around you at your fellow Christians. Each one is a child of God. A son or daughter of the Kings of Kings. A spiritual prince or princess in the family of God.

Just as with Jesus, this is what is **under threat for us**, our true identity in Jesus Christ, as a child of God. If we believe, accept, and live this out, with the riches of heaven, and the power of the Holy Spirit available to us, then our lives will be radically different, and the kingdom of darkness will shudder at the thought.

That is what your temptations are really about. They are designed to undermine your relationship with your heavenly Father, and keep you distracted from the amazing purposes God has for you (Eph 2v10). The enemy comes after your relationship with God, wanting to undermine you in your confidence, that you are this valued child of God.

This strategy of the enemy has its risks, because if we overcome them, then we are left stronger than before, just like Jesus was after the wilderness.

Know your weak point.

The Achille's heal of Jesus, at least to others, seemed to be his low status birth and that is where much of his attacks were aimed. What is your own weak-spot, that you need extra help to defend and protect. It is worth finding out, because these area that the enemy will specifically target, and hence where you will face the most temptations !

So be honest about yourself to God. Recognise your weakest areas. If you don't know them, ask your close friends what they are? Or ask God to reveal them to you. Write them down, and pray regularly for protection in those areas.

Then when that specific temptation comes, you can be doubly aware, and resist it.

The dark clouds of temptation

Imagine your mind at rest is a clear blue sky, then these dark clouds of temptations and distractions, come and take centre stage in your sky. Temptations are not sins, and should not feel guilty at all about them. Instead recognise them, then blow them out of your mind. The next one will come, do the same ! You will no doubt also face the same types of temptations that Jesus did. You can recognise them and name them when they come.

1. Temptation of the Flesh: Our flesh cries out. It could be hungry for food when we should not be eating, for emotional care from those that we should not be going to, or we could be having inappropriate sexual urges, or being tempted to take or keep what is not ours. We too, can face down those thoughts, and declare that there is more that we want from life than material things, as nice as they may be. We want Gods spirit, we want his closeness and fellowship, we want to be in his will. But we know that God will provide for our needs, if we put him first.

I personally discovered this in my twenties on a mission trip to North Africa, where I found myself without money for food, and the Lord provided what I needed every day. We could have been

tempted to have given up and gone back to the border where we had money banked. But we pushed on, and I came back not just with a good testimony, knowing personally that God had my back in times of need. He is a God that can be trusted everyday if we fall in behind him and take his lead.

“ I can not live by bread alone, but I need every word that comes to me from God”.

2. Temptation of the Eyes: Our eyes are tempted as were those of Jesus. We don't need visions though! The clever advertising machines are whirring relentlessly in front of our eyes, there are plenty of potential possessions that demand our time, effort, and money to own. There are also people and jobs, never intended for us, that once our eyes feast on our mind decides to pursue. I want to own that, I want him or her in my life, I want to feel like that etc I will go out with my own strength and determination to make it all mine and find the fulfilment those things promise me. The consumer culture can be all consuming as we serve it with our attention, our time and our money. As many have found, I can end up with the culture consuming me, before spitting me out unfulfilled and even broken.

If God gives us good gifts when we are doing his will, that's brilliant. We all like nice things and should enjoy them, though hold them lightly, as everything is only on loan to us. But we need to look to God for what we need, and what is right for us to have.

But as a Christian that is not where I will fix my gaze. I will not worship those possessions and serve those ambitions. Instead, I will fix my gaze on higher things, a generous God, who will more than provide what I need. He knows me and my needs much that I know myself. Don't be tempted to give up the higher path for attractive instant gains. Serve and trust Jesus to provide. I have just finished reading the auto-biography of George Muller who had no regular income but still managed in the 19th century to build and run orphanages for thousands of children, and schooled many more of the poor. He did this without ever asking for a penny, or letting his needs known, but just by praying for what he needed each day.

“ I Worship the Lord my God, and serve only him”.

3. Pride of the Heart: Our hearts, when serving God, can turn to seeking attention from others, for our own sakes, not for God's sake. Pride comes in and our motives become impure or at best misguided. We do not need to look far in our churches to see those who lord their positions over others, even small positions ! Some of us gifted by God, begin sensationalising things just because we are able to and enjoy doing it. That was not the purpose of those gifts. We may do dangerous or risky activities that we say are for Jesus', when actually we are 'off-piste', because we have not checked in with Jesus first over these plans to see if they were his intentions for us. With no green light, we are not following Gods lead, and If we do succeed, than we may impress people as intended, but **we** receive the glory, not God. But of course, without being in Gods will, in could all end up horribly wrong too. During the pandemic 2020, I prayed about our planned mission trip, and whilst all other cancelled, and quite right too, I felt God telling me to go and he would protect me. I did and he did. The trip was really blessed. But it would have been wrong of me to go when I hadn't been told to it prayer, or for me to boast about going after I got back !

Guard your heart and mind. Pray for humility, and enjoy serving God in the areas he has given you without needing praise from other people, or going off doing things that were never intended for you and expect God to show up and help you.

“ Do not put the Lord your God to the test”

Time alone with God

We should always protect our daily quiet times with God, our bible study, prayer and meditation, because it is where we get our daily direction from and strength to overcome temptations.

Yet there are some clouds we can't just blow away in our minds. There are regular temptations and weakness that need more from us to sort out. Just like Jesus, we need some dedicated time to sort the big issues and temptation out. We need to make a special effort. Follow his lead. We could fast and pray at home for a number of days or weeks. We don't have to give up food, you could give up your phone, or social media for 40 days, and spent the time you save in prayer ! I try and go on a retreat for this purpose once or twice a year to a remote Christian centre in Wales. It really helps set you up, for whatever comes next.

Embracing and overcoming temptations

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (Luke 4v1)

The spirit led Jesus in the wilderness with the intention that he would face temptations there, and it must have been important for Jesus to do this, as he prepared himself for his new ministry that lay ahead of him.

Thomas a Kempis said **“no man is so perfect and holy that he does not have temptations, and we cannot be whole without them”**. We see temptation as solely a negative thing, but to be tempted and overcome temptation is a positive attribute. Every moment of resistance we show is a small victory in itself, and the more we resist, the more we are able to resist. We gain strength of character from resisting our temptations.

My mandate as a Christian, do not go looking for trouble from the enemy, but be ready and embrace it when it comes, and it does come looking for me !

Not all temptation clouds and distractions can be recognised then blown easily out of the blue skies of a restful mid. Though many can. Others need us to battle against them:-

- Take the time out in prayer
- Know your Bibles, and use them to win your battles
- Protect your weak areas. Get others to pray with you and for you, if needed, to help you overcome.
- Focus on Jesus, not on yourself, and your needs and desires, but focus your mind in times of temptation on Jesus. What does he want for you? What are his needs in your life?

Overcome. **Take every thought captive and make it obey Christ.** [2 Cor 10v5]

Resist the devil and he will flee from you James 4v7

You are a child of God. Stand firm in that promise, welcome and overcome your temptations whatever they are, with a focus on Jesus, and empowered by his Spirit.

To be valiant means, to be courageous and determined. The great hymn says 'He (or she of course) who would valiant be against all disaster. Let him in constancy follow the Master. Let her never give up on following Jesus. Let us never give up on this battle of mind, continually giving into temptations and distraction. Even in this disaster, instead of retreating into our spiritual slippers and dressing gown or onesie, we can put on our spiritual boots and bullet-proof jackets

Then with courage and determination, stand firm in Him, be a confident son or daughter of the King of Kings Amen.