

The Temptation of Jesus Christ

Lesson Scope: [Luke 4:1-15](#)

Reference in brackets are from Luke 4 unless otherwise noted.

Lesson Focus

At the age of thirty, Jesus presented Himself among the common people to be baptized of John. Though John at first hesitated to baptize this One so far his superior, he consented to Jesus' direction to fulfill the will of God. Luke recorded that Jesus prayed at His baptism, and that at this juncture "the Holy Ghost descended ... like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased" (3:22).

As Jesus returned from Jordan, the Spirit directed Him into the wilderness. Mark's Gospel tells us that wild beasts roamed this place of stony barrenness. Destitute of human companionship, the newly inaugurated Prince of Light came into a contest with the prince of darkness. Here Christ underwent the testing so essential to qualify Him as the sinless sacrifice for fallen man.

Though Christ did not have the carnal nature, His victory proved that man can be victorious through the aid of the Holy Spirit. He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

Christ overcame the temptations of Satan by His choice to appropriate the power of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. We can also overcome as we follow Christ's example and avail ourselves of His grace.

The temptation of Christ was a very essential part of His qualification to be "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Christ, as a free moral agent, had the opportunity to choose to sin. Being God, He had a greater knowledge of the results of His choices than the first man Adam had. Like Adam, He did not have a preference for evil, as depraved man does, but a susceptibility. Satan exerted great effort, but our Lord resisted with an even greater power, the same power that is available to us today.

Do not spend much time thinking about what would have happened if Jesus had yielded to temptation. The answers to that question are useless speculation. We do want to praise God for His victory and to learn from Him. As we follow Christ's example and appropriate His grace, we can

overcome.

This lesson should help us to avoid a fatalistic attitude toward temptation. It is true that temptation is inescapable, and that Satan is a very persistent foe. But God has provided ample resources for us to be victorious. In resisting temptation, Jesus did not appeal to His divine power, but to the Word of God. We have a great cloud of witnesses to encourage us as well. As we are faithful in overcoming temptation, we will understand the Scripture that says, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

Lesson Aim: To learn about temptation and the way to victory.

Theme Verse: [1 Corinthians 10:13](#). There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

Lesson Text

Tempted in the Wilderness

[Luke 4:1-2](#) And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ² Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered.

Victorious Through the Word

[Luke 4:3-12](#) And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread. ⁴ And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. ⁵ And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. ⁶ And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. ⁷ If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. ⁸ And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. ⁹ And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: ¹⁰ For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: ¹¹ And in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a

stone. ¹² And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

Effective in Ministry

[Luke 4:13-15](#) And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season. ¹⁴ And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. ¹⁵ And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.

Questions for Study

Tempted in the Wilderness

1. Why did Satan choose this occasion to tempt Christ?
2. What are some factors that can make us vulnerable to temptation?

Victorious Through the Word

3. List the temptations Christ faced. What was the specific appeal of each one?
4. How does a proper view of the spiritual and the material help us to overcome temptation?
5. What are some indications that our worship and service are singular?
6. How might Satan entice us to tempt God?

Effective in Ministry

7. How did Christ's victory enable Him to meet the needs of mankind?
8. What are the results of resisting the devil?

Analyzing the Passage

Jesus ably used Scripture to overcome the devil's temptations. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" is a quote from Deuteronomy 8:3. Jesus in essence was telling Satan that man at his extremity should not take matters into his own hands to satisfy the present physical need, but should trust in the provisions of the almighty God.

"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" quotes Deuteronomy 6:13. Jesus told the devil that his desire was directly opposite the command of God.

Satan saw the power of the Word and attempted to use it himself. "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone" is from Psalm 91:11, 12.

These temptations are often linked to 1 John 2:16, "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." Eve failed just such a triple temptation, but Christ firmly resisted.

Principles and Applications

Tempted in the Wilderness

1. Spiritual victory depends on Holy Spirit power (4:1). We in ourselves are no match for the devil. But with the presence of the Spirit comes all the wisdom and grace that we need to overcome. While the Spirit may at times direct us to avoid temptation, many times He succors us in temptation. At times He brings an appropriate Scripture to mind. He bears to God our groanings for relief from our trials. When one test is past, He strengthens us to face another. "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16).

2. Physical weakness can make us more vulnerable (4:2). Satan thought surely Jesus' severe hunger would cause Him to fall for his logic. Hunger may not be our stress point, but Satan knows where we are weak. He knows when things do not go quite the way we wish they would. (And when they do!) He knows when a few dollars would really get us to a comfortable position. The day we forget that Satan will try to get us down is the day he will do it. When we feel like letting our guards down, it is time to keep our guards up.

Victorious Through the Word

3. Satan attacks man by getting him to seek physical satisfaction (4:3). We so quickly become engrossed in the material things of life. The devil will try his utmost to make us believe that having what we want right now will bring the satisfaction we desire. But the man of God reckons that it is possible to possess all that this world can offer, and yet be devoid of life—spiritual life. The life that is from above must be fed from above. "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16).

4. The Scriptures can silence the tempter (4:4). Christ used this resource to combat every thrust of Satan, and the devil never argued with the written Word. With the Word of God comes the power of God. The Spirit can help to bring words to our mind, but we dare not presume upon the Spirit's ability to bring Scriptures to mind if we are only vaguely familiar with them. Rather, we must be students of the Word, hiding in our hearts that nourishment which can sustain our souls and sharpening the sword that will drive Satan from us.

5. Satisfying legitimate desires in an unlawful way is sin (4:4-6). Shall we "do evil, that good may come?" (Romans 3:8). It would not have been intrinsically wrong for Jesus to change stones to bread. But it would have been wrong for Him to do so at the direction of Satan. Ruling the king-

doms is a part of the future work of Christ, but Satan's plan mimicked the human expectation rather than God's divine purpose. Jacob used trickery and deceit to gain the good that God had promised him. Later he reaped bitterly for those actions. From whom are we taking our direction? By what means do we accomplish God's purposes for us?

6. Satan brazenly promises the crown without the cross (4:6-8). But a crown without the cross, though it be of pure gold, is but an earthly crown, and it puts one under Satan's dominion. To the human side of Christ, and to each of us as well, offers like this hold tremendous appeal. But Christ could see beyond "a moment of time" (4:5), and we must also if we will be victorious over Satan.

7. The Scriptures expose the error of Satan's suggestions (4:8). God is faithful, and His Word contains a rebuttal for every temptation. But at the same time we must guard our exposure to temptation and expose ourselves much to the Word of God. Sometimes even in our own interpretation of Scriptures, Satan can influence our thinking. Satan himself may use Scripture to try to persuade us to take his side. We must associate with a spiritual brotherhood and be open to their interpretation of the Word to be safe in our use of the Scriptures against Satan.

8. Strong confidence in God requires no test to prove His trustworthiness (4:12). Jesus did not question God's ability to bear Him up. God is able to work beyond our highest expectations, even in things that are humanly impossible. But to selfishly presume on God's power, Jesus would not do, and neither should we. In fact, those who presumptuously test God's ability soon begin to doubt. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

Effective in Ministry

9. A life of victory brings glory to God (4:13-15). God always gets glory when Satan is defeated, but a pattern of victory every time will bring Him much more glory. Satan will not give up with one test or two. This was not the last time that Satan tempted Jesus, but the devil did leave Him for a time. God will give us times of rest if we consistently appropriate His grace for victory.

In victory we will find our spiritual life strengthened and ourselves drawn closer to God. We will leave a powerful testimony for the people of God. We will find service and witness opportunities open on every hand. Those who look on may glorify us, but we must point them to God who gives us the power for victory.

Answers to Questions

1. Why did Satan choose this occasion to tempt Christ?

He had just been inaugurated to His earthly ministry as the beloved Son of God. While He had been introduced to the multitude, He had not yet begun His work. He was alone in the wilderness, and His forty days of fasting had physically weakened Him. Satan hoped that this was his opportunity.

2. What are some factors that can make us vulnerable to temptation?

Physical weakness such as hunger, exhaustion, or sickness can make us vulnerable. Stress, such as too much work to do, more bills to pay than funds to pay them, and family duties besides occupational and church responsibilities will weaken us. Associating with the wrong kind of friends and frequenting ungodly places will take us down. We are likely weak in an area where we failed previously. We may also be weak in the area where we think we stand.

3. List the temptations Christ faced. What was the specific appeal of each one?

a) Command these stones to be made bread: Satisfy your desires right now—self-satisfaction.

b) I will give the kingdoms of the world if you will fall down and worship me: Gain the crown without going to the cross—self glorification.

c) Cast yourself down from a pinnacle of the temple: Begin your career with a glorious show of your greatness and favor with God—self-exaltation.

4. How does a proper view of the spiritual and the material help us to overcome temptation?

The spiritual is all-important and must have first priority. If the work waits while we go to prayer meeting or talk to a needy neighbor, the losses may include a few dollars and maybe a bit of ego and reputation as a good manager. If we pass out evangelistic literature instead of going straight home after church, the children might get rather hungry. But if we lose our souls, we have lost all. As we keep in focus what we can afford to lose and what we cannot afford to lose, we are prepared to make right decisions in the moment by moment crises that arise.

5. What are some indications that our worship and service are singular?

If they are singular, we can give God our undivided attention during worship. We will rarely choose to miss worship for a business opportunity. We show it by whom we seek to please and by whom we choose for our role models. We can tell by what sparks our interest and by what drives us.

6. How might Satan entice us to tempt God?

We could tempt God by asking again on an issue when He has already giv-

en clear direction. We could presume on His grace and place ourselves in areas of physical. or spiritual danger. We could try to bargain with God, saying, "I will do thus if You do this first." We could ask for His blessing without seeking His direction.

7. How did Christ's victory enable Him to meet the needs of mankind?

He is the perfect, sinless Lamb of God who can take away the sins of the world. He is our perfect example and has shown us how to appropriate the resources of God. He has been tempted and "is able to succour them that are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18).

8. What are the results of resisting the devil? He will depart from us for a time if we steadfastly resist him. We will be strengthened from heaven. God will be glorified by the testimony that shines forth from His faithful people. We will have the peace of soul that comes from knowing that all is well between us and God.

Important Teachings

1. Spiritual victory depends on Holy Spirit power (4:1).
2. Physical weakness can make us more vulnerable (4:2).
3. Satan attacks man by getting him to seek physical satisfaction (4:3).
4. The Scriptures can silence the tempter (4:4).
5. Satisfying legitimate desires in an unlawful way is sin (4:4-6).
6. Satan brazenly promises the crown without the cross (4:6-8).
7. The Scriptures expose the error of Satan's suggestions (4:8).
8. Strong confidence in God requires no test to prove His trustworthiness (4:12).
9. A life of victory brings glory to God (4:13-15).

Summarizing the Lesson

Satan tempts men to sin by promising them perceived advantage by yielding to his wishes. Though the immediate prospects are enticing, the bitter end is sure. "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:14, 15). Praise God! There is a way to avoid that bitter end.

Research Guide

1. Read the Scriptures on "Temptation, Resistance to" in Nave's Topical Bible, pp. 1321-1323.
2. Research some studies on the temptation of Christ in "Handfuls on Pur-

pose.”

a. "The Temptation"—Book 1, Volume I, pp. 123, 124

b. "Succour for the Tempted"—Book 2, Volume IV, pp. 247-250

c. "With Jesus in the Wilderness"—Book 4, Volume XI, pp. 207-211