

## **From Jordan to Wilderness.**<sup>1</sup> (slide.1)

As Mark shared last week, we are using this early part of the year to look at the stories of Jesus as found in Luke's Gospel. In particular, we're looking at how each and every one of these stories connects to the grace and freedom that is promised to those who believe. In our modern church age, it's tempting to think that our salvation and the restoration of the world comes exclusively through the cross and through the open tomb. But Luke, as well as the other Gospel writers, makes clear that elements of Christ's work of redemption are found *throughout* His earthly ministry, even from the very beginning. Last week Mark walked us through the baptism of Jesus. Today we're going to look at His temptation in the wilderness. As always, we'll work our way through the story, we'll unpack some ideas as we go along, we'll consider how these things we see might be applied to our own lives. But in the end, we'll also look at the bigger story that's taking place in this text. Kimberly already read our verses, so let's begin by looking to the Lord in prayer (slide/black.2).

In the previous chapter (slide.3), we see Jesus at the Jordan River. He approaches John the Baptist so He too might be baptized. As Mark shared last week, the curtains of heaven are pulled open, the Holy Spirit descends on Christ in the form of a dove, and a voice comes from heaven and speaks. John baptized lots of people that day, but nothing like this happened with any of the other baptisms. This one was different. After all, the one he was baptizing was no ordinary Israelite, but the promised Messiah from the line of David. So you would think that after so spectacular an affirmation, Jesus would update His LinkedIn account, print up some business cards, and begin His public ministry. But that doesn't happen. Instead, we read in the (slide.4) next chapter that, after His baptism, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, is *led* by the Spirit into the wilderness. He's not sent to Jerusalem or to Athens or to Rome. Instead, He's sent to a place of scarcity and want, a place of vulnerability and weakness. And why does He do that? He does it for you/me. And in doing so, He sets forth a pattern for life.

I like how William Lane put it. Lane was a professor of biblical studies at Seattle Pacific. He wrote that (slide.5), "*True sonship is always established in the wilderness.*"<sup>2</sup> True sonship is always found in the crucible, in that place of trial and difficulty (slide/black.6). And as God's sons/daughters, that's true for us as well. The Prosperity Gospel might promise a problem-free life where the checkbook is never empty and gas stays below \$2.00 a gallon, but that's not at all what we see in the pages of Scripture (or for that matter, within our story and the stories of those around us). So even though the baptism of Jesus seems to be the perfect jumping off point for the

start of Christ's earthly ministry and all that is to follow, the Triune God we affirmed in the creed we recited earlier in our service has something radically different in mind.

### **The Devil.**

So Jesus (slide.7) is led by the Spirit, He goes into the wilderness, He's there for forty days. And we read that during those forty days He's tempted by (slide.8) the devil. Now, in our day and age, you mention the devil (especially here in the West) and people will probably give you a funny look. But that's not true elsewhere. In fact, in most places in the world—the idea of a spiritual realm that would include evil forces is not at all an unusual concept. But in the West that kind of thinking is thought of as primitive. I suppose part of the reason why is because we in the West have it in our heads that everything has to have a natural cause and a scientific explanation. It's the arrogance of a world that believes that, just because we're able to calculate the trajectory of a cannonball, we're somehow qualified to address the mysteries of the universe. So we reject what Scripture says and we reduce the notion of evil into to something that is simply biological or sociological—something that can be fixed and controlled and legislated and managed.

Of course, some in the world around us go to the other extreme and blame the devil for everything. If they're late for an appointment, it's because of the devil. If a check bounces, it's because of the devil. If the light turns red or if the Bucs lose, it's because of the devil. So we see both extremes: those that *discount* the devil and act as if he does not exist, and those who *exaggerate* the devil and his power and in turn blame him for everything. In the introduction to his book, *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis makes this observation; he writes that (slide.9):

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, but to feel an excessive and unhealthy interested in them. (slide.10) The devils themselves are equally pleased by both errors.<sup>3</sup>

The word (slide.11) devil means "the one who misrepresents/accuses."<sup>4</sup> We get our English word "diabolical" from that same root. I'm not sure the devil is in the business of bouncing checks or giving you a red light when you're late for an appointment. But he is in the business of doing his best to get us to sever relationships. He is in the business to accuse, and to misrepresent, and to put things into our heads about each other—and *especially about God*. And that's what we see (slide.12) here in our text.

## **The First Temptation.**

Jesus had been fasting. We're told that He's hungry. The devil shows up. He says, "*If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.*" This question carries weight, especially that phrase (slide.13) "*Son of God.*" What makes it especially weighty is how Luke skillfully sets the groundwork for this question as he inserts connections and hyperlinks into the previous chapters of his Gospel. In chapter 1 (slide.14), Gabriel makes his announcement to Mary, he declares that Christ will be called "*the Son of the Most High*" and "*the Holy Son of God.*" In chapter 2 (slide.15) as Mary and Joseph find young Jesus in the temple, He speaks of how it makes sense that He would be "*in [His] Father's house.*" In chapter 3 (slide.16), Jesus comes up from the waters of baptism and hears His Father's voice declare, "*You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.*" Even Luke's genealogy of Jesus (slide.17) ends with a not-to-subtle connection to Christ, not only as the Son of Adam, but also as "*the Son of God.*" Everything we see, including this last passage, underscores Jesus's Sonship. So then, just three verses later (slide.18), ***what's the devil's question?*** He taunts Jesus, and pokes at this Sonship, and says: "*If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.*"

This first temptation questions God's provision and care. Satan isn't telling Jesus to cheat on His taxes. No, his premise is that Jesus' Sonship must mean that His Father does not want Him to be hungry in the desert so, therefore, it must be reasonable for Jesus to consider the use of His power to satisfy His hunger. And on the surface, it seems to be a small thing. There doesn't seem to be anything intrinsically sinful about turning a rock into a piece of bread, and yet Jesus refuses. As He'll later tell His disciples, His food is to do the will of the one who sent Him (John 4:34). Jesus understands that Satan's temptation is a challenge to be independent and autonomous. So Jesus quotes Scripture; He says (slide.19), "*It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'*" He saying that life is not defined by bread; rather, life is defined by doing God's will.<sup>5</sup>

On the surface, it seems like a small thing, but it's ultimately a big thing. And it's always like that. If you and I follow Jesus for any period of time, we'll learn pretty quickly that the Father will often call us to say "yes" to some things and say "no" to other things. And sometimes it may not seem to be a *big* thing, but we know it's the *right* thing. It may seem small and insignificant, but over time we come to recognize that it represents something bigger.

## **The Second Temptation.**

In the case of our text, we actually see that bigger thing—it's the *second* (slide.20) temptation. We read that the devil leads Jesus up to a high place and, somehow, "in a moment in time" shows Him the kingdoms of the world. The devil's language is stronger than what we saw in the previous temptation. He says, "*To You I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will.*" I'm not sure that's entirely true, but he says it anyway. Everything that can be offered to Jesus is offered, but there's a catch. The devil says (slide.21), all You have to do is worship me, and it's all Yours.<sup>6</sup>

What is Satan offering?

He's offering a shortcut.

He's offering the kingdom without the cross,

The scepter without the lashes,

The crown of gold without the crown of thorns.

And it's always like that. What's interesting is that both the first and second temptations are essentially the same. They both represent the challenge to be independent from God, to do something in a way other than what is prescribed by the Father. And the order is probably no accident. From it we get a sense of the tactics often used by the devil. He starts with something small which leads to something big. He starts with a morsel of bread, but leads to who we worship.

There's a 17th-century English Puritan named (slide.22) Thomas Brooks. In 1652, Brooks wrote a book. It has one of those great Puritan titles. It's called (slide.23), *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*. It's kind of a 17th-century version of C. S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*. So what does Brooks say about Satan's devices? He writes that (slide.24) "*Satan's first device to draw the soul into sin is to present the bait, but to hide the hook; to present the golden cup, but to hide the poison; to present the sweet, but to hide the misery.*" Brooks goes on to say that Satan seeks to show us all the short-term pleasures, but goes out of his way to hide the long-term pain. And in doing so, what does he do? He gets us to rationalize away our sin. And, when he's especially clever, he even figures out a way to make it look like a virtue. He figures out a way to make it look good—like something that should be justified.<sup>7</sup> You see (slide/black.25), it's often the stupid little decisions that get us:

Those habits we defend, and allow to fester, and allow to escalate and grow.  
 That temptation to get jealous, to hold a grudge, to act proudly and defensively.  
 That temptation to send that text or post that comment.  
 That temptation to stay bitter and to refuse to forgive.  
 And we go for the bait, and it eats us from the inside.  
 It starts with a morsel of bread, but ultimately it leads to what we worship.  
 And to fall prey to the one is often to open the door to the other.

So what does Jesus do? He doesn't respond to the temptation by arguing with it. Instead, as with the (slide.26) first temptation, He quotes Scripture. The devil promises the kingdoms of the world in exchange for worship. Jesus says, *"It is written: 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve'"*

### **The Third Temptation.**

Well, as it turns out, Jesus is not the only one who can quote Scripture. We read in (slide.27) verse 9 that Jesus is taken to the pinnacle of the temple.<sup>8</sup> From this dizzying height the devil again challenges Christ's identity as well as the Father's love for Jesus. He then doubles down as he tempts Jesus to dazzle the crowds by throwing Himself off the edge. It's a stupid request, but Satan justifies himself by quoting (or better yet) by *misquoting* a portion of Psalm 91. We read that same text earlier in our service. In its proper context, the passage speaks of the believer's trust in God, especially during times of difficulty. But Satan twists it into something presumptuous as he tries to tempt Jesus into forcing God's hand so he might perform a spectacular rescue.<sup>9</sup> As an aside, it's interesting that Satan chose to ignore (slide.28) verse 13 of Psalm 91—this stuff about Christ trampling "the great lion and the serpent." No, his focus is only on forcing Christ's hand so Christ might force the Father's hand (slide/black.29).

I suppose we can do the same in our lives. We can turn God into (slide.30) Santa Claus, or a circus dog, or a genie that's there to do our bidding, and in the process forget that God is God. Jesus (slide.31) was abundantly clear that He came to do the Father's will, not the other way around. If that's true for Him, then how much you and me. So once again (slide.32), Jesus cuts through all of the devil's silliness as He quotes Scripture's charge to not put the Lord to the test. And we read that after the devil had finished his tempting, he left Him until an opportune time.

### **Christ the Substitute.**

So that's the account (slide/black.33) of Christ's temptation in the wilderness. And from it we learn something about the devil and his sneakiness. And something about temptation and its appeal. And something about how temptation can lure us into rationalizing our actions and compel us to treat God like our servant instead of our Lord. And how (like Jesus) it is important for us to combat temptation with the Word of God. **But there's also something else taking place in this passage.**

It's no accident that (slide.34) the three verses Jesus quotes to the devil are directly connected (slide.35) to Israel's wanderings and the failed tests in the wilderness during those forty years following the exodus from Egypt. In fact, all three passages are within a couple chapters of each other in the book of Deuteronomy. There's a connection being made by the Gospel writers between Israel and the events of Jesus' life (slide/black.36). Just as the people of Israel fled to Egypt and later escaped, so Jesus both entered and left Egypt while still a child. Just as Israel crossed the waters of the Red Sea, so Jesus crossed the waters of baptism. Just as Israel was led into the wilderness for a season of testing, so Jesus was led into the wilderness for His time of testing. Jesus was tested for forty days and never *once* failed. ***How about Israel? (not so great).*** Israel is tested for forty years, and *constantly* fails.

The people grumble and complain.

They worship false deities.

They put God to the test.

Jesus does none of those things.

But it's more than that. The account of Christ's testing in the wilderness echoes, not only Israel's testings, it also echoes the testing of Adam and Eve before the serpent in the garden. Like Adam, Jesus is tempted to eat forbidden food by turning stones into bread. Like Adam, He's tempted to test His Father's word and act presumptuously. Like Adam, He's tempted to seize authority by bowing to Satan's will.

Yet unlike Adam, instead of listening to the words of the serpent, Jesus quotes the words of the Father back in the serpent's face. Instead of serving the creature, He serve the Creator.<sup>10</sup> As we see throughout the Gospels, Jesus is living out both Adam's and Israel's histories. He reboots their stories. He's the new creation and the faithful Adam. He's the new exodus and the faithful Israel. He renders obedience where they were disobedient. Where they were unfaithful, He proves Himself faithful. And He does this for you and me and all who believe.

It's tempting to look at this story of Jesus in the wilderness and reduce it to a list of helpful hints and techniques that will get us through times when we're feeling weak and vulnerable, but that's not the teaching of Scripture. And if we don't see/understand this, we may have Jesus as a role model, but we won't have the gospel. We may have a good example, but we won't have salvation. The hero of the story is not our ability to follow (or flounder) our way through a set of rules. No, as Mark shared last week, the hero of our story is Jesus. He comes to earth to be our substitute. He comes to live in our place, and to fulfill all righteousness in our place, and to overcome temptation in our place, and to die in our place.<sup>11</sup>

And to see this is freedom. Freedom, not only to breathe a little easier, but also freedom to obey. After all, if you are a Christian, then when God sees you, He already sees Jesus. Do any of us here honestly think we're going to do better than that?

In Mary's womb, Christ receives our humanity.

In the wilderness, He overcomes temptation.

In the Sermon on the Mount, He announces the fulfillment of the law.

In His miracles, He proclaims the coming of the kingdom.

At the cross, He dies for our sins.

At the open tomb, He pronounces victory over powers and principalities.

At the Ascension, He takes His place at the right hand of the Father.

At Pentecost, He sends the Holy Spirit.

And this is the gospel.

Our hope, our grace, our salvation, and our worship.

Let's pray.

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<sup>1</sup> Congregation OT reading: Ps 91:1-4, 11-14 (NIV 1984).

<sup>2</sup> William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974); cf. Michael Card, *Luke: The Gospel of Amazement*, BIS (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 65.

<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1942, 2001), ix (paraphrased slightly).

<sup>4</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2015), 127.

<sup>5</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *The NIV Application Commentary: Luke* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 128.

<sup>6</sup> Bock writes: "Here arises the question of whether Satan had the authority to make this offer. Was Satan offering something he could deliver? It's probably best to say that the devil's offer is a mixture of truth and error." Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 376.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices* (Banner of Truth, 1827). First published in 1652; cf. David Bisgrove, "The Temptation of Jesus" (sermon, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> The order of the temptations differs from what is found in Matthew's account. Luke switched temptation #2 and #3, saving the temple temptation for the end. The exact reason for this is unknown, though Edwards suggests that this might correspond to Luke's strong emphasis on the temple in his Gospel. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC, 129.

<sup>9</sup> Tom Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, 2004), 44; Card, *Luke: The Gospel of Amazement*, BIS, 67

<sup>10</sup> Peter J. Leithart, *The Four: A Survey of the Gospels* (Moscow, ID: Cannon Press, 2010), 180-81.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Keller, "The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus" (sermon, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 1996).