

Jesus Strong and Kind (Sunday, March 6, 2022)

Luke 4:1-13

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This morning we're invited into a pivotal moment in the life of Jesus Christ – here at the beginning of Luke chapter 4, and here at the beginning of the season of Lent. This is the story of the temptation of Jesus. His temptation – by the devil - in the wilderness. Just after his baptism, and just before the official launch of his public ministry.

We're invited into this story by Jesus himself. There's no way this account of Jesus' temptation would have made it into the Bible, and be available to us, if Jesus himself hadn't told this story to his disciples. There were no other eye witnesses, no other observers to what went on in those 40 days in the wilderness. Jesus was alone – Jesus was fasting – and Jesus was led there by the Spirit to be tempted. In the all ways you and I are often tempted. The particularities of his temptations are different, sure. But the underlying temptations that Jesus faced in the wilderness, are the same underlying temptations that you and I face today. And every day of our lives.

Jesus always invites us into his story. Because God, in Christ – God made man – condescends to us in the form of a servant, veils himself in human flesh, comes into our darkness, our filth, our lostness, and into our temptations. God, in Christ, breaks into the human story.

He breaks into your story. He breaks into my story. And Jesus creates a new story – his story. And now it's Jesus' life that empowers and defines our life. It's Jesus' obedience that empowers and defines our obedience – AND covers and perfects our DISobedience.

Jesus invites you and me into his story – because his story is our story.

And this morning, God wants to speak to us through his Living Word. God wants to draw our eyes once again to Jesus. Jesus in the wilderness. Jesus being tempted by the devil. Jesus victorious over the devil. Jesus doing what no man – what no woman – could ever do. Perfectly resisting temptation, and in so doing, completely reframing how we can live with our fallen natures.

DRAWN TO DISOBEDIENCE

Every single person in this room (or online) – is daily drawn to disobedience. We are tempted in big ways, small ways, subtle ways, overt ways, destructive ways, and sometimes unconscious ways – to turn away from God. And we are not simply tempted by other alluring things. Or just because we're wired a certain way. Or because of our genes. Or because of bad habits. Every single person in this room is daily drawn to disobedience, and is daily tempted to rebellion against God, by the devil himself.

This isn't like the cute cartoons that we have seen growing up, with a little devil on one shoulder with a pitchfork in his hand, and a little angel on the other shoulder with a harp in his hand. It's not like that at all. This is like an invisible chain around your neck. And shackles around your ankles. And at every waking – and sleeping – moment of your life – the devil is seeking to enslave you into rebellion, and into sin. And he does it to you – and he does it to me – in the same way he did it to Jesus in Luke chapter 4.

But praise God – Jesus' story is our story. And let me spoil the ending for you. Not just the ending of our text, Luke 4:1-13, and not just the ending of the book of Luke itself, and not just the ending of the Bible, but actually the end of this current age: Jesus wins! Jesus is victorious!

Jesus doesn't flinch in the face of the devil. He doesn't slip up. He doesn't make a mistake. He doesn't fail like Adam did when he was tempted. In fact, he gloriously triumphs over the devil, over the schemes of the devil, over the lies of the devil, and his victory is our victory.

We step into Jesus' story this morning, in Luke 4:1-13, and it's a story of Jesus' victory. And I'd like for us to consider three lessons from this text: First, temptation is inevitable.

1. TEMPTATION IS INEVITABLE

Open your Bibles with me and let's look at Luke chapter 4, where we read this, starting in verse 1:

¹And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness ²for forty days, being tempted by the devil.

Jesus, the perfect, sinless Son of God, experienced profound temptation. The devil threw everything he possibly could at Jesus. Interestingly, like he also does with us very often, he tried to exploit Jesus' strengths. And from several different angles, he came at Jesus, seeking to find a point of entry. He played on Jesus' hunger in verse 3, his Lordship in verses 5 and 6, and his Sonship in verse 9. The devil was tactical – and he gave it his best shot.

Jesus experienced temptation – but to *be* tempted was *not* to sin. Being tempted was not weakness. Jesus shows us – in this account – that to be tempted is inevitable, and it's permitted by God.

We all know that temptation is inevitable. I'm not telling you anything new. Of course it's inevitable. But we see – in Christ – *why* God allows it. And *how* he redeems it.

JESUS IS TEMPTED, BUT DOES NOT SIN

Right at the beginning here, in verse 1, we read that Jesus was "led by the Spirit in the wilderness". God permitted himself, in Christ, to be tempted. Why? Well here's one reason:

It's that God longed so much to provide for us, in Jesus, someone who would be able to sympathize with our weaknesses. Paul wrote in Philippians 2:7 that God, in Christ: "emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." He's born in our likeness, and he experiences – and in a sense *dignifies* the inevitability of temptation in this fallen world – and shows a way through it.

The writer of the book of Hebrews would say about Jesus: That "in every respect (Jesus) has been tempted as we are, yet without sin". He was tempted, yet he didn't sin.

TEMPTATION AVOIDANCE?

I point this out to us because we can often think wrongly about temptation. We view IT as a sin, and so we build up all sorts of walls to try to avoid it. Now, it's not wrong to avoid temptation. In fact, it's wise. And Jesus taught us to pray to the Father, "lead us not into temptation". BUT the devil will always find a crack in the wall.

1 Peter 5:8 puts it this way:

Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Temptation is a normal part of the human experience. Jesus confirms that. So, the goal of the Christian life is NOT to get to a point where you are no longer tempted. Good luck with that.

Because as soon as you arrive at such an impossible point, the devil would exploit some kind of weakness, or one of your strengths, or find some kind of unlocked door in your spiritual house.

GOD REDEEMS TEMPTATION

Jesus shows us, as he enters into our story, into the human experience, that temptation is inevitable, but surrender to that temptation is not. Every temptation is an attack by the devil, yes, but on the flip side, because God reigns over all things, every temptation is used by God as an invitation to draw even closer to him.

Our goal, when it comes to temptation, is not some kind of pious, legalistic, temptation eradication. Our goal, because of Jesus, is that we would come to see these very temptations themselves – even as they come at us as hooks of slavery from the devil's hands – as hooks our God redeems to make us more and more free in Christ.

Another way to look at it is that there is no stronger method that can God – in his power - can redeem to prepare us for what he has for us – than temptation. Why else would Jesus, fresh off his baptism, and just before he begins his ministry, be led by God to the wilderness, to be tempted? This was preparation for Jesus.

Martin Luther once said: "My temptations have been my Masters in Divinity". And if that's true, which I think it is, the topic of the first class, taught by our professor, Jesus, is that temptations are an inevitable part of the human experience that God redeems to draw us closer to Jesus.

2. THE DEVIL IS A LIAR

The topic of the second class is that the devil is a liar. Verse 2:

²And (Jesus) ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. ³The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." ⁴And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'"

The devil is so predictable. He is so perversely, wickedly, stupidly predictable. At the heart of every temptation of the devil is a question. In the garden of Eden, it was "did God really say...?" Here in the wilderness in verse 3 and again in verse 9, "if you are the Son of God..." At the heart of every temptation is a question, questioning God. Questioning God's Word. Questioning God's wisdom. Questioning God's goodness.

And at the heart of every question is an accusation. God didn't *really* say. God isn't *really* wise. God isn't *really* good. God's way isn't *really* best.

And at the heart of every accusation is a lie. The devil is a liar. He lies about God. He lies about his Word. He lies about who is good. He lies about what's best. He lies about everything.

THE DEVIL QUOTES THE BIBLE

And even when the devil says something true, he says it to question, to accuse, and to lie. Prime example, in verses 9 – 11, the devil quotes the Bible.

⁹And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,' ¹¹and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

He quotes the truest thing that's ever been true – the Bible itself! – and yet he twists it. He uses it to lie. He warps the truth of Scripture into a kind of ridiculous challenge to Jesus to throw himself off the top of the temple, and command angels to catch him. One commentator said this was a challenge "to perform a spectacular, but useless miracle". And the way he uses God's word, the way he twists it, is to tempt Jesus to test God's faithfulness, rather than to trust in it.

See the difference there? Psalm 91 wasn't written to give us permission to test whether or not God is faithful, at the time and place of our choosing. God, if you're faithful, I'm going to jump off of this temple, and you're going to catch me, because Psalm 91:12 says I won't strike my foot against a stone.

God, if you're faithful, you'll do this thing for me. You'll give this thing to me. You'll heal this thing for me. Fill in the blank. The devil is tempting Jesus – as he tempts you and me – to put God to the test. And he does this by lying. Because he's a liar. And he even uses God's Word to do it.

HOW JESUS RESPONDS

Jesus responds to each of these three temptations – each of these questions, and accusations, and lies – by quoting God's Word back to the devil. If you've ever wanted a clear example of the power of the Word of God to turn back the lies, the attacks, and the temptations of the devil, look at our text this morning.

Three temptations – one of which includes an intentional twisting of God's Word – each defeated by the power of God's Word. Jesus not only *is* the Word, but he *knows* the Word. And he used the Word as a weapon to answer Satan's lies. He quoted Deuteronomy to the devil.

HOW THE DEVIL LIES TO US

All the devil ever does is lie. And he tells hundreds of little lies to us, in hundreds of little ways, every day of our lives. About us, about our identity, about what's right, about what's wrong, and about what will bring us joy. Like he did with Jesus, he'll lie about how to provide for ourselves, about how to gain power, and about whether or not we can really trust God.

Every time you get on your computer. Or on your smart phone. Every time you walk into the office, or into your classroom. Every time you're lonely, or hungry, or craving another drink, the devil will lie to you.

Did God *really* say? Will anyone really know, except just the two of us? Won't this make you feel better? Won't this make you happier? Why wouldn't you do this thing? Say this thing? Look at this thing?

It's all a lie, everything the devil ever does is lie. And often it's in small, subtle ways, unique to us like they were unique to Jesus, and they're tempting. And the best tool we have at our disposal is the same tool Jesus had at his. The Word of God.

THE DEVIL LIES ABOUT JESUS

But there's another thing that the devil likes to lie about, more than anything else. And it's about Jesus himself. We see it here in our text when the devil questions the Lordship, the Sonship, the Authority of the Son of God. And he not only questions the authority of Jesus – but he insinuates that he actually has the capacity to give authority to Jesus. Verse 5:

⁵And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, ⁶and said to him, "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. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."

The devil can't do that. This is a delusion. This is a fantasy. And Jesus exposes it for the lie that it is.

⁸And Jesus answered him, "It is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'"

Friends, the devil is still up to this. He still lies about Jesus – even though he has been decisively defeated on the cross.

Just a few weeks ago, I was visiting with a man who is dying of terminal cancer. I sat with him, by his bed, on two separate occasions and we talked together, prayed together, imagined together all that he's about to see and experience in heaven. And I wouldn't tell you this, except he told me I could use anything from our conversation that I needed to in a sermon. He told me that sometimes the devil comes to him – in his room. He can't see him, but he can hear him. And he says the most disgusting, vulgar things, profane things about Jesus. That the devil curses Jesus.

And sitting there in that moment, two things went through my mind. First, how dare the devil try this garbage on this dear man. This child of God. What a desperate, defeated, loser. And the second thing that went through my mind is, oh how strong, and mighty, and authoritative is the name of Jesus. You might not know any chapters and verses by memory. You might not have Deuteronomy memorized like Jesus did. That's OK. You have the name of Jesus. And when the devil comes to you with his ridiculous lies, Jesus has already defeated those lies.

The devil is liar – and he knows it – and when we know it – we can do what Jesus did, and simply stand firm on what we know – and WHO we know – is true.

3. JESUS IS STRONGER

Let me close with this last point, and this last point pretty much preaches itself. It's that Jesus is stronger.

Jesus defeated the devil in the wilderness. He defeated these temptations. But Luke tells us that the devil would challenge Jesus again.

¹³And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

It doesn't take long for this to happen. By the end of chapter 4, Jesus is already confronting demons. And as Jesus' ministry progresses – as he fulfills the will of his Father – Jesus is led to the cross. Where he takes upon himself all of our sin. All of our failures. All of our giving in to temptation. All of our perversions and addictions. He takes them upon himself, to take the punishment upon himself, and as he's doing so, comes another desperate lie from the devil. Another temptation.

JESUS TEMPTED AGAIN

We picture Jesus – perfect, sinless Jesus – our substitute – hanging on a cross, between two thieves. And Luke 23:35 tells us that:

³⁵...the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" ³⁶The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine ³⁷and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

Jesus would save someone, all right. But he wouldn't save himself. He'd save you. He'd save me. He'd save us from every sin, every failure, every weak moment, every time we believe the stupid lies of the devil, every time we choose the way of the serpent, rather than the way of Jesus, every time we give into temptation.

And just like he wouldn't turn the stone into bread, he didn't turn away from the nails. And just like he didn't throw himself off of the temple, he wouldn't excuse himself from the cross. At every turn, Jesus was victorious over temptation.

And because his story is our story – it means that, at every turn, as we face temptation, and as we are assaulted by the lies of the devil – that as we stumble along, it's Jesus' victory over temptation, and over death and the grave, that ultimately defines us. Because of the first Adam who failed the test, sin and death enslaved us. But because of Jesus, the second Adam who passed the test, sin and death are destroyed.

Brothers and sisters, we are not strong enough to overpower temptation. Only Jesus is strong enough. Run to him. Run to him today. Run to him when the temptation comes again. Run to him when you hear another lie. Hundreds of times a day if you need to.

Call upon his name. Have his name on your lips. Say his name. Praise his name.

Remember what our Romans reading said today?

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

It's true. He is strong enough to save you. He is kind enough to sympathize with your weaknesses. And he is victorious enough to set you free.