

TESTING OUR METTLE—Part One

Luke 4:1-4

(NIV) "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.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.'"

INTRODUCTION

In one scene of the cartoon strip, *Peanuts*, Linus and Charlie Brown are walking along and chatting with one another. Linus says, 'I don't like to face problems head on. I think the best way to solve problems is to avoid them. In fact, this is a distinct philosophy of mine. No problem is so big or so complicated that it can't be run away from!' Is this true, or is this only true in a cartoon or make-believe world?

We begin this morning taking a close look at what are traditionally called the "Temptations of Jesus." They might better be called the "Testing of Jesus." The Greek word often translated in the New Testament in its noun or verb form as "temptation" or "tempt," as in **vs. 2**, "for forty days he was tempted by the devil," essentially means, "to put to the test." This same Greek word is thus rightfully translated as "a test," "to test," or "a trial," as in **James 1:2-3** (ESV): "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." We shall bring out in great detail that the purpose of **Jesus'** "wilderness" Temptations, from God's perspective, was not to give the Devil every opportunity to entice **Jesus** into sin, but to give **Jesus** greater opportunity to prove He could best the Devil. For roughly 30 years **Jesus** had prepared Himself for His mission to become our Savior by what He learned from prayerful communion with His Heavenly Father, by a rigorous study and meditation upon the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and by subjecting His will and desires in service to God the Father and to the people around Him. His spiritual "boot camp" under the hostile conditions of an extremely harsh "wilderness" tested His mettle; the quality and strength of His temperament, fortitude, and courage.

Dave Dravecky, now age 62, knows the thrill of a close walk with **Jesus** and the thrill of pitching in Major League Baseball from 1982-89; making the All Star team in 1983. Dravecky lost his pitching arm to cancer at age 33. After the roller coaster of experiencing the heights of professional success followed by the depths of physical and emotional trauma, he and his wife wrote a book in 1992, *When You Can't Come Back*. "One night," he writes, "a woman came up to me and told me how she was once down-and-out with a drug addiction – until someone told her about Christ, and she became a Christian and was healed of her addiction. She told me God wanted all his children to be 100% healthy. But does He? What would God's children grow up to be like if all the bumps in the road ahead of them were made smooth?" He continues, "Cancer introduced me to suffering. And suffering is what strengthened my faith. Yet that woman implied I was suffering because I didn't have enough faith. She seemed to be saying, 'Have enough faith and get the life you want.' "But that struck me as making God into some kind of cosmic vending machine, where, if you pushed the right button, you would get a sweet life, free of suffering. Someone once said the difference between American Christianity and Christianity as it is practiced in the rest of the world has to do with how each views suffering. In America, Christians pray for the burden of suffering to be lifted from their backs. In the rest of the world, Christians pray for stronger backs so they can bear their suffering."

Our two Outline points today are The Background to Testing Jesus' Mettle and The First Test.

I. THE BACKGROUND TO TESTING JESUS' METTLE

Luke interrupted his account of **Jesus'** life with His genealogy in **Luke 3:23-38**, which presents **Jesus'** "pedigree" establishing Him as King David's legal heir, which qualifies Him to be "the King of the Jews" (**Matthew 2:2**). He's also descended from "Abraham," to whom God promised, "all peoples on earth will

be blessed through you," including "Gentiles," which fully qualifies **Jesus** to be "the atoning sacrifice . . . for the sins of the whole world," Jews and Gentiles alike (**Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:8; I John 2:2**, NIV). **Jesus** is descended from "Adam," which attests to Him being fully human and in kinship with all humanity. And **Jesus** is "the Son of God" (**Luke 1:35**), whom others only "supposed" to be "the son of Joseph." His Heavenly "Father" alone is His spiritual and eternal Father (**Luke 1:35; John 10:30; John 17:4-5**).

Let's now link what Luke reported just prior to presenting **Jesus'** pedigree, found in **Luke 3:21-22** (NIV), to our text for today that resumes the account of **Jesus'** life: "When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as He was praying, heaven was opened ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are My Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased.'" **4:1-4**: "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 [tested] by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them He was hungry. 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.'""

Our sermon of March 11, *The Commitments of Jesus' Baptism*, pointed out two decisive acts required of **Jesus** before He could launch His public ministry as the Messiah (Christ) foretold by Scripture: the One God sent and anointed to atone for our sins, to safeguard us from God's judgment for our defiance of His moral laws, and to secure our privilege to inherit the everlasting joys of Heaven. First, **Jesus** submitted Himself to baptism as our representative who would take upon Himself "the iniquity of us all" (**Isaiah 53:6**) to cleanse us from our sins! Secondly, there was a more personal element to **Jesus'** baptism. By this act, **Jesus** publicly committed Himself to obey God's laws and to fulfill God's will for His life, *wherever God might lead Him and whatever God might ask of Him*. God the Father certified the genuineness of **Jesus'** commitments by His public affirmation of **Jesus'** unique identity as "'the Son of God'" (**Luke 1:35**): "'You are My Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased.'" God the Holy Spirit then fully filled and empowered "the man Christ Jesus" (**I Timothy 2:5**) to accomplish His God-given tasks.

Then, as **Luke 4:1-2a** declares, "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." Answer this question: Who was on the attack during these "forty days" when **Jesus** "was tempted by the devil," Satan or **Jesus**? The role of the Holy Spirit in His encounter with the Devil helps us answer this question. "Jesus, full of [filled up by] the Holy Spirit . . . was led by the Spirit into the wilderness where . . . He was tempted by the devil." **Mark 1:12** (NASB) employs more forceful language, "Immediately the Spirit impelled Him *to go* out into the wilderness," revealing He responded to the urgency for encountering Satan that the Holy Spirit had placed within **Jesus'** heart. It's sometimes true that the best defense is a strong offense. Rather than passively allowing Satan to set the terms of battle, God's Messiah went on the offense by taking the conflict to Satan!

We get into serious trouble if we deceive ourselves that we can enter the Devil's territory at will, as if we're above temptation. Some paraphrase **Matthew 6:12** (NIV): "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one," as, "Lead me not into temptation. I can find the way myself." A mother walked into the kitchen, interrupting her 3-year-old son on top of a chair eating cookies. When she asked what he was doing, he explained, "Mom, I just climbed up here to smell them, but my tooth got caught."

The fall of the human race into sin, and the principle of evil and destruction in our world, came about when the "first Adam," representative of the human race as first "created . . . in the image of God," yielded to temptation of "the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan" to distrust God and disobey His loving command (**Genesis 1:27; Genesis 3:1-24; Revelation 12:9; Romans 5:12-19**). At the start of **Jesus'** public ministry as "the last Adam," representative of human beings who seek forgiveness of sin and recreation in God's image (**I Corinthians 15:45-49; II Corinthians 5:17-21**), it's fitting for **Jesus** to confront and resist the Devil's temptation by giving to God the loving obedience and trust He deserves.

A comparison of the temptations of the two Adams helps us appreciate the magnitude of what Luke records and the majesty of our Savior. "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.³ The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.'" "Adam, who was the son of God," as **Luke 3:38** declares, shared with **Jesus** a reality true of no other human beings: God alone is their immediate Father; making them both, in a sense, "the son of God." They both knew the total reason of their existence on planet Earth was to know, love, and experience the joys of fellowship with God the Father. They both knew God the Father deserved their full obedience. Was either Adam or **Jesus** already inclined toward disobedience by a sin nature at the time of their testing? No. This much they had in common, but there were glaring differences between them.

Did the first Adam, at the time God allowed his mettle to be tested—the quality and strength of his devotion to his Creator and Lord—have any excuse, any justification, for distrusting God's love and care for him and rejecting God's authority? No. Up to the moment he encounters the Devil, Adam (with Eve) has lived in conditions of paradise in Eden, the most luscious, exquisite spot on Earth, and God has placed him in charge over all creation, of which **Genesis 1:31** tells us, "God saw all that He had made, and it was very good" (**Genesis 1:1-2:15**). Where did **Jesus** encounter the Devil? "The wilderness" of Judea, a dreadful wasteland 35 miles long and 15 miles wide between the fertile plateau of central Israel and the Dead Sea. It was called by a Hebrew name that means, "The Devastation." The hills were dust heaps, the rocks bare and jagged; all devoid of vegetation and all glowing with heat like a vast furnace sweeping 1,200 below to the Dead Sea. Up to the time of Adam's testing, is there any reason to think he was not well fed? But as if **Jesus'** harsh surroundings were not enough, He was called upon by God's will to fast for 40 days, bringing Him to the brink of starvation, before His first major test by Satan. Yet, though "the first Adam" miserably failed the test of loyal obedience to God, despite every advantage in his favor, **Jesus**, "the last Adam," facing horrifying disadvantages, marvelously passed all tests of loyalty with God-honoring obedience!

II. THE FIRST TEST

Frank and Ernest is an American comic strip that debuted on November 6, 1972, and has since been published daily in over 1,200 newspapers nationwide. In one cartoon, Frank and Ernest are standing before a priest, and Frank asks him, "How come opportunity knocks once, but temptation beats at my door every day?" One reason why temptation to do what's wrong seems so persistent is because we are sinfully inclined to hear or read what we want to hear or read, rather than what's truly best for us. A Dr. went to a party one night and saw one of his patients on the dance floor with a strikingly beautiful woman. The doctor went up to his patient and asked, "What are you doing?" The patient responded, "I'm just following your advice!" "What advice?" the doctor replied. "You told me to find a hot mama and be cheerful." The doctor responded in disgust, "That's not what I said. What I said to you was that you had a heart murmur and you need to be careful. I should have checked your hearing, as well!"

"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.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.'" In this first test of **Jesus'** mettle, "the devil," whose name means "accuser" or "slanderer," did not question **Jesus'** identity. As a fallen angel, he knew better than anyone on earth that **Jesus** is, indeed, "the Son of God." Luke uses Greek grammar where the speaker assumes the truth of the condition he raises: "Because you are the Son of God." The Devil is slandering His Father's love because He'd allowed the "Son" He "loved" to become critically deprived and hungry. "If God is really "pleased" with you, as He claimed at your baptism, He's sure not acting like it," the Devil insinuates. Satan's temptation is even more subtle, suggesting to **Jesus**, "You'll show everyone, including me, how much You are God's Son by supernaturally demonstrating Your God-like powers; either put up or shut up." Isn't it interesting the Devil tempted Eve she had the right to equality with God, to lure

her into taking control of her life out of God's hands, but **Jesus**, as the Son of God, already shared equality with God the Father, yet He rejected the temptation to take control of His life out of His father's hands!

Most Bible scholars believe the "forty days" of **Jesus'** "wilderness" testing mirrors Israel's "forty years in the wilderness" (**Deuteronomy 8:2**). As a Jew, sent to redeem "the house of Israel" first (**Matthew 10:5-6**), **Jesus** demonstrates the obedience God asked of Israel as a nation, whom **Jesus** now represents. The only recorded responses **Jesus** gives to the Devil are all from **Deuteronomy**, where Moses identifies the three main tests of obedience to God's will that Israel faced during these forty years. The first of these tests is described in **Deuteronomy 8:2-3**: "Remember that the LORD your God led you on the entire journey these 40 years in the wilderness, so that He might humble you and test you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commands. ³ He humbled you by letting you go hungry; then He gave you manna to eat, which you and your fathers had not known, so that you might learn that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."

Matthew 4:11 tells us that at the end of this period of **Jesus'** intense testing, "The Devil left Him, and immediately angels came and began to serve Him." His Father was fully mindful of His Son's needs and poised to intervene with even miraculous aid once God's purposes for testing **Jesus'** mettle were achieved. Regardless of how circumstances made it appear God the Father had neglected Him, or how much the Devil taunted Him to rash action to satisfy His pressing needs, **Jesus** refused to make His own will or His own wishes His "god," which would have violated the First Commandment, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (**Deuteronomy 5:7**). In response to His first test, **Jesus** tells the Devil, in effect, it's better to be hungry within the will of God than to be filled outside of God's will.

Pastor Rick Warren writes, "Since God intends to make you like Jesus, He will take you through the same experiences Jesus went through. That includes loneliness, temptation, stress, criticism, rejection, and many other problems. Every temptation is an offer to doubt God's love and wisdom. Every time you defeat a temptation, you become more like Jesus." Rick Warren also points out we have the same spiritual resources available to us that **Jesus** used when He faced and defeated Satan: Prayer (**Luke 3:22**), the Father's love (**Luke 3:23**), the power of the Holy Spirit (**Luke 4:1**), and the Word of God (**Luke 4:4, 8, 12**).

CONCLUSION

A Methodist minister shares this story. Her sociable and outgoing middle son—who was just shy of 4 years old—was taught the Bible passage of **Luke 4:1-13** one morning in Sunday school. On the ride home from church, she was surprised when her son started asking her some questions. "Hey mom," he started, "what do you know about the devil?" A bit startled, she asked: "What do you know about the devil?" "Well," he began, "the devil talked to Jesus and the devil was mean." Then, leaning closer to her and dropping his voice to a loud whisper, he said, "If we were in a store, and you and Dad were in one aisle, and I was alone in another aisle, and"—his hushed tones became downright conspiratorial at this point—"there was candy"—he paused again for effect—"the devil would say, 'Take some!'"

This minister-mother was impressed at how much her son seemed to understand about the story and about how **Jesus** taught us to resist temptation to do wrong. Then she asked him, "Honey, if we were in another aisle, and there was candy, and the devil said, 'You should take some!' What would you say back to the devil?" A genuinely sweet grin lit up his entire face as he replied without hesitation, "Oh! I would say thank you!" His mother wasn't surprised that a 3-year-old had missed the entire point of **Luke 4:1-13**. He'd not lived long enough to learn the bitter lessons from yielding to temptation and to the Devil. It is often far easier for us to say, "Thank you," when temptation comes. **Jesus** wants us to realize that when we say "Thank you" to any temptation we're also saying at the same time, "No thanks" to the Lord!