



Luke 4:1-15

“The Private And Public Victory”

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“Following Christ from City Center”

LUKE 4:1-15¹ "THE PRIVATE AND THE PUBLIC VICTORY"

Son of Adam, Son Of God, 3:38, Mt .4:1-11

1) vv.1-2 INTRODUCTION: HOLY SPIRIT, JORDAN, DEVIL, TEMPTATION, Q.

Sonship Requires Obedience, Spirit's Presence

1 a And Jesus, **FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**, returned from the **JORDAN**, 3:22, From His Baptism, Is. 42:1
 2 b and was led (continuously) by the **SPIRIT** for forty days in the wilderness, Spirit (2x) Picks A Fight!
 b' **TEMPTED** (continuously) by the **DEVIL**. 11:24, 1 Jn. 2:15, Combat/Real Battle: Heb. 2:14-18, 4:15
 a' And he ate nothing in those days; Radical Dependence, Discipline: Focus Through Fasting
 and when the days were ended he was hungry. Weak, Not Thirsty, Some Water To Survive Judean Wilderness
 1 Cor. 10:6-9, Temptation Order = Ps. 106:14-15, 19-20, 32-33

2) vv.3-4 FIRST TEMPTATION: POWER FOR HIS OWN BODILY NEEDS: STONE.

Love Pleasure Satan Has A Voice = False Guidance
 3 The devil said to him, Plants Doubt, Operate Independently: //Genesis 3:1, 5
 Provision "IF you are the son of God, Satan Assumes Sonship: Dictates Possible Actions To Demonstrate
 command THIS STONE to become bread." Question God's Provision And Care
 What Mean To Be Son Of God? You Should Not Suffer!
 4 And Jesus answered him, Dependence On God For All His Needs
 "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" Life Of Appetites Only = Dead End, Deuteronomy 8:3a
 1) Jesus Decides About The Body/Appetites: Trust/ Delayed Gratification

3) vv.5-8 SECOND (CENTRAL) TEMPTATION: WORSHIP THE EVIL ONE.

Love Possessions This Temptation Is Last In Matthew
 5 And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world *in a moment of time*,
 6 and said to him, Jesus Dialogued With Evil One, Reported This Story
 Priority a "To you I will give *all this authority and their glory*, Proudful Oversell, Visionary Experience
 b *for it has been given to me*, Subordinate! Forfeited By Adam/ Eve: Gen. 3, Half-Truth
 b' *and I give it to whom I will.* Temporarily Only! Devil Wants A Change Of Command
 7 a' IF you, then, will worship me, it shall all be yours." Shortcut Around The Cross, Exodus 20:3
 Alliance With Evil Is Offered, // Dio Chrysostom, 2 Fort 64:14
 8 And Jesus answered him, "It is written, Sword Of Spirit, Eph. 6:17b
 a 'You shall worship No Shortcuts, Only One Who Is Loyal, Obedient
 b the Lord your God, Jesus Takes Way Of Self-Denial/Service
 b' and him only Submission/Loyalty To God
 a' shall you serve.'" Deuteronomy 6:13-15
 2) Jesus Decides About Worship, Loyalty, Service: Orientation/ No Quick Fix

2') vv.9-12 THIRD TEMPTATION: POWER TO PROVE HIS IDENTITY: STONE.

Love Glory Last Temptation In Jerusalem Temple, Publicity Stunt
 9 And he took him *to Jerusalem*, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, 450 ft. Vision
 Protection "IF you are the son of God, "Let Go And Let God," Flashy Display For The Crowds
 throw yourself down *from here*, Temptation To Display Divine Rescue/Care
 10 for it is written, Psalm 91:11-12
 'he will give his angels charge of you, to guard you,' and
 11 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against A STONE.'" Satan Knows His Bible!
 Jesus Refuses A False Leap Of Faith
 12 And Jesus answered him, "It is said, No Presumption, No Forcing God Through Risk
 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" Exodus 17:1-17, Deuteronomy 6:16
 3) Jesus Decides About Submission And Initiative: Humility/Reverence

1') vv.13-15 CONCLUSION: HOLY SPIRIT, GALILEE, DEVIL, TEMPTATION.

Jesus Wins By Humble Faith, Staunch Allegiance
 13 And when the **DEVIL** had ended every **TEMPTATION**, Best Shot! Jesus Character Confirmed = Example
 he departed from him *until and opportune time*. 22:3, 6, 28, 32, 53 Fights Dirty! Luke 4:31-44 Exorcisms
 14 And Jesus returned in the **POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT** into **GALILEE**, Not Depleted, Liberation Begins
 and a report concerning him went through all the surrounding country. Jesus Emerges Tested In Virtue
 15 And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. Lk. 11:20, Acts 10:38, Kingdoms In Perpetual Conflict

¹ Parallel to Matt. 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13; italicized portions show where Luke differs from Matthew. This story shows how Jesus gained spiritual authority over the Evil One in private so that he might plunder his goods (free people) in public. It encourages us to know that Jesus was tested and that Scripture and the Spirit are our defense as well. See Ephesians 6:11ff. for a parallel treatment from Paul.

A Brief Treatment Of Luke 4:1-15

This is the next unit in Luke's treatment of Jesus' pre-public career (1:1-4:30) which at each stage is set in parallel to John the Baptist. Just as John was *in the wilderness* where he received *the word of God* (3:2b), so Jesus is now *in the wilderness* where he speaks the word of God (Scripture) to the devil. Where both Adam in the garden and Israel in the wilderness fail, Jesus' succeeds. There is one who's been tested and found worthy, and that is Jesus alone. He now has full and proven credentials to begin his public work of kingdom liberation. Jesus is Son of God by the Spirit from conception (2:1-21); he is announced as such and anointed with the Spirit at his baptism (3:1-22); the resume of his Sonship is given in the genealogy (3:23-38); his faithful character as loyal Son is revealed in his testing (4:1-15). Jesus is the real deal.

The thought unit is a 5:1 concentric pattern (1-2-3'-2'-1') pattern with multiple words of inclusion as a framing device: *full of the Holy Spirit, Jordan, Spirit, tempted, devil* (vv.1-2) // *devil, temptation, power of the Holy Spirit, Galilee* (vv.13-15). Note that the word *stone* is found in 2 // 2'. A narrative frame (1. vv.1-2 // 1' vv.13-15) frames a dialogic core (2-3-2'). The ultimate temptation is idolatry (3. vv.5-8). While many mark the unit as 4:1-13, the evidence argues that Luke intended the paragraph to be 4:1-15.

Jesus is, in the later language of the church, the visible vehicle of the Trinity. His humanity is submitted to the Father's will and suffused with the Spirit. Radical dependence and the inspiration of immediate guidance are his mode of operations (see John 5:19-30 for a parallel treatment). Jesus does not immediately enter public ministry but is led by the Spirit into the bleak Judean wilds for a long fast and continuous testing. The Spirit is for empowerment, not religious entertainment. The verbs indicate the leading of the Spirit and the temptation are continuous. The fast was from food but not water, and at the end of the forty days pains indicating the onset of starvation grew sharp. It was at his physical weakest that Satan's assault reached peak intensity. The question is, Will Jesus remain submitted? Or, Will he cave?

The devil does not so much question his status as God's Son as presume it as the basis of appeal. It's not too hard to image a rounded desert stone resembling a warm loaf of bread. Jesus cannot go much longer without food. At this point he was very skinny, even emaciated. Will he seek to act apart from his Father's command and the Spirit's empowerment? Is he an independent agent or a dependent one? His answer, his first thrust with the sword of the Spirit, is Deut. 8:3a, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" In other words, "My life and welfare depend on God, not myself; I will not eat until released to do so." All Jesus' normal human appetites and passions are fully surrendered; he has self-control.

The second round of the battle is clearly visionary which demonstrates that the Evil One has access to human thoughts and the theater of the imagination. The battle is between our ears, and the sinless Jesus hears the voice of the devil. The second appeal is to take a short cut. "Grab for the gold now. Surely this is your right as the privileged Son?" Satan is after a change of command on the turf he temporarily inherited through Adam's treason. But Jesus' devotion is exclusive. Only God is worthy of ultimate loyalty and service (Deut. 6:13-15). Jesus does not argue but again appeals to Scripture. He is savvy.

The third round is the temptation of presumption, and here the foe takes a page from Jesus' play book and quotes Ps. 91:11-12. If David was protected from stubbing his toe, surely you can *take a leap of faith* and be rescued? But Jesus, who knows Scripture can be twisted, appeals to Deut. 6:16 that God's protection is not to be presumed on or gambled with. Jesus has taken his enemy's best shots and prevailed. The devil then withdraws and re-figures his strategy. The fruit of the testing is revealed in the success of the public ministry as it begins. Jesus private victory leads to public benefit for others. He is a blessing.

THE PRIVATE AND THE PUBLIC VICTORY

*“And when the devil had ended every temptation,
he departed until an opportune time.”*

Why vigilance, even in the doldrums, is always necessary.

L U K E 4 : 1 3

We all have inherited patterns of finding our way through life. One of mine is connections, and it’s come to be a joke for the staff to say, “Are you kin to everyone?” I never took a class on connections, but my father was master at it, and I was his first and best student. One day, after I watched him make connections with four or five strangers, I asked in awe, “How do you do that?” This was his answer:

“Son, if your grow up in South Carolina, play sports, win a couple state championships, go off to Clemson, then off to war and back to Clemson, then Medical School in Charleston and internship in Florence, you know people across the state. If you stay in touch with them and your medical colleagues and their wives- including the classes just before and after yours- there’s hardly a person in the state who doesn’t know someone you know. To make a connection lowers anxiety; they’ll loosen up and talk to you. They’ll remember you took time to find a bridge into their world and set them at ease. Years later the bond is still there.”

Today I invoke connections. My uncle Harvey Lewis of Galivant’s Ferry was on Eisenhower’s staff for Operation Overlord, the D-Day invasion, June 6, 1944, the day- perhaps more than any other- that shaped our world. His sister Lida gave me this robe. For years she saved a copy of *Life* magazine that showed him, and at least a hundred others, on the steps of a manor house. “That’s my younger brother Harvey. He helped win the war; I prayed for him and my boys every day.” I pictured Harvey standing around a huge table covered with maps in some English castle as the staff planned logistics. He was a colonel, but he was in the room with Ike and Marshall and Montgomery. If the landing proved successful and secured a beachhead, then the war was won, even though there would be fighting for almost another year.

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On the other side, my brother-in-law’s grandfather was one of the last men on whom Adolph Hitler pinned an Iron Cross before he died in Berlin. I have shaken the man’s hand and held that medal in my hands. Though June 6, 1944 was nine years before I was born and sixty-nine years ago next Thursday, I have living connections and benefit from its outcome every day. Before I was born a fateful battle was fought, a battle on which freedom depended. Things that seem far away and long ago are not; we are part of the same web of life. Two degrees from me to Ike, two to Hitler. I wasn’t there, but the collision between the two shaped my life and yours. Everything big and little that’s ever happened effects us because it brought us to where we are. Every good has long echoes, and every evil only extends the pain.

Long ago another battle was fought. Two forces collided in a desert over forty days. There were no observers except in the invisible world, and had not the victor shared it the story with his followers, it would be lost.² Here was the whispering of old lies and the counter-strategy of asserting God’s truth in Scripture. Hatred assaulted the pure soul of a gentle man to the breaking point. The kingdom of God was represented in its agent Jesus, and the alternative squatter kingdom of darkness in its angelic usurper the *diabolos*: the devil, the accuser of God’s people, our ancient foe Satan. This cosmic conflict was not strung out along miles of French beach but at a pinpoint in the bleak Judean wilderness, and only one of the combatants was visible to the naked eye. If you’d been there with a camera, only an emaciated Jesus would be visible because the sights and the sounds of battle were internal and visionary. A stone magically becoming bread, a panoramic flash of all the world’s kingdoms *in a moment of time*, a look down to the Kidron Valley from the dizzying heights of the Jerusalem temple, all without Jesus having to take a step. Was it a dream or reality? It was both in full intensity. The spiritual reality of personalized evil and deception was pressuring Jesus from all sides, including inside. Jesus heard a voice, saw a vision, and correctly identified the source. Can you?

² I do not find convincing the analysis of skeptics who say the story is early Christian midrash or legend. We have two Q versions (Lk. 4:1-15, Mt. 4:1-11) and a brief Markan report (1:12-13), so multiple independent sources. This report so coheres with the rest of Jesus ministry that I account for it as a genuine Jesus tradition preserved by the disciples. Jesus invited them into his victory, first in the desert, then in his resurrection. On the reliability of Jesus spiritual warfare world view and the exorcisms, see Darrel Bock, *Who Is Jesus: Linking the Historical Jesus With The Christ Of Faith* (New York, NY: Howard, 2012), Chapter 6, “Jesus and Exorcism,” 79-92; N.T. Wright, *Simply Jesus* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2011), “Battling The Satan,” 120-127.

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Some of our most vivid experiences are internal; we each carry on a running internal dialog. Psychologists call it *self-talk*, and the question is, Are all the voices your own? If Jesus- the sanest man who ever lived- dialogued in the theater of his imagination with a dark angelic enemy, what about us? Have you ever considered what may be the source of some of your most wicked and deceitful thoughts? Are there forces who can send you a thought as easily as a banner add pops up on your computer screen? I think so. The spiritual gift of discernment, a capacity given by the Holy Spirit, helps us distinguish which ideas and impulses are from God, which from our natural but compromised humanity, and which are from below.³

I was fascinated this week to read the transcript of an episode of NPR's *This American Life*. It was titled *The Devil Inside Me*. People were asked if they ever felt under the spell of an *inner voice* that held them in bondage to unwanted thoughts. According to the host, "It was like people had been waiting all their lives for somebody to ask this question." Here are some of the responses:

A man says, "I certainly know the voice you're talking about." Another said, "The voice is irresistible...." A woman said, "It's got this life of its own, and I can't tame it anymore." A woman who just got engaged hears her Voice say: "You better try your hardest to make sure he doesn't take the ring away, because he's going to find out the truth about you.... So you better distract him with a really thin body." At the end the host asks, "Do you feel like the voice is winning?" A woman replies, "Right now, yeah. I'm in some serious trouble, to be honest."⁴

Jesus heard a voice and saw several visions; it was a clear indicator the conflict had moved to a new level of personal intensity. I have a link to that battle long ago because I am his follower. He is not two degrees away from me like Ike and Hitler

³ See 1 Cor. 12:10, "the ability to distinguish between spirits," and James 3:13-18 on the distinction between the wisdom that is *from above* and what is *devilish*. Jesus' awareness of hunger is *from within*, the voice of the tempter is *from below*, and the Scripture that is called to mind is *from above*, thus all three vectors are present here. Hebrews 5:14 says competence requires practice, "But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties *trained by practice to distinguish good from evil*."

⁴ Adapted from Ethan Richardson, *This American Gospel* (New York, NY: Mockingbird, 2012), 19-28. The episode can be listened to at www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/340/the-devil-in-me.

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but only one. Jesus is alive and available, and I am spiritually alive because of his life within me. What he did in the then-and-there effects me in the here-and-now. A free Europe was the fruit of D-Day; spiritually free people are the fruit of Jesus' battle. Our ultimate enemy, one whose virulence and malignancy makes Hitler look like an amateur, is already defeated, though not yet destroyed. His wound is fatal, but he still thrashes around. We live, as it were, between D-Day and VE day.⁵

Part of the great work of healing our battle-scarred world involves a straightforward confrontation with the Evil One, which is precisely what Jesus does before he does anything else; it's his first order of business.⁶ To win the right to be our Champion he had to face down the Great Bully. Jesus lived forty days at the violent interface of good and evil. Can he win? This story says *Yes*. He emerges from the desert much leaner than he went in, but every fiber of his being, as Luke notes in verse 14, is packed *with the power of the Holy Spirit*. Having won the private battle, Jess is now ready to engage the public battle for planet earth. Perhaps the first sign of being filled with the Spirit beyond the initial ecstasy is that your awareness of evil becomes acute. You now feel the battle.

What we have before us in Luke account are the brief summary notes of a much more involved engagement, as if we were in London and heard over the wireless on the morning of June 6, 1944, "Allied Troops have now landed on the beaches of France." Watching the first ten minutes of the movie *Saving Private Ryan* is the other side of the story. Dare we say it? That here Jesus first learned the power of the Spirit within him? How to listen, how to resist and say faithful. Here the pure faces the impure; the obedient one faces the cosmic rebel; the light of world shines in the face of the sucking black hole of the universe, and here the character of each is revealed with consistency. They are now sworn enemies who have seen each other up close.

The Bible doesn't tell us all we'd like to know about the origin of the Evil One. It hints at a heavenly rebellion in both the Old and New Testaments but gives few details.⁷ Perhaps this is wise lest we spend our time speculating about origins rather

⁵ This metaphor is from Oscar Cullman, a noted French New Testament scholar.

⁶ The short version is Mk. 1:12-13, the longer versions Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-15. Note that the order of the three trials differs in Matthew and Luke, which means there was a measure of freedom in the retelling, a liberty we preachers enjoy!

⁷ Is. 14:13-14, Rev. 12:1ff.

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than engaging in principled resistance.⁸ The classical Christian answer is that behind the enormous evil in this world is the organizing intellect of a fallen angel named *Satan*. We are not speaking of a cartoon creature with red costume and pitchfork. Nothing so silly as that. This is a creature of a different order than ourselves with intelligence and powers beyond our own. This evil angel is not the equivalent of God but of Michael the archangel. There is no eternal standoff between good and evil, no absolute or ontological cosmic dualism. Our status as an occupied and tormented planet is temporary. This world will be remade, and even now God is at work preparing for that day by announcing in Jesus the start of a new day and a new way.

Satan remains a creature- God's devil as it were- neither omnipotent nor omnipresent, and, in ways hidden to us, serves the mystery of divine purpose.⁹ He is the usurper of this world, it's temporary malevolent landlord who picked up the legal deeds when Adam was eating forbidden fruit. But Jesus has now come *to do him in* and free us from the web of pain and lies so skillfully woven into all human culture.¹⁰ Jesus is God's spiritual warrior, come to rout the enemy of us all. We cannot fix ourselves; all the self-help schemes in the world will not have permanent effects.

Our foe is described in the New Testament by several impressive titles. In Ephesians he is *the prince of the power of the air*, which is a way of speaking of the polluted spiritual atmosphere that envelopes the earth.¹¹ In another place Paul titles him *the god of this age*, which is a way of highlighting his pervasive influence over the times in which we live.¹² Even Jesus- in the midst of his mission- called him *the ruler of this world*, and here the world's future ruler names the present one.¹³ One day he will be removed from the cast of characters. Meanwhile, his greatest tools are

⁸ As our second baptismal vows inquires, "Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you *to resist* evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?" (ital. ad., *U.M. Hymnal*, 34)

⁹ For a treatment of this theme, see Sydney H.T. Page, "Satan: God's Servant," *JETS* 50/3 (Sept. 2007), 449-465.

¹⁰ 1 John 3:8b, Acts 10:38 are good examples of this theme.

¹¹ Eph. 2:2.

¹² 2 Cor. 4:4.

¹³ John 14:30.

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lying, deception, and amnesia. He lies to us that God is a spoilsport who wants to make our lives miserable. He markets that his is a better deal. He keeps us busy and distracted from the truth of God. He blinds us from seeing what God has done in Christ. He is able to tempt and lure but not to compel us to sin; the door to temptation is always opened from within. In a humorous but true vein, Mark Twain once wrote:

“We may not pay [Satan] reverence, for that would be indiscreet, but we can at least respect his talents. A person who has, for untold centuries, maintained the imposing position of spiritual head of four-fifths of the human race, and political head of the whole of it, must be granted the possession of executive abilities of the loftiest order.”¹⁴

Why is it that all the most well-meaning strategies to improve our world meet such frustration and do not deliver what they promise, sometimes even making things worse? The church across history has an answer, but it is not popular in our secular-minded age. Our true enemies- for all the pain and misery we cause one another- are not other people. “For we are not contending against flesh and blood,” wrote Paul. Then Who? we ask, Who are we contending against? We are contending “... *against* the principalities, *against* the powers, *against* the world rulers of this present darkness, *against* the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places,”¹⁵ and the heaping up of these four phrases demonstrates the complexity of the beings that orchestrate the pain of this world. And over them all, says Paul, the Evil Prince.

There are forces at work that are not visible. Weak and frail as we are, we have a common enemy who presides over a diverse hierarchy, and that enemy is not one another. It’s the one Jesus faced in the Judean wilderness immediately after his baptism. Forty days of saying No to the flesh, forty days of determining there will be no shortcuts, forty days of refusing to be a spiritual showman, forty days of relying on the invisible support and internal consolations of the Holy Spirit. Your answer to the question, Who is my enemy? will effect your vision of the Christian life. That our mainline churches try grand ethical program after grand ethical program to so little lasting effect is testimony to our neglect of the deeper issue.¹⁶

¹⁴ PreachingToday.com search under Luke 4:1-15.

¹⁵ Ephesians 6:12.

¹⁶ See Phillip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity* (New York: Oxford Press, 2006).

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Apart from the mission of spiritual warfare, the life of Jesus is incomprehensible.¹⁷ He went from an ordinary life as a Nazareth craftsman to full-time spiritual warrior in a very short time. He exploded onto the scene across Galilee after three decades of obscurity. That so many in our church are unaware of these dynamics is testimony to how effective his strategies are. One of his favorites is, “I’m only an ancient myth and medieval superstition, not a current reality. Don’t pay me any attention; I am not real, only a vivid symbol for the lack of good.” It would be a great advance if we could be as aware of his strategies as Jesus and the apostles were. Never have I so much as heard these issues- any of them- discussed at a pastor’s meeting, much less Annual Conference. Political correctness in theology and church life is rendering us spiritually impotent and blind.

Before us this morning is the classic text on spiritual conflict and the issues behind our visible world.¹⁸ It’s a battle from which Jesus emerges victorious to begin his public work of preaching and showing God’s nearness. What Adam lost through disobedience, Jesus regained through obedience. Adam ate and became weak; Jesus fasted and became strong. Adam believed a lie; Jesus resisted the Liar. Adam doubted God’s goodness and collapsed into sin; Jesus trusted his Father and stood firm and innocent. His initial victory was won in the wilderness and the effects displayed in the ministry that followed. The second battle was won in the cross and resurrection. The final battle is yet ahead at the end of the age and will culminate with the return of Christ and destruction of the Evil One.¹⁹ Jesus took his foe seriously, and if we take Jesus seriously, his concerns will be ours. If he’s not right here, why trust him elsewhere?

¹⁷ See Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: the Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 1997), especially chapter 6, “Tying Up The Strong Man: The Kingdom of God As a Warfare Concept,” 171-191; Clinton Arnold, “The Kingdom, Miracles, Satan, and Demons,” in Christopher Morgan, et. al., *The Kingdom of God* (Wheaton, ILL: Crossway, 2012), Chapter 6, 153-178.

¹⁸ See Neil Anderson, Timothy Warner, *The Beginner’s Guide to Spiritual Warfare* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 2000) for an accessible introduction. Gordon Dalbey’s *No Small Snakes: A Journey Into Spiritual Warfare* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2008) is a personal memoir on the same topic. A recent addition is Dennis McCallum, *Satan And His Kingdom* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 2009).

¹⁹ Rev. 21:1-3.

TURNING TO THE TEXT

1-2) 4:1-4 Introduction And First Temptation.

Don King is not one of my favorite sports figures. He has a bad hair day every day and- by my read- has taken financial advantage of some highly skilled but not-so-intellectually-sophisticated young pugilists. But in terms of Vegas-values King is a fight promoter of the first rank, and in this limited sense he is an apt image for one of the specialties of the Holy Spirit- who is a fight promoter of a much higher order. It was the Spirit who led Jesus into direct confrontation with the devil. The Holy Spirit takes the Chief Servant and Son of God and directs him into forty days of intense testing. Jesus can't go public till an ancient score is settled. You don't get to be Marine by going to beauty school but by going to boot camp!

One Friday evening I found myself sitting in the Atlanta airport amidst a covey of Green Berets, the oldest of which had five tours of Iraq. I felt like a big fat wimp. I told them I was a soldier working a different front in a larger war, and when I then admitted I was a pastor they grinned. When- after a time of conversation- I asked, Have you lost friends? the eyes of these men- men who looked as if they were peeled off a Rambo poster- filled with tears; it was silence all around. They knew battle. Well so did Jesus. One of his squad of twelve sold out under pressure from Satan. The rest of his unit abandoned him under fire, and in his resurrected flesh remain the five scars of holy combat. But faithful he stood, and under his outstretched arms there is still protection to be had. We have a strong and brave Savior, who is able to deal with powers and issues for which we are simply not equipped.

Some say Jesus' divine nature gave him a shield, as if it was easier for him somehow. What we forget is that in taking on humanity God the Son laid aside the privileges of deity, perhaps even its awareness at some level. To use an analogy, if Jesus' full humanity and divinity are seen as two hands, then the divine hand was tied behind his back from initial conception through final expiration. What power he demonstrated was not from the exercise of inherent deity but from the enabling of the Holy Spirit who led him every moment.²⁰ What this means is that the pure and unsullied humanity of Jesus was deliberately exposed to the full blast of evil. It was

²⁰ Re-reading the Four Gospels in light of this offers a wealth of new insight and makes sense of such verses as John 5:19, "Truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he *sees* the Father doing...."

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that-much-more intense precisely because of his innocence. When we are tempted it's like a visit from an old, annoying friend come to give us a new itch to scratch. But not for Jesus. What touched him was utterly alien. Frederick Cootz has written:

“The richer a man's personality, the more there is of him to be tempted. We need not be surprised... at the collapse of some outstanding figure. The wonder is that such are as rare as they are. The lone climber on the exposed mountain feels the fury of the gale of which the pedestrian, content to plod placidly along in the valley below, is ignorant.”²¹

It is at the highest elevations that the winds blow fiercest, and no one went higher up the mountain of temptation than Jesus; not one has experienced the raw intensity of his naked and innocent humanity exposed as it was for forty straight days to the ferocious gales and cold blasts of the utterly loveless assault of evil.

In addition, Jesus is instructed to forego eating. That he was *hungry* at the end but not thirsty means he had water. The paradox of fasting for spiritual reasons is that he is physically weakened but spiritually strengthened. This was the temporary negation of a good thing for the sake of intense spiritual activity.²² Knowing God's will and staying loyal was more important than food. Go a day without eating and devote the time you would have spent eating to prayer and Bible reading. Your stomach will scream, but your spirit will become intensely aware. If you go beyond the third day, hunger pangs will largely disappear as your flesh adjusts. Only at the end of the forty days did the pangs associated with starvation return for Jesus. He was immersed in the silence and sounds of the desert, but it was anything but peaceful. It was a cosmic battle on which the future of all humankind hung.

The first angle of attack was the body and its God-given appetites. The voice said, “If, (or better *since*), you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread. Untie the divine hand and use it. Quit trusting the Father to fulfill your needs. It's clear I care more about you than the one you call Father.”

Ever heard a voice like that? I have. We need to be aware that not all the thoughts that bubble up in our heads are from God or from us. Someone else has

²¹ Edited from “In Good Company,” *Christianity Today*, Vol. 36, No. 12.

²² Richard Foster, *Celebration Of Discipline* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1996), Chapter 4, “Fasting,” 47-61.

access to the universal wi-fi to inject thoughts into your stream of consciousness, and to recognize them as alien is a step towards spiritual mental health. I have few illusions left about my capacity for self-deception, sin, and evil, but sometimes I remember to ask, “Where in the world did *that thought* come from?” Then I remember the enemy of my soul or one of his underlings on special assignment. “Get out of here!” I say. Fiorella LaGuardia, once mayor of New York City and namesake of the airport said, “The Devil is easy to identify. He appears when you're terribly tired and makes a very reasonable request which you know you shouldn't grant.”²³ Any desires rooted in the body can be landing strips for enemy assaults, which is precisely why self-control is listed as the last of the mature fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5. If love is the queen of the virtues, then surely self-control is king.

Note that Jesus did not argue with the voice. Under the Spirit’s guidance he responded with Scripture from Deuteronomy, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’” The spiritual discipline of fasting and a history of immersion in Scripture were means of grace to keep Jesus strong. And if you’ve ignored these practices, you are the-more-vulnerable for it. In this battle you need some bullets in your gun, which is why Bible reading and memorization are important.

Many people are especially vulnerable at the level of the body and its appetites, some more than others- perhaps for genetic reasons or historical issues in their family. Satan hooks many with physically pleasurable bait, and on this front we are all vulnerable and could destroy our selves in a short period of time. Round one goes to Jesus; he refuses to obey an empty belly, but Satan always has more than one angle.

2) vv.5-8 The Second And Central Temptation.

The second assault is also visionary, an experience beyond normal consciousness. Jesus is transported to a vantage where the glory of all the world flashes before him. An offer is made. Jesus can have it all now if he will fall down and worship, the question being, Was it really Satan’s to offer? Some say Yes. Our first parents forfeited dominion when they disobeyed and handed over the family deeds. Others temper this with the equal truth than Satan is a consummate liar and always inflates his image. So whether a bluff or a realistic offer- or some mix of the two- the temptation is the same. The lure of the shortcut, and Jesus refuses it with a second citation from Deuteronomy, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only

²³ *Leadership*, Vol. 16, No. 2.

shall you serve.” In other words, if God doesn’t give it, I don’t want it. Jesus is tempted to become an independent operator and make a grab for the glory; his parry is to stake everything on God’s Word which tells him who to worship and serve.

Many take wealth as a sign of blessing, or at least of some superiority on their part. But if the stuff is in some sense Satan’s to give, perhaps we should not be so quick to envy the wealthy. Some inherit it; some earn it through hard work and smarts, some through wrongful means, and some have it given to them to numb their consciences so that they can slide into oblivion in velvet style. Wealth is ambiguous. Watch what people do with it; even more, watch what it does to them. Only then you will know if it was from above or from below. Regular tithing- giving ten percent off the top to God through the church- is a preventative spiritual discipline in this area. It keeps money- whether it be a lot or just enough- in its proper place.

As an aside, there are some in every culture who worship Satan more directly, namely those who’ve given themselves over to the occult and witchcraft in any of its forms. I have dealt with a hand full of people who’ve been immersed in such, and I tell you that the job of spiritual extraction and detoxification is difficult. To begin with curiosity about the occult and then move on to fascination, fixation and finally domination is a path into moral perversity, mental torment, physical illness and finally spiritual death.²⁴ But Jesus is merciful to all who turn to him. He restores freedom.

If the central issue in the first temptation is human flesh demanding relief, the second is worship. Those who worship God weekly in some church have a form of spiritual protection not available to others. At least once a week we are called to turn to the true and living God and away from all things in this world that call for ultimate allegiance. Rounds one and two go to Jesus, but there is one left.

3) vv.9-15 The Third Temptation And Victorious Conclusion.

In 2006 the *St. Petersburg Times* of Russia reported the death of a man who was mauled by a lioness at the Kiev Zoo. An official said the man lowered himself by a rope into a concrete enclosure holding four lions. Shouting, "God will save me, if he exists," the man took off his shoes and strode toward the animals. One lioness came to meet him; she knocked him down and quickly severed his carotid artery. Zoo

²⁴ See Francis McNutt, *Deliverance from Evil Spirits* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen, 2009); also Neal Lozano, *Unbound* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen, 2010.)

Luke 4:1-15 15

officials stated the incident- which occurred in front of a large crowd- was the first of its kind.”²⁵ Spiritual fools sometimes become lunch meat. Any attempt to force the hand of God shows the difference between presumption and faith.

A second visionary journey is taken in the third temptation, this time from the wilderness to the pinnacle of the Jerusalem temple four hundred and fifty feet above the valley below. The lure is to force God’s hand by demanding a tangible sign of protection. “Take a leap of faith, Jesus. The Bible says the angels will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone. This is God’s house, surely God’s Word applies in this holy place.” Jesus died on a cross of his own choosing; he did not splatter himself all over the pavement at a time of Satan’s choosing.

John Calvin wrote, “Satan is an acute theologian.”²⁶ He knows the Bible and twists it to his ends, which is why reading Scripture alone is never enough. It must be accompanied by the wisdom of the community to whom the Scripture is addressed. Because someone uses biblical language does not mean they’re of God. I have no doubt there are times when angels offer protection, but that is not a blanket promise for every publicity-seeking fool to go leaping off high buildings quoting Psalm 91. Faith that is willing to take risks is not the same as foolish presumption.

Jesus will not be diverted from persistent resistance, and so for a third time he quotes Deuteronomy, “You shall not tempt the Lord your God.” As in chess, for every temptation there is a appropriate counter move. Asserting God’s Word simply and persistently under the Spirit’s guidance is the best defense. When dark power comes against us, we respond with truth. Jesus refuses to win Jerusalem through stunts. A long obedience that climaxes in the cross and resurrection is his path.

I wonder how many generals have mistaken a strategic retreat for the defeat of the enemy and soon found themselves surrounded? The devil withdrew after the third assault but was not yet through, verse 13: “And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him *until an opportune time*.” That last phrase gives me a chill. We are being watched; we are being scouted; someone is looking for weak spots. We each have our besetting sins, those mushy places in our character that are easily exploited, which is why we must cover one another. We must stop shooting

²⁵ "Lioness in Zoo Kills Man Who Invoked God," *Yahoo! News* (6-5-06).

²⁶ Albert M. Wells, *Inspiring Quotations* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 198), 175.

our wounded and help them recover. If the battle is real and the ammunition live, we should not be surprised by moral and spiritual casualties in the midst of the church. So when you feel the heat and are about to cave, a good question is, What weak spot of mine is being exploited? and, Who can I get to help me? Jesus is always near.

Dr. Stephen Covey was right. Private victories precede public ones, and most public disasters can be traced to earlier private failures. The battles we lose with ourselves will be exploited. Jesus won in private, then went public. Now is the time for the great liberation of planet earth to begin: “And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and a report concerning him went through all the surrounding county. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.”

CONCLUSION

When people have difficult problems, pastors often recommend they do something that sounds totally unrelated: meditate on selected Scripture, pray at a set time each day, go to worship, receive the sacrament, focus on serving others, any number of spiritual disciplines, the reason being that these seemingly unrelated things bring us fresh grace. You will not solve chronic issues with current resources. You need more and different, which is where spiritual disciplines come in.

Jesus was able to endure the best of the worst Satan had to offer not because he *got prepared* but because he *stayed prepared*. Thirty years of Nazareth faithfulness and entering deeply into the spiritual treasures and disciplines of his people build capacity which- when needed- was activated by the Spirit.

Are you so prepared? Nothing like a little real temptation to show how thin your reserves are. Come to the table. Be strengthened in God’s grace for your next battle. Learn to spot and resist the Evil One and his underlings. Truth is found in interesting and unlikely places, including a quote from novelist Norman Mailer, former husband of Marilyn Monroe who wrote, “If you don't believe in God and the Devil, I wouldn't say you're crazy, but you are intellectually malnourished.”²⁷ Jesus agrees with Mailer. So does Luke and the faithful core of the Christian church. It has great explanatory power. John Wesley made it part of Methodist doctrine.²⁸ Ouch!

²⁷ PreachingToday.com search under *Devil*.

²⁸ Sermon 42, “Satan’s Devices,” www.gbgm.org under *Sermon 42*.
