

Temptation of Jesus

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] I would like to turn back this evening to the passage we read in Luke's Gospel chapter 4. It's a fantastic passage. It's quite a unique passage and quite a difficult passage as well in some ways as it deals with and treats the temptation of Jesus, the son of the perfect son of God. And yet there are some very important truths in this passage for us to remember and to consider this evening. I'd like to begin by looking at a couple of assumptions that are in this passage, assumptions that are made in this passage. The first is that the devil is real.

That's assumed in this passage. He isn't described. The reality of him isn't defended. It's just assumed. And we know from Scripture that that is the case, that the devil is a personal, evil, spiritual being, powerful, but yet we know a defeated foe, defeated by the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. The power of the grave and death is defeated, his power through sin. And yet his work as he thrashes out to today is to destroy the work of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God and the work of the kingdom of God. He couldn't care less about atheists, but he does care about you and I because we are in enemy territory. His aim is to take as many people to hell as he possibly can through unbelief. So remember that, that the devil is real. Not to be trifled with, not to be ignored, not to be mocked, but also we must remember he is defeated and in the power of Christ we are protected from him. But remember that fact and we'll go on to look at his temptations this evening, some of them. But what is also assumed in this account is that Jesus must have shared this account with his disciples. None of them were there. Luke who records this passage wasn't there. It was only Jesus and Satan. Yet we can assume safely that Jesus told his disciples about this event, this unique event, this unique confrontation between himself and Satan with all the mystery that's involved in it, that he shared this event with his disciples.

He wanted them to know that it happened and it was to be recorded in Scripture for our understanding of Jesus' mission and for our understanding of Jesus' successful rebuttal of Satan's temptations. So that's a couple of assumptions to begin with. The devil is real and the Jesus must have shared this story with his disciples because there are no other eyewitnesses. But secondly, I want to look at the connections between this passage and a couple of other parts of Scripture. There are connections between this passage of Scripture and between God's people and the wilderness, the wilderness temptations that they went through in the Old Testament, the 40 years they spent in the wilderness as opposed to the 40 days that Jesus spent here in the wilderness. Jesus three times here quotes from Scripture in answer to Satan's accusations and each of these quotations are taken from Deuteronomy chapters 6 to 8 which are all passages that deal with the temptations of the people of God in the wilderness and how they failed to resist these temptations. And so we have a connection between what Jesus went through and overcame and his people went through and failed in the wilderness temptations. So there's a parallel there both in the wilderness. There's this 40 days, 40 years, this connection between the numbers and also from the quotes that Jesus has. But I believe there's also a connection between this passage here and between Adam's temptation in the garden. This passage is recorded for us immediately after the genealogy of Jesus that's mentioned in chapter 3 which ends with Son of

[5 : 08] Adam, Son of God. And it seems that that is significant because there is a sense in which we have a parallel account of temptation here where Adam, the first representative of mankind, was faced with temptation. He failed. He gave in to temptation and brought humanity down with him.

Here we have Jesus sometimes called the second Adam facing the same temptations from Satan and as the representative of redeemed humanity overcoming these temptations. And so there's connections between what happens here with Jesus and what has already happened to God's people in the Old Testament and what happened to Adam at the very beginning. And that is clear even I think I mentioned it last week from the fact that the Holy Spirit has inspired this meeting as it

were between Jesus and Satan. We're told that the Spirit, Jesus' full of the Holy Spirit is led or driven by this Spirit into the desert and there is a divine appointment being spoken of here so that Jesus is meeting with Satan to overcome Satan's temptations in the same way that the people have failed in the past.

God's people in the wilderness and Adam as a representative failed before. So there's an important spiritual meeting here where Jesus is achieving something. That's why he wanted to share it. It wasn't just a private temptation. You know, we're tempted all the time but we don't feel the we don't feel the need to share that I hope. Very often maybe it's because we fail and give in.

And it's not just a private temptation between Jesus and Satan. There's something much more significant, something much more important, seminal happening here that is being recorded for us. So we have these assumptions and we have these connections in this passage. And then we look at the temptations themselves. And I'm calling these temptations and I hope I can explain a little bit what I mean by this, that they're incarnational temptations. What I mean by that is that Satan, and it may not be the right word to use, but Satan is honing in here on Jesus' humanity.

[7 : 41] Now we know that God can't be tempted by evil and in His divine nature there is no way in reality that Jesus would be tempted. But yet we understand that He took on Himself a human nature. And within that nature, the temptation seemed to be focused. Now again we recognize that He was without sin.

But nonetheless we recognize also that in His temptations He suffered. Hebrew speaks about that. That He suffered in the temptations. They were not easy for Him. They were suffering involved for Him. And it seems to be that Satan, in wanting to destroy Christ and His work before it even gets started, as it were, hones in on Christ's humanity and tempts Him at that level. As the representative of us. There's a newness in Christ's experience here that He hasn't experienced before.

And it's as if the evil one wants to drive a wedge between Jesus, the man, the divine man, and God the Father. Between the second Adam and between God in heaven. I think we see that in several ways. We see it in the responses that Christ gives when Satan tempts Him.

In the first occasion Jesus says, man does not live by bread alone in answering the temptation to turn the stones into bread. Jesus says, well look, man doesn't live by bread alone. He doesn't say God doesn't live by bread alone. He doesn't even say Jesus doesn't live by bread alone.

He doesn't say the divine incarnate son doesn't live by bread alone. But He says, man doesn't live by bread alone. He's answering as a man. And He is using Scripture to do so.

[9 : 48] Then He goes on to use Scripture again in connection with commands given to men. Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only. Jesus answered, do not put the Lord your God to the test. These are commands given to people, to men and women. And Jesus here answers Satan's temptations as if He Himself is a man and rebuts the temptations and so doing. So we see it in His responses. It's as if He's representing us in these responses. But we also see it in the focus of the attack of Satan Himself. He uses very human temptations.

He encourages Jesus to ignore God and take things into His own hands. Go on, turn the bread, turn the stones into bread, you're hungry. I'll say a little bit more about them in a minute. He tempts God, he tempts Jesus to replace God with an idol and take an easy option instead of the hard road of obedience. And He also tempts Jesus to question God about His Word, whether His Word, the Word of the Bible is trustworthy. These are very human kind of temptations that He brings to Jesus. You know, to ignore God, to question God, to replace God and take an easy option. And these are things that we're all tempted with. We can associate, can't we, with these kind of temptations ourselves. And Satan uses all His power and all His intellectual understanding to focus his attack on Jesus at this point, especially when Jesus is weak. Jesus is really weak.

Scripture is the master of understatement. It always is, especially about physical sufferings, particularly of Jesus. But you know, say, say, in verse 2, He ate nothing during those days and at the end of them He was hungry. That must be one of the most massive understatements in the whole of Scripture. He was hungry. Six weeks, He had had no food. We presume He had had water, but He had no food for six weeks. He was hungry. I think that's fair to say that that's an understatement.

He must have been near death. He must have been ravenous. He must have been emaciated. Must have been longing for bread. You know, being stones being turned into bread might not seem such a temptation for us. But it would if we hadn't eaten for six weeks. He was physically weak.

[12 : 41] Satan focuses his attack on his humanity, even breaking into the psychology of that, not just the physical hungers that he suffered and was suffering. So we see it in the focus of the attack. And we also see it in the kind of nuance of each of these temptations. The three temptations directed here at Jesus, all of them set out to put doubt in Christ's mind about the task that lay ahead. Satan was wanting to deflect Jesus from the task that lay ahead. He was wanting Him to knock Him off His rails, to deflect Him from obedience, from this great agreement that He had with the Father and the Spirit to be the Savior and to go the way of suffering and the way of the cross, to redeem us, to die in our place, to be our Savior. Everything that Satan focuses on here is to put doubt and to put mistrust and to change Jesus' mind from what lay ahead.

The devil said to Him, If you're the Son of God, tell the stones to become bread. If you're the Son of God, Jesus had just a few weeks earlier, a month and a half earlier, or maybe a little bit more, had seen the Holy Spirit descend on Him in the physical representation of a dove and had heard the voice from Him, You are my Son. I am well pleased.

So here Satan, a few weeks later, amazing, isn't it? Having been in the mount top experience, feeling the closeness of God, not that long after Jesus experiences this temptation where the voice says, Are you really the Son of God? Are you? If you're the Son of God, questions that experience, questions the reality of what He had gone through. And it's as if He's saying, Are you? Has God not abandoned you already? Oh, He made a great show with a dove and a voice and a baptism that you were the Savior, but Jesus, are you? I think He's abandoned you already.

It's only six weeks down the line and you're starving to death. Are you? Are you the Son of God? Well, I think if you are, then you need to prove it to yourself.

You need to use this power that God has given you, this infilling of the Spirit and look after yourself, make some bread from the stone, take control. God's abandoned you. He's left you.

[15 : 36] Look after yourself. Then you can go and do all the work that He sent you to do. What a temptation for Jesus at that point. What a temptation to say, I will do this.

I will take control. I do desperately need food here. It's God abandoned you. Now, each of these temptations are unique to Jesus. And it's hard sometimes to get into these temptations because it is so unique to Jesus and because of who Jesus was, Jesus being God and the relationship between God and temptation. But nonetheless, for ourselves, Satan will often tempt us along the same lines. Oh, where is your God? Where is that mountaintop experience you once had where he said that you belong to Him and that you're saved and you're born again? Forget all of that. He's abandoned you. He's turned away from you. There's no proof that God exists. There's no proof that He cares about you. Look, why don't you just live for today?

Tell the stone to become bread, Satan says to Jesus. The same temptation maybe for us would be, eat and drink. For tomorrow you die. You know, just look after what you see. Just, you know, satisfy all your appetites that you have on a day to day basis. You know, the kind of things that you have, the kind of needs that you have, the physical needs and the psychological needs and all these other needs that you have. Just look after yourself, eat and drink, because all the spiritual stuff is no more. God's far away. He's abandoned you. He's not interested. Just live for today. It's great temptation to believe that God is abandoned us and that we really have to look after ourselves, look out for our own interests. What's Christ's response to that?

It is written, man does not live by bread alone. And the continuation of that, but by every word that precedes from the mouth of God. Man does not live by bread alone. In other words, Jesus responds to this temptation, saying, no, look, God hasn't abandoned me. I don't need to take God's place here and turn bread into stone, turn stones into bread. I don't need to abandon my task and ignore him, because I'm in this relationship of trust with him. And I'm more than just flesh and blood. And he will protect me and he will feed me in his own good time. Jesus says, to all of us in our response, we are more than just physical beings. We're more than just flesh and blood. We're spiritual beings made by God, made for God, made to be in relationship with God, and made to trust God, and to trust God for all our needs. Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to us. It's not that he doesn't care about these things.

He promises to provide if we trust him. And we are to recognize we're in this relationship of love and grace, even as if everything seems to military against trusting God and having a relationship with God, and just living for the day. Because, well, everyone else is just living for the day. So why can't I just live for the day and satisfy my own needs? Jesus says, no, we're spiritual beings. We're more and can't just live on bread alone. We can't just live depending on ourselves and living as if there is

no tomorrow. We need to trust and rely on and believe in and worship God. So the first one really is, I think as we look at it, has God abandoned you? And then he returns to a temptation and says, he leads them up to a high place and shows them in an instant all the kingdoms of the world, whether that's visionary, or whether it's somehow literal. We don't know, we're not told. It doesn't matter really.

[19:57] But anyway, Jesus has shown all the kingdoms of the world and the Satan says to him, I will give you all the authority and splendor for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours. Satan's questioning whether God is really worthy of worship, whether God is worthy of worship.

Satan saying, look, Jesus, you're here. Your father sent you. Your father sent you to set up a kingdom. He says, well, I'll give it to you. I'm in control of the kingdoms of this world.

Now, of course, that was kind of a half truth, wasn't it? It's really a lie. He's not in control of this earth. He doesn't have authority and splendor. And he has no right to give it to anyone he wants.

The Bible does speak of Satan as having a degree of rule and authority here.

But it is only as it has been allowed permissively by God the Father. But nonetheless, Satan says, look, you don't need to go the way of the cross. You don't need to win a kingdom for God that way. I can give you it. I can give you all these kingdoms. I can give you authority and splendor. I can give you glory. All you need to do is bow down and worship me. That's all you need to do, because I am more worthy of worship than God. Because you see, I have all these kingdoms.

[21:47] They are mine. I'm really the one in control. I have the power and the authority. God isn't worthy of worship. Why don't you worship me? Deny God. I will give you this. And all I ask is that you worship me instead of worshiping God. And I'm worthy of that.

I'm not sure how that was such a temptation to Jesus. As we look at it now, it seems to be not a great temptation, because it's so obviously untrue. But nonetheless, it must have been a temptation to Jesus, particularly as He thought the way ahead of the cross and of the suffering and of the pain and of the separation and of all that was involved for Him. Is God really worthy of worshiping and obeying and of following? For us, well, I think that can be a very real temptation for us. Is it really worth worshiping Jesus Christ? Is it worth following Him? Is it worth belonging to His kingdom? It's a battle to be a Christian. It's hard going. He's a steer.

Be much easier not to believe. Be much easier to find a different way. There's nothing to gain by believing in Christ and simply being the object of persecution all the time.

Why don't you just turn away from Christ and put something else in His place? Make a worship something else, make an idol of something else. Better putting all your energies into your marriage or into your job or into your leisure pursuits or into whatever it is that you want to engage your life doing and make that first. Make that what you do. Make that what you spend your life doing. Sell your soul to that pursuit because God can't deliver and God isn't worth it.

He's not worthy of worship. He's not worthy of putting first. He's not worthy of acclamation and of worship and of glory. Satan is doing that all the time to us when we are tempted to disobey, when we're tempted to idolatry, when we're tempted to put other things first, when we're tempted to take an easy road and abandon the road, the Christian road that he wants us to be on.

[24:23] What is Jesus' response? It is written, worship the Lord your God and serve Him only. See the people in the wilderness, they wanted to worship the golden calf, just as they had mourned about the manna.

And you know, what they were enjoying back in Egypt, they didn't like the manna. But they also didn't regard God as worthy of worship. But the answer that Jesus gives is, worship the Lord your God and serve Him only. See idols make poor gods. And Jesus' response is to remind Satan and remind himself and remind us that there's one God, one God who gifts life, one God who can only gift spiritual life, one God who made us, one God who saves us, one God to whom we are accountable, one God who will judge us. There's only one God who loves, who is compassionate, who is good and who is gracious, one God in this universe. And he is utterly and absolutely and entirely worthy tonight of our worship and of first place.

We have been made to serve Him and as Christians through Christ we are empowered and given a new heart to serve Him. So he is entirely worthy. And in Jesus Himself we find that worthiness being reminded of it in Jesus Himself because in this very overcoming of temptation He was doing it for us. He was doing it to open the way to words across. And He was doing it in order that He could become our Savior with all the love and the power and the compassion of that.

That is why He is worthy. No one else can do that for you. No one else can die in your place. No one else can forgive your sins. No one else can open up eternity to us. He is worthy tonight of our worship. Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only. There's no shortcuts to heaven. There's no shortcuts to worship. There's no shortcuts to salvation. We must worship and serve Him His way. And the devil will tempt us with a million shortcuts. You don't need to obey. [27 : 04] You don't need to follow. You can go your own way. You can think your own thoughts. There's a myriad of ways to God. You can say all these things. Please don't listen to Satan this evening.

Don't listen to what he says. Recognize that our God is worthy of our worship. Entirely, absolutely, completely, holy, worthy of our worship. And there is no other way to enjoy life with Him unless it is through Jesus Christ. Is God worthy of worship, he says. Then he says, thirdly, the devil takes Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand in the highest point of the temple.

Again, literal, visionary, we're not told. Doesn't really matter. If you're the Son of God, he says, throw yourself down from here. But it is written, He will command His angels concerning you to guard you carefully. They will lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. Jesus answered, it says, do not put the Lord your God to the test.

There's an interesting development here in the last of the three. He, because Satan sees that Jesus has used scripture twice to rebuff Him. And so Satan himself, this time, uses scripture to tempt Jesus.

But he's questioning the scripture. He's questioning whether God is trustworthy in His word. And his temptation really is, can you take God at His word? Has God abandoned you?

[28 : 54] Is God worthy of worship? And now can you trust Him? Can you take Him? Can you take God at His word? Satan saying, Luke, he said He'll protect you. I've quoted it there from Psalm 91.

Prove Him, jump down from the pinnacle of the temple and see that you'll land in a cushion of angels and that you'll not harm yourself in any way. Prove Him. And at the same time, you know, it'll be great because maybe all the people will see it as well and they'll acclaim you and they'll all believe with this magic miracle that happens. And it'll be an easy way for you to get people to believe in you when you test God and prove Him in this miraculous of always. For us, the temptation for us is to take scripture out of His context in the same way that Satan took scripture out of its context here.

This scripture wasn't meant to be a kind of testing of the magic powers of God so that if we did anything ridiculous that He would just protect us. The whole Psalm is in the context of trusting in God and in His word and in His way. And Jesus knew what God's word in God's way was and it wasn't throwing Himself from the top of the temple in order to somehow kind of get magic acclaim and test the veracity of God's word. We can take scripture out of its context for wrong motives in the same way that Satan was tempting Jesus to take scripture out of its context for wrong motives to test God as it were to prove Himself. Can you really prove yourself, God?

Are you really true to your word in this way? Now just as a small brief aside before we finish, scripture in many places talks about protection of believers.

Psalm 91 is a fine example and indeed what is quoted here. What do we mean or what do we take from these promises of protection that the Bible gives for believers? What do you believe it means when you know of Christians who are ill or who have died young or who have been victims of accidents and for whom these promises don't seem to have been fulfilled at all?

[31 : 35] Well we must primarily recognize that the promises for protection are spiritual promises. The protection for us in His kingdom, spiritually from spiritual enemies.

When we come to Christ our souls are always safe and even when bad things happen to us practically, materially, physically in our lives, God says that He will use them for our good. What Satan means to destroy us, God will use to teach us or strengthen us or purify us or reveal His love to us in different ways. And ultimately we know that we are protected by God forever, protected through the worst of all enemies, death itself, so that it becomes for us a defeated foe, one that ushers us into glorious new life. But I also think there are practical ways in which we are protected in a hundred million ways maybe we've never understood and will not understand till heaven. And also it is always protection in trust. Sam 91 speaks very much about trusting in God and our protection comes when we're hidden in Him, protected by Him. And I do believe that if we turn our backs on God or if we play fast and loose with the truth and say, well, it doesn't matter what God says, then we do open ourselves up to disaster and to spiritual damage and to Satan's attacks

in ways that we can't resist because we are no longer living under His protection.

And He will sometimes withdraw His protective power if we grieve or clench His spirit and expose us in ways that ultimately will draw us back to Him because it will be so bad, so terrifying. But don't play fast and loose with Jesus and with His promises and with His Word as if it's some kind of magic incantation. So we do recognize that Jesus here also answers by saying not to put the Lord your God to the test. He's not some kind of inferior being that needs to prove Himself by kind of strange experiments from His Word. We are to trust Him, not test Him.

So in conclusion, can I just close by reminding ourselves in this passage of what we take for ourselves from this unique temptation of Jesus? Will we take from it the importance of trusting in God, trusting in His Word, trusting in what He has done and believing that because the devil will always seek to take away that trust. Remember who Jesus is. Can I turn to Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 17? Remember our Savior, for this reason He had to be made like His brothers in every way in order that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, that He might make a torment for the sins of His people because He Himself suffered when He is tempted. He is able to help those being tempted. We trust Him because we can go to Him and because He suffered for us, we can know help through our suffering and temptation. He understands and He went through this in order to understand us better. Sometimes we think He is far away but He understands and He has been tempted. As He goes on to say in chapter 4 and verse 15, He is not unable to sympathize with our weaknesses. Remember that. But we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are yet without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence. So in our prayer life, which is the expression of our trust, we can be confident because Jesus Christ has suffered and gone through temptation in a way that enables Him to sympathize with us and understand what we are going through. Knowing about our weaknesses, He doesn't need us to be big, macho, strong people all the time. He knows what we are like. He knows our weaknesses but He wants us to trust Him. Trust in

[36 : 42] His salvation, trust in His Word, trust in His work, trust in His love, trust in His grace, trust what He says, not what our conscience sometimes says or what our sinful nature says or what the world says but what He says, trust. That is surely one of the great implications of this passage.

Surely also it is to recognize the root of all temptation, which is a follow-on from this, which is to bring us to mistrust God, break the relationship. The hardest thing in the relationship either between two close friends, between husband and wife, between father and daughter or father and son or mother and son and daughter, whatever it is, greatest trouble will come when trust has gone, when there is no longer trust in a relationship. Terrible thing erodes that relationship to its very core and that is the root of Satan's temptations for each and every one of us as Christians, is to doubt God, to cause us to mistrust Him and when do we struggle most? It is when we doubt God, when we don't trust Him, when we listen to Satan's voice which says, if you're really a Christian, do you think you are? If God loves you, does He? Do you really believe that's the case that He resurrected or is it just some kind of fairy story to make you feel better when you go to bed at nights?

A wedge, driving a wedge between us and God and between us and His Word, does God really say, is this what God says? Would you not be better back in Egypt with all the food and drink that you enjoyed and the homes that you lived in? You're stuck out in this wilderness, eating manna all the time. Is God worthy of worship? Is He worthy of trusting? Is He worthy of following? Please recognize if you have these doubts and if these doubts well up within you, they are from the pit of hell itself. That is what Satan wants to do, to make us mistrust God and our relationship with Him. So trusting God is obviously the corollary, the opposite of that. That's what salvation is, trusting God and His Word. And then the last implication I've taken from this passage is the importance of knowing your Bible. As Christians, each of us, to know our Bible when we are tempted by Satan, Jesus says it is written.

Jesus says, for it is written. Jesus answered, it says, Jesus, the perfect Son of God, knew His Bible, memorized the truth, was able to use that as the sword of the Spirit.

That is a powerful, powerful message to bring to cause Satan to be defeated and to be failed in his task. Know our Bibles. Know the Word of God. Remember Jesus here, we're told that the first verse in this chapter was full of the Holy Spirit, but He said it is written.

[40 : 16] He was full of the Spirit, but it was the Word that He used as the sword to defeat Satan. It's important for us to know our Bibles, to know the Word. If we know the Word, if we know the Bible, if we know the Lord of the Bible, if we know the truth of the Bible, then we have the greatest

weapon there is against temptation and unbelief, and doubt and defeat. Know the Word. Great truth.

Let us remember that. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Lord God, we ask for your forgiveness for the number of times that we have so easily given in to the temptations of the evil one to mistrust you, to doubt your Word, to doubt your truth, to doubt your promises, to doubt your salvation, to doubt your historicity, to doubt your relevance, to doubt your goodness, to doubt your love. Gracious God, forgive us we pray and help us to know your Word, to know your promises, to know your worthiness, to experience that in our lives, to be filled with your Holy Spirit.

Help us to learn from this admittedly unique temptation to learn the principles of satanic attack and also the wonderful principles of protection and victory, to be more than conquerors, to know the High Priest of all high priests who intercedes on our behalf, and to know the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Gracious God, may we not hold loosely to the Word, but may we love it and embrace it and imbibe it and know it and memorize it and live it and love it. Help us we pray in all these things. In this evening we do ask for your protection on us as a congregation. We ask for your deliverance. We ask for your forgiveness.

We ask for your forgiveness. We ask for your grace and we ask for your love, to move and to mold us at all times. For Jesus' sake, amen.