



CHRISTIAN CRUSADERS

7401 UNIVERSITY AVE., CEDAR FALLS, IOWA 50613

(319) 277-0924

INFO@CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

WWW.CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

Sin, Satan, and Self-Control

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Pastor Tim Boettger

TEXT: Luke 4:1-13 (NIV)

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, 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.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For 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 is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Well, the same question has resonated in many people's hearts down through history. And the question is framed something like this: Where or to whom do we turn to find out what's really real in our world, what's really true in our world? The question resonated from the heart and mind of Pilate in the time of Jesus when Jesus told him he was a king, but his kingdom was not

of this world, and that he came into the world to testify to the truth. And Pilate retorted, "What is truth? What's real?" And Christ's followers for centuries have approached the Bible as a book that is to be trusted, both historically as a record of things that actually happened in our history, and it's to be trusted spiritually in terms of what is revealed about God and the unseen world. It's to be trusted and accurate in how to live, teaching us how to live and in what to believe.

In our text today, we see Luke introduce to us very clearly some spiritual realities about the unseen world, and those realities have to do with sin and the missing of the mark or falling short of God's intent in our lives, the reality of Satan, the person of Satan, the source of evil, and then the need for self-control. The text says "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness." Now, this is just after Jesus baptism, where God the Father has opened up the heavens and the Holy Spirit has descended on Jesus like a dove. And we see then God speak after Jesus' baptism, and he says, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased." And then with this Holy Spirit now residing in him, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert.

First of all, we see that this idea that becoming a Christian automatically equates our lives with prosperity is confronted at the very outset of Jesus ministry, when actually the Holy Spirit leads him into the wilderness, into the desert for 40 days, where it says he was tempted by the devil. Now, here is our first introduction in Luke's Gospel to this person of Satan or the person of the devil. Now, there's a lot of ideas about the devil in the world, but as we look into God's Word, we see that we use the Bible to help us see who the devil is and what he's like. It's one of the great principles of interpretation. We let the Bible interpret itself. Now, the great author, C.S. Lewis, has said there's two equal and opposite errors into which we as human beings can fall when we think about the devils. One is to disbelieve their existence, the other is to have an unhealthy, excessive interest in them. What we want to do is study what the Scripture says about this so we can have keen spiritual insight into the devil.

Now, what is the devil? Who is the devil? What's he like? What is the Bible tell us about him. The devil, Ezekiel 28, says that he was like a high ranking angelic-type being that was created by God himself. It simply says this about Satan, about the evil one.

You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God. Every precious stone was your covering. Sardis, topaz, diamond, barrow, onyx, jasper, sapphire; armored carbuncle and crafted in gold where your settings and your engravings. On the day you were created they were prepared.

You are an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you, [God says] you were on the holy mountain of mine – on God's holy mountain. In the midst of the stones of fire you walked. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, until violence in your midst and you sinned. So, I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, oh guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was proud because of your beauty, you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. I cast you to the ground.

The Lord says.

You know, the Bible encourages us not to fix our eyes on things that are seen, but on that which is unseen and. And the scriptures, inspired by the Spirit of God, peel back the veil so you and I can see into the unseen realm. And this imagery painted about the devil is so clear. It's so specific about how he was created, what he was like. Such a high ranking, angelic being. But unrighteousness came into him and there was violence in his midst, and he turned away from God. He sinned. And so, God cast him out of his presence and cast him to the ground. Isaiah says it this way: "How you are fallen from Heaven, oh, Lucifer, son of the morning. How you are cut down to the ground, you who weaken the nations." You're starting to get a picture of this angelic being Lucifer, Satan, the devil, created by God as a magnificent spiritual being, but then rebels against God and is cast from his presence here to the ground where he's come and he now weakens the nations. John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, calls him "the ruler of this world." Paul also writes to those in Corinth under the inspiration of God, he says he's the blinder of the minds of many people. He calls him the god of this age. And he says he's blinded the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. Paul writes to those in Ephesus and says, He is the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. The Scripture calls him the accuser, the deceiver, the tempter. Jesus refers to him as a liar. One who fills the world with lies, even refers to him as a father of many individuals, and there are many who are trying to please him and live their lives for him.

And so, we see the devil is a very real being in our world. As a matter of fact, the scripture says our real struggle, our real wrestle is not against other people, but against the principalities and the powers and the authorities of this dark world. And they are headed by none other than this Lucifer, the Satan, this evil one, the devil himself. And Jesus has a confrontation with him very early on as he starts into his public ministry in the desert, where Jesus full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for 40 days he was tempted by the devil.

Now, what does it mean to be tempted? My grandfather used to take me fishing when I was younger. I can vividly remember him taking me to a place called Prairie Rose State Park, and we would go out on a boat or sit on the side of the shore there, and he liked to fish with a bobber and a worm and a hook. And I remember him teaching me about the depth and kind of trying the depth of the hook from the bobber so you could see which depth the fish were at. And he showed me how to put a bobber on a line and he showed me how to tie a hook on a line. And, and then his specialty, which he deceived me and myself as a youngster, he always bought a little can of worms, but he acted like he pulled the worms out of his mouth. And he told me that fish really appreciated worms that were kept warm. And he would act like he pulled a worm out of his mouth. And then he showed me how to bait the hook, and he showed me how to push the hook through the worm in two different places, but allow it to still wiggle on both ends, so it would look like it was alive in the water. And he said the goal of fishing is to dangle some bait in front of a fish in such a way that it looks so alive and so real to the fish that the fish is compelled to want to go after the bait and doesn't see the hook – to be deceptive in baiting and tempting a fish to take the bait so you can catch the fish to go on. Fishing is not just fishing but catching. And he taught me how to bait the hook and then watch the bobber so that you knew when a fish was being tempted and if it was just tugging a little bit and the bobber was just bumping a little bit, you waited and you waited until you had the sense that the fish had taken the bait into his mouth and was running with the bait. And then you had to in the right, with the right amount of tension, set the hook in the fish's mouth so that you could reel the fish in.

Fishing is a great image of tempting, tempting someone to go after something that and create a want in them so that you can do something selfish with them in the end. That's what fishing is. Jesus was tempted by the devil for 40 days. This one who is a tempter, a deceiver, a liar. And how does this temptation happen? We're not to be unaware of his work in the world. You know, the devil has no real new tricks. We understand from the Scripture: he's real, he's in the world, he has great power among us. And he's still using the same old things he's always used. We don't have to be ignorant of his schemes. We don't want to be unaware of his schemes, Paul wrote to those in Corinth. And so, we see that he uses basically three kinds of bait. The Bible says in 1 John, "Everything in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life come not from God, but from the world." And this is the world. These three things, they're passing away. And if you get caught up in these three things, you'll waste your life. But whoever does the will of God will live forever.

Now, this is Jesus come among us, and He's come to do the will of God to be obedient to God. He humbled himself and became obedient even to death and death on a cross. But he faced the same temptations. He was tempted in every way as you and I are. And we see these three temptations with Jesus in the desert. The lust of the flesh: Jesus full of the Holy Spirit, tempted by the devil, He ate nothing for 40 days. At the end of them, he was hungry. The devil came to him and said, "If you are the son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

Notice that the devil creates confusion, tries to in Jesus' mind. Jesus has just come off his baptism. And the Holy Spirit has come upon Him. And God, the Father from Heaven has said this: "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased." And of course, any one of us can become a son or daughter of the most high God by coming to God and asking for forgiveness of our sins and receiving the gift of Jesus into our life. Greater love has no one that He lay down his life for his friends. And that is what Jesus has done for us and what great love He has lavished upon us. Once we open up our hearts to Jesus, we're born into His eternal family and we can be called the children of the most high God. And you know, the devil loves to confuse us about our identity. And he's doing the same thing here with Jesus. And he's running rampant in the world, confusing people about their identity. People don't even, you know, discern always in our world whether they're even a man or a woman anymore. And this is the devil at work creating confusion. And he's trying to do that with Jesus. The devil said, "If you are the son of God," and he tempted him with the lust of the flesh – he's hungry, his flesh is hungry. He's crying out for food. And so, the devil puts the bait in front of him and says, "You can do it. You can turn this stone into bread. Why don't you do it?" And Jesus answers him and says, "It is written: man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

There is the lust of the flesh. All the desires that you and I have as human beings. God has given us them and appropriate ways to have those desires satisfied. But the devil wants to become enslaved to the desires of our flesh, and that can be any arena of the flesh. There's the lust for food, there's the lust for pleasure, the lust of sexuality and comfort in all these things. And if we give our lives to these things, they can take over our lives, and our lives can be wasted in pleasures, of which Solomon said "They are chasing after the wind. In the end, they're meaningless." The lust of the flesh can cause us to sin.

And the devil then took him to a high place with the lust of the eyes and showed him so he could see in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor. It has been given to me and I can give it to anyone I want to. If

you'll worship me, it will all be yours." Tempting him with power and authority and the lust of the eyes. All the things we can possess. And of course, this can infect the human heart in great ways. And it's rampant in our world. Some people who aren't tempted so much by the pleasures of life are tempted deeply by power and authority in the lust of the eyes and in owning all sorts of things and having all kinds of power in life. And the devil is willing to give that to people who will give their lives to him and worship him. And this is what he was tempting Jesus with. And Jesus answered him "It is written: worship the Lord your God and serve Him only." Do you know that great blessing? What could seemingly look like great blessing in this life might just be someone who's enslaved to a lot of the lust of the eyes, of the things of this world that are passing away. You see, ultimately, the devil is trying to get you and I to waste our lives on trivial things.

And so then he tempts him with the pride of life. He takes him to Jerusalem and takes him to the highest point of the temple and says, "If again you are the son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully. They'll lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against the stone.'" He's basically tempting Jesus to make a name for himself. Show people how powerful he is, sort of pound his chest and have people look at him as he calls forth the angels to rescue him and raise him up and save him. The pride of life is tempting Jesus to make it all about him. And Jesus said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." You know when the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until a more opportune time.

Friends, there's an evil one in the world. And he's tempting you and I to stray away from God and waste our lives on temporary things that don't matter: the lust of the flesh, the lust the eyes, and the pride of life. But God wants you and I to fulfill a far greater purpose than temporal living. He wants you and I to be caught up in the eternal kingdom of God. And this is why Peter wrote "Be alert and be of sober mind. Your enemy. The devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him. Stand firm in the faith. Be self-controlled. Be alert." The Bible says people without self-control are like a city without walls. In the Old Testament, a wall protected a city from the enemy. But if you didn't have a wall, the enemy could get in and destroy the city. And the devil is looking for whom he might destroy. And he's tempting us. And he's trying us. And he's working in the world to do this. And you and I are called to stand against him in self-control. Read the Scriptures, see how God wants us to live. We can be overcomers, victorious in living a full life before God. 1 John tells us "Greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world." Though the devil is created with great

power. God himself is the ruler of all that is. And when we believe the same spirit that raised Christ from the dead takes up residence in you and I, and we can live as overcomers.

Friends, ask God to help you see where the devil is tempting you, running the bait in front of you. Ask God to help him give you strength, to resist temptation and flee from it. And then pursue after righteousness, peace, and joy, and call on the Lord with others who are doing the same. We're called to gather together to encourage each other in our faith and the fight against evil in this world. We hope it's an encouragement to you each week as we open God's Word and work to encourage each other all the more as we see the day approaching.

Let's pray together. Father, thank you for your kindness to us and your mercy. Thank you for teaching us about your ways and the reality of spiritual things happening in our world. Thank you for showing us about the evil one, and in the same old tricks he's used down through history to tempt us. Give a spiritual insight to see where we might be being tempted, and then give us the power to say no, to walk away, and to live victorious with you in our Christian life by the power of your spirit. Thank you for Jesus, who was a great example of this, and then who went to the cross and paid the price to cancel the power of sin in our lives and then was resurrected to cancel the power of death and defeat Satan and his schemes once and for all. Help us walk in Him by the power of your spirit. It is in Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.