

The Gospel of Luke

Lesson 5: The Temptation and Rejection at Nazareth -- Luke 4:1–30

The water of the Jordan is barely dry on Jesus when the Spirit who descended like a dove drives Him out into the wilderness. There are no crowds here, no synagogue, no friendly faces, only sand and stone and silence and the slow grind of forty days without food. This is the same Spirit-filled Son the Father has just called “my beloved,” and the first place that beloved Son goes is into the desert to be tested by the devil. We sometimes imagine that the closer we walk with God, the smoother the road becomes. Luke shows us the opposite. The fullness of the Spirit led Jesus straight into the fight, because the new Adam had to face the tempter where the first Adam fell, and win.

When the devil finally speaks, he does not come with horns and fire. He comes with a reasonable suggestion to a starving man: turn this stone into bread. He comes with an offer of all the kingdoms of the world, a shortcut around the cross. He even comes with a Bible verse, quoting Psalm 91 and inviting Jesus to throw Himself from the temple and let the angels catch Him. Three times the assault lands, and three times Jesus meets it with the same weapon: “It is written.” He does not argue from feeling or pull rank as the Son of God. He stands on the Scriptures, the words His Father had given to Israel through Moses, and the devil finally leaves Him, Luke ominously adds, “until an opportune time” (v. 13).

Then Jesus comes home. He returns to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, His fame spreading, and walks into the synagogue at Nazareth where He had grown up, where neighbors had watched Him become a man. He unrolls the scroll of Isaiah and reads the great promise of the Lord’s favor: good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, sight to the blind. Then He sits down, every eye fixed on Him, and says the most astonishing sentence these people had ever heard: “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (v. 21). The long-awaited age of God’s favor was not coming someday. It had walked into their hometown synagogue and was sitting in front of them.

What happens next is a warning we dare not ignore. Wonder curdles into offense. “Is not this Joseph’s son?” they mutter, and familiarity hardens into unbelief. When Jesus reminds them that God’s grace once reached past Israel to a Gentile widow in Sidon and a Syrian leper named Naaman, their pride boils over into rage, and the very neighbors who had just marveled at His gracious words try to throw Him off a cliff. Read this passage slowly and watch two doors swing open. One leads through testing into faithful obedience, armed with the word of God. The other leads from privilege through presumption into the kind of unbelief that can murder the Savior it once admired.

Group Discussion: Three times the devil tested Jesus, and three times Jesus answered, “It is written” (vv. 4, 8, 12), refusing to act apart from the word of God even when He was hungry,

even when a shortcut was offered. In a culture that tells us to follow our hearts and trust our instincts, what does it say to you that the sinless Son of God fought temptation not with willpower or feelings but with Scripture? Where have you seen the difference it makes when someone meets temptation with God's word rather than their own reasoning?

Personal Reflection: The people of Nazareth had the greatest privilege imaginable, the Son of God in their own synagogue, yet their familiarity with Jesus bred contempt rather than faith. Is there a way that long exposure to the gospel, to church, to the Bible, has made any of it feel ordinary to you? What would it look like this week to hear the words of Jesus as if for the first time, the way the captives and the blind in Isaiah's promise would have heard them?

Read Luke 4:1-30

Study Questions

1. Three times the devil tempted Jesus, and three times He answered, "It is written," quoting Deuteronomy (vv. 4, 8, 12), and when the devil himself quoted Psalm 91 (vv. 10-11), Jesus did not abandon Scripture but answered with Scripture rightly used (v. 12). What does this passage teach about the authority and sufficiency of God's word, and about the danger of handling Scripture out of its proper context?
2. Jesus was tempted in three ways, through appetite (the bread), through power (the kingdoms), and through presumption (the temple pinnacle), the same kinds of temptation that come to us. Looking honestly at your own life, which of these three is most likely to draw you off course right now, and how have you typically tried to fight it?
3. Luke says Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" and "led by the Spirit in the wilderness" where He was "tempted by the devil" for forty days (vv. 1-2). What does it teach us about the Christian life that the Spirit led Jesus into the place of testing rather than around it, and what does it mean that Jesus was genuinely tempted yet remained without sin?
4. After the wilderness, Jesus returned "in the power of the Spirit" and taught in the synagogues, being "glorified by all" (vv. 14-15). When you have come through a season of testing or hardship, what difference has it made in your usefulness to God, and where might God be using a current struggle to prepare you for service rather than to defeat you?
5. In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus read from Isaiah about "good news to the poor," "liberty to the captives," "sight to the blind," and "the year of the Lord's favor" (vv. 18-19). Who are the poor, the captive, and the blind that Jesus came to rescue, and what kind of liberty and sight is He chiefly offering?
6. The devil offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if He would worship him (vv. 5-7), a shortcut to glory that bypassed the cross. Where in your life are you tempted to take a shortcut to something good, success, security, recognition, in a way that compromises your worship and loyalty to God alone (v. 8)?
7. When the devil quoted Psalm 91 to lure Jesus into a reckless leap from the temple (vv. 9-11), he twisted a true promise into a temptation, and Jesus answered, "You shall not put the

Lord your God to the test” (v. 12). How can we tell the difference between genuine faith in God’s promises and a presumption that demands God prove Himself on our terms?

8. The people of Nazareth first “marveled at the gracious words” of Jesus, then asked, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” and ended by trying to throw Him off a cliff (vv. 22, 28–29). Where do you sense the danger of familiarity dulling your wonder at Jesus, and what would it take to keep your heart tender and amazed at Him rather than offended by Him?
9. Sitting in the synagogue, Jesus rolled up the scroll and announced, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (v. 21), declaring that the long-promised age of God’s favor and kingdom had arrived in Him. What is Jesus claiming about Himself and about the kingdom of God in this single sentence, and how does this guard us against thinking of His kingdom as a merely future, earthly, political reign rather than a reign He is exercising now?
10. Look back across the whole passage, from the wilderness, where Jesus stood on God’s word against the tempter, to Nazareth, where He announced that God’s promised salvation had come in Him and was offered even beyond Israel. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from Luke 4:1–30 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Deuteronomy 8:1–3, the lesson of the wilderness that man does not live by bread alone, which Jesus quotes against the tempter; Hebrews 4:14–16, our high priest who was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin; Isaiah 61:1–3, the full text of the prophecy Jesus reads and claims to fulfill in Nazareth; James 1:13–15, where temptation comes from and how it grows into sin; Mark 1:14–15, the kingdom of God at hand in the ministry of Jesus, calling for repentance and faith.