

Weaving the Word

The Temptation of Jesus

Part 4 – December 15, 2013



Who wants a *stricter judgment*? Raise your hands! Nobody? I mean, like, in heaven, if there's two lines, a *Judgment line*, and a *Stricter Judgment line*, who's joining me in the *SJ*? Because, apparently that's where *I'll* be ...

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. – James 3:1 NIV

This verse *haunts* me. Often. In a good way. Keeps me seeking. Leaning. Trusting. And extremely grateful that Jesus is my advocate! Still, I picture that line when I teach on something as puzzling as the temptation of the Son of God.

Could Jesus be tempted? Yes! Can God be tempted? No! (James 1:13) **Are Jesus and God One?** Yes! (John 10:30) Am I talking in circles? No. Yes. *Maybe*. I'm just covering my bases with the *line-angels!* Actually, I don't think that's a contradiction, I believe it's a puzzle, a paradox, and the solution is *in God's Word*. I just haven't found it yet ... *completely ... but, I'm workin' on it!*



In the meantime, let's settle for an analogy and move on! A man who'd never seen a 747 fly (and didn't understand aerodynamics), could only conclude that it couldn't fly. *Especially* if you stack a Space Shuttle on it! "Well, if I thought it couldn't fly *before!*" Even if he *saw it* fly, it'd remain beyond his comprehension. He could only stare in wonder and say, "Well, *I'll be.*"



Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him." – John 1:32 NIV

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. – Matthew 4:1 NIV

Well *I'll be*. The writer of Hebrews makes it abundantly clear that ...



Because **he himself suffered when he was tempted**, he is able to help those who are being tempted. – Hebrews 2:18 NIV

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been **tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin**. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. – Hebrews 4:15-16 NIV



We may never comprehend how the sinless Son of God can *also* be the tempted Son of Man, but **if we fail to see His suffering, we'll fail to see His sympathy with *our* weaknesses, and we won't have confidence to approach Him to receive mercy and find grace.**

This is a monumental battle and a decisive victory! **The wilderness isn't just a random detour ... it's a *battlefield*.**

The Son of Man battled the same natural, God-given impulses as we do. He got hungry, thirsty, tired, and lonely. **It's not a sin to be on the battleground; it's a sin to surrender.** You may feel dirty from the fight, but temptation isn't sin. **The sin is giving in and surrendering godly desires to ungodly ways.**



I remember a youth pastor saying that **the sin is usually found in the *second* look!** Remember, the devil isn't dumb enough to try to tempt you into sin directly. **His strategy is to tempt you into something *risky*.** I was in Walmart the other day in the checkout line, battling the second look. When the underdressed (I'm being polite) woman (again, polite) left, I had battle fatigue! I suffered *more* in the moment because I *refused* to look. **So often we stop the battle by giving in.**

Now, imagine never ever giving in. Ever. Battling every temptation to its bitter end. To the death. Like a gladiator. That's what Jesus did, with *every* temptation. And, He *suffered*. And imagine the chief deceiver working overtime to trip you up, relentlessly bombarding you. Even appearing in person!

How do you picture the devil coming to Jesus? What's he look like? I want to put a picture in your head. It's what I picture.



Remember God's curse on Satan in the Garden?

"You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life." – Genesis 3:14b NIV

That's a picture of a Creeping Devil Cactus. But, I picture the devil *crawling* up to Jesus, self-important and arrogant, completely unaware of a big, filthy, dirt-ring around his mouth.

Why the curse of eating dust? He seeks to devour us. (1 Pet 5:8) Always has. And what're we made of? It's like God said, "You want to devour dust? So be it!" It's like getting the shells without the nuts!

Turns out he's just a crawling dust eater; sadly, we're just dust! Dust that God has thankfully, lovingly breathed His Spirit into!

The Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted. **But, aren't we supposed to flee temptation? We're told to flee temptation** (1 Cor 10:14, 6:18) **but not the tempter. We have to face him in battle.**

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. – James 4:7 NIV

And this is exactly why Jesus is led *into* the wilderness. **You can flee a specific temptation. But, you can't outrun an enemy who wages war within.** To that we must take a stand. And how was Jesus, so physically weakened by His 40-day fast, able to resist? Only by His conviction in God's Word.



Here's the thing, a very critical thing: **Jesus wasn't able to resist just because He knew God's Word, and could quote God's Word, but because He lived on and by every Word that proceeded from God's life-giving, Spirit-breathing mouth!** This is why fasting is an important discipline. **Fasting reveals who's really in charge. And every time I intentionally deny my flesh (in even the smallest ways) I remind it who's supposed to be in charge.** When my stomach growls, I say, "That's right, you're not the boss of me!"

Fasting teaches a most profound lesson: **it's okay to be hungry.**

But, Satan isn't called the father of lies (John 8:44) for nothing; he's concealing something - a subtle temptation under an obvious one. Sure, he's tempting famished Jesus to eat, but why?



Jesus is baptized. The heavens open. The Spirit lands. The Father says: "You are my Son; whom I love." (Mark 1:11) *Now, listen closely ...*

The tempter came to him and said, "**If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.**" Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but **on every word that comes from the mouth of God.**'" – Matthew 4:3-4 NIV

And, the words that had just come from the mouth of God were what? "You are my Son; whom I love." **The subtle, sinister temptation hiding under the obvious was to doubt God's Word, and therefore the Father's love. He hides the same thing under most of ours.**

He isn't stupid, but he isn't creative either. **He almost always hides a sinister temptation under a natural appetite or desire.** "You so deserve to have what God apparently doesn't love you enough to give." But, Jesus is concealing a little something *too*. His response is a repeat of Moses' rebuke to the Israelites, in the wilderness, when they complained that God wasn't meeting their needs.

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, [Why 40 years? One year for each of the 40 days the unfaithful spies were in the enemy's territory, as Jesus is now. And, why were they led into the desert? Same reason you will be] **to humble you and to test you** in order **to know what was in your**

heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with **manna**, [The mysterious “Bread from Heaven,” (Ps 78:24; 105:40). This is what Jesus was concealing; Rev 2:17 says, “To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna.” The word “manna” literally means, “What is it?”] which neither you nor your fathers had known, [Because, they were asking the wrong question. It’s not “What is it?” but “Who is it?”] to teach you that **man does not live on bread alone** [In fact, we’re dead on just bread] **but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.** – Deuteronomy 8:2-3 NIV



Mount Sinai

Moses heard the words from God’s mouth, when he’d fasted 40 days and nights in the wilderness on Mt Sinai. (Ex 34:28; Deut 10:10)

When the Lord finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God. – Exodus 31:18 NIV

[At the beginning of John’s Gospel he says] The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. – John 1:14a NIV

And, what did Jesus say to His disciples at the Last Supper?

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you ...” – Luke 22:19a NIV

God turned stones into His Word, His Word into flesh, and His broken body into the Bread of Life. This is what Jesus was doing, was becoming, was *concealing*. **Jesus is the Hidden Manna!**

[Later] Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” “Sir,” they said, “from now on give us this bread.” Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life.” – John 6:32-35a NIV

In the wilderness, Jesus began the final phase of turning stones into bread. Satan was clueless that the Father was using his temptation to reassure the Son that all was according to plan.

“If you are the Son of God, tell **these stones** to become bread.” – Matthew 4:3 NIV

“If you are the Son of God, tell **this stone** to become bread.” – Luke 4:3 NIV

“Don’t worry, *Creeper*; I am.” Every evil the devil devised against the Son had already been brilliantly woven into God’s perfect plan.

Same goes for his schemes against every child of God.

The devil wasn’t just defeated in the desert – he got *played!*