



Sermon Preparatory Notes

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Sermon Notes:

Gospel Commentary

Luke 4:1-13

The problem with the temptation narratives at the beginning of Lent is the reductive view of all temptations as garden-variety challenges to individual faith.

How many times do we need to elide Jesus' desert temptations with our Lenten disciplines concerning chocolate or coffee? To preach temptation narratives it is helpful to understand their unique role in each Gospel. Although all three synoptics put the temptation narrative shortly after Jesus' baptism, only Luke follows his with Jesus' hometown sermon-gone-awry in Nazareth (Luke 4:14-30).

For Luke, the issue is not equivalent to personal temptations around faith, but to Jesus' unique vocation as Spirit-anointed Son of God. Jesus' vocation is grounded in his baptism story with all that Holy Spirit (Luke 3:21-22) and described as the Spirit's anointing work of good news for the poor at Jesus' home-town sermon (Luke 4:18-21). Luke's temptation is about *how* Jesus will fulfill his Spirit-anointed vocation as Son of God.

How do we know? Luke's temptation narrative starts with lots of Holy Spirit. The description of Jesus in verse 1 as "full of the Holy Spirit" and "led by the Holy Spirit in the wilderness," hearkens back to the baptismal scene.

Whatever temptation means here, it connects deeply with the Spirit that alighted bodily like a dove on Jesus in 3:21-22 and the Spirit that animates Jesus' synagogue preaching from the scroll of Isaiah in 4:14. It is Jesus' attunement to and relationship with this same, purposeful Holy Spirit that drives the wilderness temptation narrative in Luke.

That said, the temptation narrative does not also begin with equilibrium on Jesus' part as it segues into verse 2. The text notes that Jesus was in the desert, a place of divine meeting *and* demonic danger, for forty days. By this time, Jesus' hunger meter had been fully activated. The Greek indicates that "Jesus did not eat nothing" and was famished. This Jesus is vulnerable. The one who meets Jesus in this vulnerable situation is the devil. As the demonic was part and parcel of the desert/wilderness context, it only underlines the disequilibrium in the story.

These temptations are not garden variety, but targeted on this vulnerable Jesus as Son of God.

With verse 3, we see the **first** of the three temptations. This one builds off of Jesus' vulnerability and goads him to **turn stones to bread**. Please note, however, the tone of the temptation. The devil says "If you are the Son of God ... " This if (*E?*) is not hypothetical, nor is it a kind of shorthand for "whether," but more like "**since**." Both the **devil** and Jesus know the reality of Jesus' identity -- as does the reader who has overheard Jesus angelically so named to Mary since Luke 1:35.

The issue is not *whether* Jesus is Son of God, but **how he will carry out his Spirit-anointed vocation**. That is what is at stake in the devil's "if." Jesus responds with scripture, a familiar quote from Deuteronomy 8:3. **The first temptation of a different way of being Son of God is turned away.**

In verses 5-8, the **second** temptation comes to the fore. The devil shows him all the kingdoms of the inhabited world and **offers their authority and glory**. The "if" of this temptation is a bit different: it is a conditional if (*Ean*) that operates like "Grandma's rule:" **If you do X, I will give you a cookie**. But here's the **strange part: why are the kingdoms of this world, their authority and glory for the devil to give? The ancient world often thought of such things as God's to give and God, well, God has no rival in the power department.**

The Greek verb in verse 6 is rendered in the passive which may actually be divine: for whatever reason, God has "given over" such power to the devil. What it may also

imply, however, is that the ultimate power is not actually the devil's at all -- it is rather the devil's temporary demonic holding in the present order. This second temptation dances and darts with the passive voice and future tense verbs in Greek. Could it be that it is actually just a flimsy worship contract with a party with no real standing in the present? Whatever it means, Jesus refutes it again with scripture -- now with Deuteronomy 6:4.

With the third and final temptation in verses 9-12 both the devil and Jesus turn the tables. The devil does it by starting with scripture. He quotes Psalm 91:11-12, also in the future tense, as a way of goading Jesus to jump off the "tip" of the Temple in Jerusalem, where the devil has brought them both. Now the devil returns to "if" in the first sense: since you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here and show me and all of Jerusalem what you got. Provoke God's action in your own interest at the Temple -- as the Psalms themselves intimate that you are God's own precious concern.

Jesus, however, is not interested in being Son of God in a way that vindicates him here and now in the presence of the Temple and of Jerusalem itself. He not only turns away this final temptation with another scripture reference, Deuteronomy 6:16. But Jesus turns the tables on this scripture-quoting devil. This last temptation is less a temptation for Jesus than an attempt to tempt God. God is not to be managed or provoked, even for the sake of the Son of God. And this is not just important here in Luke 4, but even more so in Luke 23:35-39 where this particular

temptation will appear one final time in the Lukan narrative.

All this is to say that these temptations belong to Jesus as Spirit-anointed Son of God. He has a vocation, which is revealed after his baptism in prayer in 3:21-22 and described in his inaugural sermon in Nazareth in 4:14-30. Given that the final temptation goes away, like the devil himself, only to return at a later time at Jesus' crucifixion in Luke 23, it is helpful to note that the work of the Spirit is not conducted in happy times only. Jesus' own sermon almost gets him thrown over a cliff in Luke 4:29-30. Luke is just reminding us that these temptations are part of a struggle that belongs to what it means to be Son of God who is led by the Spirit ... in the wilderness.

ESV Gospel Commentary

Luke 4:1 Jesus, having been anointed by the Spirit at his baptism ([3:22](#)) and **full of the Holy Spirit** (see [1:41](#)), is **led by the Spirit** to face Satan. See note on Matt. 4:1.

Luke 4:1–15 The Temptation of Jesus. The temptation is the last preparatory event before Jesus' public ministry begins. It is tied intimately with the declaration of his sonship at his baptism ([3:22](#); [cf. 4:3](#), [9](#)).

Luke 4:2 Forty days is reminiscent of Israel's 40 years of wilderness wandering ([Num. 14:34](#)) and the 40-day fasts by Moses ([Ex. 34:28](#); [Deut. 9:9](#)) and Elijah ([1 Kings 19:8](#)). See note on Matt. 4:2. **Being tempted** (a present participle) indicates Jesus was tempted the entire 40 days and that the three temptations mentioned were the culmination. **devil**. A Greek term (*diabolos*) used seven

times in Luke–Acts. It commonly translates Hebrew *satan* (“Satan”) in the Septuagint. See note on Matt. 4:1. He is the supreme adversary of God. **Luke 4:3–4** **If you are the Son of God** implies a challenge for Jesus to demonstrate his divine power. Satan is asking, in essence, “Why should the very Son of God have to suffer in the wilderness in this way?” See note on Matt. 4:3. **command this stone ... bread.** Satan tempted Jesus to use his power to satisfy his own desires rather than trusting in God to supply all that he needed during this temptation. Jesus’ reply here (and in the following temptations) begins with **It is written** followed by a quotation from Deuteronomy that tells what the people of Israel should have learned in the wilderness: **Man shall not live by bread alone (Deut. 8:3).** Satisfying one’s need for food is not as important as trusting and obeying God.

Luke 4:5–8 **And the devil took him up** introduces another temptation but does not imply that the temptations occurred in this order (Matthew has a different order, and more indications of chronological sequence). This temptation involves being shown **kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. To you I will give.** Though Satan claims that **all this authority and their glory** (of the kingdoms) **has been delivered to me**, and though in some sense Satan is the “ruler of this world” ([John 12:31](#); cf. [1 John 5:19](#)), the claim should not be accepted as fully true. Satan is “a liar and the father of lies” ([John 8:44](#)), and in the final analysis, all authority belongs to God (see [Rom. 13:1–4](#); cf. [Ps. 24:1](#); [Dan. 4:17](#)). Because of common grace (see notes on Matt. 5:44; 5:45), even a

fallen world still gives glory to God ([Isa. 6:3](#)). This is a temptation to break the first commandment ([Ex. 20:3](#)). Jesus replies that worship belongs to the **Lord your God** alone.

Luke 4:9–12 The next temptation takes place on the **pinnacle of the temple**, the southeastern corner of the Temple Mount, overlooking the Kidron Valley (see note on Matt. 4:5). **He will ... guard you**. This time the Devil quotes Scripture ([Ps. 91:11–12](#)), but incorrectly, for the psalmist did not mean that a person should attempt to force God to protect him (see also note on Matt. 4:6–7). Jesus replies, **You shall not put the Lord your God to the test**([Deut. 6:16](#)). All of Jesus' answers come from God's Word, specifically from the book of Deuteronomy, which was highly respected in Jesus' time. By quoting Scripture back to Satan, Jesus demonstrates the centrality of God's Word in defeating Satan's attacks and temptations (cf. [Eph. 6:17](#)).

Luke 4:13–15 **he departed from him**. Although the Devil will remain active in opposing Jesus' ministry, Jesus will not experience such a direct confrontation again until his crucifixion. Having experienced divine confirmation and anointing by the Spirit at his baptism and now through his victory over the Devil in the wilderness, **Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee** to begin his ministry (cf. [23:5](#); [Acts 1:22](#); [10:37](#)). For the connection between "power" and "Spirit," see note on Luke 1:16–17. That Luke describes Jesus as **being glorified by all** indicates **Luke's strong b**

