

## **Resisting Temptation (Luke 4:1-13)**

*Giving in to temptation leads to disaster. It is a tragedy common to us all. Yet Jesus never gives in to temptation. How does he do it? How can we become more like him?*

### **Why Resist Temptation?**

Yesterday, I went to a prayer breakfast and someone came around with extra sausages. Can I tempt you to have another sausage he said!

Temptation these days is often associated with the temptation to eat too much. Lent is also associated with giving up eating or drinking things, chocolate, wine, coffee and possibly even sausages!

The danger is that our attitude to temptation becomes trivialised. For Jesus and the Bible temptation was a much bigger issue.

Chapter 4 of Luke comes immediately after a long genealogy of Jesus, which goes all the way back to Adam, who is referred to as 'the Son of God', because he was the first man created in God's image. Yet, Adam's legacy was that he gave into temptation. The one thing he was told not to do, he did when tempted by Satan and the results were catastrophic. He was kicked out of the Garden of Eden, away from the tree of life and death, suffering and pain became the lot of humankind.

The results of giving into temptation, do not mean just putting on a bit more weight, they can be incredibly destructive and catastrophic. You could argue that Ukraine is being destroyed now, because Putin gave into the temptation to prove his power by military means.

Yet, the new Son of God, Jesus Christ came and he never gave into temptation. It says in Hebrews:  
"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin." (Hebrews 4:15).

It was only because Jesus did not give into temptation that he could save us. It is only as we learn to not give into temptation that we can be increasingly useful for God.

### **Bible: Learning from the mistakes of others...**

So how can we resist temptation? Well, we can learn from Jesus's example in this passage. In it all he does is quote from the Bible!

We might think that all Jesus is doing here is memorising a few clever quotes. But actually, what Jesus is referring to with each quote is a lesson learnt from the experiences of God's people. In fact all the quotes are from Deuteronomy, which records Moses's final sermon to the people, where he outlines the lessons they have learnt as they travelled through the wilderness for 40 years.

The texts are therefore totally relevant to what Jesus is doing in spending 40 days in the wilderness. Jesus is not just quoting cleverly picked proof verses, he is referencing the lessons learnt by the people of God. He is learning from their mistakes. We too need to read the Bible as a story. It is the narrative that plays a key role in training us to resist temptation.

**Listen to God not your stomach!**

The first temptation is to do with Jesus's stomach. He was fasting in the wilderness and no doubt would have been very hungry. So, the devil comes along and tempts him by saying,  
"If you are the Son of God tell this stone to become bread." (Luke 5:3)

In other words the devil wants Jesus to use his divine authority to meet his natural bodily desires.

Jesus's response is to quote from Deuteronomy 8:3. But let me give you the whole of Deuteronomy 8:3:

"He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." (Deuteronomy 8:3)

Do you see how Moses is drawing on the history of Israel travelling through the wilderness to show them the lessons God was teaching them.

Actually, God used the Manna in a very particular way to teach them the importance of listening to his word, rather than their stomach!

He gave them very specific instructions about how and when to collect the manna. When they obeyed his instructions everything went well, they collected just what they needed to live on and came to see that God would provide. When however, they were driven by their hunger and tried to circumvent the instructions their efforts were wasted!

So, God sent don't keep the manna until the next morning. Some however, worried that they would go hungry the next morning, didn't listen to God and kept some for the next morning. The result was that it full of maggots and smelly - completely inedible. Not listening to God meant that it had all gone wrong!

Then at the end of the week, God said that they should collect twice as much on the day before the Sabbath and keep it overnight and not collect any on the Sabbath. However, this time, when it came to the Sabbath some did go out to collect some and found that their efforts were wasted and there was no manna to collect! Once again they lost out because they listened to their stomachs rather than God's word.

Jesus gives Satan a short pithy quote, but behind the quote is a story, which much more powerfully and memorably teaches us the lesson. We live by hearing and obeying God's word, not ignoring it and being led by our stomachs.

- Lent is a time when people often give up eating or drinking certain things. This can be a great way to train ourselves not to be too controlled by our desire for these things.

This is perhaps increasingly important in a world, where advertising and our phones are set up to appeal to our bodily desires. Whether it be take aways, alcohol or even the way our phones are set up, we are constantly being manipulated to do and buy things through an appeal to our natural impulses.

So yes, it is good to train ourselves not to be controlled by them.

But, for us as Christians, Lent needs to be more than about freeing ourselves from false impulses. We need to also train ourselves to listen to God's word and to obey it. That is what Jesus was seeking to do in the wilderness.

When it later came to obeying God's will and facing the physical agony of the cross, Jesus proved that God's word was more important than his bodily desires by his act of obedience. If Jesus hadn't managed to do that then we would not be saved!

So what drives you? Your stomach or other bodily desire or the word of God? Perhaps this Lent you could commit not just to giving up something, but to taking up God's word and seeking God's help to live by it more fully.

### **Submit to God not others**

The second temptation is that Satan offers Jesus full authority over all the kingdoms of the world - if only he would worship the devil!

Jesus's response is to quote Deuteronomy 6:13. But let me quote you the verses leading up to it:

"When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you--a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant--then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name. Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you;" (Deuteronomy 6:10-14)

The LORD their God had defeated the Egyptians. He was about to defeat the people in the land of Canaan. Israel would owe their existence, their freedom and their occupation of the land to God, because God had shown that he was really in charge of the world. He had the ultimate power. He then was the one they should fear.

The temptation, however, faced by Israel was to look to other gods to help them. Perhaps when other nations seemed to be prospering or doing better, when they seemed to be stronger and have more powerful armies, the temptation was to start worshipping those gods instead. But that was always a mistake, because it was to forget who had the ultimate authority!

Satan's temptation to Jesus was similar. Satan claims to have the ultimate authority in the world. There is some truth in that. The Bible often talks of Satan as being 'Prince of this world,' because people tend to listen to him rather than God. Yet, still the ultimate truth is that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it. Satan's seeming rule is only a temporary aberration. One day he will be totally destroyed and defeated.

In Jesus's ministry, he would be critical of those who seemed to have all the authority and power. This when the people in power had just had John the Baptist arrested, then beheaded for telling the authorities they should obey God! The temptation must have been strong not to stand out against the human authorities, to accept their rule as being more important than gods. Indeed, as Jesus went to the cross, it seemed that this earthly power, with Satan behind it seemed to be victorious as Jesus died a brutal and humiliating execution mocked by all around.

Yet, Jesus refused to bow to any human or Satanic authority. Rather he kept worshipping God and doing his will. The result was God proved that his kingdom was a greater kingdom by raising Jesus from the dead and seating him at his right hand! From then on repentance and faith in Jesus has been preached in all nations and he has followers everywhere.

Jesus has ultimate authority not by worshipping Satan, but by worshipping God alone.

- In our world this is an encouragement to us. When we see tyrants who seem to have absolute power wielding it in horrendous ways - Putin is the most obvious example at the moment. We can know that their power is only temporary. God has the ultimate authority.

But the question is are we willing to worship God alone or do we bow to the pressures and forces around us. Do we seek to fit in with one cultural opinion or other in our world, bowing to the prevailing views or do we constantly seek to test all views and opinions against God's will, worshipping him alone.

### **Trust God don't Test Him**

In the last temptation, Satan tries to use Scripture to push Jesus into doing something wrong.

He takes Jesus to the high point of the temple and suggests that he throw himself down, because God has promised he will rescue him with angels. The quote comes from Psalm 91 that we read earlier.

Jesus's response is to quote again from Deuteronomy.

Let me give you the full verse again:

"Do not test the LORD your God as you did at Massah." (Deuteronomy 6:16).

Once again there is a story behind all this. Israel have just come out of Egypt and gone into the wilderness. They have seen God do amazing things in sending plagues on the Egyptians, leading them through the Red Sea and destroying the pursuing Egyptian army.

Now, however, they are in the desert and there is not much water. They start complaining to Moses. They wonder what God is up to. Has he just led them out to die? Is he really with them?

Of course he is - and proves it by telling Moses to strike a rock. The result is water comes from the rock and they have plenty to drink.

The problem is that they were demanding proof that God was able and willing to support and look after them - even after all he had done.

The devil is seeking to get Jesus to want God to prove his trustworthiness to him by performing an amazing miracle. Yet, such a desire to test God in this way, shows a lack of trust in God's care and provision.

When Jesus went to the cross, he would have to trust that God would bring him out the other side of death. That he would be resurrected. There was no way to test that before hand!

- For us too, there will be times in life, maybe especially when things are tough, when it feels like God is not there. We may start thinking God needs to prove himself to us, for us to continue. Insisting that God shows us an amazing answer to prayer.

But who are we to test God. Such an action is a failure of trust, the antithesis of faith. We need to learn to trust that God will see us through even in the most difficult and challenging of times. That he will not let us down.

Only that kind of non-testing faith will really see us through, as it saw Jesus through.

### **Resisting Temptation**

So can you also learn to resist temptation? We need to learn the lessons from the Bible. Not just punchy memory verses, but the lessons of God's relationship with his people. The story of the Bible.

When we do that like Jesus, we see the importance of keeping God as number one in our lives.

Learning to listen and follow his word more than our natural bodily desires.

Seeking to keep him as our worship and focus and not any ideologies, cultures or rulers of this world. Trusting him without feeling we need to make him pass a test. Rather trusting that he is with us and will be with us even through the toughest of times.

That is what Jesus did and that is what Jesus calls us to seek to do as well, with his help.