

Luke 4:1-13

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[0 : 0 0] We are in Luke 4 tonight. Paul read for us from verses 1 all the way down to verse 13 of the temptation of Jesus Christ. I'm probably going to pull off a nifty trick because I'll eventually preach on the whole Luke 4 just now, but I had Paul think that I'm only going to preach in the first 12 verses.

And you've got to be warned, I've had a nap this afternoon, and so it means it's going to be a long sermon. I hope you're strapped in quite comfortably. And so, yeah, that's all good.

Luke 4, it follows, of course, what's happened at the beginning of the Gospel. And we've all enjoyed Christmas, I hope, and we have reminded ourselves of the birth of Jesus Christ.

And we've most likely looked at various texts in the Gospels describing the birth of Jesus Christ.

And so we're at the beginning of the Gospel, and you can trace the story of God's Son, Jesus Christ, who is born.

And then as he is born, he is also eventually baptized, circumcised first, and then baptized later as an adult. And he is then tempted in the desert.

[1 : 1 5] That's what we've just read of. Now, I want to help you do a number of things. The first thing is a little bit harder to do, and that is to take your Christian faith out of the Victorian myth category.

And hopefully we are not there, but where you somehow treat your Christian faith as a great heartwarming story that you pay attention to on a Sunday morning, a Sunday evening, and perhaps when you read the Bible at various stages.

But where you carry on with your visceral, physical, flesh-and-blood life, well, there it's doggy-dog.

There it is, a different set of rules that apply. And it's there that, well, decisions that I make there, well, what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.

But in church, well, that world is apart. So I live with a sort of dualism between the heavenly spiritual things and the earthly fleshy things.

There's a dichotomy there. There's a separation there. And I want to show you that the way to straddle this gap, to not live in this dualism, is the Word of God.

[2 : 2 8] It is God's Word that straddles this gap between the reality of heaven and God and angels and Satan and demons and the reality of this world and work and play and school and everything else.

What straddles the gap is the Word of God. In other words, if you want to live a really rich life, where you're not just moving superficially through this created world, through the city, on the train, on your bicycle, at home, just dealing with immediate emotions, a desire for food, you're tired, you want to sleep, just dealing with physical, fleshy things, if you want to pursue, if you're not a Christian, you want to pursue a much richer, deeper experience of reality, the way to do that is to pay attention to the Word.

It is the Word that can open up a world of richness to you with depth and with texture and with imagination and with exhilarating truths and fantastic stories and just opens up a much richer reality to you.

If you want to straddle that gap, it's the Word of God that does it. And this shouldn't be unfamiliar to you, that you can live in two realities. Just yesterday, I was driving to the co-op down the road, and I was going to buy some milk, and I could see a couple just standing.

It's raining. I don't want to be outside. That's why I'm driving to the store. It's raining. And there they stand with their raincoats on, just looking at their phones. I had to think as I'm driving. They are living in two worlds at that very moment.

[4 : 09] I want to get out of the rain. I want to move. I want to get some, but they're completely sucked into whatever is on their phone. So it's possible for you to be physically present in a certain circumstance whilst mentally in another place.

And I'm not talking about Facebook's metaverse just yet, but that's what they're selling. It's sort of grabbing us and our attention out of this world, out of the physical realm, and pushing it into another realm, one that they've made and created.

How do I straddle the gap between heaven and earth? The Word of God. The Word of God. Where do I get it in this passage?

Well, that is for me also the million-dollar question. Let's look at the passage, and I hope I can show you how it fits together. Now, it is the temptation of Jesus Christ. And right from the off, we learn that Jesus had just finished his time in the wilderness that lasted for 40 days.

40 days. And after this time in the desert of 40 days, something strange happens. Verse 3 tells us that the devil came and tempted him, asking, if you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread.

[5 : 29] Now, this is where it gets weird. And if you're not a Christian, you think, hang on, the devil? Are we, are you sure? I mean, it feels like I've slipped down a rabbit hole, and it's a fantasy novel.

I'm expecting magicians on broomsticks to fly by any moment. It feels like you've taken me from a very visceral story. This whole story is based in history.

We're getting mentions of Tiberius Caesar and Pontius Pilate and Herod the Tetrarch. You can date the things that's happened. It happened in real time, in real history. And whoa, all of a sudden, we're dealing with the devil.

We're dealing with temptation and this strange business where Jesus goes from the wilderness to a mountaintop and then to the pinnacle of the temple. It feels like everything has just gone off track a little bit.

And it's just suddenly spiritual, metaphysical, different reality all of a sudden. Please don't shut off. Don't take this passage that doesn't fit your neat, perhaps conservative, evangelical, rational world where you can look at historical facts and evidence for Jesus and fit it all together.

[6 : 36] It doesn't fit that neat world because it speaks of demons and devils and angels in a spiritual way that you find a little bit uncomfortable. Don't shut it down.

No, do the hard work of bringing the spiritual and the physical together through the Word of God. It's Jesus that straddles this gap. And the clue is in the 40 days.

You see, the 40 days mimics something or at least recapitulates something that happens in the Old Testament in a very real sense. It's the 40 years that God's first son, Israel, was in the wilderness. And you'll soon see that everything that happens with Jesus in this temptation is essentially a smaller, shorter, compacted version of everything that happened in flesh and blood history to Israel in the whole Old Testament.

Yes, Israel was in the wilderness 40 years. Yes, Jesus in the wilderness 40 days. And then Israel, well, God met Moses on Mount Zion and there he gave him his Word.

[7 : 47] And whilst God was meeting with his church, with his people, with his first son Israel and making covenant with them from the mountaintop, well, the people were making a golden calf and worshipping it.

But there's a mountaintop experience in Israel's history. They go from the wilderness to the mountain and from the mountain they eventually end up in the promised land and the temple. And that's where Jesus' temptation takes him next, to the temple, to the pinnacle of the temple. And so this is a clue that helps you to see that far from being simply spiritual, metaphysical, this whole thing that happened to Jesus when he's being tempted, it's actually something that's happened in flesh and blood real time to God's first son Israel in the whole Old Testament.

And you've got to start seeing that there is a congruence between what happens in the physical realm to that which happens in the spiritual realm. There is a connection between these two things. Strange. It shouldn't surprise us, should it? Ephesians 6 says, put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

[9 : 05] For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. There is supposed to be a connection between the heavenly realms and this physical experience that we live in this world.

And if you want to straddle the gap, you can finish that sentence by now. You need the word of God. That's exactly what Jesus came to do. He is the word in the flesh.

And he's here to straddle that gap. To show us that he is the way, the truth, and the life. And if we want to have a fuller understanding of reality, we need him to lead us in this way.

So the devil tempts Jesus. And he tempts him on these three occasions. In the wilderness, on the mountaintop, and in the temple. He tempts Jesus.

But why is he tempting Jesus? It's Hermann Barfing that said, The essence of the Christian religion consists in this, that the creation of the Father, ruined by sin, is restored in the death of the Son of God, is restored in the death of the Son of God, and recreated by the grace of the Holy Spirit into a kingdom of God.

[10:21] It's this mission that the devil was trying to stop. First in the first son, Israel.

Before that, in Adam and Eve. And now in Jesus. And then in the New Testament church, the church that we live in now. He wants to stop this mission where God's creation, ruined by sin, that has been restored in the death of the Son of God.

If Jesus did not die, the restoration would not have been possible. So the devil wants to stop this mission, this project. It would not have been possible, so that it can then not just be restored, but recreated by the grace of the Holy Spirit, as we build the kingdom of God.

So the devil schemes as to interrupt this plan. And he tempts Jesus after 40 days in the desert, then on a mountaintop, and then on the top of the temple.

And the heart of his temptation is a single question, if you are the Son of God. He asks this basic question about Jesus' identity. If you are the Son of God, do this.

[11:32] If you're not the Son of God, don't do this. If you are the Son of God, do this. But it's the Son of God, the identity of him as Son of God, that is where the real battle line lies.

If you continue to read Luke 4, you'll see that Jesus then follows up this temptation with miracles that proves that he is the Son of God. He drives out demons, he heals the ill, the unwell, and he speaks with such authority that people start to say, hang on, this man is the Son of God.

So the people start to recognize what the devil wanted to suppress, that which Jesus knew. So God's Word, God's Word, is that which helps us to straddle the gap between the spiritual and the physical, the heavenly and the earthly.

But how does he do that? We read Luke 4, and the following thing happens. Jesus is in the temple, in the synagogue.

And it's on the Sabbath day that he preaches. And in verse 17 we read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll, he found the place where it's written.

[12:53] And this is what's written. But before I read what's written, Jesus stands up, he reads this. When he's done reading this, he will say this. He will say, everything you've just heard, the prophet said, is about me.

Everything I've just read from the prophet, it's me. So let me read what he reads on Isaiah. He reads in verse 18, It's me.

That's what Jesus is saying. He's reading this prophecy from Isaiah, and he says, I am the anointed one. I am the son of God. And can you imagine the scene in that synagogue?

It's a bit silent. Jesus has just read it. He's received the scroll from the synagogue assistant. If I had one of my sons, they would have brought me the scroll. I would unfurl it and stand here, then read, and then with drama and suspense, slowly roll it up and hand it, and they take it, and they put it away.

And then everyone with suspense wait to hear what Jesus has to say about what he's just read.

This is what he says. He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

[14:16] And he began to say, Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. Today.

So everyone sitting there looking at Jesus starts to make the calculation in their minds. The anointed one, today this has been fulfilled. They know the reports of Jesus healing people and setting captives free.

They're starting to think, well, perhaps, perhaps, who knows, but look what happens. And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth.

You see what happened? Jesus said, I am the one, and people started to calculate it, and then as they sat there, they said, mind blown, this is him.

This is the anointed one. This is Jesus. Now we said, if we want to straddle the gap between the spiritual and the real, we need the word of God.

[15 : 22] And what Jesus was doing at the very point, he was saying to them, I am the word of God. Not, here is the word of God in a scroll written up for you to go and read, but the word of God is physically in front of you in three dimensions right here in front of you.

If you want to straddle the gap, don't just listen to the teaching, but eat me through faith. I'll explain that later, but eat me through faith.

I want to say that in a slightly jarring way so that you don't make the mistake that the audience made in the synagogue at the time, they were listening to Jesus as he was reading, much like you might listen to a sermon when someone is preaching.

I agree with that. That's fine. Okay, that makes sense to me. But yet, and this has happened in our church, yet your job is you work for a gambling firm and so tomorrow you go back and you write algorithms for a firm that essentially makes the poor poorer by stealing their money through little phone apps and you don't think twice about that because, you know, I've been able to separate two things.

I can think about Jesus and about how interesting the Bible and the gospel and all of these things, but flesh and blood stuff doesn't matter. I can live it the way I want to live. These two things don't need to come together.

[16 : 42] But Jesus won't leave you there and what you do with Jesus, what you do with Jesus will reveal how you view him. Perhaps you've not read this, but we've read it in Canada Water Church in Luke 2 where Simeon picks up the baby and says to Mary, the sun is destined for the fall and rise of many and essentially he will provoke a response from everybody.

Well, Jesus provoked a response here in Luke 4. The response was that people listened to him and loved him. That was the first thing they did. The second thing they did is they said, but hang on, you're the son of Joseph.

You're one of the kids of our town, of our village. And we've heard you've done some great stuff in other little villages. Put us on the map. Put us on the map. You're one of us.

Come do some stuff for us as well. Why don't you come and do a lot of miracles over here so people will flock in and come to our little town and we'll become famous for having Jesus, the miracle worker around here.

They wanted to co-opt Jesus. And listen to what they've done. They've heard the word, but instead of doing the only thing that you could do when Jesus reveals himself as the word of God, that is to fall down and worship him, they wanted to co-opt him.

[18 : 03] They wanted to get him under their thumb. They wanted to get him as one of them. They refused, in other words, to accept that Jesus is speaking of a different reality that will require them to relinquish the way that they viewed the world until the very moment and say, here is the one and we are to worship him.

It's not surprising what they do next. Continue reading Luke 4. You see that when Jesus finally says, look, you want me to perform miracles for you.

Be your performing miracle worker. But God's prophets like Elijah and Elisha is beholden to no one. We are in no one's pocket. We work for God and for God alone. Elisha and Elijah did it the same.

They yield foreigners instead of Israelites. Don't expect me to work for you. I'm not in your pocket. I am from God and I'm for God and I will exist to proclaim his gospel fully and completely.

That is what he's saying. And when he said that, they rose up. Well, first, when they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath and they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built so that they could throw him down the cliff.

[19 : 25] But passing through their midst, he went away. This is the same group of people that marveled at him speaking and then quietly resented that he didn't want to be co-opted by them and then raged with anger enough to want to kill him when he didn't fit their agenda.

Is this so dissimilar to what happens in Jesus' temptation? Just think about that for a moment. The devil comes three times to tempt Jesus. He tempts Jesus in the wilderness, make bread for yourself out of these words.

Jesus rebukes him with scripture. He tries a second time. He refuses to fall down and worship Jesus. He tries a second time.

He takes him to the high top. He says, if you fall down and worship me, you'll get all the authority with me over all of these towns and kingdoms. And Jesus again rebuts him with scripture.

And then he ups the ante a little bit and he takes him to the top of the temple. And there he quotes scripture back at him and he says, if you throw yourself off this high pinnacle, he will command these angels that will scoop you up in their hands and you will not strike your feet.

[20 : 43] He warps scripture and Jesus responds with scripture. And these three temptations in my understanding of this text gets reenacted in some way in the way that the Jews in the synagogue respond to Jesus.

and the reason I want to put these two next to each other and I'm pretty sure my New Testament professor isn't listening to this at the moment. He said, once you've seen three points that make neat sense and you want to fit the rest of the passage into your little model, you're most likely on the wrong path.

Could be. But hear me on this and see if you see the correlation. Is that this almost fantasy novel-like experience of Jesus on being tempted by the devil?

Wilderness, mountaintop, temple. Is reenacted in the physical realm through the people in the synagogue that refuses to believe that Jesus is the word of God.

That refuses to believe that Jesus is to be worshipped. They want to co-opt him. And refuses to believe that Jesus will not allow scripture to be warped for nonsensical purposes.

[22 : 04] No, he exists only to glorify God and he will not throw himself down a cliff or jump off the tip of a temple. Jesus straddles this gap between the spiritual and the real because he is the word of God.

Let's make this practical for a minute. if your faith as a Christian is currently sustained on fridge magnets, on tweets, or on Facebook posts, you will use the scriptures in the same way as Satan used the scriptures against the Lord Jesus.

If you sustain your spiritual faith with tidbits, you will warp it and misunderstand that Jesus came as the son of God in the flesh to straddle the gap between heaven and earth so that he will one day bring heaven and earth together in the new heavens and new earth.

And you will have such a low view of what Jesus came to accomplish that you'd be likely to do not just what the devil did with Jesus but do what the synagogue rulers and those listening to him did the first time.

You might as well stop with that because where that ends is you want to join in the crowd by throwing Jesus off a cliff because he will not be beholden to a fridge magnet or a tweet or to whatever your particular agenda is at the moment.

[23 : 34] He will reveal through his actions and through his words that he is the Lord of the universe and there's only one right response to him and that's to fall down and worship him. And so if you sustain your spiritual walk at the moment with tidbits, be very careful.

It's the word of God that straddles the gap and here we are at the beginning of the year. Would you take up the word and read it this year? If you are here tonight and you don't have a regular Bible reading plan where you immerse yourself in the scriptures, where you allow the scriptures to come at you, not just this short sayings, not just this little teachings.

If you're reading a Bible devotional at the moment that just has two verses at the top and a lot of human speech below it and a little summary prayer at the bottom, you can't sustain your faith with that.

You've got to come into the Bible which is a world. The Bible comes to you not just as little tidbits, as little sayings. Of course there's sayings in there.

There's wisdom literature, there's psalms, there's songs, there's narrative there's history, there's prophecy, there's a whole world in the Bible. And here at the beginning of the year, God is enticing you to come into this world so that you get to know him not just as words on a page, but you get to know him as the person that can stand up in the midst of the synagogue and say, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from my mouth.

[25 : 16] Hang on, he didn't say that. Huh? Did he? Kids, I'll do a trick quickly. What's noticeable about me at the moment?

What's about me moment? what's drawing your attention at the moment? Except for my striking good looks and the fact that I wear a jean.

I've never worn a jean in church, but here we go. There's something missing, isn't there? That's what's drawing your attention. Now, when Jesus spoke to the devil the first time, and he said to the devil, man cannot live by bread alone.

You know a Jewish reader, when they read Luke and they hear that first phrase, they want to finish it. Can anyone finish it? Let me first ask children, can you finish, how does that sentence go?

Man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from my mouth. That is a quote from Deuteronomy 8.

[26 : 32] And when Jesus said to Satan, man cannot live by bread alone, and the reader of Luke's gospel read that passage, he wanted to fill in the dot where it says, but by the word that proceeds from God's mouth.

That is how we live. And so Jesus was drawing attention to that which was missing, and that he is the word of God in the flesh, and that you will live, not just when you tickle your ears with the gospel where you hear God's word and say, that's good, but you live the way that you want to live.

He is the word that proceeds from God's mouth. He is God's word. He is the one that as we hear him, we shouldn't just hear him, we should eat him.

He should become our bread of heaven. In the same way as Israel in Deuteronomy are panting for food and God gives them food out of heaven.

He is the one that we are to eat if we want to live. He is the rock on whom we should build our lives if we want to straddle the gap between the heavenly and the earthly.

[27 : 47] And so the invitation of this passage is that you will come and eat the Lord Jesus through faith. Israel failed in the temptations against Satan. Jesus succeeded fully.

You are now the new Israel as God's church. You are now the new Israel. And so these temptations will take different forms in our lives where the question will come is Jesus the son of God that is to be worshipped?

And the scripture says yes he is. And you follow that up with a life of conviction as you live in that light. And I want to close with this. If we are the new Israel and we are, then we can go back to the word of God not just the New Testament bits that we enjoy reading but we can read the Old Testament with a new understanding to say we are the new Israel.

The promises of God to his people of old has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ and we can therefore stand in confidence and boldness in the broken world that we live in that God will do what he has promised to do and that is that he will fix this world.

He will come and he will redeem it all and he will finish his mission for which he has come. So let me read these words in closing from Zephaniah 3 verse 14 and it's Old Testament written to Israel at the restoration of Jerusalem.

[29 : 08] Will you believe that this is true of God's church today? Will you believe that this is true of you today? And will you start to live with a richness of experience as you know that the world is not just flesh and blood stuff in front of us.

It's rich with God's promises and he will fulfill them. Sing aloud O daughter of Zion shout O Israel rejoice and exult with all your heart. O daughter of Jerusalem the Lord has taken away the judgments against you.

He has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel the Lord is in your midst. You shall never again fear evil. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem fear not O Zion let not your hands grow weak.

The Lord your God is in your midst. The mighty one who will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you by his love. He will exult over you with loud singing. I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival so that you will no longer suffer reproach.

Behold at that time I will deal with all your oppressors and I will save the lame and gather the outcasts and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you in.

[30 : 15] At the time when I gather you together for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your eyes says the Lord.

Let me pray. Let me Thank you.