

## TEMPTATION

Dan McCoig | Luke 4:1-13 | 21 February 2010

1.

Jesus fasted for forty days.

I cannot fast for forty hours.

To say the least, he was starving and yet resisted each and every temptation.

I would be like Esau, selling my birthright at the first offer from Jacob for a bowl of stew.

So, how did Jesus do it?

How did he resist temptation?

2.

Currently, there seems to be a proliferation of food-related programs on television.

How to cook, how not to cook, what to cook, what not to cook, where to dine, where not to dine, and so on . . .

I have discovered that some of the best food the world has to offer isn't necessarily found in the fanciest restaurants with white tablecloths and high prices.

Rather, some of the world's best food is found in the same place you'll find cabs, newspaper stands and crowds of people making their way to work.

Some of the best food your fingers can grab is found on the street in major metropolitan areas of the United States.

A cheese steak in Philadelphia, a bagel in New York, a hot dog in Chicago, a fish taco in Los Angeles, alligator on a stick in New Orleans.

3.

In today's text, we encounter *a Jesus who had to be hungry*.

Forty days wandering in the wilderness is a sure-fire way to get your stomach howling for almost *anything* edible.

Sure, Jesus was sinless and perfect, but he was also fully human.

That means when we find him in chapter 4 of Luke's gospel, Jesus is seriously starving.

But there's a point and a purpose to it all.

Jesus is on a mission.

Actually, he's prepping himself for one.

You see, Jesus is in the midst of a fast.

He's been purposely abstaining from food and wandering in the wilderness to prepare himself for the three years of ministry and miracles as humanity's Messiah, or Savior, that stood before him.

Yet we must imagine that, at this point, had even the nastiest of New York hot-dog carts (which are nowhere near kosher) crossed his path, even Jesus would have been tempted to call it all off and take a bite.

In fact, that's kind of what happens here.

In place of a street vendor, however, Jesus crosses paths with Satan himself.

Knowing that Jesus is feeling weak and hungry, Satan nudges up next to Jesus, saying, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread" (Luke 4:3, ESV).

In other words, "Hey, Jesus, if you're hungry and you're God, then what are you waiting for?"

How 'bout a little street food?

You make the bread, and I'll provide the butter."

Tempting for sure.

4.

Just like Jesus, you and I know what it's like to be tempted.

We know what it's like to have a hunger for something we want — something that others might say we need — but that we know will serve only to distract or derail us.

Click on that questionable Web site.

Spend that extra dollar.

Talk trash behind the back of this coworker.

Sleep in on Sunday.

Eat the doughnut.

Ignore the kids.

The list is endless.

Temptation is everywhere.

And, like the smell of great street food when your stomach is empty, its pull is strong.

The truth is that Jesus isn't the only one who has Satan whispering in his ear.

5.

So what do we do about temptation?

How do we fight temptation and stay on track?

First, it begins with understanding what temptation truly is.

Some people see temptation as evil.

Many Christians would probably even answer that *being tempted* is a sin.

And the end result of that idea is followers of Jesus worrying about the strength of their faith or the fullness of God's Spirit in their lives because they feel the pull toward selling out to sin.

However, when we look at the Scriptures, we see that this isn't true at all.

Temptation was a part of life on God's planet even before everything fell apart and sin entered the picture through the disobedience of Adam and Eve in Genesis chapter 3.

Likewise, we hear today of Jesus being tempted, and yet the Scriptures tell us he committed no wrong, that he "knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

This may sound crazy coming from the pulpit, but don't treat yourself terribly because you're tempted.

It simply means you're human.

This isn't to say that temptation shouldn't be taken seriously.

It may not be a sin, but it is a tool of the devil who, Scripture tells us, is "prowling around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8, ESV).

And if Satan can lure you in through subtle temptation or an overt call to crazy sin, he'll do it.

Again, just look at Jesus.

If the devil is bold enough to try to fool the Son of God, he surely isn't intimidated by you and me.

6.

Now temptation, like street food, comes in countless forms.

But no matter how it manifests for you, Satan's goal is always the same: to pull us away from a life that gives glory to God in exchange for a life of gratifying ourselves.

This is the tactic he tried with Jesus.

"Hey, Jesus, forget about following the plans of your Father.

Feed your stomach instead.

Stop submitting as a son.

Instead, bow to me and grab some glory for yourself.

Why do you trust all God's plans in the first place?

Jump from these heights and see if he has your best interest at heart."

The goal of temptation, just like with Jesus, is to pull you off the mission of living a life that's obedient to God and gives glory to God.

Instead, Satan wants you to walk through life scratching every sinful itch and ultimately just gratifying yourself.

The hope is that if he can get you to do it enough, he can get you off God's team altogether.

7.

Back to our question: *So what are we to do?*

Well, *the antidote to temptation isn't to assert more willpower.*

As if we have it within us to resist every single sin if only we try hard enough.

Some would argue that the best defense is to barricade your life from as many evil influences as possible.

Cancel the cable.

Pull the plug on the PC.

Homeschool the kids and start making your own clothes.

Pull away from society, and you'll stay far from temptation.

The only trouble is that Satan can permeate our perfect world.

He followed Jesus into the desert; he'll follow us, too.

Besides, there's this whole issue of our depravity living within us that can warp almost anything into some kind of sick little sin.

Seriously, what do we do?

8.

Fight temptation with truth.

If we look back to Luke, we see that Jesus decides to fight temptation in a very specific way.

He didn't assert his power, although he could have.

He didn't flee, although it was an option.

Instead, Jesus fought temptation with *truth*.

He fought temptation with the truth of God's word.

With each offer, Jesus answered by pointing Satan to the promises and standards of the one true God.

As temptation tries to pull us from God, the greatest antidote we have — our lifeline — is the truth of God.

When temptation shades our eyes and clouds our minds, God's "word is a lamp to [our] feet and a light to [our] path" (Psalm 119:105).

We can't truly live by feeding our hunger, by devouring the bread or by savoring the joy of street food alone.

We truly live only when we feast on the things of God.

How can we fight temptation or even know that we're being tempted if we don't know God's expectation?

How might we know that this choice or that option is less than God's best if we've never been inspired to strive for his ideal?

How will we spot the lies of Satan and self if we don't know the truth of God?

Honestly, this is one reason the study of Scripture is so essential to the life of a disciple. It isn't just so we all become Bible nerds.

It's so we can see the lies, hold to the truth, stay on mission and steer away from sin.

9.

In this section of Scripture, Jesus is fighting temptation the way we should fight it, too — with God's word.

There's something else here, though, that's even greater — something incredibly important for us to understand.

During his time under the pressure of temptation, Jesus didn't budge.

He didn't sway.

He endured.

He did it not only to stay on task, but he did it all for us.

We give in to temptation all the time.

Jesus never gave in once.

But where we have fallen down, Jesus succeeded.

Scholars tell us that during his time in the wilderness, Jesus was replaying the struggles of Israel and being the faithful child of God that they weren't, so that through him, they might be restored to God.

During his time in the wilderness, Jesus was also "reliving" the struggles and temptations of you and me and being faithful in our place so we, too, might be counted as righteous in the Father's sight.

Therefore, when we fall to temptation and prove ourselves unfaithful, we have the ability to hold on to the faithfulness of Jesus.

We can cry out to God, saying, "I have fallen, but your Son is strong.

I am rebellious, but he is obedient.

Forgive me for his sake, and set me again on his path."

And as sure as there are amazing tacos on the streets of Mexico City, there is forgiveness, there is mercy and there is grace abundant for us.

Temptation, like street food, comes in countless forms.

And, it can look and smell incredible!

But just because we're hungry for it doesn't always mean we need it.

This Lent, let's lean on the strength of Jesus.

May we run to the truth like Jesus.

But most of all, when we fall, may we feast on the forgiveness found in Jesus.

Amen.