

Temptation Part 3 The Spirit Of Temptation

We return again today to these precious words of scripture that tell about a very difficult time within the life of the Lord Jesus, the days in which He suffered through some of the worst of temptations, temptations that were wrought upon His soul by the master of all tempters, the devil himself.

May I begin first by reading the scripture passage that tells us about his temptations, these words given to us in the first few verses of the Book of Luke chapter 4. Follow along with me.

¹Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ²being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry. ³And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." ⁴But Jesus answered him, saying, "It is written, '*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.*'" ⁵Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. ⁶And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for *this* has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. ⁷Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours." ⁸And Jesus answered and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, '*You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.*'" ⁹Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. ¹⁰For it is written: '*He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you,*' ¹¹and, '*In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.*'" ¹²And Jesus answered and said to him, "It has been said, '*You shall not tempt the Lord your God.*'" ¹³Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time. (Luke 4:1-13)

These precious scriptures within our bibles are said by our bible teachers to be both "prescriptive" and "descriptive". "Prescriptive" in that they instruct us as to how we are to think, and how we are to do the things of this life in a Godly and Holy way. And they are "descriptive" in that they describe for us who God really is, and they describe what the "world" is really like, and they give us the real truths of how God sovereignly manages the affairs of this earth.

In these first few verses of Luke chapter 4, God presents for us the reality of who the Lord Jesus really is, His “humanness”, and also His “Godness”. And here also, we are given an in-depth look at the person of satan, his ambitions and his wickedness. And here, as we watch the response that the Lord Jesus has to the temptations of satan, we learn instructions as to how we are to respond when we ourselves are being tempted by this evil being. And folks, we will be tempted by him. Because that is who he is and that is what he does. The devil and his army of demons, they tempt.

And as the world today seems to be spiraling more and more into a frenzy of uncontrolled evil activity, lawlessness seems to be increasing and ever abounding across our world. These are the perfect opportunities for the world, the flesh and the devil to do as these scriptures warn about, to travel to and fro upon the earth seeking whom they may devour. More and more it seems so obvious that the demonic world is devolving into a frenzy of evil activity.

But as I have noted in other messages, I find that these observations about the activities of satan are not spoken about much in many of the churches today, especially within our own Presbyterian denomination. Many of my friends will comment to me that they do not look for a demon behind every bush. And they make naïve arguments saying that we must not give the devil too much credit, that we don't really need for the devil to tempt us, we are sinful enough within our own souls to account for all the sin we get involved in.

And there is some real truth in the things those folks say. But I do fear, based on scriptures such as these before us today, that my friends are only considering one part of the threat that sin has to our souls. It seems in some ways to be similar to the way that a foolish general on a battlefield might focus his fight only against one flank of the enemy, while ignoring an even greater threat coming from another flank.

But folks, we must not be that foolish. These scriptures are clear. As we observe within these words before us today, the devil and his demonic kingdom are very, very real and their intent is clear. They really do desire for every creature, from the Lord Jesus to you and me, to bow down before them and to join them in their evil works.

God has revealed the devil's intention to us all throughout these scriptures, beginning within the first few words of Genesis, there in the Garden of Eden. And now here also in these words in this Book of Luke. And folks, you and I must

not be naïve and ignore the devil and his intentions. He really does desire to devour our souls.

So then, contrary to some people's insistence that there isn't a "demon behind most every bush", there might really well be. And we really do need to be wary of their evil presence and their activity in the ordinary matters of our daily lives.

And no, we must not ascribe more power to the devil nor his fellow demons than they really have. They do not have power or control on the same level as the Lord Jesus. But folks, they really do still have power and control beyond anything you or I might have within ourselves. And so, without the immediate help of the Spirit of God, we are not able to withstand their daily onslaught.

I have given today's message the title, "The Spirit of Temptation". And as we study these scriptures here in Luke chapter 4, and as we read other similar passages, such as those in Ephesians 6 and Colossians 1, we must clearly understand that the "spirits" spoken about in these passages are not just "heightened emotions" or "personality traits" as some people reckon them to be, but those "spirits" are instead "real beings", "demons". And those demons are, in every way "evil" at their very core, "evil beings" with great power, intellect and influence. And they are constantly at work influencing and guiding some, perhaps many, of the people we encounter each day. And our only protection against those "evil beings" is the whole armor of God that is provided for us through the Lord Jesus and through His Holy Spirit.

I implore us to consider these words of our text carefully. Here, we are clearly told about how the "Prince of demons", the "devil" himself "comes out from behind his bush" and tries his very best to tempt and to lure the Lord Jesus into sin!

And I implore us also to please do remember that one of the reasons God gives us these words is to clearly warn us that yes, the devil will, and he does, ply these same evil temptations to your and my souls almost daily.

And may I emphasize for us again about this very special "weapon of choice" that satan and his fellow demons choose to use against us, that of "temptation", "temptation". And may I ask the question of us again, "Why is temptation satan's weapon of choice?" And the answer is a simple one! Temptation "works", and it "works" well. That's because satan observes us closely and he knows which temptations uniquely fit our "private lusts", enabling him to uniquely tailor his temptations to fit each of those "lusts".

When a temptation offers to fulfill and to satisfy our most basic of needs and desires, we are often quick to surrender ourselves up to it. And because of that, temptation has remained the most effective tool that satan uses to influence our hearts to turn us away from Christ. And knowing that, you and I must ever and always be on our guard to never linger too long with a temptation and give it an opportunity. If we do, we will surely suffer a fall that might never be remedied.

And as we've said, the devil makes it his first priority to know all that there is to know about us. And from warnings given to us like those in 1 John 2, the devil is able to know our most intimate and hidden weaknesses. Listen to those warnings in 1 John 2, where the Lord says to us . . .

¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

Folks, the devil knows these scriptures so very well. He knows that each of us really does have a love for the things and the ways of this world. And he knows that each of us is especially susceptible to the “lust of our eyes, the lust of our flesh and the pride of life.” And he panders to those weaknesses in every situation we allow ourselves to be involved in.

And in most all of those lusts, the devil doesn't hesitate to also engage the help of his other cohorts, especially the world with all of its lures.

As we have been saying, this “unholy trinity”, the world, the flesh and the devil are powerful forces working relentlessly to cause us to stumble and fall so that they can devour us. And may I say again that their plan is to seldom, if ever, work alone. They are most often inseparably linked together, working in tandem, to bring about circumstances within our lives that will draw us deeper and deeper into their pitfalls and lairs, circumstances such as, poor health, unhappy employment, unfaithful marriages, rebellious children, addictions of all kinds, and on and on.

And yes, you and I are only able to see the real people involved within our miseries, ourselves and the people around us who keep making our lives miserable. But folks, masterminding all that takes place is our old enemy the devil and his fellow demons.

In an earlier message, I spoke about those enemies of our souls. Listen again to those words in Ephesians chapter 6 where God tells us to . . .

¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹²For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (Ephesians 6:11-12)

Folks, may I repeat myself again! Though you and I aren't able to see it with our natural eyes, there really is a "spirit world" revolving all around us every moment, churning, stirring, provoking and tempting every one of us to think thoughts and to do things, to commit sins that we might not have otherwise even considered.

And again, yes, there is a nature that is born into each of us at birth that is filled with the lust of our flesh, the lust of our eyes and the pride of life making us especially open and vulnerable to sinful behavior. But these words of Ephesians 6, and those in our passage here in Luke 4, are also clear that at the foundational core of all of the forms and venues of temptation resides the person and the schemes of the one great tempter, satan. And his greatest desire and purpose is the downfall of every man, woman and child.

I recognize that I am repeating myself in this and in other recent messages. But I want us to clearly understand the truth about this great enemy of our souls, "the devil"? He is not a just some contrived myth as some people would have us to believe. He is a real person, an angel named Lucifer, who at one time was one of God's most treasured, most beautiful and most powerful archangels. But somehow, pride rose up within Lucifer and stole his heart away from God. And now the once great archangel is ever and always consumed with exalting himself above the heights of God.

And satan is intent on bringing as many creatures with him as he can gather. As we are told in the Book of Revelations, satan won a third of the angels over to his evil side. That is how the demonic kingdom was born.

And now, satan and his demonic partners tirelessly roam to and fro throughout the earth seeking to bring every soul they can garner into their fold, and into their way of life.

But unfortunately, most of the world does not know this is taking place. Most of the world seems either to not believe that satan and his demons really exist, or they see the demonic world only through the fantasy of Hollywood and its movies.

If they do believe that satan exists, they seem to think that all that is needed on their part is to simply ignore him or to avoid contact with him and he will not hurt or influence them.

But folks, we must understand that that is simply not so! Satan is a predator, and he is the power behind the sin that crouches at each of our doors and desires to have us. Satan has a plan, an agenda. And through his plan and agenda, he intends to rule the world. Satan wants to be exactly like God and even to be above God. And he will do anything and everything to reach that end.

And again, as satan reaches out for you and me, and our loved ones, his favorite “weapon of choice” will always be “temptation”.

Again, why? It's because temptation is such an appropriate and versatile tool. It can initiate or it can follow up on any and every kind of sin there is. Temptation can draw a person into ill health. And while there, temptation can hook that same person into a lifelong addiction to prescription drugs. If we have doubts about that, all we have to do is go to our own medicine cabinet and count the pill bottles.

And not only that, when we see that we are about to run low on one of those pills, another “evil spirit”, the “spirit of fear” rises up within us. And again, that “spirit of fear” is not just some emotion, it is a demonic spirit, an evil being, grabbing hold of our emotions.

Think about it for a moment. We feel pain in our left arm, or perhaps a little numbness, or we have indigestion, and immediately our minds are drawn to the “worst case scenario”, “heart attack”. Folks, health issues and “fear” are a perfect environment for demonic spirits to invade and to control.

And if health is not our great concern, satan and his fellow demons have any number of other opportunities that will fit our needs perfectly, and “temptation” remains at the heart of each of their ploys.

For the younger set, satan uses temptation to draw our youth into illegal drug abuse. And after he has them hooked, he then draws them on further into crime to pay for those drugs.

Temptation can draw decent men and women into high paying jobs. And once there, temptation can then lead those same men and women to abandon their families in favor of spending too much time at that work.

And I would like to mention again that one of the cleverest elements that satan includes within temptation is “rationale” and “commonsense” kind of thinking. And it really works.

Rationale was at the foundation of the first temptation, with Adam and Eve. Just ask yourself, “Does it not seem right that we should know and be able to determine matters of right and wrong for ourselves?”

Folks, God and God alone is, and must always remain, the sole determinant of matters of right and wrong, and of truth and error. Yes, you and I really do want to know more, and we want to have more control over our own lives. But we must realize that such desires are arising out of a corrupt nature that was born into us and is being continually provoked by satan and his demonic helpers. But God wants you and me to take those desires and those imaginations of our hearts captive and to yield them up to Christ for His help.

May I close with this reminder. In our receiving Jesus as our Savior, He has come to live within you and me and we no longer are compelled to listen to and to obey the temptations of satan. Just as the Lord Jesus said “no” to satan as He was being tempted, so also, you and I can do the same. We have the power to say the same “no” because it is Christ who is living in us to say our “no” for us.

The Lord willing, we will continue these thoughts next week. Listen to these words again from Romans chapter 6 as we close.

¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. ¹³And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴For sin shall not have dominion over you. (Romans 6:12-14)