

Baptism & Temptation // Luke 3:21-23; 4:1-13

// I'm sure we've all experienced the comedown that happens at some point after a significant high point in our lives. It could have been a successful performance, the adrenalin rush from an energetic activity, or maybe just a bit too much chocolate. As we come down from those highs, we are vulnerable to temptation, and in Luke 4 we see that Jesus was no different.

But let's back up a bit and look at the high point that Jesus experienced. It's His baptism. This is a big deal. Matthew's gospel tells us that John the Baptist was reluctant to baptise Jesus at all - he recognised that Jesus was the Messiah and if anyone should be doing the baptising, Jesus should be baptising him.

Imagine if Mary Berry arrived on your doorstep and asked you to bake a cake for her.

Or if David Hockney turned up, requesting that you paint his portrait.

Or imagine if Lewis Hamilton asked you for a lift to work.

This is Jesus, the only Son of God, asking a man to baptise Him.

So it all goes ahead. Jesus is baptised, and take note it's not a special occasion set up just for him. No, Luke tells us this happened

“when all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too.”

His baptism happened with us, like us, as one of us.

The thing that marks this occasion out as being decidedly unusual is the events that follow after the baptism has happened:

“As he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’”

This is the ultimate family reunion. This is where the Holy Trinity comes together in a moment of great celebration, as the Son of God is acknowledged and affirmed.

On the 8th of December in 1996, I was baptised. It was a great experience, but definitely more than just an experience. It was an opportunity for me to stand before family and friends, to confess my faith, and to go through the public act of baptism, symbolising dying to the old self, and being brought back up out of the waters and into the resurrection life given by Jesus.

I remember being incredibly nervous - it was one of the first prominently public things I had ever done. And I remember feeling so close to God. At that time, with all my past left behind me, I could see ahead into a road of potential as I followed where God would lead me.

I went back to school the following Monday full of desire to share my faith with my friends, and to reject the things of the world that would lead me astray.

But the high point that I experienced didn't last. Even by trying my best to read my bible daily and to pray regularly, I found that it was impossible to avoid coming back down into the valley of trial and temptation.

Thankfully I was able to hold on to the knowledge that Jesus has had the same experience, which we're about to go on to look at.

// Before we are told of the temptations Jesus went through, Luke takes us through His genealogy. It's an area that's often skirted around, and I'll admit that we've not chose to focus on it in detail today, but it's worth making a few points about it before moving on.

Firstly, we are told that Jesus was about thirty years old when He began His ministry. So what? Let's look at it from a couple of angles.

From a Jewish perspective, this is pretty normal. In the book of Numbers it's said that those in ministry are to be aged between thirty and fifty, so for a Jewish person reading this account of the life of Jesus, this is recognisable as the moment where Jesus has the credentials to move forward.

From the perspective of where we stand today in 2014, I think it's fair to say that thirty is probably a good age to aim for if you plan on going into Christian ministry. It's not always right or best to go straight into it at a young age. I'm willing to speak for myself on this matter. If I'd stepped out into ministry at 25, I'd have fallen flat on my face. I'm sure that by God's grace I could have got on ok, but I definitely wasn't as aware of my faults and failings as I am today.

And using Jesus as our example, we might want to take note of how we know very little of what He did for the first thirty years of His life. We see in the gospels that He was known for being the son of a carpenter, so he most likely worked as an apprentice in the trade.

I think it's safe to assume that He also spend a significant amount of time in the synagogue, listening to the rabbis, asking questions, and learning the scriptures.

When you feel like nothing is happening in your life, very often that is when you are being prepared for something God has waiting for you. The question is, are you going to be ready to draw on those preparations when the time comes? Take the time to ask Him what He is doing in you *now*.

After referring to Jesus' age, Luke unpacks the genealogy - that is, who His ancestors were. This is important firstly for the Jews who first read this, and secondly for us reading it today.

For Jews, it was important to see how Jesus had a legal right to David's throne. Luke says Jesus was "the son, so it was thought, of Joseph," who came from the line of King David, which the prophets had said would be where the Messiah would come from.

For us, we see an even bigger picture. Jesus is of David's line through His adoption by Joseph, but He is entirely other. This is God breaking in to our lineage, going all the way back to Adam, and completely redefining it.

Jesus IS the very coming together of God and Us.

// So, “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days He was tempted by the devil.”

We get to hear about three specific temptations, but let’s not ignore the fact that the temptation of Jesus went on over the course of forty days.

The timing of these temptations is predictable. As we’ve already seen, after a time of encouragement or a ‘mountain top’ experience, we are vulnerable. Here, Jesus has received a wonderful affirmation of His identity in the presence of the Father and the Holy Spirit. So what does the devil do? He attacks His identity.

Just as a side point before we continue, it’s a good idea to recognise that we sometimes get very caught up in the question of “was Jesus even capable of sinning, if He was God?” While it’s a good question, and an interesting one, for our purposes here it’s not helpful.

Luke tells us here that Jesus was tempted, and Luke tells us that Jesus did not sin. Jesus is fully man, Jesus is fully God, and Jesus is without sin. It is in His victory over temptation and sin that we find salvation from our own sinful nature.

And a side point to the side point: being tempted is NOT the same as sinning. Sin is the fruit of temptation, and we all have a choice in how we respond to it. If you’re struggling with temptation, don’t beat yourself up about it, but do pray with others about it. Be real, be open, be honest, it’s a fantastic weapon against the efforts of the enemy.

Hebrews 4:15 tells us

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin.”

So the devil’s attack strategy to get Jesus to sin is to question His identity: *“If you are the Son of God...”* This is less of an attempt at getting Jesus to

actually doubt His position, and more one that tries to get Him to use it for the wrong reasons. Some literal translations have put this as “**Since** you are the Son of God...” - making this not so much a challenge as an affirmation.

We are told of three specific temptations that Jesus goes through, and they cover three basic areas in which we will all be tested in.

// The first test is in our faith and our maturity.

This is where we face the challenge to put off immediate pleasure and gratification, and we endure whatever pain or discomfort we are in the middle of, holding on to the hope that we are being grown, developed, and made into the people God has made us to be.

Our faith will be tested because, as the writer to the Hebrews says in chapter 11, “faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”

If our faith comes under attack, which it will, our challenge is to hold fast to it, because it’s where we find our hope in what we haven’t yet seen, but have been promised by our Father in heaven.

It’s also a test of our maturity - patience is a virtue, and it is learned. Just take a look at any child and you’ll see they have not yet learned that if their immediate needs are not met right away, they can still trust that those needs will be met in time as long as they are able to wait.

Here in Luke, we are told that Jesus was hungry because He had been fasting in the desert. He had gone without food as a spiritual discipline, as a way of being close to God, and He is tempted to eat - and tempted to use His divine ability to turn stones into bread.

Now if we were to simply take this as face value, there’s a pretty easy get-out. Have you ever been tempted to turn stones into bread? No, of course you haven’t. Why? Because you can’t!

Could Jesus do it? Of course he could. He turned water into wine, he multiplied loaves and fishes, no problem.

But Jesus resisted this temptation because it would have only solved an immediate discomfort for Himself. When Jesus performed miracles, signs, and wonders, He did it to glorify the Father and to point people to Him.

The devil's attempts at tempting Jesus here were trying to get Him to act in a way that would be solely for His own gain, through relieving his immediate hunger. It was an attempt at separating a physical need from a spiritual discipline.

You see, eating is a spiritual matter. We should not be quick to separate the spiritual from the physical. We have been given bodies by our Creator, and we are told to honour and respect them, to treat them as living temples.

When we eat, we feed our bodies and we glorify God by responding to the way we are made. When we choose not to eat, when we fast, we glorify God because we are recognising that all we have comes from God and we can trust Him to be our provider. Food - and eating it - is a good gift, but they can be abused and twisted through gluttony, overeating, and eating disorders.

That's why this is about our faith and our maturity. We are called to be prepared to do the tough stuff first, and the easy stuff later.

I know this so well, it's so hard to put the fun easy things to one side to focus on what is important and needs to be done right now.

We learn from Jesus' response in this time of temptation. He responds with scripture: "*Man shall not live on bread alone.*" That's a mature response. He knows the significance of God's word, and that it builds us up and sustains us for life.

Putting off spending time with God each day, pausing in prayer, reading God's word, it weakens us if we leave it alone. These things are our spiritual exercises, and we need to get into habits and routines to grow in our faith and our maturity.

//The second test is in our hope and our integrity.

This is the challenge to consistently match our behaviour with our beliefs, and to remain happy and satisfied with who God has made us to be.

Jesus is shown, from a high point, a vast wide view of his surroundings. He could see the places he had been, the places he looked forward to visit.

Luke tells us that the devil says to Jesus:

“I will give you all authority and splendour; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours.”

Now, the bible tells us that the devil has indeed been given a certain amount of authority over the earth for a time. But that time will come to an end, and for now we have the ability to resist him and his work.

The temptation Jesus faces here is again to do with bypassing the hard work so that what has been promised to Him will come more quickly.

In the book of Genesis, Abraham was promised by God that he would have a child with his wife, and it didn't happen quickly enough for him. So he tried to 'speed up' God's promise by having a baby with his wife's servant. He was tested in his hope and integrity, and messed up. He was unable to trust that God would come through for him, no matter how impossible the situation might have seemed.

Jesus knew the promises given to Him by His Father, and He stuck by them. He responds again with scripture: “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.’”

This is the first commandment, and the one all other commandments follow own from. This is significant stuff right here.

I don't really like to set things in black and white very much, but I think it's unavoidable here: if you're not worshiping God, *you're not worshiping God.*

And if you're not worshipping God, *you are worshipping something else*. Now I'm sure the devil would love for us to worship him directly, but I'm also sure that he would settle for us to at least put something - anything - else in place of God as our number one focus.

//The third and final test is in our love and our priorities.

It follows on from what we put first in our lives.

In this final temptation that Luke tells us of, Jesus comes to another high point, where the devil adopts a new tactic. He starts to use scripture.

“throw yourself down from here. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’”

This is a great example of scripture in the wrong hands - words of truth, where identity is found - taken out of context and distorted. The enemy knows the bible! Perhaps better than we do? This is another call to be rooted and established in God's word, so that we are able to respond to tests and temptations with scripture.

Jesus responds to his test with scripture: *“It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”* He was ready and equipped with God's word as a weapon against temptation.

If we are to be of any impact on the work of the enemy in the world today, we start by first defeating his work in ourselves. If you struggle with regular temptation, or habitual sin, learn scriptures that help you to fight in those times of testing.

This isn't about a magic formula. We all struggle and frequently fail. Luke 3:13 tells us that after the devil had finished trying to tempt Jesus, *“he left him until an opportune time.”*

He won't give up, he will keep trying, and we need to stay in shape.

The way to combat being tested in our priorities is through generosity. Generosity is a willingness to give beyond what we think we need, and trust that God will provide for us.

Trusting God as our provider isn't always easy, especially in today's economic climate. But God's economy operates differently to our own. The truth is, as we give our time and our money to God's purposes - however that might look - we invest into His Kingdom in Heaven and on earth.

We're called to trust God, and not to test Him. As the hymn goes:

*'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus,
And to take Him at His Word;
Just to rest upon His promise,
And to know, "Thus says the Lord!"*

*Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him!
How I've proved Him o'er and o'er
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus!
O for grace to trust Him more!*

Lord, may we know Your promises and Your grace, as we grow in faith, and maturity: enduring what we face now with hope for our future; hope, and integrity: our behaviour matching our beliefs and putting You first in all we do; and in our love, and priorities: help us to know Your word and to have generous hearts. Amen.

Chris Marsh // 5th January 2014