

## Luke 4 v 1-13

It's the first Sunday in Lent. We've just started a time of year when it's traditional to give up something, to fast.

In the ideal, when we fast we don't just turn away from something we might enjoy, even might enjoy too much, but we turn towards God at the same time.

The scripture we have today is part of the inspiration for that tradition of fasting during lent. From what we read, the fasting itself might be the easy bit. It's not encouraging that your fasting may be accompanied with temptation.

During Lent, we might be tempted by the contents of the fridge, rather than by authority over all the kingdoms of the earth, but we can still learn from Jesus' example.

We read that Jesus spent forty days being tempted. It's not clear whether the specific temptations that are here were the extent of this tempting, or whether this is a selection of what he faced. The very fact that these particular three examples are the ones recorded both in Matthew and Luke suggests that they in some way sum up the temptations or at least that they are illustrative of something important.

I think we can learn from these examples in two ways. First, how Jesus responds to temptation. But also, by the example of what he is tempted by.

The nature of the temptation here is illustrative of what we may face in temptation. What we see here are specific temptations that Satan has engineered for Jesus - we're probably not going to be tempted to literally turn stones to bread, because we can't - but these are temptations that share a common root, a similar underlying tactic, accompanied by a similar defence.

Verse 3:

*The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God*

*if?! We might like to say it should really be 'since' you are the Son of God. Doesn't he know who he's talking to? What we're seeing is that Satan is already calling into question God's word. Just before Jesus was led into the wilderness, at his baptism, God the Father speaks down from heaven and says 'You are my beloved Son'. It's not like that would be forgettable, Jesus clearly knew what His Father said, Satan knew the truth as well, but Satan's tactic is to call into question the truth right out of the gate. Father of lies indeed.*

*tell this stone to become bread.*

We read that Jesus was hungry. What would be the issue with Jesus feeding Himself? Satan presumably thought that Jesus was capable of this. But what Satan is really attacking is Jesus' faithfulness. Is Jesus committed to this forty day fast he has been led to do? Or will he satisfy his material desires in his own strength?

Jesus' responds directly by quoting from Deuteronomy:

*It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'*

Jesus is saying more than the obvious here. This isn't just diet advice.

The scripture that Jesus quotes is from Deuteronomy 8:

*Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your*

*ancestors 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.*

Notice that the point of the manna, the miraculous bread from Heaven, is not merely to relieve the hunger that God had caused, but to teach them that God is to be relied upon, that it's Him and His word that gives them life.

Jesus showed that the need for God and His word is greater than that of food. We are tempted to place our material needs before our need of God. God is here leading his servant through the wilderness, as He did with Israel, showing that it is Him that is to be relied upon.

Verse 5:

*The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their 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."*

"You can be King of everything", says Satan. Again, doesn't he realise who he's talking to here? But Satan is really saying "be king on your own terms". "Forgo the suffering and be king anyway. You can have it all, and you don't need God to get it."

Remember when Jesus is explaining to His disciples that he must suffer and die. This is God's plan. And Peter rebukes Him. (Matthew 16v22-23) What's Jesus' response to Peter? "Get behind me, Satan!"

Satan again tempts Jesus to forego trust in God, and place his trust elsewhere. To swap Kingship in heaven for earthly kingship. Material riches, in place of heavenly riches. God's plan for something more short term palatable.

How does Jesus respond to this? He again quotes Deuteronomy - this time chapter 6 verse 13.

Verse 8:

*It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'*

Worship, meaning to hold in high regard. When you worship, you devote yourself. Jesus is showing us we must put God first, trust in Him foremost.

Now if you look up that verse in Deuteronomy, you'll find that it's rendered there 'Fear the LORD your God and serve Him only'.

It's important to know what is meant by this fear of the Lord. We can see from the beginning of Isaiah 11 something of what this fear is. It's talking about Jesus and says:

Isaiah 11 v 2-3

*The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—  
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and of might,  
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—  
and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.*

What is this fear of God that Jesus delights in it? This is not being afraid of God in a negative sense, but rather the sort of fear that causes humility and awe before our creator and redeemer and drives us to worship.

Fear of God is so often tied together with knowledge of God. Proverbs 9:10 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom". The more we know about God, the more we know God personally, the more earthly riches pale in comparison.

Jesus shows us that we battle temptation by looking to God Himself.

Verse 9:

*The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "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."*

The obviously interesting thing here is that the tables have turned. The devil starts quoting scripture. We've seen Jesus use scripture to repel Satan's attacks, but now this?

Satan is quoting from Psalm 91, which starts:

*Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.*

And it goes on in a similar way for 16 verses, talking of the trustworthiness of God, His reliability.

On my initial reading of this, I thought that this was again calling into question God's word - that Satan is implying that God won't really send angels to catch you. But looking at Jesus' response, it may be more likely that the temptation here is to turn faith to presumption.

Jesus responds with scripture, again from Deuteronomy 6:

*It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'*

Do not take God's care of us for granted. To self-righteously presume that God owes us protection is again to turn from God and turn to ourselves. Whereas that fact that God grants us protection we do not deserve should turn us away from ourselves and towards God.

We've seen three times Jesus answer 'It is written' or 'It is said'. Each time he is tempted his response to temptation is to look to God's word, to trust in it. He doesn't fight back against temptation by relying on his human ability. Many of us will know from experience that trying to defeat our sin in our own strength doesn't work. After all, isn't that what Satan wants to provoke here? To trust in ourselves rather than in God?

That doesn't mean there aren't practical things we can do - there are - but to really strike at the root of temptation and sin requires us to turn away from ourselves and our own strength and turn to Him.

The same tactic has been used since the beginning. In Genesis 3:

*"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"*

Quickly followed by:

*"If you eat of it ... you will be like God"*

The first temptation, quickly leading to the first sin, that of not trusting God and turning to ourselves instead. This is at the heart of all our sins and temptations, whether that's struggling to get through forty days with no chocolate or something more serious.

Jesus shows us that the way to fight back is to look to God's word, to trust in Him.

Just as the Israelites needed to be reminded of God's provision each and every day, with miraculous manna, so too must we daily seek God.

Our passage ends with verse 13:

*When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.*

Are we leaving Satan an opportune time? Remember, the manna went off - it needed to be harvested daily. If we are not regularly seeking God, we are leaving more opportunities than we would otherwise.

I was also struck that Jesus probably didn't have written scriptures with Him in the wilderness. These days we have Bibles that can fit in pockets and with a smartphone we need never be more than inches away from a full copy of scripture, in multiple translations, plus whole libraries of related material to aid us. But what an advantage in being able to recall from memory the scriptures, even if just a few verses.

Maybe you're thinking, well that's good for Jesus, but surely he's a different case, isn't he? Yes and No.

Hebrews 4:15

*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.*

Jesus, truly human, faced just what we face. The way he battled temptation is a great example for us.

"Yet without sin" - Where Adam was tempted and failed, where Israel was tested in the wilderness and time and again turned away, just as we face temptation daily, Jesus faced temptation and succeeded.

There is little hope for us if Jesus was not tempted just as we were and no hope at all if he was not victorious over sin and temptation.

So when you face temptation, look to God for strength. Look to Jesus as your example, and as your saviour.