

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Luke 4:1-13

## Introduction

Looking at the start of Jesus' ministry there are two questions that spring to my mind.

Why did Jesus need to be baptised?

And

Why did the Holy Spirit lead him out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil?

The answer to the first question is, I think, that Jesus needed to know that God loved him unconditionally and was pleased with what he did and who he was

And He needed his role as Messiah to be affirmed and publicly proclaimed

We all need to know we are loved and doing well and to especially hear that from our parents. One of the driving forces of my life was to gain my father's approval, to know that he loved me and that he was pleased with the things I did.

Somehow I never really gained it. Looking back I know he loved me but he never said it. He also never told me he was pleased with me because he was always encouraging me to do better. I wanted to be a nurse, he thought I should be a doctor, I got a grade A and 9 C's at O level – He thought I should have got ten A's.

Jesus was about to start on his life's work. It was going to be difficult and demanding and at the beginning he needed two things:

1. To know that his father loved him unconditionally and was pleased with what he did and who he was
2. He also needed his role as Messiah to be affirmed and publicly proclaimed

As the Messiah Jesus represents all human beings and when God tells him he loves him and is pleased with him he says it to us as well.

## So why the testing?

The second thing he needed to do was to face and deal with the temptations he would face during his ministry

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One early Christian writer tells us that Jesus was tempted in every way as we are. We cannot be surprised then that after his great moment of vision when his sense of calling and mission was so dramatically confirmed at his baptism, that he had to face the whispering voices and recognise them for what they were. These suggestions are all ways of distorting his true vocation; The vocation to be a truly human being, to be a servant to the world and to other people. Jesus must face these temptations now and win, at least, an initial victory over them. If he doesn't he will meet them suddenly, in the middle of his work, and they may overwhelm him

So what was the first temptation?

If you are the son of God tell these stones to become bread  
The temptation Jesus is facing is to use his power and status as God's Son for his own ends. Not to further the purposes of God but to still his hunger and deal with his own human needs

The first two temptations play on the very strength he has just received., "You are my Son, my beloved one". God had said to him. "Very well, whispers the demonic voice; if you really are God's Son surely he can't want you to go hungry when you have the power to get food for yourself.

### **Secondly**

If you are the son of God throw yourself down  
The temptation Jesus is facing is to do something spectacular to grab people's attention and to show them who he really is

Again the temptation to prove who he is; "If you are God's Son surely you want people to see who you are? Why not do something really spectacular?

It's fascinating how the devil uses words from the Bible to tempt Jesus with. He is using scripture and twisting it – making the temptation appear to be a spiritual thing to do where as he is simply trying to divert him from his mission and lead him astray into proving himself. I am reminded a bit by today's cult of celebrity where so many people want to be known, to be

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recognised and to be rich and famous. This is the sort of thing Jesus is being tempted by here

### **Thirdly**

All this I will give you if you bow down and worship me  
The temptation here is to find another way to power. If he turns away from God, the tempter says, I will give you power over all things

Finally dropping his apparent logic the enemy comes out boldly, forget your heavenly father. Just worship me and I'll give the power and greatness that no one else ever had. The irony of this temptation is that by resisting it Jesus has gained the power over everything, all powers and dominions are now subject to him because he has conquered the devil, who true, does have power in this world, but Jesus through his death on the cross and through his defeating of death and sin has taken the power back and has authority over all things. If he had turned away from God and worshipped Satan what a different story it would be.

Jesus sees through the trap. He answers, each time, with the Bible and with God.

- He is committed to living from God's word
- He is committed to trusting God completely without setting up trick tests to put God on the spot
- He is committed to loving and serving God alone

The flesh may scream for satisfaction, the world may beckon seductively; the devil himself may offer undreamed of power; but Israel's loving God, the one Jesus knew as Father offered the reality of what it meant to be human, to be a true Israelite, to be Messiah.

We too are tempted

To distract us from our calling as children of God

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We can use the same defence as Jesus

The temptations we all face, day by day and at critical moments of decision and calling in our lives, may be very different from those of Jesus, but they have exactly the same point.

They are not simply trying to entice us into committing this sin or that sin. They are trying to distract us, to turn us aside from the path of servanthood that our Baptism commissioned us to. God has a costly but wonderfully glorious calling for each one of us. The enemy will do everything possible to distract us and thwart God's purpose. If we have heard God's voice welcoming us as his children we will also have heard the whisperings of the enemy.

But as God's children we are entitled to use the same defence as the Son of God himself.

### **1.Store scripture in your heart and know how to use it.**

Form regular habit of Bible reading – alone and with others

Bible reading notes

Audio tapes and Cd's

Memorise verses. - Note especially important verses and learn them

### **2.Keep your eyes upon God, and trust him for everything.**

Make a habit of focusing on God first thing in the morning. Lay your day before him and ask him to equip you with his power for the day ahead

I have realised that there are basically two sorts of people those who greet the day saying "Good morning Lord" and those who respond "Good Lord it's morning"

If we can become the former we will be equipped to deal with temptation.

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God and the devil are at opposite poles. If our eyes and mind are fixed on God we will have our backs to the devil.

*demonstrate*

### **3. Remember your calling, to bring God's light into the world.**

We have been called and commissioned to bring the Good News of Jesus into the world. We are called to be a blessing to those we live and work amongst. As Christians we need to make a point of thinking "How can I be a blessing to this person" Bless people in Tesco's, on the road etc. We need to learn to turn anger into prayer and blessing

We need to so busy serving God that we have no time for mischief

### **4. Know your weaknesses and defend yourself against being attacked at your weak point**

The temptations that the devil put before Jesus were those to which he was most vulnerable. Here he was about to begin his ministry – actually preparing himself to begin his ministry by being alone with his heavenly Father and the devil knew where he would be vulnerable. He attacked him where he believed him to be weakest; where the challenge of his ministry might prove too much.

It is the same with us. The devil knows what our weak points are and that is where he attacks us.

He would never bother trying to tempt me to pig out on beetroot because he knows I can't stand it. But cheese – that's a different matter.

He wouldn't try to tempt me to be lazy because he knows I'm a work - aholic. So what he does is to tempt me to take so much on that I am totally ineffective.

The devil knows what might push my buttons and where I am weakest. So in order to resist him I need to know myself; to know that when I am over tired I am at my most vulnerable. To know what sins I might most easily be tempted to.

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We need to know ourselves and defend ourselves. And say a firm no to the voices that try to lure you back into the darkness.

We need to stand firm and say no. To quickly recognise when those voices are luring us away from quiet trust and faith and simply turn our back. Use Jesus' own words to Peter when he tried to tempt Jesus from turning away from his death on the cross – "Get behind me Satan" and then turn our backs on him so that we are looking again into God's face and seeking his help to go forward

As I have been thinking about this passage this week and also reflecting on the war in Ukraine I have been reminded how things that might seem small can have huge effects. The rich Oligarchs have been lured into satisfying their greed for sumptuous lifestyles and possessions and in doing so have supported a totally corrupt regime.

The desire for power has been taken to extremes in Vladimir Putin and as the devil stood beside him and showed him the surrounding countries and whispered ...'all this can be yours if you bow down and honour me'. Each small step we take away from God and submit to temptation leads us away from God and can have disastrous consequences. So as we pray for Ukraine let us pray for Putin and the oligarchs as well, that they will see their error and allow God to reclaim them