

“The Unpopular Concept of Temptation” (Luke 4:1-13)

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The Text: 4:1-2a: *“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil.”*

Introduction: The Unpopular, but True Existence of the Devil:

- A. The subject of the devil isn't exactly taken seriously nowadays, but our standard as Christians is the Word of God. Therefore, we know he is real.
- B. Satan = “Adversary”/ “the one who lies in ambush for”.
- C. His origin is discussed in Ezekiel 28:12f.
- D. His existence explains a lot, but especially when it comes to temptation [Matzat's illustration].
- E. The core meaning of temptation is quite basic:
 - 1. To make acquaintance.
 - 2. To experience.
 - 3. To make an attempt.
- F. Explanation: Because the devil is real, we have real encounters with him. When these encounters occur we “make acquaintance, experience, or have an attempt made upon us.” Temptation is a kind of contact with the devil.
- G. But what is this acquaintance, experience, and attempt all about? The evil goal is ALWAYS to make us unfaithful to the Lord. It is seduction for the purpose of causing disobedience to God; to turn from our allegiance to the Lord.

- H. “Temptation” describes this encounter, this experience. EVERY time you are confronted with the strong thought, desire, or urge to do what is contrary to the will of God, to turn from Christ in thought, word, or deed, you are experiencing temptation. Thus we pray in The Lord's Prayer: “And lead us not into temptation.”

What does this mean? *“God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory.”* (Luther's Small Catechism, explanation of the 6th petition of the Lord's Prayer)

- I. Some of us, however, feel defeated before we even begin the fight. A mother once told her little boy that she was going to the grocery store and that he was not to touch the jam! Upon returning, the mother noticed the jam all over the little boy's fingers and on the corners of his mouth. “Didn't I tell you when Satan tempts you that you should tell him to get behind you?” his mother quizzed him. But the little boy explained, “Yes mommy, but as soon as he got behind me, he pushed me right into it!”
- J. We can relate. We know better, but we can all say with St. Paul in Romans 7: ***“...I do the very thing I hate.”*** (Romans 7:15)

Part I: Away from trying to deal with temptation through our own will power and such, instead let us run to Christ!

- A. The problem is that too often we convince ourselves that the key to overcoming temptation is our own self-discipline. In other words, “we have to be stronger.”
- B. But none of us can withstand the assault. The devil is stronger than we are period.
- C. There is only One who has stood against him successfully: The Lord Jesus Christ!
- D. So when tempted, flee to Jesus!
- E. Notice in the book of James -- at chapter 4 verse 7 -- where we are taught to resist the devil, the command is qualified by the part just prior to your resisting. Scripture says, “submit yourselves therefore to God.” That is, we are to return to Christ. Otherwise any so-called “resistance” is only wishful thinking!
- F. We must understand that temptation is not for us to defeat. Rather, believe in the Gospel and confess the truth of what the Gospel reveals: Jesus defeated temptation FOR YOU!
- G. The temptation in Luke 4 (and the other Gospel parallels) is extremely important for our Lenten season. Lent is not for you to embark on 40 days of making yourself better, but 40 days of having Christ before your eyes of faith, the ONLY ONE who faced and defeated all temptation! On account of His victory over the devil, Jesus said he saw the devil fall from heaven like lightning (Luke 10:18). Jesus saw his defeat. Thus it is Christ’s victory we must cling to in temptation.

- H. But too often our sinful pride takes over and we want to imagine that we can muster up the strength to be our own saviors. This is delusion.

Part II: Understand Christ’s temptation in terms of its Biblical placement:

- A. It occurred after His baptism.
- B. The devil knew that in being baptized, Jesus was joining Himself to us. Jesus’ life would become our life; and Jesus victory would become our victory.
- C. In desperation, the devil attacked Christ. Hoping that the attack against this Second Adam, the New Adam would have the same outcome as his attack on the First Adam in the Garden of Eden.
- D. The devil tempted Jesus hoping that Jesus’ plan to join you in order to save you would be rendered ineffective, null and void; meaningless and pointless. If the Son of God gave into temptation, then you would be helpless in the face of Satan’s temptations.
- E. So off the evil one went to attack the Lord with the temptations recorded in this morning’s Gospel!
- F. But the result was clear: Jesus withstood the temptations. The devil would return to tempt the Lord many times and even while the Lord hung on the cross, but again, Jesus withstood every temptation.
- G. So what is left for the devil to do? He can only try to TRICK YOU. He tries to convince you that you face your temptation alone. He desires to try to deceive you into believing that

you stand alone so as to make you forget that Jesus was victorious over all temptation!

- H. But our Savior will not allow this and He wants you to know that we mustn't listen to the devil's lies. Instead we are to cling to the Word of God to know that Christ faced all temptation for you and defeated it for you!

Hebrews 2:14-15: *“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”*

Hebrews 4:14-15: *“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone before the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.”*

- I. That is dear Christian you are saved solely by the death of Christ when He shed His precious blood to cover your sin, but you are also saved by the LIFE of Jesus because He overcame temptation for you! He took ALL your temptation; He faced EVERY temptation when the evil one sought to cause Him to revolt. The evil one completely and utterly FAILED and Jesus was completely and utterly VICTORIOUS for you! For YOU! His victory over temptation was given to YOU the moment you were baptized into Christ, the moment you came to saving faith!

Romans 8:37: *“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us!”*

Conclusion: Therefore return to faith in Jesus when temptation comes:

- A. Do not be tricked: Christ is with you when temptation comes. His baptism into you and your baptism into Him proves it!
- B. Then express your baptismal grace through confession: confession of sin and confession of faith!
- C. Cling to Christ in faith. This is not about will-power, but about faith in Christ's victory!

Luther: *“We should learn that if God were to let us enter into a severe temptation, we should not follow our own ideas or human advice, which directs us hither and thither, to ourselves or to others; but then we should think that we must look for Christ...simply and only cling to the word of the Gospel, which clearly shows and reveals Christ to us.”*

- D. That little boy with the jam got a lot wiser. Once when he was sitting on the sofa reciting the Gospel, all of a sudden he felt the devil's temptation: “Oh that Gospel is not for you!” The little boy felt as if the devil was speaking from underneath the sofa, so the little boy took the Bible and opened it to Genesis 3:15, put his finger on the verse and then put his hand and Bible under the sofa: “Here devil,” the boy said, “read it for yourself [as the boy recited]: **‘He**

shall crush your head!" The evil one had fled and that sofa was perfectly safe.

- E. But even with this equipping for facing temptation, remember that you will never apply it perfectly. You will continue to cry out with St. Paul (and you must in order to be a true Christian): ***"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24) The answer is Paul's answer: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:25a)***

- F. St. Paul could proclaim this with such power because of our Gospel in Luke 4: Jesus defeated temptation for you...especially that temptation to despair...Christ's victory also covers your wretched state. But Christ is your covering dear Christian. Christ is your covering.