



Testing Times (Luke 4:1-13)

There is the story of an enthusiastic but somewhat unscrupulous salesman who was waiting to see the purchasing agent of an engineering firm. The salesman was there to submit his company's bid, or price quote, for a particular job. He couldn't help but notice, however, that a competitor's bid was on the purchasing agent's desk. Unfortunately, the actual figure was covered by a can of juice. The temptation to see the amount quoted became too much, so the salesman lifted the can. His heart sank as he watched thousands of ball bearings pour from the bottomless can and scatter across the floor.

You've guessed from the reading that I want to explore the subject of temptation this morning. Temptation is something most Christians worry about and are happy to pray the words "Lead us not into temptation". So what is temptation? Here's the dictionary definition:

The act of tempting; enticement to evil by arguments, by flattery, or by the offer of some real or apparent good.

For a believer, temptation draws someone away from God. We often see it as coming from outside: from other people, from things we see, from things we hear, from substances we take. In fact, almost anything in our environment. However, as James quite rightly points out, there's a second, more important angle to temptation. That's your openness to it. *Each one is tempted by his own evil desire* as James says (1:14).

The root word in the NT for to tempt is *piarazo* which is much broader than the dictionary definition. It means to test somebody for their knowledge, competence or skill, or try something out, or to assay the quality of silver or gold, or most negatively, to solicit someone to commit sin.

But as we consider how we may face temptation and fear falling into it, we read this story from the gospels how Jesus was tempted. Yet He didn't fail, He didn't sin.

Heb 4:15 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. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

I'll come back to that. But before get to the passage, let's be clear what temptation isn't. We all go through situations in life that are difficult – illness, family problems, money difficulties, marital difficulties, relationship problems, bereavement, job problems, problems with the neighbours, injustice, suffering – whatever. All those things are what life throws at us. They are often times when we are at our weakest; at our most vulnerable. But it's at that point temptation can set in. The sin isn't in the problem, but how we respond to the temptations it may bring.

Sometimes temptations catch us on the hop -unexpectedly – although in my experience, only at those times when I haven't got my eyes on God!

The passage in Luke is here so that we can learn from it. So what do we learn?

● Temptation is part of the Christian experience

The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. It was a position into which

Jesus was intentionally put by the Holy Spirit. In fact Mark uses the words “drove Jesus into the wilderness”. He was there for 40 days and He fasted. That wasn’t unusual in scripture as men of God often went into the wilderness to spend time with God. But this was unusual in that Jesus was under attack for 40 days and we are given record of three specific temptations.

We all face times of difficulty or just simply a spiritual wilderness – maybe that’s your situation right now. There are many reasons why that may be the case. It’s something God allows us to get into, or allows us to get *ourselves* into because of our own mistakes or wrongdoing. Sometimes God actually puts us into a difficult position so that Satan will try to exploit our weakness for purposes we don’t immediately understand. Job never deserved anything he suffered. God let it happen but as a result, he was tempted by Satan, his wife and then his three dodgy friends. His wife just said “curse God and die”. But Job remained faithful and God blessed Him double. He only found out the whole story at the end.

Why does God allow us into a position or even put us into a position where temptation happens? It goes back to the Greek word which means to test as well as to tempt. Let me try to illustrate this by using something we are familiar with – exams! Yes, we’ve all sat them at some time in our lives. I’ve experienced them as both an examinee and one of the dreaded examiners.

What’s the purpose of an exam? First of all it is to show the examiner what you can do so that everyone can know what you can do. It helps you to understand what you can’t do and how you need to improve. If you go through the process properly, exams are part of a process of growth in your life.

But of course they are a trial – you have to do lots of work for them, years of lessons in school or college, hours of revision, then the dreaded exam room. But succeeding is sweet isn’t it. You’ve won! You’ve got the prize. You’ve got a victory – and you’ve got stronger and better as a person. And you’re more aware of your weaknesses and where you need to improve.

And what happens to those who just haven’t learnt their stuff? Apart from the fact that they may fail their exams, their offerings get posted on the internet. Here are a few.

1. Ancient Egypt was inhabited by mummies and they all wrote in hydraulics. They lived in the Sarah Dessert and traveled by Camelot. The climate of the Sarah is such that the inhabitants have to live elsewhere.

2. The Bible is full of interesting caricatures. In the first book of the Bible, Guinness, Adam and Eve were created from an apple tree. One of their children, Cain, asked, “Am I my brother’s son?”

3. Moses led the Hebrew slaves to the Red Sea, where they made unleavened bread which is bread made without any ingredients. Moses went up on Mount Cyanide to get the ten commandments. He died before he ever reached Canada.

4. Solomom had three hundred wives and seven hundred porcupines.

Actually, it’s never intended that people who are put in for exams should fail. It’s quite the reverse – passing them is intended to make their life better: and the vast majority make the grade and pass. As a teacher, it’s no point putting pupils in for exams if you think they will fail. It’s bad for you and bad for them.

So what is the purpose of God allowing us to end up in a place where our faith, our allegiance to Him, our morality and our obedience are tested? That’s where understanding exams comes in. Exams test and prove our knowledge and skills. The intention of allowing temptation is quite clear - God does not put us there to bring disaster, but to prove our faith and His faithfulness. And coming through it should make us grow through it.

1 Cor 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

If you’re tempted, don’t feel persecuted – it’s common to our race. Having problems, aggravations and lures to do sin are part of life and we’re not immune. Facing them actually makes us grow as Christians because we learn God’s way in dealing with life. So in temptation God always provides a way out so that you can stand up under it. Note that it isn’t to be freed from it, but to stand up under it. It’s about learning God’s way.

So as we go through difficulties in our life and faith, we learn about ourselves and our faith – and we

grow though it as we find that God is faithful.

Notice who the tempter is. It isn't God. In Luke 4 it's the enemy, the devil. But it needn't be him either. James says this: *1:13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*

We're led astray as much by our own desires as we look at what the world has to offer us, as by the devil.

God does not tempt. He is not going to solicit us to sin – because that's not the nature of God. He doesn't want us to fall. But He does want us to develop the ability to resist the pressure that the devil, ourselves and the world, and we can only do that by being exposed to their temptations. And we grow through that.

And Jesus proved that to Satan by resisting his temptation. And when we realise that we are under temptation, we have the same ability to resist and will get the same result. *James 4:7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you.*

● It should be prepared for

So how did Jesus resist Satan? He was prepared for it and He had the same tools as we have to do that. His reply to Satan on each occasion was to quote God's word. He had just been affirmed by the Father at His baptism. He was the beloved Son in whom the Father was well pleased. And Satan uses the phrase "if You are the Son of God.." Jesus knew what was what in relationship to Himself and in relation to His work. He knew His stuff and was happy to quote it back at Satan.

The problem is that we often face life ill-equipped. We find ourselves in moral dilemmas and we don't know what's right and wrong. We don't know where God is in what we are doing. We are not walking with His Spirit, we don't know the word sufficiently. And Satan jumps into our ignorance and stupidity and can shipwreck our faith.

Let me ask you a question? How prepared are you? How well do you know the word? How much time do you spend in the presence of God daily? How much time do you give for listening to His word preached? How much time do we spend discussing it with others?

Jesus was tempted. It was a real test in the NT sense of the world. Satan was giving Jesus a try-out. And the result. Jesus was more than well-prepared for the test and Satan gets shot down in flames. As we face temptation, how do we fare? Do we pass with flying colours? If not, we need to take the opportunity to respond by coming back to God in repentance and realizing our failure. One thing about tests and exams is that it exposes our weaknesses so that we will do better next time. So if we have been tempted and failed, learn from it.

But we can learn too from Jesus' success. Jesus was tempted in three ways.

Firstly Satan went for Jesus' hunger. Jesus was fasting. It was a good and God-honouring thing to do. Satan was trying to get him to gratuitously use His powers to feed Himself and put His devotion to the Father second. Jesus wasn't going to do that and Satan gets the reply "man cannot live by bread alone". One thing Satan always tries to do is tempt us from our fellowship with God because he knows he cuts a lifeline when he does. But how often that happens. We get distracted from spending time with God each day. The time gets curtailed for some other reason. Or we intend to go to worship on a Sunday, but bed seems more comfortable or the sun is out, or it's raining too hard. Or we're just tired. Satan doesn't want you to spend time with God and worshipping and praying with God's people. Yes, I know we have responsibilities in life but man cannot live by bread alone.

The second temptation is even worse. *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, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered, "It is written: "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only."*

Satan offers Jesus authority if He would worship him. What a cheek! Satan claimed he had authority over the kingdoms of the world. No he didn't. He had also no right to demand worship. Jesus knew

that and gave him short shrift. Remember – satan is a liar. He reminds me of one of those letters you get. “You have won £10,000.” But you haven’t won anything – but in greed most people send their £30 admin fee and get nothing. The number of times I have met Christians who use church and the people of God to build up their own egos and importance is legion. It’s one of satan’s great lies and a vulnerability of leaders in particular although almost anyone can turn into a tinpot god. Who are you worshipping and serving today. Is it God who you should serve only? Or is it someone yourself – or someone else.

Finally *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.'" Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

Come on Jesus. If you are the Son of God – make a spectacle of Yourself. Everyone will see and know who You are. Do a stunt, People will be impressed. But that wasn’t what Jesus was about. He wasn’t here to impress people, but to bring them back into relationship with God. And again He used the power He had in His ministry and ultimately to His death and resurrection. He reposts the if you are the Son of God with the scripture *'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'* In other words if I’m the Son, you’ve no right to try it on with Me.

Do we try it on with God. Do we give God conditions? If you answer this prayer, then I’ll do this or that. Lord just show me a miracle and I’ll believe. Jesus isn’t a stuntman. God has already done the greatest miracle He can by Jesus dying to redeem you. Just trust Him. Personal testimony.

It should not be faced alone

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.

And finally. Jesus went into the wilderness full of the Spirit and came out in the power of the Spirit. Jesus faced the wilderness and temptation with the Holy Spirit. He wasn’t alone. One of the reasons Christians fall under temptation is that they have the Holy Spirit but ignore Him. If we’re walking with the Spirit, we will not fall and we will not fail. And if satan gets an oar in, we get to come out of it with more power – and Jesus gets all the glory!

Are you feeling weak this morning? Do you know of temptation that’s in your way? Then know this – Jesus has been there. he know. He understands so as you come before Him in prayer; know that you are going to receive His love and mercy. *Heb 4:15 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. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.* So do that and know you’ll get His help,

Have you yielded to temptation this week? Then come before that throne of grace in repentance and receive His forgiveness. IN all, the Lord wants us to grow through it.

Jesus went into the wilderness full of the Spirit and came out in His power. Let’s pray that for ourselves that we may walk in victory. “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”

You’re also not alone because you’re not in the wilderness but in Weymouth and in a church where other people can walk with you and pray with you. I’m going to pray now and during the last hymn, take the opportunity for someone to pray with you and minister to you.