

Defeating the Enemy

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[0 : 00] Now, we're going to come to our Bible reading, which you'll find on page 859. We're reading in Luke chapter 4. The Gospel of Luke spends a great deal of time on the early days of Jesus' ministry, perhaps longer than the others, and this is one of the great and important episodes.

Luke chapter 4, reading from verses 1 to 13. And 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. And he ate nothing during those days, and when they were ended, he was hungry. The devil said to him, If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.

And Jesus answered, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone. And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will.

If you then will worship me, it will all be yours. And Jesus answered, It is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.

[1 : 34] And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, For it is written, He will command his angels concerning you to guard you, and on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.

And Jesus answered him, It is said, You shall not put the Lord your God to the test. And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Now, could I ask you please to turn once again to page 859, the passage we read in chapter 4 of Luke, verses 1 to 13.

And we'll have a moment of prayer. Our Father, we know that as disappointed, frightened, and disillusioned, the disciples of what the road to Emmaus, that the Lord Jesus Christ joined them, and showed them in the scriptures the things about himself.

And we pray we may have that experience today, when Christ caused their hearts to burn, their eyes to be opened, and sent them out into the world, with the message that the Lord is risen.

[3 : 05] We ask that this may be our experience today, in his name. Amen. Every single one of us, whatever age we may be, from the time we are old enough to decide what is right and what is wrong, to the very last moments of our life, are faced with temptation.

We're not all faced with the same kind of temptation, we're not all faced at different points in our life, with temptation, of the same nature, but it is a daily battle, with what elsewhere is described as the world, the flesh, and the devil.

I googled temptation, and discovered there were 13,600,000 entries. I didn't read all of them. Indeed, I didn't read any of them.

I noticed one, though, that said, five steps to take, to avoid temptation. I thought, aha, that will be a help. And then I thought, of course it will.

It's rather like those things, you read in the Reader's Digest, in the Doctor's Waiting Room, five ways to impress your boss, ten ways to improve your marriage.

[4 : 26] Now, I've read these idly, and forgotten them the moment that the doctor or dentist called, and I've never in my life met anyone, whose life has been changed, by that sort of thing.

Because that, if it does change, it simply changes external behavior. It doesn't change the deep attitudes, the deep patterns, in our lives. So, you see, we mustn't begin this passage saying, how am I going to avoid temptation?

That is entirely the wrong place to start. I like looking at the story of David and Goliath, in 1 Samuel 17, and saying, what this story is about, is that we have giants in our lives.

The big bully down the road, the awkward boss, the difficult colleague, and we have to fight them. But that's not what the story is about. The story is about the fact that the Lord's anointed defeated the giant, and therefore we can defeat the giant as well.

And so it is here. The Lord Jesus Christ met and defeated the devil, and only in him can we stand against temptation.

[5 : 39] That's where we need to begin, with this face-to-face encounter with the devil. Now John, sorry, Luke, I've got to get the guy's name right. Luke, from the very beginning of his gospel, has been authenticating who Jesus is.

The very beginning, Gabriel comes to Mary and says, the child to be born of you, is the Holy One of God. Simeon, Simeon greets him in the temple, as the one who is to come.

And of course, the angels over the plains of Bethlehem. John the Baptist had authenticated him.

And even more so, the voice from heaven, this is my beloved son, listen to him.

And then, at the end of chapter 3, there's the long family tree of Jesus, tracing him back to Adam.

This is Adam come again, the last Adam, the second Adam, who to the fight and to the rescue came, the descendant of the woman, who is to crush the head, of the serpent.

So that's where we begin. Jesus met and defeated the devil, in the power of the spirit. But also, we mustn't stop there, of course.

[6 : 53] It is an anatomy of temptation. It does tell us about temptation, and it does tell us how to face it. Not so much specific temptations, as I say, which are different to everybody.

They vary from individual to individual. But the basic principles underlying temptation. What is the devil trying to do here with Jesus?

And what is he trying to do with us, facing David, at different times of our life? Jesus, we are told, full of the spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the spirit in the wilderness.

There are some who have written on this story, and said that the devil had Jesus in a corner. That's totally untrue. It was a spirit. As I was saying, the devil, I always feel the devil was the one in the corner.

If he could have escaped that day, he probably would have. He realized he was facing one stronger than himself. And that indeed is what John the Baptist had said, one stronger and greater than I is to come.

[8 : 06] So Jesus, full of the spirit, led by the spirit, because as a man, in dependence on his father, Jesus was led by the spirit, and we need the power of the spirit to face the tempter.

Because we cannot resist him on our own. The old hymn says, the arm of flesh will fail you. You dare not trust your own. I'm sure many of us here have relied on the arm of flesh, and it's let us down again and again, and it always will.

So what is temptation about? What happens when the devil comes? First of all, in verses 3 and 4, the devil said, if you are the son of God, command this stone to be made bread.

Don't trust God to provide. That's the first thing. Don't trust God to provide for our needs. Now, of course, we know that Jesus could have changed stones into bread.

Timothy Dudley Smith says in the hymn we've just sung, he makes not bread, what God has made a stone. He at whose bidding water turns to wine.

[9 : 18] Read the incident in John chapter 2. Jesus turned water into wine, not to prove something, but to show his glory.

His disciples saw his glory and believed in him. And behind this story lies another story, the complaints of the people of God in the desert in the book of Numbers, complaining, complaining, complaining, doubting that God could provide.

And the psalmist in Psalm 78, commenting on this, they said, can God provide food in the desert? Now, this is the point. Can God provide food in the desert?

There are a couple of things here. First of all, it is not an appeal for fasting. Fasting is an important biblical doctrine. That's not the point here, because daily bread is one of the requests in the Lord's Prayer.

Give us today our daily bread. We see once again, it goes back to that story. We've been looking at Deuteronomy recently, the words from Deuteronomy chapter 8, verse 3.

[10 : 26] Moses said, God is taking you into the land. He's been faithful to you in the desert, so you can trust him in the land. It is written.

That means God has said it, and God can be trusted. Now, it doesn't mean that it's not just about food. It's excessive concentration on outward needs and distrust in God.

There's nothing wrong in having a healthy appetite, but gluttony is bad. Indeed, Paul vividly speaks of this in Philippians 3, verse 10.

Their God is their belly. Now, our God may not be our belly, but what would we write if we were writing that phrase and putting in it our particular temptation?

So, you see, it is trusting in God. My God, says Paul, will supply all your needs. This is trying to short-circuit that.

[11 : 27] And secondly, it underlines God's care. As the son of Adam, Jesus will live depending on God's care. Of course, there's another story behind this, isn't there?

A story in Genesis 3, where the serpent again, same serpent, same devil, came to Eve and said to Eve, did God really say?

And instead of Eve thanking God and saying, look at all those splendid trees. Look at the fruit. Look at the luxury. God's given us all these.

Now, what did she say? There's one tree we're not allowed to eat. One tree we're not even allowed to touch, which is a lie, of course, because God has said nothing about touching.

See what she's done? She's turned his grace into a bullying negative. Isn't that what temptation does? Lord, you've given us all this, but you haven't given me what I really want.

[12 : 28] That's the problem. We all understand that, and we all fight that daily, don't we? You see, Eve makes it, Eve makes his grace too narrow by false limits of her own, and so often we do.

God can be trusted, but the devil wants us to live without faith. The devil wants us to depend on everything that's outward. The devil wants us to depend on God's gifts rather than on God.

And of course, when we start depending on God's gifts, we'll forget their gifts, and we'll think they're entitlements, we'll think we deserve them, and so on. It is written, if it's there, if God has said it, God will not go back on his word.

God cannot lie, we are told elsewhere. So, the first thing about temptation, you don't trust God to provide. Now, the second temptation, verses 5 to 8, the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, to you I will give all this authority in their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I will give it to whom I will.

The devil, we are told, is the father of lies, and like all accomplished liars, he mixes truth and lies together. After all, that is the art of a propagandist in every generation, isn't it?

[13 : 59] Don't tell blatant lies. Make sure there is truth mixed up, mixed up with it. And, part of what he says is true. After all, Jesus calls him the prince of this world in John.

In Ephesians, Paul destroys him as the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who works in the children of disobedience. And in the book of Revelation, the dragon, the devil, summons up two great powers, one from the sea, persecuting power of the state, the other from the land, the beast of propaganda and lies and spin, if you like.

And what we're told, the devil gave them their power and their throne and their great authority. So, there is truth in what he says. That is why we still pray, your kingdom come, you will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

There are two things here. Temptation to false worship. See, until earth is fully redeemed by God, Satan will exercise great influence.

Now, we know, of course, from the succeeding chapters that Jesus is going to expel demons, he's going to curb the sea, and he is going to show that Satan's claims are exaggerated.

[15 : 22] You see, if Satan's claims were absolutely true, he'd be entitled to say, worship me. You see, when he says, worship me, he's not asking Jesus to sing a chorus.

He's asking Jesus for full allegiance of heart and mind. That's the problem. That's what worship is about.

Worship is, worship by its very nature, has to be exclusive. I used to think I was very clever arguing with Jehovah's witnesses.

We had a great many of them in Durham. They used to come to the door. I used to argue with them. Probably I won the arguments most of the time. I never won any hearts. Convinced someone against their will, they're off the same opinion still, as the old jingle says.

Eventually, I realized there was only one question to ask them and people of similar view. Do you worship Jesus? Not do you admire him, not do you think he's wonderful, but do you worship him?

[16:28] Because worship is exclusive. You shall worship the Lord your God, and him alone shall you serve. So, the temptation to false worship.

Who do we worship? And then, the use of scripture. Once again, quoting from Deuteronomy. Interesting, actually, the phrase in Deuteronomy, which this quotes, comes from chapter 6, teach your children these things, that's the truth of the law, the gospel, and so on. Interesting word, teach, it's not the normal word, teach or train, it literally means sharpen their teeth. In other words, from the moment of birth, surround them with gospel influences. influences, obviously, it's got to be adapted to the age. You don't sit down with a one-year-old and say, now today we are going to study the prophet Nahum. Obviously not.

We adapt, but what it does mean is we surround them with gospel influences, teach them to know and love Jesus, teach them the truths, and indeed, make scripture part of our conversation.

[17:43] Often, Christians will talk about anything and everything other than scripture. I don't mean by that, quoting Screeze of the Bible to show how well we know it. What I mean is the gospel actually influencing our thinking and our conversation and therefore trust in God.

So you see, the devil is ultimately saying, God is not going to bring in the kingdom. The kingdom belongs to me. And Jesus is saying, it doesn't.

The kingdom belongs to the one who alone is to be worshipped, the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve. Then the third temptation, beginning at verse 9, he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple.

In a sense, this temptation sums up all of them. Now the pinnacle of the temple was probably a drop of some 400 feet to the Kidron Valley.

that's a huge space and if you're at all giddy or felt dizzy, it was not the place to be. This is a very subtle temptation saying, you say you trust in the Bible.

[18:57] Here's a chance to prove it. Their temptation don't have confidence in God's word. We know, as Shakespeare said, the devil can cite scripture for his purpose, almost certainly drawing from this passage.

If you are the son of God, it's going to be said later, come down from the cross. I was told when I was young, a text a day keeps the devil away.

You fight him by throwing text at him and he'll run. But I did and he didn't. Because that is not the way to fight the devil, by individual texts.

But if we try to fight him by individual texts, on the one hand, we become extremists and tear texts out of the context, which so often happens.

Or else, like liberal theology, we'll use parts of the Bible to discredit other parts, usually parts about love, to discredit parts about judgment. No, it's not individual texts.

[20:03] Although individual texts are wonderful, and sometimes at moments of great stress, an individual text can actually mean a great deal. As I prepared this, one of my very favorite texts kept recurring to me, whenever our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts.

Now, of course, people say trust your heart, and to some extent that can be true, say in a relationship, in a decision you have to make. My goodness me, the heart, says Jeremiah, is deceitful, and desperately wicked.

God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. But, it's the point, it's getting to know Scripture, letting the Word of God dwell in us richly, as Paul says, thinking with the mind of Christ. And we'll never think with the mind of Christ if we neglect Scripture. Without the Bible, the remembered Christ soon becomes the imagined Christ, projection of our fantasies.

So, what's happening here? First of all, it's an artificially created situation. There was no need at all for Jesus to throw himself from the pinnacle of the temple.

[21:21] It was simply sensationalism. Like, in the 19th century, there's a Frenchman called London, who used to push a wheelbarrow across a tightrope stretched across the Niagara Falls.

Apparently, he died in his bed at a good old age, but that's not a recommendation for wheeling barrows across a tightrope. And he used to say to people, do you believe I can carry you across it? Oh, of course. Right, come into the barrow. No one ever did, apparently. You see, that is a sensationalism. But here, it would be very different if God puts you in some type situation.

comes back to the bread again in the desert. After all, the manna stopped, Joshua tells us, when they entered the land. You don't expect manna from heaven if you live next door to the supermarket and have money to pay for food.

It's wanting God always to act in sensational ways. God chooses to do that for his own purposes, he can and will, and we mustn't limit him.

[22 : 30] But to expect that as an alternative to trusting his promises is quite wrong. You see, the devil is saying to Jesus, I don't think you actually believe in these promises.

Prove to me if you do. But you see, God is not on probation. God has already spoken and if he spoke, I mean, after all, think about it, even in ordinary human life, if a trusted friend makes a promise to you, you don't keep on trying experiments to find if it's true.

Now, sometimes trusted friends can let us down, sometimes because they made a promise that they couldn't weren't able to keep. But God will never let us down.

God is not on probation. And when he quotes here from Psalm 91, the context is about attacks on the faithful. God's promised protection of them.

He will command his angels concerning you to guard you. Interesting, in Matthew's account of the temptation, when this temptation is over, the angels come and minister to Jesus.

[23 : 43] So, you see, what Jesus is saying to the devil is, you don't know your Bible at all. The devil is doing, he's taking texts.

That's why he's throwing texts at him, because he knows the texts. The point is, we face him in the power of the risen Christ, the living words, to whom the written words point so fully and faithfully.

You see, this story, while it's about temptation, is actually about Jesus. Who he is, what he is, what he has done, the promised Messiah, the Son of God, the King of Israel, authenticated by the voice from heaven, and the culmination of the story that began with Adam, the wisest love, that flesh and blood, which did in Adam fail, should strive afresh against the foe, should strive and should prevail. You see, we need to know our Bibles. Not know our Bibles, as I say, in the sense of showing off our knowledge, but knowing them as as the food we need, as the strength we need, and we need to get to know them better and better.

That's why we're committed here to expository Bible teaching, which ultimately is the only way in which the whole of the Bible is going to be given.

[25 : 14] So, verse 13, when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time. These times are going to come thick and fast.

Demons, the raging sea, Gethsemane, the cross itself, and of course, at the grave on resurrection, mourning angels in bright raiment, rolled the stone away, kept the folded grave clothes, where his body lay.

And for us, it's going to come every time as well. There is never going to be a time on earth when we're going to be free from temptation.

Alexander McLaren, a preacher of a much earlier generation, who was noted even in days of Victorian grandiloquence for his powerful metaphors, said once in a sermon, the hounds of hell will pursue you to the verge of heaven and leave their fang marks in the golden gates.

We need to realise that. As we finish, he wants to say two things. First of all, don't treat the devil quite lightly. Peter says, your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

[26 : 36] Now, remember, the devil is a subtle enemy. All there are people who involve themselves in black magic and all the rest of it. And that's not the most common way the devil works.

The most common way the devil works is by lies. When you hear, did God really say, you know whose voice is being echoed there. Don't treat him lightly.

Don't imagine that we can stand against him in our own strength. That's the first thing. The second thing is, don't be afraid of him.

he is an enemy, but he is a defeated enemy. After all, if Peter tells us to resist the devil, that means we can do it.

And resist the devil, says James, and he will flee from you. They don't need to do what Martin Luther did and throw an inkwell at him, but at least that showed how powerfully Luther was aware of the devil.

[27 : 35] The most important thing about the devil is that Jesus Christ has defeated him. Never forget that. That's why Paul is able to say at the end of 1 Corinthians 15, thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the strong one who defeated the devil, who destroyed his power, and who one day will banish him completely.

And we pray, Lord, that we may never try to face temptation on our own, that we may never try to think we are too clever or too holy. Help us to trust in the one who has gone above and who is at God's right hand, interceding for us when Satan tempts us to despair.
And so bless us now and go with us. In Jesus' name. Amen.