

**“The Dynamics of Discipleship:
Dealing With Temptation”
Luke 4:1-13**

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It has been said that people are a lot like tea bags. You cannot tell their real strength until you put them in hot water. Fresh from the high moments of His baptism, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness where for forty days He is tested by the devil.

Let me be perfectly honest and completely real. The journey of discipleship is not a casual walk in the park. It is survival in the war zone with the evil one. Happy is the one who, having been tempted and tried, finds the grace and strength of God to carry on.

Temptations are real but they are not unique. They've followed the same themes since the beginning of time. No temptation is knocking at your door that has not knocked at other people's doors in other times and places including the door of your brother and Savior, Jesus Christ. So we come to the temptations of Jesus today hoping to find ways to withstand the evil one. **The temptations that Jesus faced are these: intensified desire, the will to power, and the claim to fame.**

After forty days of a spiritual fast, the devil says to a hungry Jesus, “If You are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Hunger, real hunger! Why wait when you have the ability to take? Why not meet **intensified desire** with instant gratification? Is this not the American way?

Sociologists observe young people have problems with just

saying no to drugs and waiting for sex because they have been raised in a culture where 'no' does not exist. Jay Mantel in *Rolling Stone* magazine says, "Everything is a flash in the pan, so why not get the most out of your flash?"

Of course, instant gratification is not reserved for the young. On Ash Wednesday, an office manager vowed that she was going to stay off the sweet stuff for the Lenten season. The following Friday, she came walking in with a wonderful coffee cake. The explanation went something like this: "I was sitting at the stop light when I saw "it" in the window of the bakery. I thought, 'Lord, if you don't want me to have that coffee cake, don't let there be a parking place in front of the bakery.' I knew the Lord must have wanted me to have it because on the third time around the block, there was a parking space right in front of the store!"

Max is thirty years old, a good guy, sitting in a hotel room on business. We'll let him tell the rest of the story. "Away from people who know me, away from a family that loves me, the endless chorus of voices come again and again. There's a lounge in the lobby where I can make new friends. There are late night adult movies where my fantasies will be fulfilled. There's a telephone book full of escort services where I can find instant love. Voices all promising acceptance, tenderness, comforts and a quick cure for loneliness."

From age to age, the temptations are the same. All who are tempted today to take some short cut on the road of life, let me ask you to hear another voice. It is the voice of none other than Jesus Himself saying, "You do not live by bread alone or by drink alone or by sex alone." There's more to life than instant gratification. From age to age, the temptations are the same.

Verse 5 speaks of **the will to power**. "So the devil led Him up to a high place and showed Him, in an instant, the

kingdoms of the world. And he said to Him, "I will give you all authority and splendor if You will simply worship me."

One of the most powerful movies I have seen in recent years is Al Pacino in *The Devil's Advocate*. In it, he poses as the devil disguised as a powerful lawyer trying to get a young, southern, sensational attorney to join his firm. In walking around the swimming pool on the rooftop of his Manhattan office, Pacino says to this would-be successful and powerful attorney, "Just look around you. The 20th century has been all mine. Attorneys are forming my new priesthood. Vanity is my favorite vice. The successful are the most susceptible to me. Take it, it's yours."

It was the German philosopher, Nietzsche, who said, "Basic to human personality is the will to power."

How do you define success? What is "making" it for you? Is success winning at all costs, manipulating the circumstances to your control, or having people to boss around? It is really true that he, who has the most toys when he dies, wins? Or does he just have a bigger junk pile?

"Success," said Ralph Waldo Emerson, "is to laugh often and much, to win the respect of intelligent people, and the affection of children. It's to earn appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends. Success is to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others, to leave the world a better place; whether by a healthy child, a redeemed social condition or a job well done."

Power corrupts and absolute power absolutely corrupts. That has been especially true in the Church. If you don't believe me, read Church history.

From age to age, the temptations are the same. Intensified desire, the will to power, and there's one more in Jesus' trilogy

of temptations – **the claim to fame.** Verse 9: “And the devil led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the highest point of the temple and said, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here and let the angels come and care for you.”

Had Jesus been tempted in our time, He would have certainly been offered a national TV appearance. There’s something about us that makes people on television instant celebrities. In fact, it is so profound in our day that it’s really difficult to know the difference between a hero and a celebrity. I want to tell you that there’s a big difference! Our world is full of celebrities but is starving for heroes. Heroes have great achievements but celebrities have great images. A hero is a big person. A celebrity is a big name. A hero lives for service but a celebrity lives for show. A hero lifts cultural standards. A celebrity often lowers cultural norms.

The writers of the apocryphal gospels in Jesus’ time tried to make Jesus into a celebrity. In those writings, the Child Jesus made clay pigeons come to life and then fly off into the sky. In those writings, Jesus could take a dead fish and put it into the water. It would suddenly take life and go its own way. In those writings, Jesus turned playmates into goats to teach them a lesson and made people go blind and deaf so He could have the power to heal them. But I remind you today, Jesus is no comic book character nor a Las Vegas magic show. He’s the Son of God – the crucified One – the Servant of us all and, sooner or later in life, you will choose to be a star or a servant.

If the temptations are constant, then I raise another question with you. Are not the means of resistance consistent? Temptations are the same generation after generation, century after century, then could we not learn from the temptations of Jesus, some ways to withstand the test of the evil one? If you haven’t run into the evil one, hang on a while,

you'll meet him face to face one day.

Jesus gives us some wonderful examples in this narrative dealing with Satan, Himself. Let me mention a few in our time together this morning.

Remember who you are. Did you catch that big, little word in our text? Listen to the words of the devil himself: “**If** you are the Son of God, then tell this stone to become bread.” “**If** you are the Son of God, then throw yourself down from here.” Surely Jesus wanted to show the devil a thing or two. “Remember Who you’re talking to? I could do any of these things.” But Jesus refuses to use His power to prove His worth. Let me tell you, my friends, you don’t have anything to prove to the world. You are already a loved child of God. You are already baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ Himself. Don’t ever forget who you are!

How was it Kipling put it?

*If you can keep your head when all about you,
men are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowances for their doubting too,
If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings, nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you but none too much,
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds worth of distance run—
Yours is the earth and all that's in it,
And what is more—you'll be a man, my son.*

You are a child of God. You have been bought with a price. You need not sink into sin or lapse into shame when you fail. You’ve already been redeemed and you’ve already been

forgiven. Christ Himself has bought you today. Remember who you are when the devil looks you in the eye and you struggle to survive -- remember, always remember who you are! Don't ever forget it!

Remember you are not alone. After His baptism, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness. I would have written it differently. I would have painted this beautiful scene of baptism and I would have had it as wonderful as a Sunday morning worship at Brentwood Church. I would have had the Spirit moving everywhere. Then I would have let Jesus go alone into the wilderness. That's not what the Bible says. The Spirit is there with Him. Psalm 139 says, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence? If I go up to the heavens, You are there. If I make my bed in hell, You are there, too."

Jesus said, "Consider the birds of the air and the lilies of the fields. If your heavenly Father cares for them, think how much more He cares for you." The writer of Hebrews says, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness but we have One who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin, so let us approach the throne of grace with confidence that we may receive mercy and grace in our time of need." Don't ever forget it – you are not alone in your struggles. The Holy Spirit Himself will go to hell and back for you. You are not alone.

There's another side to this company. **Other people are counting on you.** When you're out in the wilderness, in the desert, facing the evil one, there are other people who are counting on you. No one lives alone and no one falls alone. Bill Clinton would have done well to remember that he had a family and a nation to lead.

17.3 million people watched *Temptation Island* on the Fox network last week. "*Temptation Island* has been proven to be

compelling television,” announced the producers as they planned a second series. Titillation has always been compelling. I ask you today, does Fox television have any responsibility for the moral standards of America?

We are not alone. We don't live alone, we don't sin alone, and we don't fall alone. There are people who are counting on you. Generation after generation is counting on you to leave the world a better place than you found it. When you're in the desert, remember; you're not alone.

There's one more thing. When you're in the desert, **remember your spiritual disciplines.** When Jesus said, “It is written, man does not live by bread alone.” He also said, “It is written, worship the Lord your God and Him alone,” and also, “It is written, do not put the Lord your God to the test.” Mark 4:18 says, “Watch and pray so that you don't fall into temptation.”

Gertrude Behanna was raised among New York's most elite a half a century ago. After fifty years of life -- three husbands, two divorces, and an addiction to drugs and alcohol, in a drunken stupor one night, she tried to commit suicide. But in her desperate state, she called out to God and God heard her prayer. The Spirit hovered over the chaos of her life. In loving kindness, Jesus came to her. When the intensity of the spiritual experience subsided, she called her booking agent and said, “Send me a Holy Bible.” “My God, what has happened to you?” asked her agent. “My God has happened to me,” said Gert Behanna. “I've got to make some sort of sense out of what I've just experienced. Send me the Book. I need to read it.”

You need to be equipped in the desert. Take with you the Scriptures and the ability to pray. They are the exact things that Jesus used to get through the desert.

Life is not about surviving. It's about abiding. St. Augustine was right. We cannot keep the birds of temptation from flying over our heads but we can keep them from building nests in our hair. Therein lies the challenge of discipleship.

Amen.