

Potomac Hills Community Church

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The Power of Truth

“Revealed Grace” - a series from Luke
Luke 4:1-13

INTRODUCTION: *An Awesome Sunrise*

When I was growing up in North Jersey, I was really into camping and backpacking. So were a lot of my friends. Where I lived was in the Northwest corner of New Jersey and it was very hilly. It was the beginning of the foothills of the Appalachian mountain range. I was in Jr. High at the time and all the kids on my street would hike out there Fridays after the High School kids got off work ... anywhere from 5 to 20 of us would go. It was about six or seven miles away to the “big hills,” as we called them. We would climb to the highest place we could find, I can’t remember the name of the hilltop but I can picture it clearly. And we’d camp out up there.

In the morning we would get woken up by the sunrise. And you could look out across the Ramapo river valley to the hills on the other side, which was where we lived. But the hills we camped on were about 500 feet higher than the hills we lived on. So you could look out over our town and even beyond the town. The morning fog would sort of hover over the hills of the town and I think we realized, even back then, that it was a beautiful sight. You felt you were out in the middle of nowhere, when in reality, you were still in North Jersey.

But gradually the sun would burn off the fog and then you could see really far. In fact, on a clear day, you could see all the way to New York City. And you’d try to pick out the Empire State Building (there were no World Trade Towers back then). And as you can imagine, New York City dominated the skyline. But the longer you stayed there you’d come to realize that the view wasn’t all that great anymore. The light of the sun revealed more of the landscape than you could see at first. And so what looked like a beautiful scene at first ... became an eyesore, once the sunlight shined on it for a while.

How many times have you been tempted by something that looked good at first glance, but when you were finally able to see it under a closer light, lost its attractiveness? The key to fighting temptation is being able to see past the first impression, and being able to discern what you should think and what you should do about this particular temptation.

And that sort of sets the scene for this passage in Luke 4. Good and tempting things are going to be presented to Jesus, but He will look past the first impression and apply God's Word to that situation, to that temptation.

First off, we're now at the beginning of chapter four in the book of Luke. We've seen all the events of the Christmas season leading up to and just after the birth of Christ. And then we took a big jump in time to when Jesus was twelve. And then we took another big jump in time and saw the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. For all practical purposes, everything we have seen and heard up to now served as the Preface to the real story. The real story, of course, being the story of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

But before beginning His public ministry, Jesus faces off with Satan in the wilderness. However, this is not a case of Jesus getting ambushed unawares. The text tells us that He was "*full of the Holy Spirit*" and that He was "*led by the Spirit in the desert.*" What occurs here then, takes place under the Sovereign direction of God.

However, before we jump too far into the story today, let's go over again, briefly, what this book is about.

Luke is the author of this book **and** the Book of Acts, written as Volumes 1 & 2 in the story of Christ and His Church.

In these two books you'll see the **Sovereign** plan of God at work in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. You will see is a constant emphasis on **Jesus as the Savior of the World**. Everything Jesus does is designed to highlight this unique point ... that He is the Son of God and Savior of sinners. You will see **the Gospel** as the message of New Life in Christ that changes people and offers eternal life. And finally, you will see an emphasis on **Truth**.

To sum up the book, it is **the person and work of Jesus Christ** that takes center stage. It shows us the Sovereign plan of God, the Savior through whom that plan takes place, the Gospel message that explains that plan, that it is all true, and that those who place their faith in Christ can rest confidently in that plan. The Book of Luke is the story of "**Revealed Grace.**"

But please don't mistake "Revealed Grace" as this sort of benign, gentle activity that is always passive and easygoing. For Christ to reveal the Grace of God in all its fullness takes Power and Authority. Grace is not going to be revealed by passive behavior, but by bold authoritative action that forces people to wrestle with who Jesus is and what He's doing.

So let's jump into the passage ...

We ended chapter three and we begin chapter four by seeing that Jesus is ...

v. 1-2: THE SECOND ADAM ¹

“Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan River. He was led by the Spirit to go out into the wilderness, [2] where the Devil tempted Him for forty days. He ate nothing all that time and was very hungry.”

We left chapter three and the genealogy of Jesus with the comparison to “Adam, the son of God.” Now we immediately arrive at the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. And I think the comparison continues. Jesus’ testing takes place in an environment exactly the opposite of what Adam faced. Jesus is tempted in the wilderness, which in Israel was a rocky, barren place while Adam was tempted in the Garden of Eve, a place filled with all good things. That was a cosmic confrontation by which, with Adam’s sin, we all became sinners. Now there is another cosmic confrontation with Satan, as he tempts Jesus, trying to derail God’s plan of salvation for mankind.

Jesus’ success in encountering the devil reveals how thoroughly dedicated He is to following God’s will. Jesus will only take the road God asks Him to take. He refuses to take any shortcuts. He knows that a successful walk with God means going where the Father leads ... and nowhere else.

This event, this attack on the plan of God by attacking the Sonship of Christ, is built around three distinct temptations. Now these temptations are subtle, they present things most people would consider positive and good, they challenge Jesus to support His own Sonship. But Satan has sinister motives, his goal behind these temptations is to lure Jesus into acting independently of the Father and thus create a rebellious Sonship instead of an obedient Sonship.

And that brings us to the first temptation ...

v. 3-4: THE TEMPTATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

*“Then the Devil said to Him, “If you are the Son of God, change this stone into a loaf of bread.” [4] **But Jesus told him, “No! The Scriptures say, ‘People need more than bread for their life.’ ”***

This first temptation questions God’s provision and care for Christ as His Son. Satan’s premise here is that Jesus’ Sonship surely must mean that God does not want Him to starve in the desert, so the mighty Son of God should simply turn stone into bread and meet His own needs under His own power.

But Jesus is discerning and can see past first impressions. He immediately understands that this request is not a challenge to be strong, but to be independent. And in reality, such independence is weakness and will lead to failure. Which, in fact, is what Satan wants.

So Jesus’ response comes from **Deuteronomy 8:3**, where Moses is talking

¹ The exposition of the text is adapted from The NIV Application Commentary: Luke by Darrell Bock, pages 127-132.

to the people of Israel. That verse says, “Yes, He [God] humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. **He did it to teach you that people need more than bread for their life; real life comes by feeding on every word of the Lord.**”

He is arguing that life is run by more than food. Actually, in the priority of things, life is not defined by bread at all. Instead, doing God’s will and depending on His leading is what defines life. And certainly Jesus never forgot the truth of that. In fact, in **Matthew 6:25**, Jesus told His followers, “So I tell you, don't worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food, drink, and clothes. Doesn't life consist of more than food and clothing?”

And then in John 4, Jesus expounds further on this theme with His disciples, **John 4:32-34**, “He said, “I have food you don't know about.” [33] “Who brought it to Him?” the disciples asked each other. [34] Then Jesus explained: “**My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent Me, and from finishing His work.**”

And then in John 6, after the feeding of the 5000, when many people wanted to become His followers, He confronted them with this same truth about getting to the real meaning of life. In **John 6:26-27**, “Jesus replied, “The truth is, you want to be with Me because I fed you, not because you saw the miraculous sign. [27] **But you shouldn't be so concerned about perishable things like food. Spend your energy seeking the eternal life that I, the Son of Man, can give you. For God the Father has sent Me for that very purpose.**””

Life isn’t about food, just as it isn’t about things, or about meeting needs. Now none of those are bad things, they just don’t define life. Life comes from following Christ and from doing the will of God. Satan is well aware of that, but Jesus reminds him, and in so doing, reminds us.

So Satan strikes back with ...

v. 5-8: THE TEMPTATION OF IDOLATRY.

“Then the Devil took Him up and revealed to Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. [6] The Devil told Him, “I will give You the glory of these kingdoms and authority over them—because they are mine to give to anyone I please. [7] I will give it all to You if You will bow down and worship me.” [8] **Jesus replied, “The Scriptures say, ‘You must worship the Lord your God; serve only Him.’ ”**

Now Satan gets bolder. He presents all the kingdoms of the world to Jesus. Jesus only has to do one small thing ... bow to Satan. This temptation is an invitation to worship Satan and abandon His loyalty to the Father. In reality, it’s a direct challenge to the First and Second Commandments, which say in **Exodus 20:3-6**, “Do not worship any other gods besides Me. [4] Do not make idols of any kind, whether in the shape of birds or animals or fish. [5] You must never worship

or bow down to them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not share your affection with any other god! I do not leave unpunished the sins of those who hate Me, but I punish the children for the sins of their parents to the third and fourth generations. [6] But I lavish My love on those who love Me and obey My commands, even for a thousand generations.”

The proposal Satan makes here is a swap. “You give Me you allegiance, and I’ll give you authority.” The temptation is not only to join an alliance with Satan, but for Jesus to excuse Himself from all that lies ahead in His ministry. He can skip the rejection and the suffering for quick access to power.

And yet, in reality this proposal is a lie, as are all of Satan’s attempts to delude and mislead us. While he has great power, he doesn’t have the authority to grant this wish. Only God has the power to grant this kind of authority. And grant it He does. In **Matthew 28:18**, “Jesus came and told His disciples, ***“I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth.”***”

Who gave Him “complete authority”? God did.

Satan was trying to tempt Jesus with something only God could give, and something that God would give. And Jesus’ reply makes clear that He understands this ... that He knows what the truth is. Jesus understands that going Satan’s way is not the way to gain power, but to lose it. Jesus opts to receive from the Father what is the Father’s to give. So He replies with **Deuteronomy 6:13**, “*You must fear the Lord your God and serve Him.*”

Now that Jesus has appealed to the Father, Satan uses His faith as the next point of departure in this series of temptations. And so we go to ...

v. 9-13: THE TEMPTATION OF FAITH.

“Then the Devil took Him to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, “If you are the Son of God, jump off! [10] For the Scriptures say, ‘He orders His angels to protect and guard You. [11] And they will hold You with their hands to keep you from striking Your foot on a stone.’ ” [12] Jesus responded, “The Scriptures also say, ‘Do not test the Lord your God.’ ” [13] When the Devil had finished tempting Jesus, he left Him until the next opportunity came.”

The third temptation, like the second, involves a vision-like experience, a peek into the future, so to speak. Jesus is taken to the temple in Jerusalem – probably on the Royal Porch on the temple’s southeast corner, which looms over a cliff and the Kidron Valley some 450 feet below. The ancient historian, Josephus, mentions that just looking over the edge made people dizzy. To throw oneself off the porch and survive would take divine intervention. The location at the temple probably highlights the idea that God is present to help.

And then Satan adds to the temptation by quoting Scripture himself, citing Psalm 91, which promises God’s protection for His own. His premise is, “If God protects His own, and You are His Son, then surely You can jump and not worry,

You won't be crushed." He is suggesting that such wonder-working protection will enhance Jesus' dependence on God as He flings Himself into God's caring arms. Surely God will not let Jesus suffer pain and death like this.

And as spiritual as Satan makes this sound, Jesus recognizes the temptation as a presumptuous test of God's care. God hasn't asked Jesus to engage in this kind of test, and this action would artificially create a need for God to act. Since it puts God in a "show me" or "prove it" kind of position, it's really testing God with a lack of faith, not a demonstration of great faith. You are not to test God or characterize His ministry with a flashy display engaged in for selfish purposes. "Oh, look how much God loves me, I can throw myself off here and He won't let me get hurt." And Jesus won't do that. His ministry is not going to be a traveling road show of self-centered miracles.

So He responds to Satan with **Deuteronomy 6:16**, "*Do not test the Lord your God as you did when you complained at Massah.*" This is a text where Moses rebuked Israel for testing God.

And so, having failed three times, Satan departs for a while. It's not a long departure, since Jesus will face down demons later in chapter four. Through all the temptations, Jesus has shown His true Sonship and dependence on the Father, and again, fulfilling the law and will of God where Adam failed.

Now this is all good to know, but what difference does it make for us today or tomorrow? Well, I think there's a lot we can learn and apply from this passage that deals with ...

APPLICATION: *Responding to Temptation*

I think the first application that comes out of this passage is about temptation itself. Tests in life are not necessarily bad; in fact, they can be divinely sent.

James 1:2-4 says, "*Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. [3] For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. [4] So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything.*"

The main issue with tests and temptations are my response to them.

Do I respond in a way that looks to God to guide me through this?

Do I trust God, or do I turn it around and test Him with this?

Do I get angry about it?

Do I try to get control over it?

Or do I just stop and trust God in the midst of it?

I wish I could say I always do that, but I don't.

And my guess is, neither do you.

But if you and I are going to grow spiritually, then trials, tests, and temptations aren't mere possibilities, but certain expectations. God uses them in our lives to make us more like His Son.

Satan tested Jesus about bread, sometimes we try to ‘feed ourselves’ with those things we think we need. But usually those needs translate into bigger homes, more gadgets, nicer cars, newer clothes, and a host of other “things” to say that we’ve arrived. Yet life is not defined materially; rather it is defined spiritually and relationally in terms of knowing, loving, and serving God. Sometimes giving ourselves to those ends may mean giving up money and stuff.

Will Satan succeed in testing you to take ‘bread’ that God is not asking you to eat? God’s Word says that life is found not in ‘bread’ or ‘things’ but in knowing and doing His will.

Another way we show lack of trust is to grab for power that is not ours, or to take power in a way that it is not intended to be received. Satan tempts us to slip into idolatry as he did with Jesus, using subtle substitutions. Perhaps we worship our work, our status, our possessions, our children, our own goodness, or anything else that stands in the way of knowing God.

Maybe we’re tempted to take the easy path of spiritual growth without facing suffering or rejection, even though we claim to be following someone the world rejects.

Perhaps we show a lack of trust in God by trying to force Him to act on our behalf. We test Him to see if He really loves us or not. This type of spiritual wagering doesn’t involve leaping from high places, but walking into events where we say, “Okay God, if you really care about me, then this situation will turn out this way.” This is just trying to control God instead of following Him. And often we’re just setting ourselves up for disappointment, since it may have really been better for us for the events to turn out differently.

Another issue may be our tendency to blame God for any suffering that does come our way, when in fact, He may just be getting our attention, to show us a better way, or to call us to meet with Him in the midst of the hard times.

These kinds of temptations and tests aren’t all that different from what Jesus faced. Each and every one is an appeal to selfishness.

“Surely you should feed yourself, Jesus?”

“Surely the Father wants you to have authority, Jesus?”

“Surely God will protect you, Jesus, why not try Him out?”

And while Jesus’ temptations are unique to Him, the Satanic challenges to faith and to following God are not.

Satan will try to short-circuit your walk with God by offering you shortcuts to spirituality ... shortcuts that turn out to be dead ends.

And our response to testing is to look at the truth, trust God, and walk down the road with Him, however hard that road may be. Anything else we do that demonstrates our independence from God is only revealing our unbelief in His truth, our lack of faith in His love, and our desire to go our own way.

How did Jesus know God's will?

He knew God's Word.

God's Word was the bridge to God's will.

Jesus knew it and Jesus followed it.

Our rationalizations to God fall flat when God's Word is clear.

Our twisting of Scripture to justify our selfishness sounds empty when it contradicts the whole counsel of God.

Our desires to focus on ourselves backfires when it goes against the Biblical focus on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Ultimately temptation comes down to one question ...

What comes first? My will ... or God's will.

It's a simple question.

But the answer can be quite revealing.

On who will you depend?

Will it be your power, your will, your wisdom?

Or will it be God's power, God's will, God's Word?

If "*real life comes by feeding on every word of the Lord,*" then we cannot live as God intends apart from His Word.

And that Word, The Bible, is clear about what we should do. **Hebrews 2:18** says, "*Since He Himself has gone through suffering and temptation, He is able to help us when we are being tempted.*"

Luke wants us to see that the Jesus story is not only about Him, but also about us. These texts **reveal** God at work; and shows us how God provides wisdom for people even when blinded by temptation. God takes people who are "outsiders" and makes them "insiders" ... people who are involved in a relationship with the God of the universe. People who are called to live a life that looks to God because He has poured out His grace on those of us who have recognized that our salvation is found in running to Him.

Even if we haven't earned it and don't deserve it.

Because that's the essence of grace ... getting what you don't deserve.

We're going to finish with an old hymn that tells that story. Putting no hope in my own works, no hope in my own wisdom, no hope in my own way ... but simply clinging to Christ and totally depending on Him.

Luke tells the story of how **Jesus revealed that grace**, died to provide it, rose again to bestow it, and will return to establish its presence over all of creation. The church **must show** what **such grace looks like** ... starting by bringing that grace to those who live with temptation everyday of their life.

Jesus is called the Great High Priest because He not only fulfills the role, but He understands what we go through.

Hebrews 4:14-16 says, *“That is why we have a great High Priest who has gone to heaven, Jesus the Son of God. Let us cling to Him and never stop trusting Him. [15] This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for He faced all of the same temptations we do, yet He did not sin. [16] So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive His mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it.”*

And all who trust Him said, “Amen.”