

THE MAN WHO IS GOD – TESTED & TRUE ... FOR YOU

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What Advent is to Christmas, Lent is to Easter. What diet-to-fit-into-the-mother-of-the-bride dress is to the wedding, Lent is to Easter. It is a time to prepare. Typically in Lent people have prepared by giving up things – chocolate, red meat, tv. But we can also take on things – maybe tithing, the reading of the devotional booklet...and, for us, a sermon series on Jesus from Luke. Luke for Lent, and him presenting Jesus as the Man Who is God.

How it revealed that Jesus is a man who is God? Luke begins by showing the constellation of angel visits, miracle pregnancies, prophetic utterances, and salvation hymns that surrounded Jesus' birth. That boy's "baby book" did not have the standard entries most of ours had. But then again, there was also the typical – he was born into a plain ol' peasant family, put into everyday swaddling clothes, and visited by basic shepherds. So the irregular and regular joined in his life early on. In it, Luke is showing Jesus -- God and man.

When Jesus comes on the scene as a grown up, it is to be baptized. While he wanted to identify with humanity in that Jordan River experience, God at the same time identified with him saying, "You are my son." Man ... baptism. God ... son.

But seldom do you have to do more than get started with God before testing comes. And that is what happens, even to Jesus. We read. (Luke 4:1-13)

*¹Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. ³The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." ⁴Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" ⁵The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. ⁷So if you worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" ⁹The 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. ¹⁰For it is written:
" 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; ¹¹they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" ¹²Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ¹³When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.*

Did you notice in the beginning that it was the Spirit who drove Jesus into the wilderness where the testing by the devil happened? Look at that hard and long. The Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness where the testing by the devil happened. That means, big truth here, God doesn't exempt those who serve him from struggle. In fact, rather than let us avoid the very struggles which would make us strong, he sends

us into them. Sometimes we struggle with the wrong things. Sometimes we avoid struggles with the right things. Charlie Brown said that there is no problem so big that he cannot avoid it. We try to avoid. But God, the Spirit, takes us to what we need to face. If he didn't, we wouldn't know clear-headedness, strength, victory, or usefulness. His goal in the immediate is not strictly our comfort but our growth.

Look, at some point parents do not do their children's schoolwork for them, even if they're struggling, but let them struggle with it. This is about love. See, God may test (test) to develop us so we may know peace through strength, but Satan tempts (tempts) to weaken and destroy. Life has its wildernesses, and we will come to them, and in the universe there is He who would develop us, and he who would destroy us.

Once in a Sunday School class someone observed of this passage, "Jesus must have told the disciples about his experience in the desert." Indeed he must have. No one else was there at the time. How could it have become known unless Jesus shared what happened?

My Sunday School class' next question was, "Why? Why did he share this experience?" That's a good question. I think the answer is that Jesus knows that every single one of us will face, and must face, all sorts of temptations, but ultimately the three he faced.

It doesn't strike me as much different than looking at my children and knowing that they must face work and budgeting, relationships and the opposite sex, and God. These are just practical

matters that they must and should face. Jesus looks at us and knows each of us must face something related to bread, testing God, and worldly kingdoms.

For Jesus, what he faces comes as a direct confrontation with none other than Satan. All the way back to the first Adam in a garden do we have to go to see such a thing. The first Adam was in a garden and this second Adam, as Paul calls Jesus, was in a desert. The first had Eve and the second Adam had no one. But tempting comes amid plenty and amid lack, with companions nearby and with none. These three temptations in all sorts of circumstances seem to come.

The first temptation is about bread. It is a symbol for everything material, everything our flesh needs, that related to our finitude. Let's say it has to do with simply our needs.

The tempting comes, we are told, when Jesus had not eaten for forty days. In other words, it comes when Jesus' body is weak.

"Turn the stones to bread," says the devil. He could have, you know. Jesus could have. But, if he did, he would have done something you and I cannot do. He would not have suffered in all ways like we, as the author of Hebrews, says. He would have pulled out special powers to counter his hunger (and even others').

But he chose not to. He chose not to partly for our sakes – to walk all the way in our shoes – but partly also because he knows, Jesus does, that though we have bodies that need food, we are also spirits that need more than food.

There have been many studies done with monkeys to children that show one can take care of their bodily needs, but if there is not interaction, touch, love, they wither. That line of study shows what the Bible says; we are more than bodies. And we can shovel food of all kinds into our lives, all sorts of sensual and material goodies, thinking it will take care of our need. But it will not. Until we face that we need God, that we are physical beings that need a spiritual answer, we will get nowhere.

The second temptation is about seeing and getting the kingdoms of this world. It is a temptation to gain the glamour for oneself by following a lie, a path apart from God. If the first temptation was, we said, in simple terms, our physical needs, this would be our mental/psychological/spiritual/social *wants*. There is an inner self that is just as hungry for attention, status, excitement, and worth as our stomachs are hungry for bread. But genuine satisfaction, enduring satisfaction, satisfying satisfaction ... isn't Satan's to give. He says it is, which is why it is a lie. But while we have physical needs and these other wants or desires, the answer for them is with God. Man needs to come to rest in more than bread, God. Man *wants* come to rest in more than kingdoms, God.

Funny thing, dastardly thing that most of us are aware of from those who are addiction counselors. We have desires that go awry ... we only temporarily get satisfaction, and then we need more, and we need it more frequently. This is our matter at hand, desire and what we do with it. Jesus kept his

body and its needs before God. Jesus kept his spirit and its desires before God.

The third temptation is for Jesus to throw himself off a tall structure. He's to step out, not so much in faith of God, as in a pushing of God to act. It is one thing for God to force *our* hand, and it is another to think we force *his*. He is God and we are not. I am reminded of a quote on a slightly different topic but I think you'll see the correspondence.

*We as sinners have no right to "forgive" God, and God has no need of it. ... (Peace comes) because (the sinner) has found forgiveness (from God), not because (the sinner) has granted it (to God). God is good. He does not need our forgiveness. He never stands in the dock (of a courtroom) as the accused, not matter how much our sinful anger seeks to put him there.*¹

Humans have a side that wants to rule over God, to manipulate God, to get him to apologize, to push him to act at our instigation, to get him to take care of all our wants, when and how we want.² This all stems from a vision of God as less than great and less than good. So pray that this soul-stuff that wants to push God, rather than join God, ... pray that this subsides before the great and good God before whom

¹ Powlison, David. *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*. V.14#2.

² If our bodies have *needs*, our spirits have *wants*, then our egos have "*vaunts*." Bodies for bread, psyches for excitement, and egos power?

we then, understanding his greatness and goodness, bow humbly.

Let's go back to Jesus sharing this incident, as it were, to tell us that we, too, would face these temptations, and indeed we must. He passed through them into his ministry. He navigated them, and then had this amazing ministry. So, to us. We need to navigate them for us to have fullness of life and ministry. But Jesus not only told us that we would face them, but in the story he tells us *how* to face them. If the first Adam in the garden failed and this second Adam in the desert succeeded, then we can learn where not to go, and where to go in order to succeed.

Quite simply, in each temptation, Jesus addressed the tempter with scripture. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test." "The Lord only will you worship." The Bible says. The Bible says. The Bible says. If God's son needed scripture to stand, don't we? Satan kept trying to get him to doubt what God said, or to twist what God said, or set aside what God said. But Jesus relied on what the Bible said in all its fullness. So this Lent, let us read, read, read scripture. Let us study, study, study scripture. Let us memorize, memorize, memorize scripture. Let us apply, apply, apply scripture. Then we might literally follow the one we say we are followers of.

Just one thing more. You and I might think that if we just read the Bible enough, we'll succeed in the test. Let me tell you something, we won't ... but

he did. Try we may, but rely we can. He succeeded in the test ... for you and me. And *that* is enough. Jesus Christ didn't just succeed in the test. He succeeded in the test for you and me ... and that is enough for you and for me. Thanks be to God.

Prayer: Gracious God, in coming in Jesus Christ, you so loved us as to walk in our shoes. In our path are temptations. It is the sin nature in us, around us, and the devil beyond us. We are doomed without a teacher to show the way. More seriously, we are doomed without a champion to do the way for us. I pray that we would try, but in the end find confidence for our well-being in Jesus' work and righteousness. Through him who is God we can move beyond the wages of our sin to the gift of his eternal life. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

*If you would like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors and elders of the church would welcome your call. pastorjeffwood@gmail.com
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