

Text: Luke 4.1-13

1/22/12

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. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" 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 splendor, 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.'" 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.'" When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

If you want to test how tough something is, ask 10 boys, about 5 years old, to play with it. Doesn't matter if it is luggage, furniture or a smartphone. After one hour of playing and jumping and throwing and bouncing, you'll know just how tough it is. Whatever survives will probably have scratches and dents and pieces broken off.

God decided not to use 5 year old boys to test how strong Jesus was. He needed an even tougher test. Last week we talked about how Jesus stood in the Jordan as our substitute, pleasing God with his whole life.

Easy for Jesus to be perfect with his Father looking down from heaven and the Holy Spirit perched on his shoulder. But would the Father, who demands absolute perfection, still be pleased with his Son after the Devil had beaten on him with all different kinds of temptations? Jesus would have to come out of this battle without a scratch, without any dents or dings. If he sinned just once, just stumbled a little bit in obeying God, Jesus would no longer please his father and no longer be able to take us to heaven.

What does it take to dent Jesus?

The Lord set out to prove that Jesus was worthy of God's approval – no matter how the devil tempted him.

The proving grounds were the wilderness area away from the Jordan River, right after Jesus had been baptized. The Holy Spirit led Jesus out specifically to give the devil a chance to tempt him every way he could for 40 days. The three temptations Luke tells us about are just samples of the spiritual bombs the devil kept dropping on Jesus over and over for 40 days and nights.

I want all of us to see how Jesus overcame temptations which trip up you and me. But every real life example I came up with, I couldn't use it because I thought, "So and so will think I'm talking about him." So I'm using examples from elementary, middle and high schools. I'm not thinking about specific people, but I'm hoping everyone of us gets the idea and can apply it to our own lives.

A young high school woman faces the temptation – "if I don't dress like the other girls, how will the guys ever notice me?" Jesus commands us to be modest in the way we dress, but this is a serious temptation for a young Christian woman. Many Christians, not just young ones, fall into this temptation.

At the heart, the temptation is obedience verses needs. Do I obey Jesus if it means I may have to go without something I need – or think I need? Dressing modestly or the attention of the boys?

Look at the first temptation of Jesus.

He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

Jesus was not imagining the growling in his stomach. He had gone without any food for 40 days. That would kill the average person. Because Jesus is God, he was able to hang on to life. But his empty stomach hurt him just as much as if you and I had somehow been able to survive 40 days without any food.

He was weak, he was hungry, he *really* needed some food.

So the devil tempted him to change a rock into a loaf of fresh bread – give his stomach something!

Where was the wrong in this? The Lord had led him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. When the Lord led the Israelites into the wilderness and they got a little hungry, they had not trusted God to provide for them. Jesus would not commit the same sin.

Philippians 2:5-7 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

Jesus did not use his power as God to serve himself. His Lord had led him into the wilderness to be tested. He would endure the hardship the Lord had led him to, obediently, no matter how hungry he was.

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'"

Jesus quoted Moses from Deuteronomy when he explained to the Israelites the Lord had fed them manna every day to teach them to trust him by obeying his command to pick only enough manna for the day and save nothing for the next morning.

Instead of obeying his command, they tried to save their manna for the next day. They needed food so they disobeyed. We also disobey because we "need" something.

Jesus obeyed. God would give him what he needed. We failed, Jesus succeeded.

No dents!

Would the devil get the better of Jesus on top of a mountain? What would happen to Jesus when the devil offered him a chance to avoid horrible pain?

Every week our Sunday school teachers assign a memory passage to our children. Now some of our children have a lot of homework during the week. If they don't get their homework done, they could get a bad grade in school. The temptation is not to do the memory work so they have time for the homework. Or not to come to Lenten services on Wednesday night so they can do their homework.

The heart of this temptation is do I serve my Lord or do I avoid suffering? Serve my Lord or my nerves? If following Jesus means suffering, maybe I won't follow Jesus so closely. Fair to say we fall for this temptation?

Jesus was facing horrendous pain we can't even begin to imagine. Three years from this he would suffer the fires of hell while he was on the cross – the pain we all deserve together.

The Devil offered him a way out.

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 splendor, 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 could become world emperor and make sure no child ever starved to death again. He could make all parents be good parents so no child's body would ever be found at the county dump. He could eliminate all prisons, all drug use, all broken marriages and just make life on earth pretty good.

But we would still be separated from our Lord forever. We would never know the joy of our God being in our hearts, our heavenly Father loving us unconditionally, never know what heaven was like or experience God's arms wrapped around us. Emperor Jesus would be able to give us only an imitation of paradise.

Jesus had come to earth to serve his Father – carry out his Father's will. His Father's plan meant the cross and the pain of hell. Jesus would not serve himself. He would serve the Lord and him alone – even though it meant terrible suffering.

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

Again, Jesus used a Bible quote from Deuteronomy to beat back the devil's temptations. His holiness was still undented. He is still the perfect Savior.

No dents!

This last kind of temptation wasn't any easier. You and I have fallen into it many, many times.

I pray the Lord helps me make the basketball team. I really love basketball. I want to be on the school team so badly. I pray and pray about it. I work out. I practice my dribbling and my shooting. I throw a 100 chest passes and 100 overhead passes into the brick wall of our house in the freezing cold every night. I so want to be on the basketball team.

And I get cut. After all my prayers, all my hard work, God doesn't answer my prayer. Why did I even bother praying to him? He promised he would hear my prayers. I prayed in Jesus' name. I prayed with all my heart. I did it just the way he wants me to. He didn't listen.

At the heart of this temptation:

The Lord controls my life, I don't control the Lord.

The devil put it to Jesus this way – in Jerusalem - in the Temple courtyard. When Herod laid out this

pavilion, he had to build up the southeast corner with a retaining wall so the Temple grounds could be flat on top of Mt. Zion. From this corner, the retaining wall dropped 100 feet down to the valley floor.

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."

Since Jesus had been quoting Scripture and insisted on trusting the Lord, now was Jesus' chance to prove it. Jump up and prove that you trust God's promises in Psalms to keep you safe.

Except this temptation wasn't about trusting God. It was about pushing God's buttons. He made a promise to me, so let's see if I can make him do what I want him to do. Is God under my control? I'll use his words to back him into a corner.

Jesus refused.

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

Jesus refused to push God's buttons. He would trust the Lord to take care of him, but he wouldn't push the Lord's buttons by jumping off a cliff.

No dents!

Can anything dent Jesus?

Every time the devil enticed Jesus with a temptation, Jesus answered with the Bible. As God, Jesus could have banished him with a simple command, "Be gone!" He would be using a power we don't have. We do have the Word. Jesus showed us the Word is all we need to stop sinning.

But we still sin. We still get beaten and bruised and dented beyond recognition. Which is why we need an undented Savior.

Jesus committed no sin – you heard that in our 2nd Bible reading. He never yielded to temptation. Never even entertained a thought such as, "Boy I'm hungry. Sure would be nice to convert that limestone into a fresh loaf of bread. No, no, I won't do that."

If Jesus had thought that way, he would have mentally sinned and eternally failed as our Savior. He never did.

He actively obeyed God every second of his life. He walked away from these 40 days of blistering temptation the same way he walked in – perfect, holy, undented.

His perfection, his resistance to temptation, is deposited into your account with God. You have obeyed God, even if it meant going without the attention of the boys. You have served the Lord no matter how much pain that meant. You have never tried to control our God to do what you want him to do. You've always accepted his control of your life.

Nothing dented Jesus. Tempted in every way like us. Passed every test unlike us. This is your Savior. This is why you **know** you're going to heaven. Because nothing dents Jesus. Amen.