

I. Introduction

Good morning! May I ask a question? How many of you have been baptized? Please be bold and raise your hand if you have been baptized. Praise the Lord! Now, I have another question. Think back and remember, after you were baptized, was there some kind of hardship or spiritual trial? Yes, I think a lot of us have had that experience. Today we are going to try to understand the reasons for that a little better.



Ephesians 4:5, declares that there is, **“one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”** When we believe and are baptized, we declare that we are one with all who have received baptism in the Name of Jesus. Baptism is a common experience which unites the church, and one aspect of this is hardship. When someone confesses their faith in Jesus through baptism, often a test of faith soon follows.



Why is that? Well, consider this example. Suppose you applied for a job teaching Chinese. At the interview, you say that your Chinese is very good, almost like a native speaker. They want to give you the job. But first, what do they ask for? They ask for your test scores. And, if you have not already been tested, they will test you. And if your Chinese really is very good, you are happy to take a test to prove it.



When we say we believe in Jesus and get baptized, should we be surprised that a test soon follows? No, it is normal. A few people go through a test of their faith before they get baptized, but for many Christians the test comes soon after baptism. The purpose is to demonstrate your faith. You yourself and others need to know that your faith is real. Jesus set the example for us by undergoing a severe test after baptism. God the Father had already declared that He was pleased with His Son, Jesus; and the Holy Spirit had already come upon Jesus. But a time of testing was also necessary and it came very quickly. Let's read Luke 4:1-13.



II. Scripture Luke 4:1-13

[1] Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, [2] 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. [3] The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." [4] Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" [5] The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. [6] 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. [7] So if you worship me, it will all be yours." [8] **Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"** [9] 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. [10] For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; [11] they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" [12] Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" [13] When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

III. Teaching

Some people have distorted ideas about Christian life. They hear that God blesses and provides for us; and then they imagine that this means that life will be easy and comfortable after they get baptized. But that is not what the Bible tells us. God does bless us, and provide for us. But His blessings and provision are

according to His wisdom and not according to our own ideas. God gives us what we really need, and it is not always what we think we want. In an interview (<http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/17175.htm>), Pastor Rick Warren explained about hardship and trials like this, “*The reason for this is that God is more interested in your character than your comfort. God is more interested in making your life holy than He is in making your life happy. We can be reasonably happy here on earth, but that's not the goal of life. The goal is to grow in character, in Christ likeness.*”

The Scripture says in **Luke 4:1-2** “**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.**” Notice that it was the Holy Spirit that led Jesus into the desert. Notice that Jesus ate nothing for forty days and was hungry. Jesus suffered in the test. Because the Holy Spirit led Jesus to the place of testing, we know that all of this was part of God’s plan. But the tool that God used to test Jesus was the devil. That may make us uncomfortable, but there it is. The devil is real, and evil, and he intends to do us harm; but God uses even this for good purposes in His plan. For those who want to learn more about how God uses the devil to accomplish good purposes, I recommend the book of Job.

In **Genesis 7**, Noah entered the ark and it rained for forty days. In **Exodus 24**, Moses spent forty days on the mountaintop. In **1 Kings 19**, Elijah traveled for forty days. In **Jonah 3**, the prophet preached for forty days. We could find a few more examples, but I think this is enough to see that a forty day test is a common pattern in Scripture. Sometimes the forty days speak of God’s judgment, and sometimes of God’s love. But it seems they always speak of the special presence of God. Like the Old Testament prophets before Him, in **Luke 4**, Jesus undergoes His own forty days.

This 1872 painting by Ivan Kramskoy shows Jesus, tired and hungry, seated on a rock with His head bowed in prayer. Throughout church history, many Christians have felt called to follow Jesus in His forty days of fasting. Some fast completely, eating nothing and drinking only water. Others choose a partial fast, such as eating only one meal a day, or a fast of a particular thing, for example, eating no meat for forty days. Whether for one day or forty, fasting and focusing on deeper prayer may bring spiritual growth. But we need to be careful to avoid legalism or spiritual pride. A fast with the wrong attitude may do harm rather than good. And we need to be wise. For example, if you are a diabetic, or have other medical conditions, then you should talk to your doctor before considering a fast.



The Scripture does not give a precise location, but, according to church tradition, the place of Jesus’ fast was in a cave on a mountain near the ancient site of Jericho. There are several variations of the spelling, but the place is called Mount Quarantania, and there is a Greek Orthodox monastery at the site of the cave. As you can see in this photo, it is a rugged and isolated area.



The devil came to Jesus and tempted Him. Over the centuries, the scene of the temptation has been imagined in many ways, sometimes with the devil appearing as an ugly angel, sometimes as an old man. More recently, in the *Movie of Jesus*, the devil is shown first as a beautiful young woman in a red dress, and then later as a businessman in a suit. Perhaps the devil really does have the ability to appear in different ways. But the devil’s power is limited; there are many things the devil cannot do.



The devil is in only one place at a time and he does not know the future. In contrast, God is beyond time and space; God transcends the universe He has made. The devil is powerful but he is a created being, limited by time and space. Good and evil are not in some kind of balance. The goodness and love of God is vast beyond without measure and eternal. But evil is limited and temporary; one day it will be eliminated completely. Meanwhile it serves God’s purposes to allow the devil to continue his ugly work. One of these purposes was to test Jesus to prove that Jesus was completely committed to His mission to provide salvation

from sin by going to the cross and giving His life for us.

The devil comes to Jesus and says, **Luke 4:33**, “**If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.**” The devil says, “**if,**” because his strategy is to sow doubt and deception. But we know that Jesus is the true Son of God and He certainly has the power to turn stones into bread. Notice also that Jesus’ forty day fast is over and there is no command that says, “Thou shalt not turn stones into bread.” In fact, the desert was full of stones; Jesus could have turned all the stones into bread and satisfied the hunger of the whole world. But instead Jesus answers (**Luke 4:4**) “**It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'**”

Next, the devil tries something else. The devil shows Jesus the kingdoms of the world, (**Luke 4:6-7**), “**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.'**” In effect, the devil is saying, “*You want to be the King of kings? With my help you can skip the cross and rule right now.*”

The devil is a liar, but he is a clever liar. The devil mixes truth and falsehood. God gave Adam authority over the earth; and when Adam sinned, he basically turned his authority over to Satan. Now, by controlling sinful man, Satan has a lot of power. But Adam was only a steward, not the true owner of the earth. So the devil is an usurper and a cheat. God is still the real ruler and owner of the earth. And God will only allow Satan to deceive people for a limited time. As Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 10:26** (quoting Psalm 24:1), “**The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it.**” The devil has no valid right to rule; he is a false ruler and he will be cast down and judged. But Jesus simply says, **Luke 4:8**, “**It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'**”

In **Luke 4:9**, the devil tries again. “**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.'**” This time the devil tries quoting Scripture, using words from Psalm 91:11-12 that speak of how the angels will protect the Messiah. Of course, the devil ignores the context and twists the meaning. We need to know that we cannot trust everyone who quotes Scripture. Jesus answers Satan by pointing out another Scripture, (**Luke 4:12**), “**It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'**”

Three times the devil tempted Jesus, and three times Jesus replied with Scripture, for those who want to look them up, the quotations are from Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:16, and 6:13. The three temptations Satan tried parallel the words Satan spoke to Eve in the Garden of Eden, and are the three kinds of temptations we are warned against in **1 John 2:16**, which the NKJV calls, “**the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.**” Each of these is a wide category, but basically Satan only has three kinds of temptations.

However, the temptations of Jesus also have a common theme. All of them can be seen as arguments against the plan to go to the cross. God’s plan was for Jesus to die on the cross in order to save us from our sins. The cross provides a solution to the problem of sin and death and an eternal salvation. But Satan basically suggests that Jesus abandon God’s plan for a different plan.

First Satan suggests that Jesus could save Himself from hardship by turning stones into bread. This would set a precedent for making relief of temporary physical needs a priority instead of eternal salvation. Jesus could do miracles to feed all of the hungry and heal all of the sick. Jesus could have been a social savior providing for the needs of the people.



Or, Jesus could have accepted Satan’s offer to make Him the ruler of the nations immediately. Then Jesus could have become a political savior, bringing peace to the world and putting an end to war and conflict. Jesus could have freed Israel from the Roman Empire and established justice among the nations.



The third temptation that Satan uses is to suggest that Jesus could become a great leader by doing spectacular stunts, like jumping off the pinnacle of the temple. Satan suggests that if the people saw the angels rescue Jesus, they would all accept His teachings, follow Him, and be His disciples.



Each of Satan's suggestions could have quickly led to a more pleasant and comfortable world. But Jesus did not come to make a fallen and sinful world more comfortable. That would be like adding carpet and a large screen TV to a jail cell. Mankind would have been more comfortable, but we would still all be imprisoned by sin and death. Satan would have been happy with allowing mankind to be more comfortable, but still trapped in sin and death.



But God had a bigger and better plan than that. God's plan was to set us free from sin and death by providing a decisive victory at the cross. God's plan was to give us eternal salvation and freedom in Christ. God's plan was not the comfortable or easy way, but it was the best way.

IV. Conclusion

Jesus did not come to make us more comfortable; He came to give us the gift of forgiveness of sins and eternal life. To achieve this Jesus had to stick to the plan of the Father. Jesus had to know and do the Father's will, putting God the Father's desires first. No shortcuts. No compromises with evil.

Here is the lesson and challenge for us. If we want to have an abundant and victorious Christian life, we need to put God first. We need to know the Scriptures so that we can understand the purposes of God and so that we can resist the devil's temptations. God and His plans and purposes need to come first, ahead of our comfort and preferences.

Luke does not mention it, but Matthew 4:11 tells us that after the devil left Jesus, that angels came and took care of Him. We also can be sure that God will not abandon us in our time of testing, but He will be there with us, watching over us and at the right time He will provide comfort and help. Even if we go through a difficult time of testing and trial, we can be sure that it is for good and loving purposes, and that when it is over God will meet our needs. Regardless of temporary circumstances, we are safe in His love and we can trust His perfect plan. And, it just the right time, the Lord will return and He will wipe away every tear and bring perfect peace and joy.



Let's pray.

V. Closing Prayer