

## *Joining Jesus in the Wilderness*

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 Title: Why the Wilderness? – The Wilderness is a place of Temptation  
 Text: Luke 4:1-15 (Key verses: 1, 2, 13-15)  
 Theme: “For forty days, being tempted by the devil” (Luke 4:2)

Introduction:

### **What makes this passage so important?**

Around my house I have poison ivy. I have never encountered poison ivy before living in this home. During my first encounter with poison ivy, I still had a man of steel mentality so I would work around the poison ivy and at times I would carelessly weed whack the poison ivy thinking that it did not matter much to me . . . until . . . the day I got poison ivy. Once you get poison ivy your attitude towards it changes significantly. After that time I still got it again, but I am really careful when I am working around poison ivy.

Sin and its forerunner in temptation are like poison ivy. If you are not careful it will snap you and if you think you are immune to it . . . watch-out.

**The root cause of all temptation and thus all sin is the appeal to abandon trust in Christ.** Is He everything He claims to be or do we need more? This is the bottom line. Whether you are elementary age, middle age, or the ancient of days, the devil is using the two platforms of the world and the flesh to undermine your confidence in Christ.

### New Testament Illustration:

- “Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me (2 Tim. 4:9, 10).”
- “Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say (3 John 9).”

### The bottom line is this:

It is because of our Lord’s victory over temptation that we have help in our time of need (Heb. 4:15-17).

### **Why am I teaching this?**

The world, the flesh, and the devil are determined to undermine what God is endeavoring to do both in us and through us to those around us. Although their attempts will fail, the onslaught is no less real. The devil uses the world to tantalize us on the platform of our flesh. Our flesh cries out for satisfaction. The act of attack is a temptation. **Temptation is the call to compromise and betray the absolute sufficiency of Christ for His people.** It is for this reason that we must consider the wilderness as a place of temptation.

The Scripture is inviting us to join Jesus in the wilderness. Going into the wilderness was a common practice and a part of our Lord's regular activity. The wilderness provided for Him a place of solitude and uncluttered communion with His Father. This is what the wilderness can afford us. But the wilderness can also be a place of temptation. "Luke shows that Christ's fast was complete, not partial. It is certainly not surprising that at the end of forty days of fasting Jesus was hungry. **The devil naturally selects this moment as his golden opportunity.**" (William Hendriksen, The Gospel of Luke, NTC, 233)

There are many aspects to this temptation that are strategic.

Everything preceding this moment is an establishment and declaration of His deity. The virgin birth, the forerunner, His baptism, and the genealogy all seek to strike the chord of His status as the only begotten Son of God, God in flesh. Satan is a part of this redemptive drama. His comments are direct, "If you are the Son of God (4:3, 9 ["He is assuming the reality of the condition" - Since])." He is taunting and testing. He is probing like the appendage of a parasitical blood sucker to find its host and drain Him dry.

The imagery is weighty. As the second Adam He will succeed where the first failed.

"Man's fall was brought about when the first Adam, as mankind's representative, yielded to the temptation of the devil. Thus sin began. So now, as Jesus' public ministry was about to begin, it was proper that He, as the last Adam, the representative of all who trust in him, should resist the devil's temptation and render perfect obedience to God. Thus grace would receive an open door." (William Hendriksen, The Gospel of Luke, NTC, 230)

It is while in the wilderness where communion with God was accented that the devil seized his moment to undermine the purposes of the Godhead.

In considering the temptation of Christ there are two (2) introductory thoughts.

I. The wilderness is a place of temptation (v. 13a [every temptation])

**First**, "I believe it is better to view the three solicitations of Satan as three different attempts to get the Savior to commit the one sin of acting independently of God the Father's will for Him." (Understanding Christian Theology, 595)

**Second**, there is a theological debate as to whether or not Jesus could not sin or whether or not He simply chose not to sin although capable of it. I do not believe Jesus could have sinned for the following reasons.

- First, although He is 100% God and 100% man in the union of the two, the ruling nature is His deity.
- Second, although He is 100% man, He did not possess a fallen nature. To be human does not necessitate a fallen nature.
- Third, no matter what God does, it is not sin.

In light of this, “Jesus’ temptation is not the same as the self-engendered lusting described in James 1:14-15 – a fact to keep in mind when we question how Jesus could have been perfect and yet truly tempted. The issue, therefore, is not one of allurements to perverted self-gratification but a challenge to act apart from faithful dependence on God.” (EBC, “Luke,” Walter L. Liefeld, 8:863) There are two primary ideas I would like us to consider in looking at our Lord’s temptation: the platform for temptation and the protection against temptation.

#### A. The platform for temptation

### **What do I see as the dangerous conformities (inside and outside the church) that lead us away from new life?**

#### ILLUSTRATION:

The Great Wall of China is a gigantic structure which cost an immense amount of money and labor. When it was finished, it appeared impregnable. But the enemy breached it. Not by breaking it down or going around it. They did it by bribing the gatekeepers.

Temptation takes many forms and the most dangerous are the most subtle and innocent appearing. Let us note three platforms that temptation uses.

#### 1. The platform of provision (v. 3, 4)

“In the first temptation the devil tries to convince Jesus to use his status as God’s Son to satisfy his own physical desires, instead of trusting in the Father to provide his needs.” (Baker Commentary on the Bible, “Luke,” Thomas R. Schreiner, 810)

It is an interesting parallel to note how “it was in the sphere of the appetite that man was first tempted. He lost (Gen. 3).” (William Hendriksen, The Gospel of Luke, NTC, 240)

“Jesus proves by His response that His heart is not divided but that He is dependent on God and obedient to His Word (v. 4).” (EBC, “Luke,” Walter L. Liefeld, 8:864)

Is God able to meet me during my greatest needs? What is your greatest need? What do you really need? I think we have become so consumed by the temporal that we fail to realize that this life is only a moment in time. We are not living for this life. We do not need to live, but we do need Him.

What do I need that I do not already have in Him? This is what provides contentment in my want. It causes me to see that the temporal although necessary for this life is not adequate for the next.

If all we have is this life, then we are already dead. Regardless as to what your present “need” is, your greatest need is to know Him and to see that He is enough in this life and in the life to come. Is this answer a cop-out? I recognize that James exhorts us to feed those who hunger as opposed to saying to them, “be fed,” but what if we cannot meet their physical needs, are we finished? Is that it?

Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give to you: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk” (Acts 3:6). Peter assures us that silver and gold cannot redeem the soul of man (1 Pet. 1:18). This is still our message today. Jesus said, “I have meat to eat that you know not of” (John 4:32). The Word and work of God sustains us in the midst of our temptations.

Today I am trusting God with my financial needs, but what about when I am faced with financial ruin? Is He still in control? Trusting God does not negate your responsibility to plan and prepare, but you can never allow yourself to think that you are in the driver seat.

## 2. The platform of power (vv. 5-8)

The devil shows our Lord all the kingdoms of the world.

“All these are vividly displayed to Jesus in *just one* very significant moment! All this wealth is by Satan offered to Christ, all for the price of just one genuflection! If Jesus will but *worship* the devil, he can have it all.” (William Hendriksen, The Gospel of Luke, NTC, 235, 236)

“Far more reasonable is the thought that throughout Satan was tempting Jesus by trying to show him how he could reach the crown without suffering the cross.” (William Hendriksen, The Gospel of Luke, NTC, 241)

Satan’s appeal was to circumvent the cross. Scripture teaches that the Messiah should first suffer and only then “enter his glory” (24:26). His attempt was to try and prevent Christ’s voluntary death for our sins. The implication of this second temptation was that by accepting an immediate kingdom the cross would be avoided.

If what God wants me to have is inevitable, then why not help Him accomplish His purposes? Only God is worthy to be worshipped. What does this mean in real life time? Consider how much time you spend on things other than God? Consider how much money you spend on things other than God? Consider your planning and effort and energy, where is God in all of it? God is the only One worthy of your life strength.

Modern Christianity tends to bend around the world, the flesh, and the devil, but Christian/Christ stands in opposition to those things that seek to rob Him of His glory.

### 3. The platform of presumption (vv. 9-12)

“I’ll just trust God and do nothing.” Do not presume to know what God wants. If you jump off the cliff chances are you will fall.

Jesus was tempted in every point just as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). No one else in time has ever been able to say this. You and I have no idea as to the true nature of our Lord’s temptation. Yet His temptation far exceeds any force that comes into play in our temptations.

These temptations were unique to His person. “It is no temptation to us to turn stones into bread or leap from a Temple pinnacle, for the simple reason that it is impossible for us to do such things. These are temptations which could have come only to a man whose powers were unique.” (Barclay, Luke, 43).

If a parallel exists between Israel as God’s son and our Lord Jesus Christ, then in each one of these temptations our Lord succeeds where the nation of Israel failed. (EBC, “Luke,” Walter L. Liefeld, 8:862)

- Israel grumbled against God’s provision (Deut. 8:2, 3) Jesus accepts God’s provision.
- Israel wanted a kingdom without a cross whereas Jesus refused the kingdom apart from the cross.
- Israel continually put God to the test whereas Jesus completely trusted His heavenly Father.

All temptation is a test to see whether we believe Jesus is enough? When we chose sin we are saying that something is lacking in what God provided. When we see sin for what it is, an attack against God’s ability to provide what He has promised, then it will begin to lose its stronghold on us.

## ILLUSTRATION:

John Piper says that sin (lust for example) “gets its power by persuading me to believe that I will be more happy if I follow it. The power of all temptation is the prospect that it will make me happier.” Quoted in Putting Your Past Behind You, E. Lutzer, Here’s Life, 1990, p. 54.

The purpose of the fight is to enjoy all that He is, has done, and I now am in Him. The purpose of the fight is not to settle for second best when Christ is enough.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer offers this insightful thought.

“At this moment God is quite unreal to us, he loses all reality, and only desire for the creature is real; the only reality is the devil. Satan does not here fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God ... The lust thus aroused envelops the mind and will of man in deepest darkness. The powers of clear discrimination and of decision are taken from us.” (Creation and Fall, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

This leads us to our second idea.

- B. The protection against temptation (How do I apply this idea to my life?)

I would like to offer five preventive steps against yielding to temptation.

## ILLUSTRATION:

Earlier I made reference to my experiences with poison ivy. Before I caught poison ivy I would work around it in short sleeves and short pants. Now I put on long sleeves and long pants with gloves and covered feet. I do whatever is necessary to make sure I do not get tagged. Just as with poison ivy, so also with temptation and sin. We should do everything necessary to protect ourselves from getting tagged by sin.

We fight against temptation by having confidence in the written Word of God as the means through which He ministers to His people sustaining grace.

Three times the devil referenced the Scripture (vv. 3, 7, 9-11) to undermine the purpose of God. If three stands as the number of witness, then there is an intentional stand-off between the devil and the Son of God.

Although the devil does not quote Scripture directly, his appeals are couched in biblical ideas. In each of the occurrences Jesus responds by quoting Scripture: (v4) Deuteronomy 8:3, (v. 8) Deuteronomy 6:13, and (v. 12) Psalm 91:11.

Let me suggest five actions that we can take to protect ourselves from temptation's attraction.

1. Don't give place to the devil (Eph. 4:27 "Neither give place to the devil").

#### ILLUSTRATION:

It has been said, "If you give an inch they will take a mile." This is no less true as it relates to temptation.

Many fall prey to the devil's devices because they make provision for him. The same idea is express in Romans 13:14. Do not make provision for him and you stand a better chance of not falling into his traps.

2. Do put on God's armor (Eph. 6:11)

Ephesians 6:11 "Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."

Unfortunately we are not active participants in the battle against evil. Putting on God's armor is to be a daily activity. Unless we put it on we are not actively resisting him. The armor is secured when we keep our eyes on the author and finisher of our faith.

3. Do be on the alert (1 Pet. 5:8)

1 Pet. 5:8 "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:"

While in the midst of the battle many have fallen asleep. Do not be caught off guard. Stay focused.

4. Do resist him (James 4:7, 1 Pet. 5:8, 9)

James 4:7 "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

1 Pet. 5:8 "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:"

1 Pet. 5:9 "Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."

The devil, the world, and the flesh are our opponents and we are to resist them at every turn. You can be sure of this: they are fighting and resisting us at every turn.

## 5. Do practice positional truth (1 John 2:13, 14)

1 John 2:13 “I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.”

1 John 2:14 “I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.”

Victory has already been secured and temptation’s end is already sure. It is simply up to the believer to claim the victory that is his in Christ Jesus the Lord. You are always working from victory, not for victory.

### II. The wilderness is a place of continuation (v. 13b [until an opportune time])

It is the devil’s desire to put you to the test. His mission is to destroy you and your testimony for the Lord. Notice how this idea is brought out in Luke 22:31.

“And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.”

Our Lord said Satan desired to “sift” Peter. He used an agricultural term. The idea is that of sifting wheat or grain. It is our adversary’s desire to bang us around. Revelation 12:10 adds to the thought by noting that he habitually accuses us as a prosecuting attorney before our heavenly Father. John uses a tense and mood that speak of his activity as being relentless. The devil is determined to bring you down. He is a formidable opponent. He will not give up.

Rev. 12:10 “And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.”

When our Lord was attacked by the devil in the wilderness it says that after Satan’s immediate defeat he left our Lord “for a season.” The phrase “for a season” speaks of a measure of time. Our Lord’s battle with the devil was not final. The devil left, but would return when the opportunity afforded itself to strike again.

We often speak of His temptation in the wilderness as if it was all that He faced. The temptation of Christ did not end in the wilderness; this was only the beginning. Remember the garden and the cross?

We have a mistaken notion that in our pursuit of Christ temptation will lose its grip. It is when you have strung together several days, weeks, months, of tangible victory that you will begin conceding ground in your fight against sin.

APPLICATION: (Where do we go from here?)

Application for . . . there is an area of temptation and the response

<u>Area</u>	<u>Temptation</u>	<u>Response</u>
• A man	lust	find satisfaction in Christ
• A woman	insecurity	find security in Christ
• Married	frustration	be content in what you have in Christ
• Single	entertainment	seek your joy/pleasure in Christ
• Youth	future goals	make God your goal
• Senior	Loneliness	God will never leave you or forsake you

#### How to have seven Sundays

Monday	Be content with what you have
Tuesday	Be content with where you are
Wednesday	Be content with who you are
Thursday	Keep putting on the cross work
Friday	Stay focused on who Christ is
Saturday	Flee to Christ and from temptation