

Sermon Notes: March 9, 2025

Focus: Desert Temptations and Lent

[Lectionary Readings](#)

Jesus' 40-Day Fast

In Luke 4, Jesus completes 40 days of fasting. He finishes hungry and faithful. He accomplishes what he set out to do: prepare for ministry, resist the devil, and trust the Holy Spirit's provision for what comes next. Luke highlights the Holy Spirit more than any other Gospel. Jesus is not merely wandering—he is led into the wilderness by the Spirit. This is a Spirit-driven confrontation with evil.

Echoes of Israel's Past

40 days trials are not just for Jesus. The number 40 in biblical history represents testing and transformation of individuals and groups:

- Israel's 40 years in the wilderness.
- Moses' 40 days on Mount Sinai.
- Elijah's 40-day journey to Horeb.

What I learned

It never occurred to me that Jesus was reenacting/redeeming the story of his people in this wilderness fast. He is the “new Israel” who is faithful and trusting where “Israel the people” had flopped around for far too long in their desert trails and trials. In each of the three temptations below, I hope you can see the personal / national connection that Jesus is making.

The Three Temptations (Luke 4:3-12)

In each temptation, Jesus faces both a personal challenge *and* he carries a national burden. As refugees from Egypt, they struggled with hunger, power, and idolatry in the wilderness—Jesus now relives and redeems those trials. By quoting Deuteronomy, he is connecting himself to a faithful Israel that God desires.

1st Temptation: Bread

"If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread."

In Exodus, the people longed for leeks, onions, and savory meats, forgetting their harsh reality of enslavement. The good memories of momma's home cooking have a way of taking center stage when you are hungry. They became forgetful of the pain of forced labor that they left behind in Egypt.

I imagine Jesus, starving in the wilderness, also remembering his favorite meals that his mom made. Hunger could take him off course, tempting him to satisfy himself now. But instead, he anchors in Deuteronomy, “One does not live by bread alone.”

Some scholars see this as a temptation to misuse divine power. Jesus could prove himself with a miracle—but he refuses to perform for a hostile audience of one. I

think it's even simpler. Jesus thinks "I know who I am. I know who truly feeds me. I know this hunger will end."

2nd Temptation: The World

"I will give you all the kingdoms of the world... if you worship me."

The devil claims he has the authority to give power—which is a nuanced truth. Evil has influence, as history shows, and you only need to look around. Jesus ultimately embraces God's reality where true authority only belongs to God. Jesus, like Israel before him, must decide whom to trust.

In contrast to Matthew, Luke places this temptation second, emphasizing that the devil's power is real, but not eternal. Jesus refuses to take shortcuts to authority. He answers to this temptation: "Worship the Lord your God and serve only him." (also, Deuteronomy)

Jesus redefines messianic power: not through force or empire, but through trust and legacy. This reminds me of the sci fi series *Dune*—a story where absolute power becomes a curse. Paul Atreides, once victorious over imperial oppression (early books), ultimately blinds himself to escape the weight of his unchallenged, universal rule. Jesus refuses that path of sucking up all the power. Instead, he trusts the Spirit's lead.

3rd Temptation: The Temple

"Throw yourself down from here... for it is written: 'He will command his angels to protect you.'"

The Temple was the heart of Jewish faith. The devil wants Jesus to prove himself with spectacle—to force God's hand. Satan even quotes Psalm 91, twisting scripture into a view where angels can't stand to let poor, fragile Jesus get hurt. He is not fragile and responds, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." *more Deuteronomy.*

They did not have the Temple in Exodus, but the people had all sorts of chances to trust God or not. In the Exodus story, Israel tested God at Massah. They demanded proof of God's providence by insisting that God provide a spring of water for their thirst. It was not their best moment. Jesus, however, refuses to manipulate God. His mission is not about performing miracles for applause or on demand—his purpose is to let God reveal a plan of love at the right time.

The end. Sort of.. "When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time." Luke foreshadows future battles.

Why This Passage Matters for Lent

This passage appears on the first Sunday of Lent because:

- Temptation is part of life.
- True freedom comes from relying on God, not ourselves.
- In our fasting, prayer, and scripture study, we walk alongside Jesus.

You are in good company with Jesus this Lent when you fast, pray, and read scripture.

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