

02-17-13 – Ashes to Fire – Year C

Luke 4:1-13 - A Wilderness Survival Guide

Ashes to Fire – setup.

Lent – fasting? Giving up only? What about adding to?

What do you think of when you think of fasting? Is it drudgery? Is it something to weaken you or build you up?

I hope our look at today's passage will help you to see that the fasting we partake in during the Lenten season is not meant to weaken us but to give us strength, and we will see this in the life of Jesus in our text.

I love the gospel of Luke for several reasons, but one of them is that he brings out the humanness of Jesus. All four gospels talk about the same Jesus, yet in different ways with different emphases. Matthew portrays the kingliness of Jesus; Mark brings out His servanthood, and John emphasizes Jesus' deity. However, Luke depicts the humanity of Jesus and refers to Him as Son of Man (Jesus favorite title).

Matthew and Luke both give us a lineage, and yet they are different for good reason. Matthew traces Jesus back to King David, since his emphasis is on Jesus' kingliness. Luke, however, traces Jesus all the way back to Adam – the first man – the son of God. Since God created him from nothing, he is called the son of God, though imperfect, as we have found. Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man – a title that depicts his humanity while keeping a connection with Almighty God.

This is particularly relevant to our text for today.

READ: Luke 4:1-13 (NIV)

Let's look at the story line. Jesus was just baptized in the Jordan River. At that time, God Almighty spoke from Heaven declaring Jesus as His Son and with Him He was very pleased – meaning Jesus was all God expected – perfect – sinless – ready. God confirmed in Him the relationship, the calling, the dependence; it was God and Jesus all the way as a team, no, as a Father/Son effort.

The first son of God, Adam, failed the test, as has all of humanity after him, but Jesus passed with flying colors as an example for us. He is the true and only Son of God. Yet, He didn't accomplish this on His own or by misusing supernatural powers. He accomplished this by depending fully on God and His relationship with Him.

In the beginning there was a garden, and God created two humans, Adam and Eve, and placed them in that Garden. God gave them everything except one tree, and with this exception He also gave them the ability to choose. They could choose to believe that God was holding back something good and eat from that tree anyway, OR they could

choose to abstain and believe God wouldn't hold back anything that they needed. They gave in to the temptation and ate from that tree, and there began a long tradition of God's children being tempted into looking outside of Him for what was good.

Jesus was perfection incarnate. He had to be in order to accomplish what He did for us. We will look at this passage and see Jesus for who He is and what He can do for each of us even today. Have you ever been tempted? Duhh – We are all tempted, all the time, continuously – but – how do you fair under temptation?

Ray Stedman tells a story of King Canute, the Danish king of England in the eleventh century. A court of flattering "yes men" surrounded him. They continuously said, "You are great; you are invincible; you are the most powerful king who ever lived; there is nothing you do not know; you are perfection incarnate."

A humble and realistic man, King Canute soon tired of all this empty praise. So, he commanded his throne be removed from the high place in the palace and brought to the seashore and set at the water's edge. He took his seat on his throne. His subjects gathered and wondered what he was up to.

As the tide rose and the waves crashed, he began to order the sea with his arms stretched open... "Waves, be still! Tide, be stopped!" Nothing changed and the tide rose and the waves moved upon him. He continued his command of the sea and wind, but soon he was overtaken and knocked off his throne and washed up onto the sand.

His "yes men" who claimed he was perfection incarnate were perplexed. The king got up wringing wet, and he ordered his throne be returned to the palace. Once there, the king brought them all to a statue of Jesus on the Cross. "Do you all see this man? He did what I cannot do! He stilled the waves; He commanded the sea! He is perfection incarnate. I am just a man."

Then he removed his crown and placed it on the head of the statue of Jesus. The crown remained there until the king's death.

The Gospel of Luke is the gospel of the man who was perfection incarnate, the only perfect human being. (Adventuring Through the Bible, Ray Stedman, p. 515,516)

The perfection of Jesus' humanity can be easily understood by today's passage from Luke 4. Here we see the same Jesus who was just praised by His Father, now led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. This in itself is a strange concept to grasp. God just acknowledged that Jesus is His Son in whom He is pleased. What else did He have to prove? What's the point?

Jesus proved he was perfect in this wilderness temptation experience. God announced in advance, "this is my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." In order for Jesus to be pleasing to God/Father, he must have been perfect, sinless.

Hebrews tells us a lot about Jesus' humanity in relation to his earthly mission for God on our behalf.

Heb. 2:17 – He “had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.”

The rest of humanity cannot live up to the challenge. This is also proven over centuries in the Bible. Adam and Eve failed the test; their offspring for centuries failed the tests. The Israelites failed miserably in their temptation experience in the wilderness. In a sense, Jesus is successfully passing the test/temptation in His wilderness experience that the Israelites failed during their wilderness experience.

The First Temptation. Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit and empty of food as he fasted 40 days being tempted. We are usually the opposite, full of food and empty of the Holy Spirit. He was led by the Spirit into this situation. Moses fasted 40 days; Jesus was tempted 40 days; the Israelites were in the wilderness 40 years. There are many similarities.

The Devil tempts Jesus, while hungry, to use His powers to satisfy his own need – to eat. Jesus never used his powers for his own gain. The Devil says, **“If you are the Son of God...”** It was just confirmed by God Himself that Jesus IS His Son. Jesus is being tempted to doubt his relationship with God, because he is in need. The devil asks Jesus to prove his deity by working a miracle for personal relief – bread/food.

Here’s the connection: **Deut. 8:2-3 - Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. 3 He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.**

The Israelites failed the test. They grumbled and complained. They turned against Moses and didn’t trust God to provide for their needs. God worked a miracle to provide bread for them in the wilderness. The devil is posing the same thing to Jesus, but Jesus uses the lesson God was trying to teach the Israelites to overcome the temptation and pass the test for us to see that God is trustworthy and true.

He quotes part of Deut. 8:3 – “Man does not live by bread alone.” He resists.

The Second Temptation: Luke and Matthew have the second and third temptations reversed. Luke has the Devil take Jesus up to a high place and shows Him all the kingdoms of the world. He offers Jesus all authority and splendor - “kingship” of the world IF He would just worship the devil. Since Matthew’s emphasis is on Jesus’ Kingliness, he ends the temptation experience with this test. Luke emphasizes Jesus’ humanness, so he ends with a more personal test.

Again, the Israelites failed this test constantly in their wilderness experience. Let's look at Deut. 6:12-14 – He tells them of all He will provide for them and then says,

be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

13 Fear the Lord your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name.

14 Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you;

The Israelites failed miserably on this command and test. They ran after other gods and were constantly being chastised by God. We too, fail this test on a regular basis. We follow the other gods of the people around us and forget the Lord our God.

Jesus again passes this test and reminds the Devil of what God originally told His people in the wilderness...

Luke 4:8 – “It is written, Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.”

As a side note, Jesus is and will be King of the world and have all authority and splendor anyway by being obedient to God in completing the mission He was sent to do. Luke tells us the essential mission of Jesus and theme of his gospel in

Luke 19:10 – “The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

He accomplished this mission by his sacrificial death on the cross once and for all humanity. The Devil's authority and rulership will be taken away. Jesus would have lost it all if He failed this test. The devil was offering Jesus the military messiahship the Israelites were expecting and all that comes with being that kind of conquering king. This was not God's will for Jesus at this time.

Fame, riches, possessions, notoriety, etc too can tempt us. It can lure us away from the Lord and worshiping him only and first.

The Third Temptation: Luke tells us that the devil led Jesus up to the highest point of the Jerusalem Temple and tempted him in this way...

“If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here. For it is written: (quoting from Ps. 91:11-12)

“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.”

Here the temptation is for Jesus to deliberately challenge God to save His physical life by doing something really stupid. The Devil quotes Scripture out of context here, manipulating the Word to tempt Jesus. We can't deliberately step into harms way and expect God to rescue us. Ps. 91:10 says if harm “befalls” us he will protect.

There were some who drank poison and let snakes bite them because Mark's gospel says Jesus' followers would be protected if they did this – Know what? They died!

Israel was waiting for their Messiah to appear on or in the Temple. Here was a sure way for Jesus to win the people over to believe He is Messiah. If He jumps to certain death, and angels from Heaven save Him, He is surely the Messiah and the people would have to believe this and accept him. How tempting, and without having to die a horrifying death on the cross to accomplish the same results. Wow.

This temptation challenges Jesus' humanity as well, since he would have to deliberately risk his life to pull this off. In reality it is foolishly testing God to own up to His Word concerning Jesus – as if there would be any doubt. Jesus again answers the devil with the words God spoke to the Israelites in the wilderness.

Deut. 8:16 - Do not test the Lord your God...

Jesus would face this same temptation at other strategic points in His life and ministry. He faced at Gethsemane, but yielded to God. He ultimately faced it on the cross with the crowd jeering, "If you are the Son of God, come down from that cross." Thank God Jesus was in full submission to the Father's will – for our sake.

Jesus' answer to this temptation is simple – don't test the Lord. Period! He was not about to and either should we. God will always do what He has promised He will do, whether we see it in our time frame or feel anything or not. God is faithful. If we really trust Him and know what He has promised in His Word, we can overcome the temptation to put Him to the test in the tough times.

We might think that because Jesus was fasting and hungry, he was weakened. However, the opposite is true – He was at his peak strength – ready for the temptations.

*"This teaches us the importance of spiritual disciplines. Prayer, fasting, solitude, and meditation on Scripture – God used all these to pour strength into his Son so he would be ready for spiritual conflict. The temptations would continue throughout his life. But those weeks in the wilderness taught Jesus the Source of his strength. V. 14 – **"Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, returned to Galilee."***

The testing and the temptation is never over. It wasn't for Jesus, and it won't be for us either.

v. 13 – "When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left Him until an opportune time." Or as the Message says it... **"That completed the testing. The Devil retreated temporarily, lying in wait for another opportunity."**

If you are not being tempted right now, that's great, but don't get too confident in yourself. It's only a matter of time – when you least expect it maybe. How will you hold up under your next temptation? Can we build up our spiritual lives this Lent by developing some spiritual disciplines that will strengthen us for our next conflict?

Paste illustration – Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Temptation

In a “Frank and Ernest” cartoon, the two characters are standing before a priest and Frank asks, “How come opportunity knocks once, but temptation beats at my door every day?”

Few would argue that the percentage of occasions when we face life’s temptations is terribly high – dare I say 98 percent? Or how about 100 percent? And I have yet to meet anyone who denies ever having been tempted. (Chuck Swindoll)

Thank God for Jesus – our High Priest...

Heb. 4:15 - *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.*

Jesus – perfection incarnate – is trustworthy and available to help each of us in our times of temptation. Do you believe this? Will you trust Him?