

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness,<sup>2</sup> where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished.<sup>3</sup> The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.”<sup>4</sup> Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”<sup>5</sup> Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.<sup>6</sup> And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please.<sup>7</sup> If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.”<sup>8</sup> Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”<sup>9</sup> Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here,<sup>10</sup> for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’<sup>11</sup> and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”<sup>12</sup> Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”<sup>13</sup> When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

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If you’ve ever taken an introduction to psychology class, you likely have heard of “The Marshmallow Test.” If you don’t know what I’m talking about, videos of the Marshmallow Test can be easily found online. The test has been performed for decades by psychologists. Basically, they sit a child in a room at a table. On the table is a plate with one marshmallow on it. The psychologist tells the child that they can eat it now and enjoy it, or they can wait until the psychologist returns to the room in 15 minutes. If in 15 minutes they haven’t eaten the marshmallow yet, they will be given a second marshmallow to eat. Most kids opt for receiving two marshmallows. A video camera captures the scene as the adult leaves and the kid just waits there. Usually within a few minutes they’re fidgeting and playing with the marshmallow. Eventually they might pick it up, or “accidentally” knock it off the table. They will often lick it, or perhaps nibble a little bit on it. As you can imagine,

these tests often end with mutilated marshmallows. Many times, the marshmallow is fully gone. The test isn't setting up a pass/fail situation, though. It is often performed on the same kids over the course of months or years as a way to gain insight into how human impulse control develops and how we come to understand delayed gratification.

In the lesson today from Luke's gospel, we should take note of what is told right before the temptation story. Just as it is told in Matthew and Mark, the event immediately before the wilderness temptation was Jesus' baptism. However, Luke calls a time-out between these two events. It is an odd placement, but right here – between baptism and temptation – Luke gives us the genealogy of Jesus. We never read it in worship, and most of us just skim the whole thing at best. It names a male, then says he is the son of another male, and it continues. "So-and-so, son of so-and-so, son of so-and-so." If you read it, it drags on for a long while, but the genealogy finishes with these words: "son of Adam, son of God."

Luke likely placed the genealogy in this spot because he wants us to connect the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness with the story of Adam and Eve's temptation in the garden. Most notable is how these two stories contrast. In the garden, Adam and Eve have all their needs met. There is an abundance of food. They walk freely and peacefully among the plants and animals. In the wilderness, however, Jesus has no food to eat. Instead of abundant life all around, the scene is desolate. Jesus is more at risk with the wild beasts than traipsing among them peacefully. Given the circumstances, Adam and Eve have the upper hand. All their needs are met – food, safety, shelter – so they are the most likely to resist temptation, right? Right?

The story of the garden has been called the first coming-of-age story, because all people can relate to the message of temptation and learning about the consequences of actions. So let's put ourselves in the comparison. We might have all our basic needs met, but do you and I ever fall to the temptation of desiring more? When people have the wealth to secure a fully stable life, when they have no concern for food, safety, and security, are they less tempted by the prospect of more stuff and more accolades? (Does anyone remember last summer's billionaire race for space?) Throughout history are examples of humans who have all that they need in life, but they desire to have more.

Then there is Jesus, hungry and weak in a desolate place. It is interesting that in the garden, the snake uses God's own words to tempt the couple. In the desert, the devil also uses God's own words to tempt Jesus. So, right here is an excellent cautionary tale: just because someone talks about God and that person even quotes scripture, that doesn't mean the person has your best interests at heart. Yes, I know there is irony that I'm wearing a collar and saying that. Anyway, getting back to Jesus – the devil uses God's own words to tempt Jesus. Pastor Chelsey Harmon comments perfectly on this situation. "The difference between how humanity and Jesus Christ respond when facing temptation... is whether or not they know the meaning of those words and trust the person behind them."

The sad thing is, in both the garden and the wilderness, the temptation is to believe that God's promises aren't enough, and something else needs to be done to get more out of those promises. In the story of Adam and Eve, they have everything. They even bear the image of God. Yet, maybe if they eat the fruit they will have more! Using the same playbook, the devil tempts Jesus to think there could be more. The truth is, however, Jesus already has the gift to work miracles. He doesn't need to prove it to the devil. The truth is, Jesus already has authority in heaven, he doesn't need to abuse that authority here on earth. The truth is, Jesus is already loved by the heavenly Father, so Jesus doesn't need to put himself into a situation to force the Father to prove that love. Basically, the devil is trying to convince Jesus that what God has already provided and promised to Jesus is not enough, and Jesus should take some shortcuts to obtain more of it. In my assessment, the reason Luke connects these two stories is to show how Jesus, unlike us, doesn't fall to temptation. But I think Luke's point is to also highlight that the promises that God has given us is sufficient, even if we are prone to desire something more.

I doubt any of us will find ourselves in scenarios like these narratives. We are not going to find ourselves in a garden just like Adam and Eve, and we aren't going to find ourselves in a wilderness just like Jesus. However, we still can gain a lot from pondering these stories in our daily lives, especially during this season of Lent. You are a beloved child of God. Sometimes hearing that just doesn't feel like enough. I wish there was a way I could magically make all of us fully embrace that claim. A display that catches us off guard, proving God's love for us is real, like if one object –

say, a marshmallow – were turned into two. If it is something like that you are waiting for, you will need a lot more patience than even the kids in the Marshmallow Test.

Instead of magic – instead of grand displays – God uses common elements to remind us that, yes indeed, we are beloved children: common elements, like some bread and some wine. It is the simplest of meals, actually, when you think about it. Yet it is the simplicity that makes it so compelling. God uses a common meal to remind of her presence. All are welcomed to this meal. All can come to the table and hear the words, “Given for you. Shed for you.” The whole thing is a reminder that we are beloved children of God.

During this season of Lent, hear the words that you are a beloved child of God. Taste and drink that word. This season is a time set aside for us to walk more closely to God. There is an open invitation to do that. Don’t be tempted by a belief that you first need to get certain aspects of your life in order, or that you need to do prescribed actions in order to begin walking more closely with God during Lent. You are already a beloved child of God. Hear those words; take them in. Allow this season to be a time to go deeper with God into that claim. Amen.