

**Jesus Temped in the Desert**  
**Luke 4:1-13**

Brothers and sisters, if we are asked “how well do we know someone?” what do you think we need to know about that someone in order to say we know them well?

We should probably know where they came from; where they were born and grew up and who their family and friends were...

We would probably want to be able to describe some of the significant events in their life, where they went to school, where they worked...

We definitely would want to be able to identify the sort of things they like and enjoy and what their hopes and dreams are...

And you would probably agree with me, that you really don't know someone very well- unless you know their struggles and temptations... right?

And I think you would also agree that when we are getting to know someone and we discover that their struggles and temptations are the same as our struggles and temptations... we suddenly have a deeper sense of sympathy with them.

We can relate to them, we know they can relate to us – we have this shared experience that connects us and bonds us together in a unique way that other people just can't quite understand.

Do you know what I'm talking about?

And as we are looking to get to know Jesus – it is common to read Luke 4 as an attempt to help us connect and bond with Jesus and feel closer to Him because He too knows what it is like to struggle with temptation – just like we all do.

The reasoning is that if we are trying to help people get to know Jesus and discover who He really is... if we can get people to relate to Him and connect like this... then maybe

they will be willing to believe in Him and trust in Him – and love Him... right?

So is Luke telling us about Jesus being tempted in the desert in order to make the Son of God seem a bit more down to earth so we feel like we are better able to relate to him – in the same way that campaign managers have to make a political candidate appear more relatable to the average voter.

Well no... that is not what is going on and in fact that presenting Jesus in this way can backfire on us...

Because while we can see that Jesus was indeed tempted, as we are, we also can see that He handle these temptations rather easily and shuts down the devil by simply quoting scripture – end of story.

Now I don't know about you but the last time I was tempted that's not exactly how things turned out for me.

So I would be tempted to conclude that standing up to temptation and being obedient to God is easy for Jesus –

because He's the Son of God - but I am just a human – prone to error and mistakes, and sinfully inclined to give into to temptation when it comes my way...

So Jesus is actually way beyond me, I can't relate to his ability to handle temptation at all.

But brothers and sisters, this is another classic example of what happens when we try to make Jesus relevant instead of understanding that He is a revelation.

As we heard in last week's scripture reading from Luke 2:32, Jesus was born to be *"a light for revelation to the Gentiles..."*

So friends, if we really want to get to know Jesus as we go through the gospel of Luke we must consciously make an effort not fall back on our modern inclination to make Jesus relevant - but instead intentionally ask the question *"what does Jesus reveal to us?"*

So what is Jesus revealing to us in being tempted in the desert?

Well, you may have noticed that the Devil's efforts to tempt Jesus are all connected to Jesus' identity as "the Son of God."

Look at the first and last temptations in vs. 3 and 9, where Satan specifically says "*If you are the Son of God...*" and in the second temptation in vs. 6 where Satan indirectly refers to it in boasting that all the kingdoms of the world have "*been given to him [Satan], .*" I'll say more on how that is a reference to the Son of God in just a minute.

So – Satan is focused on Jesus' identity as the Son of God, but not because Jesus or Satan is questioning it or even trying to goad Him into proving it, when Satan says to Jesus "*If you are...*" He means "*since you are...*"

But we translate it to the English with "*if you are...*" because it conveys the discrepancy that Jesus is experiencing between his identity as the Son of God and his experience in the desert.

You see the Holy Spirit has lead Jesus to be tempted by Satan, for a period of forty days where Jesus hasn't eaten anything, so he is hungry and thus Satan tempts Jesus suggesting that He command the stones to become bread.

Now we typically think that this temptation for Jesus to misuse his divine power to perform a selfish miracle, but that's because we misunderstand the term "*Son of God.*"

We tend to read this term as it is used in the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed where we confess to believe *in the one Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, begotten of the Father [the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God,] Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father...* and this is true...

But this is not how what the scriptures mean when the term "Son of God" is referred to; for instance if we look at Exodus 4:22-23 God tells Moses "*Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, 'Let my son go, so he may worship me.'*"

So here we see that being the “son of God” has to do with being chosen by God, and in the context of the nation of Israel being delivered from Egypt – being God’s son, firstborn son at that, means that Israel is heir to the covenant promises that God has made to Abraham.

Next we look at Psalm 2:7-8 which says *“I will proclaim the Lord’s decree: He said to me, “You are my son; today I have become your father. Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.”*

So in this case we see that being the “son of God” has to do with being chosen by God, to be the King over His chosen nation of Israel, and that the rule of Israel’s king will extend over the nations of the world.

And this Psalm is attributed to David, whom God chose as King and made an everlasting covenant with, and whose son Solomon experienced unprecedented influence over the surrounding nations during his reign.

Thus when Satan tells Jesus that all the kingdoms of the world are his; it is an indirect reference to Him being the Son of God.

So in the scriptures, this title “the Son of God” is really about being chosen for a specific task in relationship to God and if we had read Luke 3 before we read this story in chapter 4 we would see how Luke arranges his gospel to attach these scriptural meanings of “the Son of God” to Jesus.

It starts with Luke’s account of the baptism of Jesus in Luke 3:21-22: *“When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”*

So John the Baptist was calling the nation of Israel to repentance and as ALL the people were baptized for repentance, Luke included Jesus in this repentance of the people as well, so that it become evident that they are included in Him.

Luke wants us to understand He considers Jesus to be Israel. Jesus now represents the people and the nation from whom He was born in their special covenant connection and relationship with God.

So Jesus repents of their sin and then as Jesus is praying to God, the heavens open and the Holy Spirit is poured out on Jesus... and God declares – you are my Son, you are Israel.

As God's Son, Israel, Jesus is now the heir to all of the Covenant promises given to Israel under the Law of Moses, and to their ancestor Abraham...

But it's not enough that God simply says Jesus is now Israel – there needs to be an actual legal and physical connection between Jesus and those whom he is to represent.

So Luke traces this out for us starting in vs. 3:23 saying that when Jesus began his ministry "*He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph...*"

Now we all know this is mistaken – but even if this was the case, Luke's genealogy provides ancestral evidence that demonstrates that Jesus, through Joseph, is related to King David... and thus rightly called "the son of God"

And going further back, Luke can trace his lineage to the tribe of Judah – a prominent representative tribe in nation Israel, and to Jacob – who was renamed Israel, and Isaac and Abraham... the original recipients of the covenant of Blessing so Jesus is rightly called "the Son of God" as Israel.

And going even further back, Luke traces Jesus' lineage to Noah... another covenant figure, and then back to Adam, who Luke says is the first and original "son of God" (3:38)

So – even if you mistakenly thought Jesus' father was Joseph in an attempt to deny Jesus' divinity – Luke can show you that in no way affects what it means that Jesus is the "Son of God" in terms of being King and Heir to all the covenant promises God has ever made, or even claiming God as His father.

Tracing all the way back to Adam also allows Luke to explain that Jesus and Adam are actually more alike than any of these other ancestors in between - since Adam was formed from the dust and was given life by the Holy Spirit and given a commission and a test... (*Don't eat from the tree!!*)

Jesus was also conceived by the Spirit, given a commission through being identified as the 'Son of God' at His Baptism and He now also faces a test...

So yes Jesus is the 'Son of God' – but not in the way we typically understand it as a marker of His divinity – rather this title is what identifies the specifics of what Jesus will do with His life and Ministry, and before He begins, God has Him tested – to prepare Him for what He will do.

So the temptations which test Jesus all link back to the commissions and purposes that are wrapped up in being the Son of God as Adam... as the King of Israel... and as the Nation of Israel.

Now the purpose and commission for the Nation of Israel can be found in Ex 19:5-6 where God says to them *“Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”*

Israel's purpose and commission was to be an example for the nations around them of what it was like to be in Covenant with, and know, the One True God and demonstrate the blessedness of living by His Law.

So - the last time the Son of God was in the desert for a period of testing for forty years... God had provided food, mana from heaven so that the nation of Israel would not go hungry.

This time, during the period of testing for forty days there is no food provided – Jesus goes hungry.

So Satan's temptation tests Jesus' resolve to resist grumbling and complaining that God is not providing for His needs. He is God's chosen one – he is special, he is an heir to amazing Covenant promises of blessing not scarcity – even if he must

go through testing in the wilderness isn't that were He should expect to see God intervene and provide on His behalf?

So Satan says *"If you are the Son of God... command these stones to become bread!"*

But if Jesus does this... then He will repeat the mistake Moses made in striking the rock to provide water for Israel not giving God the credit. So God says to Moses afterwards *"Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them."* (Num 20:12)

If Jesus gives into this temptation He will also disqualify Himself as the Son of God as Moses and Israel had during their time of testing in the desert.

Next Satan tempts Jesus with regards to the Son of God being the King of Israel by showing Jesus a vision of all the kingdoms of the world, which by rights belonged to the Son of God as

King of Israel - as we saw in Psalm 2:8 and by Prophets like Isaiah, e.g. Is 14:2.

Satan claims it had all been given to him instead and that he could give it to anyone whom he wanted to... and he offers it to Jesus if Jesus will bow down and worship him.

But for the King of Israel to bow down and worship anyone other than Yahweh the Covenant God of Israel would be for the King to abdicate his purpose!

The King of Israel was to lead the nation in Covenant faithfulness to God, at the heart of which was to worship God alone and not be led astray into the worship of false gods and idols.

It is not by happy accident that King David was a poet and musician who wrote so many of the Psalms, or that his son King Solomon built the Temple.

So if Jesus, as the King of Israel, bows down to worship Satan to receive authority and power over the nations – then he will fall prey to the same temptation that overtook King Solomon; who was seduced into idolatry by foreign wives whom he had married to secure political influence with other nations.

This was the beginning of the downfall of the Kings of Israel – and if Jesus bowed to worship Satan in order to claim what was rightfully promised to Him, He would disqualify himself for the purpose he had been called as King of Israel – to lead people into the right worship of the one True God.

For the final part of the test Satan takes Jesus to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the temple and challenges Jesus throw himself off the temple to a certain death – quoting scripture, Psalm 91:11-12 to say that Jesus ought to be able to expect as the Son of God, a miraculous intervention that would prevent Jesus from coming to harm or death.

It makes you wonder; does Satan have premonition of what await Jesus in Jerusalem? Does Jesus know its citizens will

welcome Him as King on Palm Sunday but then crucify Him as a criminal on Good Friday?

I think so... it was foretold by the Prophets, otherwise this temptation doesn't make much sense – but set in the context of what Jesus goes to Jerusalem to accomplish it does.

If Jesus tests God in this situation to see if He will spare His anointed one from harm and death as promised in scripture, it would fundamentally undermine the only way by which the consequences of Adam and Eve eating from tree of good and evil could be overcome.

Adam, as the Son of God, had been tested by the prohibition to stay away from the tree. His obedience would bring life, and disobedience would bring death – not only for himself but for all humanity...

Christ as the second Son of God is going to be tested by the command to go to a tree that will bring Him death – in order that through His obedience we might have life.

How can something like that be part of God's good plan to restore creation? How can death bring about something good like life? How can a God who reveals Himself as Good, ask the Son of God to be given over to something evil like death?

But this is what Jesus must trust God with; He must not give into the temptation to test God to see if God really is good... if what God will ask Him to do will actually bring about good.

To do so would be to repeat the mistake of the first Son of God, and his wife, who succumbed to Satan's temptation and tested God to see if what was set off limits was truly indeed detrimental to them – and then brought down the covenant consequence upon themselves and humanity and all of creation since then.

To test God would fail to demonstrate a complete trust in God's Goodness – which is so Good that yes it could spare the Son of God from death, but do even more than that and bring Him out of death – which is the only way to reverse the curse and restore the creation and life.

So thanks be to God that Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, and quoting the Law of God from Deuteronomy resisted Satan, did not give into these temptations and passed the tests – and was not lead into the sin by which others had failed.

Now what this reveals to us about Jesus is that He truly is the one who is able to bring about God's plan of salvation – for Israel, for the Gentiles (us), and for the entire creation!

That is the revelation here friends... Jesus is the Son of God, the second Adam - a second chance for our humanity, He is the true Israel the rightful heir to ALL the covenant promises from God, and He is the King of Israel who will reign over all nations.

This is a Jesus who you can build your life around – who is worth shifting your life to put Him at the center!

And yes... once we see this revelation of who Jesus is, then it is perfectly appropriate to know that HE sympathizes with US as we struggle against the temptations that come from the

reality of knowing who Jesus really is – and the reality we may face in our day to day life.

Jesus who is Israel knows what it is like to be tempted to grumble and complain to a God who provides when things are scarce...

Jesus who is the King knows what it is like to be tempted to turn good things into god things to we receive the blessings we've been promised when we must wait for them...

Jesus who is the second Adam knows what it is like to be tempted to doubt that God is good and gives life, when we can see that following God leads to death in some way...

He knows what it is like to be tempted to test God, to wrestle with God and plead if there is any other way...

As it says in Hebrews 4:15-16: *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we*

*are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*

This mercy and grace is possible friends because Jesus knows that we not only struggle with temptation – we frequently fall into it, and so Jesus offers us himself.

His sinless nature always faithful to God, His resurrection body and life, His place at God’s right hand in Heaven – all this is ours because Jesus also poured out the Holy Spirit upon us, and the Holy Spirit immerses us – baptizes us – into Jesus, the Son of God and everything that means to help us overcome.

Friends believe this scripture from Gal 3 which says *“In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise!”* AMEN!