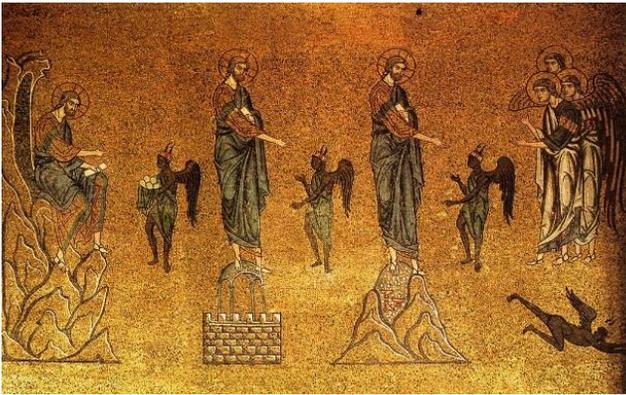


## Luke 4:1–13 Christ Conquers Temptation!

<sup>1</sup> Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, <sup>2</sup> where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’” <sup>5</sup> The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. <sup>6</sup> And he said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. <sup>7</sup> If you worship me, it will all be yours.” <sup>8</sup> Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’” <sup>9</sup> The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here. <sup>10</sup> For it is written: “ ‘He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; <sup>11</sup> they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” <sup>12</sup> Jesus answered, “It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” <sup>13</sup> When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.



The basilica of St. Mark in Venice, Italy includes a series of mosaics on the life of Christ. This mosaic represents the temptation of Christ in the wilderness. They are in the same order of Matthew’s account of the temptation.

With this picture in front of you, I think you would be able to tell the whole story. Jesus in the wilderness, on the highest point of the temple and on a high mountain. At the far left we see Jesus holding a scroll, representing the written word. In the next sections he’s holding that scroll close to his heart. The devil appears four times, the first time holding 5 stones out in front of him. The fourth time

he appears, his crown has been knocked from his head and he appears to be fleeing. It tells the story: Christ was tempted, but he conquered temptation.

Luke tells us all that in his Gospel. But there is something even these 13 verses don’t tell us. Yes, Christ conquered temptation, but what does this mean?

Let’s start with this thought: This is how it’s done! Christ conquers temptation by remembering God’s Word and promise, by remembering the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment, and by understanding that testing God’s promise to protect is not the same as trusting his promise. A simple pattern. A simple message. This is how you can do it. Jesus is the example for you to follow.

But there is a whole lot more going on here, something entirely different. Jesus himself gives us some clear clues. Three times we hear Jesus quoting from the book of Deuteronomy. He takes us from this story of 40 days and no miraculous food to 40 years in the wilderness with miraculous food. Even in his great hunger, Jesus trusts the Father to provide what he needs. By contrast the children of Israel grumbled and complained, even though the LORD was not hidden, but constantly giving evidence of his presence to protect them, the pillar of cloud by day, of fire by night.

But there is an even starker contrast to consider. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, were tempted by food. They were not in a harsh wilderness, but in a garden. Everything in the world was theirs to enjoy, including the fruit of every tree but one. In a world where God’s love for them was evident everywhere, the devil pointed to that tree as evidence that God was holding out on them. They believed Satan’s promise and they were thoroughly defeated.

That history matters. That defeat matters. Just as my history matters. If I wonder how they could be so foolish, so gullible, so clueless, so easily deceived, I can find the answer in my history. Temptation promises to

- Provide care, when God seems absent and distracted from what I need right now.
- Provide glory, status, attention, when God’s plan doesn’t seem to be headed in that direction at all.

- Provide protection, when God seems to be asking me to do things that are risky.

The voice of temptation loves to twist God's promises, especially the promise of forgiveness, using it to suggest that sins don't matter with such a forgiving God.

You know your personal history with temptation, the scars left by foolish and harmful desires. Jesus' perfect example can't bring hope. It can only condemn us. The history of our sin matters.

It might seem a stretch to connect this picture with Adam and Eve in the garden, but that would be to forget what the LORD said after Adam and Eve's defeat. Yes, he spoke to them and exposed their guilt. He had a message of comfort for them that didn't say, "Here's a few tips on how to do better." Try to imagine how stunned they would have been at the empty promise that defeated them.

The first time the Gospel appears, it is clearly not instructions for them to do anything, because at that point the Lord was speaking to their enemy. I will crush you. I will crush your head and I will put a right and righteous hatred of you in my rescued people.

The victory seen in that mosaic, that history, really matters. It's the victory of the Seed of the woman, our Substitute. He conquered every temptation for you. We call that his active obedience.

The story of the temptation foreshadows the story of the crucifixion in a subtle way. The temptation, the challenge to his identity, **If you are the Son of God**, comes through those who mocked Jesus. **If you are the Son of God, come down from that cross.** Adam and Eve fell to temptation when God's love was evident all around them. Jesus was victorious even when the Father hid his face from him.

In Jesus, our Substitute, we see the perfect answer to Satan's claim in the book of Job, that Job only served God because it paid. Jesus held firmly to his Father even when that love was completely hidden from sight.

Christ's goal was not merely to take away our punishment, but to form a people who are like him, who battle to face temptation as he did, with a constant remembering of his Father. We can do that especially by remembering the Savior he gave us and the promises he has given us.

What promises can you call to mind? Go to God's Word and find promises to remember...

- When you are tempted to question God's care?
- When you are tempted to question God's plan?
- When you are tempted to question God's protection?

There is one more challenge to prepare for, one that we might tend to overlook in the story of Christ's temptation. Satan used it twice: If you are the Son of God... He attacked Jesus twice with a challenge to his identity as the Son of God. He loves to use it especially with people who grieve over their sin and want to honor their Savior with their whole life.

It's the temptation that starts, "If you are a child of God, if you were really a child of God,

- Would you worry so much and pray so little?
- Would you show so little gratitude to your parents?
- Would you be so selfish and impatient?

How can you respond when you can't forget all the evidence that stands against you? What about the accusations that are true? How can you call yourself a child of God? That's the love the Father has lavished on us. He calls us his children, so that is what we are. Point to your baptism. Above all, point to Christ! You can confess every embarrassing defeat, because your Father sent his Son to carry all the guilt on the cross, having lived a perfect life as your Substitute. Christ conquered temptation for you. He lives and fights to conquer temptation in you.