

## Bible Study Guide: Week of 2-28-2022

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

### Luke 4:1-13

<sup>4</sup>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.

**<sup>4</sup>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.**

It is, perhaps, easy for us to become bogged down in the details of this story—both its ordinary and fantastical features. For instance, many readers wonder, “How could Jesus do without food for 40 days?” Some commentators spend far too much time attempting to explain how this was possible. Perhaps Jesus ate very little—reducing his caloric intake, but not eliminating food. Perhaps he took breaks during the fast to survive. Perhaps his status as not just truly human, but also truly divine helped him hold out without food for so long. Though we often get hung up on the “how,” much more important is the “why?” *Why* did Jesus fast for 40 days in the wilderness? His experience mirrors that of ancient Israel who wandered in the wilderness for 40 years after the Exodus from Egypt. The number 40 in the bible can, of course, be literal, but it also has important figurative and symbolic meaning. “40” can be a short-hand way of saying “a lot” of something; “40 days” can mean “many days” or a long period of time. Consider, for example, the flood story in which God made the waters above and below the earth break forth for 40 days and nights. Likewise, here, Jesus is in the wilderness for a long period of time and during that time he did not consume enough food to fill himself up. We also must acknowledge not just the overt comparisons between Jesus’ wilderness wandering and that of the Israelites in the Old Testament, but also the fact that Jesus is led by the Spirit. Here, he is not just “driven out by the Spirit” as in Mark’s account, but he is “led by the Spirit *in* the wilderness.” The Spirit is active and present with Jesus the whole time. The word “tempted” can also be translated as “tested.” “Tempted” conveys the connotation that Jesus was truly tantalized by the devil’s empty promises. We don’t get that sense from his responses below. Therefore, “tested by the devil” is probably a better translation, since this implies that Jesus endured a barrage of trials by the devil and emerged stronger and more resolved in his mission than when he began his time in the wilderness.

**<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.’”**

In his first test, the devil plays off of Jesus’ obvious hunger pangs and tries to entice Jesus to use his power to feed himself. Although this seems harmless on its face, notice the way the devil frames the test. First, he assumes Jesus is indeed the Son of God. He recognizes Jesus has the power to do what he is enticing him to do. The Greek construction of this phrase from the devil could also be translated as, “If you’re the Son of God (and we both know that you are), command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” In other words, the test is not intended to question whether Jesus is or isn’t the Son of God; rather, the test is to question *what it means to be* the Son of God.

The request of the devil calls to mind the story of Israel’s wilderness wanderings and God’s provision of manna in the wilderness. The Israelites, remember, had no food. So God sent them quail and manna—a strange sort of dewy bread that fell each night—to feed them. This was evidence of God’s faithfulness in providing. At issue for Jesus, therefore, is whether he would obey the devil and feed himself by his own power, or whether he would trust God to provide. He quotes a passage from Deuteronomy to the devil, clearly passing the test: “One does not live by bread alone.” The rest of that passage from Deuteronomy says that, rather, “one lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” In other words, Jesus says to the devil, “I’m hungry, but not hungry enough to stop trusting in God or to listen to you.”

**<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.’”**

In this second test, the devil makes a claim that is disturbing: all glory and authority and all the kingdoms of the world have been “given over” to the devil to give to anyone he pleases. On the one hand, this statement may be a lie concocted by the devil to trick Jesus into worshipping him. On the other hand, (and more disturbingly), the devil may be telling the truth up to a point. We don’t have to look far and wide in our world today to see places that seem to be firmly within the devil’s grasp and control. In either case, once again the challenge is not to Jesus’ identity as the son of God, rather at issue once again is: what does it mean to be the Son of God? Yes, it means to have power and authority, but we know from the end of the gospel this authority will be won by Jesus’ faithfulness to God’s will, not by obeying the devil. Jesus reminds the devil of this, again quoting Deuteronomy. This again points back to the Exodus story and the history of the people of Israel. They also faced the temptation of serving other gods. Jesus succeeds where the people once failed.

**<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.’”**

The third and final test of the devil follows a similar pattern to the first two. Once again, the devil calls into question the definition of Son of God. To be the Son of God, though, is not to serve oneself, but rather to be obedient to God’s will. The devil is quite crafty here, deciding to quote scripture to Jesus in his third test. He quotes from Psalm 91, trying to entice Jesus to “prove” God’s Word. Jesus, however, again quotes from Deuteronomy, arguing that one should not test God as the people had done in the Exodus. Here again, Jesus succeeds where the people once failed. It is important to note that it is not enough to merely quote Scripture. Jesus is triumphant over the devil here in part because he not only quotes scripture, but does so in a way that is consistent with the will of God. Obviously the Psalmist did not intend for people to throw themselves off of tall buildings to prove God’s power and protection is real. Rather, the Psalmist was writing to say that God is trustworthy even in turbulent and trying times. In this way, Jesus emerges triumphant because he remains true to the will of God rather than bending to follow his own will or the will of the devil.

**<sup>13</sup>When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.**

This is, perhaps, the most ominous verse in the New Testament. We will see demonic and diabolical figures throughout the gospel when Jesus casts out demons. Most clearly, however, we see the devil return in Luke 22:3 when Satan enters into Judas Iscariot prior to his handing Jesus over into the hands of the authorities. The ultimate test of Jesus will come on the cross. There, still at issue is the question: “What does it mean to be the Son of God?”

#### **Discussion/Reflection Questions:**

- 1. How does this story inform your own 40 day Lenten journey?**
- 2. Which of Satan’s test do you think would be most difficult to resist for you? Why?**
- 3. What tests or temptations do you face in your own life? How does Jesus’ example help or guide you through these times of trial?**