

Temptation 101: Quoting Deuteronomy

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"Temptation" by the Arché Foundation

Prayer of Illumination

O Lord, may the words of your mouth be our daily bread,
and may the leading of your Spirit become our way;
in Jesus' name.
Amen.

Background

Have you ever fasted before? I've fasted in my younger years—but it's been awhile, until recently. When we were doing mission work in Egypt fifteen or so years ago, Abby was six months old when we came and Luke was born in Alexandria. I joined in with my Muslim friends in the Ramadan fast. It was one of the most challenging experiences of my life. For forty days, each day, from sunrise to sunset, you eat no food or drink any water. You could eat and drink only at night. I was not only tired, but *hangry*.

But it was a spiritually enriching experience for me, and a way to connect with our Muslim friends.

But I got out of the habit of any kind of fasting. I'm a three-square-meals-a-day kind of guy. I mean I need energy to work, work out, and raise a family. Well, recently I've decided to start up again, and it's been both a challenging and spiritually nourishing experience.

I'm in a zoom book study with some friends from Washington State and Michigan. The group started nearly 25 years ago—we call it Jesus and Joe. This last week, we all fasted together at the same time. We prayed for each other and prayed for ourselves, and we zoomed about the experience this last Thursday. It was one of the most exhilarating discussions of my life.

Fasting has shown me how addicted to food I am. I eat mindlessly. Don't even think about it. I just do it. If I'm hungry (or sometimes if I'm not even hungry), I eat or snack. No questions asked. I not only obey my thirst, I obey my stomach.

What I like about fasting is that it gets you out of your brain and into your body more. Fasting makes your faith so much more than cerebral, but a little more gutsy and from the heart. You have a little more skin in the game. It takes your faith out of the abstract and conceptual, and makes it more experiential and multi-sensory and alive.

Fasting teaches you a lot about yourself. Emotions that are already there, are brought up to the surface when you fast. Things about yourself are revealed. It's harder to hide them or mask them when you're fasting.

Fasting teaches you also to keep your natural impulses in check. To have disciplined strength—harnessed by the Spirit. To have self-mastery. Better self-knowledge. Self-awareness. The definition of meekness is not weakness—meekness is disciplined strength. Fasting helps you become more meek. It also powerfully teaches you to hunger and thirst for the kingdom of God and God's righteousness.

Through fasting, God imparts to you spiritual focus and spiritual strength. It empowers your resolve to resist natural cravings and caving into temptation. This is not just in the area of eating, but resisting other bad habits, attachments, and addictions in your life. Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, "when you fast..." Not if you fast, but when you fast.

Richard Foster in his classic *Celebration of Discipline* tells us:

Moses the Lawgiver fasted. David the King fasted. Elijah the Prophet. Esther the Queen. Daniel the Seer. Anna the Prophetess. Paul the Apostle, and Jesus the Messiah fasted.

Fasting is a part of our Reformed heritage, too. Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, Jonathan Edwards, David Brainerd, and countless other believers have practiced this spiritual discipline. If these spiritual giants needed to fast, how much more do I? How much more, should we fast? Fasting also unites us with people of all faiths. All the major world religions fast—also, Confucius and the Yogis of India. Philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle fasted. Even Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine fasted. A nice byproduct of fasting is that it detoxes your body—it's healthy.

Check with your doctor, but I encourage you to consider fasting this Lent. You can start small—go from lunch to lunch. Have lunch, then skip dinner and breakfast, then break your fast at lunch the next day.

Drink lots of fluids. And then build on that.

In fact, I'd like to give an invitation to the Immanuel community. If your medically approved, would you fast with me tomorrow? Eat lunch on Monday, then break your fast by eating lunch on Tuesday. That's skipping two meals. Pray for Immanuel, pray for the world, pray for your family, pray for yourself. And drink lots of water. Let us know on our Facebook page if you're going to take the fasting challenge. Let us know what the experience is like, too. Well, let's turn to our text now.

Jesus' temptation in the wilderness is his second rite of passage before his public ministry would begin. Jesus' first rite of passage came at his baptism in the Jordan River. The Father's baptismal affirmation of the Son echoed from the heavens and reverberated across the wilderness:

"This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

But the Father's love isn't soft—God's love disciplines and prepares the Son for his mission of service, crucifixion, and resurrection. So the Son was sent by the Spirit into a wilderness retreat to be tested. Now the wilderness is rife with symbolism in Scripture. The wilderness represents not only testing and self-denial, but it's a place of preparation and perception. But in this scene, a very different voice, a sinister voice, is heard speaking to Jesus. It's not from the Father, but from the Father of Lies.

"If you are the Son of God." IF.

This was spoken by none other than the Devil, which in Greek is diabolos—where we get the word diabolical. Literally translated, the name means "slanderer." Satan started his temptations from the ground up, in ascending order. First on the desert floor. Second from the pinnacle of the temple. Thirdly from the highest mountain peak. The disciple Peter would later take the "temptation" baton when he scolded and corrected Jesus after Jesus said he must suffer and be crucified. Do you remember Jesus' response to Peter's temptation? "Get behind me, Satan!"

Ouch! Jesus called Peter "Satan." Jesus was serious about his mission, and how he was to do it. He would not be deterred from the task his Father had given him. It was written in eternity: he must suffer and die. His life would be a ransom for many.

You see, Satan tempts in order to distract and destroy you. To put a wedge in your relationship with God and others. To cause you to doubt your standing with God. And to derail your mission and divine purpose. But God tests for redemptive purposes. To refine you and develop your spiritual character. To reveal what's in your heart, what you're made of. Your mettle. To draw you closer. To hone your mission and divine purpose.

So history is being repeated here in the wilderness. Jesus is kind of a Second Moses. If you remember, Moses also fasted in the wilderness for forty days. But Jesus can also be seen as a Second Israel here—representing all of God's people.

Today's Scripture is a kind of redo of Israel's wilderness wanderings. Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness are like Israel's 40 years in the wilderness. Like Israel, Jesus is tempted by hunger in the desert. Like Israel with the golden calf, Jesus is tempted to commit idolatry. Like Israel who was commanded to be obedient to enter the Promised Land, Jesus is tempted by Satan to forgo the kingdom of heaven and the cross and take a shortcut to power. Satan sought to entice the Son to misuse the power

entrusted to him for selfish and self-protecting purposes. But this time, Israel obeyed, through Christ, the Second Israel, because he was both human and divine. Jesus took no shortcuts. Power would not be an end in itself. His power has a purpose—to serve and to seek and to save the lost. He also came to destroy the works of Satan. His power glorified not himself, but the Father.

The good news is this: we're not alone in our hour of temptation. This same Christ resides in us—giving us the power and the will to resist temptation and to do God's will.

Let's hear now the Word of the Lord from...

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11 (NRSV)

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

But he answered, "It is written,
'One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"
Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him,

"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,
'He will command his angels concerning you,'
and 'On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"
Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

'Worship the Lord your God
and serve only him.'"

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

***The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.***

SERMON – Temptation 101: Quoting Deuteronomy

Jesus—we all heard the Father say you're the Son of God— isn't hunger beneath you? You're royalty. You don't need to be hungry—you shouldn't be hungry. Treat yourself. Turn these stones to bread. If you don't do something, you're going to starve.

Say something, say anything, why not the Hebrew word Abracadabra, which means "I create as I speak." Jesus' stomach grumbled as he digested the devil's words and scrolled through the Hebrew Scriptures in his mind's eye. Deuteronomy 8:3 says, "God humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna... in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Israel may have grumbled, but Jesus trusted. He remained at peace—in the midst of the uncertainty, the anxiety, the want. He stayed with the hunger. Hunger was his teacher. Hunger was teaching him something that a full belly never could. He knew the pangs wouldn't last forever. God would provide food on the table on the Father's timetable, not the Son's. Give us this day, our daily bread.

In the next scene, Satan takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple. Jesus, if you're so trusting, take the leap of faith. Do it. For isn't it also written in the Psalms, On the hands of angels they will hold you up, "so that you will not dash your foot against a stone"?

For a while, all you could hear was the wind whistling. "Yes, that's Scripture, but you're twisting it. It is written in Deuteronomy 6:16, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Don't put God to the test by deliberately devising a situation where God has to come and rescue you. You can't become God's God. God can't be controlled or manipulated or made to serve us. "I came to serve, not to be served," says Jesus.

The third and final scene takes place on a mountain peak. "See all these kingdoms of earth? I'll give them to you." Picture it now Jesus—no cross, no death—just power. All you have to do is transfer your allegiance to me. That's it. "Worship me Jesus, and you can have it all." A coyote could be heard howling in the distance. "Away with you Satan." I'm here to announce not the kingdom of earth, but the kingdom of heaven.

Deuteronomy also says, "Worship the Lord your God and serve only him." It is the Father, not you the Father of Lies, who will hand kingdoms over to me. With that Jesus ended the conversation and sent Satan packing. Jesus trusted God. He didn't force God's hand to protect him. He didn't exploit his own power to further himself. In due time God met Jesus' needs—by sending angels to attend him and provide for him.

Jesus tells us, "Seek first the kingdom of God"—not the kingdom of earth—"the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you."

To "seek first the kingdom of God" means to love God with every ounce of your being. With all your heart, all your soul, and with all your strength. Keep God's word in your heart. Let it flood your mind and soul.

God is #1 in every aspect of your life. Christ is not only an example to us, he's living in us—helping us to be faithful to God when we're being tested and tempted. We can trust in him because he didn't take a bite out of the juicy forbidden fruit. He didn't grumble about manna or begrudge a bevy of quail.

Christ forgives us and helps us to be faithful to God in our forty days of Lent... and beyond.

Amen.

Sermon Art: "*Temptation*" featured in "*Perched on the pinnacle of the temple*" by the [Arché Foundation](#), Italy

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