

# “If You Are...”

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*Book of Kells, Luke; Temptation of Jesus*

## 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

The Father's baptismal affirmation of the Son echoed from the heavens:

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

But the Father's love isn't syrupy—God's love disciplines and prepares the Son for the tests he will be facing and his mission of service, crucifixion, and resurrection. So the Son was sent by the Spirit into the desert to be tempered by the temptations he would face.

The wilderness is rich with symbolism. It represents not only testing and self-denial, but it's a place of preparation and perception. When we're in our wilderness and stripped down to nothing, we're emptied and ready to be filled—looking to God with open hands, open hearts, and a humble trust. Satan tempts in order to bring you down, to put a wedge in your relationship with God and others. To erode trust. But God tests to refine you and strengthen your spiritual character. To reveal what's in your heart, what you're made of. To draw you closer. To deepen your dependence on God for future challenges.

History is being repeated here. Jesus is doing a redo of Israel's wilderness wanderings. Israel is called God's son in the Scriptures. Jesus too is called God's Son. Just as Israel passed through the waters of the Red Sea into their Exodus in the wilderness, so Jesus passed through the baptismal waters of the Jordan into his New Exodus in the wilderness.



Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness is 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.

Important questions will be answered in these 40 days in the wilderness:

- *Will Jesus learn the wilderness lessons that Israel failed to pass?*
- *Will Jesus stand firm where Israel stumbled?*
- *Will Jesus exploit his messianic power for personal gain or trust the Father's provision?*
- *Can Jesus be a trusted leader?*
- *Can Jesus help us face our personal deserts and demons today?*

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

### **Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11 (NRSVue)**

<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. <sup>2</sup> He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished. <sup>3</sup> The tempter came and said to him,

"If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." <sup>4</sup> But he answered, "It is written,

'One does not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

<sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup> 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.' "

<sup>7</sup> Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' "

<sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, <sup>9</sup> and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

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

<sup>11</sup> 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 – "If You Are..."**

Jesus—we all heard the Father say you're the Son of God—so don't you think hunger is beneath you, since you're the Son of God? 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.

Jesus' stomach grumbled as he digested the devil's words and scrolled through the Hebrew Scriptures in his mind.

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 comes 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.

In the next scene, Satan takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple.

Jesus, since you're so trusting, take a leap of faith. 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 feet against the 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."*

The third and final scene takes place on a high mountain—yet another mountain scene in Jesus' life.

"See all these kingdoms of earth? I will give them to you. 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 jackal 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, who will hand kingdoms over to me. I worship the Father, but you are the Father *of all lies*. With that Jesus ended the conversation and sent the Tempter 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, with all your reason, 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.

Think about these three questions this Lent:

*Who do you trust for your nourishment?*

*Who do you trust to love and care for you?*

*And whom do you trust with your service?*

All three questions go back to God's words at Jesus' baptism, *"This is my Child, the Beloved, in whom I am well pleased."*

In effect, the tempter whispers:

*For nourishment, don't trust God — trust yourself! For loving care — well, really, who can you trust? God? If you believe that, why don't you jump from this tower — and then we'll see how many angels come to your rescue!*

*And with your service, don't trust God — trust me!*

Basically, the devil's temptations are an attack on Jesus' baptism, on the very idea that Jesus is God's beloved child, made for a life of humble, open-handed reliance on God.

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 forbidden fruit.

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

Amen.

Sermon Art: Book of Kells, Folio 202v: Luke; Temptation of Jesus

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