

The Gospel Of Luke

16 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’²⁰

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’ (Luke 4:16-21. NRSV)

Message 2

The Desert

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Luke 4:1-13

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Introduction:

Today I feel a deep need to be humble before the text. I’ve heard numerous sermons on this text and I know you have too and there is a temptation to think we know this one but we don’t. This is a deep place and we could come back here again and again and again and not go away empty.

Open your Bibles to Luke 4:1-13.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where 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. ³The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.’ ⁴Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “One does not live by bread alone.”’ ⁵ Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And 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. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.’

⁸Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”’

⁹ 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, ¹⁰for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you”, ¹¹and “On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”’

¹²Jesus answered him, ‘It is said, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”’ ¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time. (NRSV)

There are a hundred true messages you could preach on this passage. I heard one once that still sticks in my mind to this day. E.V. Hill preached one of the best messages I've ever heard on this passage. The whole sermon had about 200 words to it but it went on for 50 minutes. He said: 'When the Evil One tempted Jesus with selfish, simple, ANIMALISTIC SELF GRATIFICATION, what did the Good Lord do? HE HIT HIM WITH THE BIBLE. And when the Evil One tempted our Lord Christ with THE EASY WAY, the WIDE PROUD ROAD OF FALLEN MAN, what did the Good Lord do? HE HIT HIM WITH THE BIBLE. And when the Evil One tempted our LORD AND GOD with the SPECTACULAR, with the NON-SENSICAL, with the SELF AGGRANDIZING WAY what did the Good Lord do? He hit him with the Bible! He HIT HIM, he HIT HIM and he HIT HIM AGAIN. HE HIT HIM WITH THE BIBLE. PRAISE YOU JESUS, HALLELUJAH AMEN.

That's a true message. That's a loud message and that's a needed message. But there is still more and I want to show it to you. Let me take you back in your brains to last Sunday. Context is everything right? Last Sunday we looked at this funny phrase from Jesus' baptism:

²² And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased." (Luke 3:21-22. NKJV)

I told you that the best guess of scholars is that the phrase *swmatikh eidei* refers to the Holy Spirit settling on Jesus from above in some sort of visible, tangible, observable way. But the word 'dove' gives everyone pause. It would have been more natural to just say: 'like a bird'. All birds settle on to someone's shoulder in a visible, gradual, 'from above' kind of way. Why say dove? And why not say 'eagle' or 'falcon'? Those are way cooler than doves which are really just pigeons in fancy clothes. Now you might say, 'because doves are a symbol of the Holy Spirit' but doves only became symbols of the Holy Spirit AFTER this story. Before this story doves were a symbol for the nation of Israel. That little fact leads many scholars to suggest that whatever else Luke meant with this phrase, in some way, he is suggesting that all of the promises, all of the calling, all of the ministry that was given to Israel now rests on Jesus' shoulders. As we get into that headspace we immediately begin to recognise some incredible similarities between the story of Israel and the path that Jesus begins to walk.

For example, in the Old Testament when the story of Israel really gets going in Exodus God reveals how he looks at his people:

²²Then you shall say to Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord: Israel is my firstborn son. ²³I said to you, ‘Let my son go that he may worship me.’ (Exodus 4:22-23. NRSV)

So God tells Moses to tell Pharaoh that Israel is God’s Son and God’s Son needs to go worship him in the desert. Now here in the New Testament we have the baptism of Jesus and the voice of God sounds again and he says: THIS IS MY SON – ON HIM MY FAVOUR RESTS. Israel is not my son anymore – this is my son and he will go and worship me in the desert. And Jesus gets up and the Bible says the Spirit led him into the desert or into the wilderness, depending on your translation. Now, who led the son of God into the desert in the Old Testament? The Holy Spirit – the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Now in case you think I’m making all of this up, look carefully at how Jesus answered the three temptations. By the way, the order of the last two is different in Matthew’s Gospel and in the version Paul had but that is not significant. Luke uses the connecting word ‘kai’ which does not mean ‘then’ as most versions have it; there is no implied sequence in that word. It simply means ‘and’ and even less than that it is what Greek scholars call a simple connective. It just ties things together without specifying whether the tie is chronological or thematic. So it doesn’t matter. Either way, look at all three of the Scriptural quotes Jesus uses. Do you notice anything about them? They are all from one page of the Old Testament. Do you want to guess from what story they are taken? The story of Israel’s temptations in the desert. They are all from Deuteronomy 6-8. Jesus knows EXACTLY what is going on. He is intentionally reliving the story of Israel in the desert.

The New Testament authors understood this. Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 10. Let me read you the first 13 verses:

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ²and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. ⁵Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

⁶ Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. ⁷**Do not become idolaters as some of them did**; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play.’ ⁸We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. ¹⁰And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹²So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. ¹³No testing has overtaken you that is not **common to everyone**. God is faithful, and he will

not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it. (NRSV)

Are you seeing this? God is saying that Moses was your deliverer the first time around, now here is your deliverer Jesus Christ, the long awaited 'prophet like Moses'. Moses baptised you in the waters of the Red Sea, Jesus too was baptised. The Holy Spirit led Israel the Son of God into the desert and now here too the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert – but here is where the stories diverge. When the faith of the Israelites was tested in the desert THEY FAILED. They failed and the purpose of God was stalled. But now, God says, we are going to RESTART that purpose in this FAITHFUL SON JESUS CHRIST upon whom ALL OF THE PROMISES to Israel now rest and upon whom all of my FAVOUR AND LOVE now rest. So Jesus had to go back into the desert of testing and he had to succeed where the Israelites failed.

Let me show you the three common tests so that you can understand how Jesus was DIFFERENT IN THE DESERT.

Different In The Desert:

First take a look at Luke 4:3,4:

³ And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."

⁴ But Jesus answered him, saying, "It is written, '*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.*'" (NKJV)

1. Jesus did not reduce faith to a matter of personal prosperity and provision.

What did Jesus do different in the desert? He didn't reduce faith to a matter of personal prosperity and provision. The devil says: 'If you have a special relationship with God, why are you out here in the sun suffering? Shouldn't someone with a special relationship with God be enjoying prosperity and rich provision? Use your relationship to call down personal blessing and to feed your appetite'. The Apostle Paul saw the connection. He characterises the failure of the Israelites this way:

'The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play.'⁸We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. (1 Corinthians 10:7-8. NRSV)

All of this is referencing a story in Numbers 25 from the wandering of Israel in the desert. They were supposed to be out there developing a relationship with Yahweh and instead they ended up dabbling in some Moabite worship because it involved feasting and sleeping with prostitutes, something that seemed way cooler to them than all of this fasting and obeying in the religion of Yahweh. They wanted to integrate the blessings of Moabite religion with their own new faith. Wouldn't it be neat if after reading the Torah, instead of fasting, or eating manna, we could have a feast and have sex with prostitutes? God didn't think it would be neat and he killed 23 000 of them in a single day with a plague.

Jesus' reply to this temptation reveals that he understood what the Israelites did not:

"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'" (NKJV)

Jesus understood that God sends us into the desert to hear his voice not to feast and to satisfy our appetites. The religion of the pagans is all about securing physical blessings and riches, the faith of Yahweh is about hearing the voice that draws us into eternity. The religion of appetite threatens to make us beasts and animals. The Bible says that again and again. In Philippians true Christians are contrasted with people whose:

end is destruction; **their god is the belly**; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. (Philippians 3:19. NRSV)

The Israelites lost faith in the desert because they listened too much to their appetites and they became slaves to their greed and lusts. Jesus met that temptation head on and he said 'No! I am a man and not an animal. God is not my feeder he is my father and I will seek for more than food. The life of a man begins with hearing God's voice, not feeding one's belly.'

2. Jesus was content to receive from God's hand, in God's way.

The second way that Jesus was different than the Israelites comes out in verse 5:

the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And 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. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.' ⁸Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."' (NRSV)

The devil whispered in Jesus' ear: 'the path of the cross is a humiliating path. There is another way. There is a way to bypass the cross and still claim a throne. Together we can build a kingdom mightier than Rome'. Jesus faced this temptation more than once.

¹⁵ When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself. (John 6:15. NRSV)

Do you ever get tired of doing things God's ways? Do you ever feel like eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil so that you can be like God and make your own rules? The Apostle Paul knew that Israel failed when faced with this same temptation:

¹⁰And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. (1 Corinthians 10:10. NRSV)

That phrase 'the destroyer' is the tip off. Paul is referring to the desert failure recounted in Numbers 16:

Now Korah son of Izhar son of Kohath son of Levi, along with Dathan and Abiram sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth—descendants of Reuben—took ²two hundred and fifty Israelite men, leaders of the congregation, chosen from the assembly, well-known men,^{*} and they confronted Moses. ³They assembled against Moses and against Aaron, and said to them, 'You have gone too far! All the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. So why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?' ⁴When Moses heard it, he fell on his face. ⁵Then he said to Korah and all his company, 'In the morning the Lord will make known who is his, and who is holy, and who will be allowed to approach him; the one whom he will choose he will allow to approach him.... (Numbers 16:1-5. NRSV)

So there was a show down. These men felt like the kingdom of God was a bit top heavy and needed to be more tribal like the ways things were in the people around them. This was an early Semitic tribal culture and cultures like that tended to have smaller units and tribes, each with tribal elders over them. These new leadership forms of prophets, priests and holy men didn't fit their definition of a kingdom and it left them out of the choice positions. So Moses, rather than defending himself and his rights says: let's go out and stand before the Lord. You propose these constitutional changes and we'll see how he responds. The Bible records that God responded thusly:

³²The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, along with their households—everyone who belonged to Korah and all their goods. ³³So they with all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol; the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. ³⁴All Israel around them fled at their outcry, for they said,

‘The earth will swallow us too!’³⁵ And fire came out from the Lord and consumed the two hundred and fifty men offering the incense. (NRSV)

In Jewish tradition this story is called ‘The Rebellion Of Korah’ and it was answered by the Destroying Angel of God manifesting in earthquake and fire. The people of Israel failed to understand that they were not being invited to EDIT GOD’S METHODS. They were not CO-CREATORS of the kingdom. The kingdom of God is not a democracy and it does not learn from the fallen methods of a power hungry abusive clan divided world. Jesus knew that. He wasn’t fooled by the devil’s offer. He was content with the methods of God, strange as they may seem at times.

3. Jesus did not become impatient with the Lord’s timing.

The final way that Jesus was different than Israel in the desert is revealed in verse 9:

9 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,¹⁰ for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you”,¹¹ and “On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”’¹² Jesus answered him, ‘It is said, “Do not put the Lord your God **to the test.**”’

Israel faced this temptation too and failed. Paul says:

⁹We must not put Christ **to the test**, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. (1 Corinthians 10:9. NRSV)

He’s talking about the desert story in Numbers 21. Let me show you:

4 From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but **the people became impatient on the way.**⁵ The people spoke against God and against Moses, ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.’⁶ Then the Lord sent **poisonous serpents** among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. (Numbers 21:4-6. NRSV)

The devil came to Jesus and began to whisper to him as he had once whispered to God’s elder son Israel and he said: “Boy this is taking a long time. Haven’t you ever heard that the shortest distance between two places is a straight line? Why all this wandering in the desert? There is a much faster way you know.” The Israelites fell for it, and they began to complain. “God, the tour guide you sent us STINKS!!!! This guy couldn’t lead his way out of a paper bag! And

HELLO, the in flight meals are awful. And why are we taking the long way anyway? It doesn't take 40 years to walk from Egypt to Palestine by the way, it takes about TWO WEEKS!!!! For crying out loud!" That little outburst was not well received and God sent poisonous serpents into the camp and many people died.

Where the Israelites failed, Jesus was different. The devil offered him a short cut: 'Do a swan dive off of the temple and let everyone see you fly. The dumb sheep will all clamour for the miracle boy to do his show. If you want a kingdom kid, I know a short cut for recruiting citizens.' Jesus faced this temptation again and again too. The people were always clamouring for a sign, for a demonstration of power and for a religious light show. And he would say later in Luke's Gospel;

29 When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, 'This generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. (Luke 11:29. NRSV)

'We're not taking any short cuts, we are not listening to the murmur of the crowds. We are not doing a numbers drive. We are doing this God's way no matter how long it takes'. This son of God was different in the desert.

Conclusion:

So who cares that he was different? So Jesus went back and passed all of the faith tests that Israel failed, why does that matter for us? Because the Bible says we have to pass them too. Paul said:

¹¹These things happened to them to serve **as an example, and they were written down to instruct us**, on whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹²So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. ¹³No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. (1 Corinthians 10:11-13. NRSV)

Paul says: 'These are universal faith tests friends! Everybody's faith has to pass the desert test. After your baptism, God doesn't suck you up into heaven, he sends you out into the desert, he leads you out into suffering so that the reality of your faith can BE TESTED. You can fail out there – in fact most do. You can lose faith in the desert, you can think you are standing and yet be face down in the ditch. Your faith can die under the harsh grind of sand and sun. This isn't heresy, this isn't even interesting or risky. Jesus said, the Gospel is like seed that is sown into

soil and sprouts up. He says that some of the sprouts DIE because the soil is too hard. Things were harder and drier than they imagined. Some DIE because the thorns and thistles which are the cares of this world choke them out. Some DIE because they get stepped on. Somebody hurts them, somebody offends them and they NEVER recover and they DIE. And some die... why? Because the crows come and eat them for breakfast. The crows are the angels of the enemy. The devil comes. He tempts and he tests and he steals the faith of many.

Jesus faced EVERY TEMPTATION that is common to man in that desert but HE WAS DIFFERENT. His response was DIFFERENT and the Bible lays out both options for us and it says choose this day the path that you will follow. One path leads to death and all who travel on it lose what was theirs and they do not enter the rest of God. The other path has fewer footprints on it but it leads to eternal life.

Listen to me church, there are a lot of people who have been baptised, who have been filled with the Holy Spirit, who have cast out demons and have done deeds of power in Jesus' name who will DIE in the desert because they will fail the test. I don't want to be buried alongside of them. I don't want to be taken down into Sheol by the Destroying Angel of God. I want to live! And I want you to live. So I want you to follow the way of Jesus. I want you to reject any version of Christianity that would tell you that your relationship with God should be leveraged to secure PERSONAL BLESSINGS. Man does not live by bread alone – we are not animals and our god is not the belly! I am here to find the voice of God church – are you here for that? I don't need a bigger house, I don't NEED more money, I NEED THE VOICE OF GOD ALMIGHTY and I won't leave the desert until I find it.

And I want you to reject any so called version of Christianity that comes dressed in the ways of the world. I know you CAN build a church that way, I know that you CAN build a kingdom that way but unless THE LORD BUILDS THE HOUSE THOSE WHO LABOUR LABOUR IN VAIN!!!! I know the Lord's ways seem strange to a man, I know that there is a way that seems right to a man but the end of that way is DEATH! I have not been invited to edit the Lord's ways and I have no desire to try. I will sit in the path of the Lord and wait upon him. I will walk the path of downward mobility and wait to be exalted or NOT, in his pleasure.

And I want you to reject any so called version of Christianity that substitutes the spectacular for the substantial. I seek the Spirit as much as anyone in the kingdom but I will not build a church on miracles and experiences. The Apostle Paul said to a church that worshipped the manifestations of the Spirit: 'I'm glad that I speak in tongues more than any of you, never the less I would rather speak five words with my mind to instruct you than ten thousand words in the tongues of angels.' If any one could have built a church on miracles it was Paul! It was said that the Spirit was so strong in him that people were healed just by touching his used Kleenexes. Yet he always pointed to his fruit, his converts. He said: 'I don't want to talk about miracles, I want to talk about life change.' In his letter to Thessalonica he says:

our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but **also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction**; just as you know what kind of people we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, ⁷so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. (1 Thessalonians 1:5-6. NRSV)

Paul is saying that the evidence of the Holy Spirit is POWER but he defines that power as the power of full conviction, full conversion, full transformation. You pagans became imitators of us and more, you became imitators of Jesus! That's power! Church, I know that we are all excited by the fresh flow of the Holy Spirit but I will not struggle out of one ditch only to fall face first into the ditch on the other side of the road. The devil would love to push us past reason and past wisdom into a childish obsession with spiritual manifestations. He would say to us: 'Fill this place with stories of miracles and healings and dreams and visions. Titillate people with angelic speech and promises of supernatural visitation.' NO!! That is not the way of Jesus and that will not be our way. I will not grow discontent with the Lord's timing and seek the spectacular short cut.

Church I am so sick of the word 'breakthrough'. Everywhere I go people are crying out for breakthrough. 'We're so tired of this pace Lord! We feel restricted by the requirements of righteousness and study of the Word! Can't there be a BREAKTHROUGH JESUS! Can't there be a short cut? Can't you show up in such a way that you will over ride our laziness and inattention to your instructions?' Where is this word in the Bible? You know what I see in the Bible? Faithfulness. Yeast. Jesus said:

'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.' (Matthew 13:33. NRSV)

That's an image of process, that's an image of thorough saturation over time. That's the way of Jesus church. SALT. YEAST. MUSTARD SEED. We will not grow impatient as the Israelites did, we will wait with Jesus.

This sounds tough doesn't it? Well it has a good ending. Look at Luke 4:14. Jesus was different in the desert and this is the result:

14 Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. (NRSV)

Jesus was different in the desert and as a result he came out FULL OF POWER and he began a ministry that changed the world. I don't want to be raptured out of the desert; I don't want to be airlifted and I don't want to be buried here. I want to be different here, I want to be found FAITH-FUL here and I want to come out of here with power and I want to change the world, for the glory of God and the honour of his name. And all God's people said: Amen.