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Luke 4:1-15

Third Message

Brian Morgan

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# JESUS IN THE WILDERNESS: CONFRONTING THE EVIL ONE

*SERIES: WHEN LIFE IS A WILDERNESS*

A group of our college students returned last week from a trip to Israel. They met some fascinating individuals during their travels in the Holy Land. They were introduced to Yigdol Yadin, the famous archaeologist who has excavated Tel Dan. He gave them a personal tour of his work at that site. Our college pastor, Doug Goins, who led the group, said that the highlight of the trip, however, was not the cities and the archaeological sites but the time they spent in the wilderness of Sinai and their ascent to Mt. Horeb. They were impressed by Cairo, with its minarets and its hustle and bustle. They visited Luxor, the religious capital of the Pharaohs, who put their entire Gross National Product into their tombs in a futile effort to evade death. But against the stark backdrop of the wilderness, with its nights of absolute darkness, and stars so bright they could almost be touched, they began to visualize the glory of God as it was revealed to Moses on Mt. Horeb. The wilderness exposed the sensuous nature of the Egyptian idolatry, unmasking it for what it was. The wilderness has a way of doing that. It gives you a clear focus on the nature of evil.

Unmasking evil is the theme for our study this morning. In this series of messages we have looked at Israel in the wilderness; a nation newborn, brought through the flood waters of the Red Sea and put in a place of testing by God where she could not cope. There in the wilderness, Israel discovered a world upside-down: she drank from water which sprang from a rock rather than fall from heaven; she ate bread that fell from heaven rather than come up from the earth. Then we observed King David in a wilderness of his own making. Would God abandon his king who had sinned? No. David repented, and naked and vulnerable, he found God. Today we come to Jesus' time in the wilderness. There he meets the evil one, in what we could call a scene from the Garden of Eden revisited. Adam failed his test in the Garden, but this second Adam will confront the devil in the wilderness and emerge triumphant and victorious.

Two things in Luke's gospel that precede these temptations, Jesus' baptism and his genealogy, are very significant. These introduce us to the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Luke 3:21:

**Now it came about when all the people were baptized, that Jesus also was baptized, and while he was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well-pleased." (Luke 3:21-22 NASB)**

I have always been puzzled as to why Jesus presented himself for baptism. John the Baptist, the last prophet, went into a wilderness to prepare the way of the King, and Jesus the King came to be baptized. The significance is this: Here, in the person of Jesus, is the new Israel. Just as the old Israel came to the floodwaters of the Jordan to be born, so this Messianic King is creating a new Israel, a new covenant people, bringing them to the floodwaters of the Jordan to repent. And at his baptism, the prophetic silence, which had lasted for 400 years, is broken by the voice of God himself announcing his King, "This is My Beloved Son. In Thee I am well-pleased."

Here, the Father links two very important texts of scripture, bringing them together to describe one man, Jesus. First, the text, "This is my Son," taken from Psalm 2, and then, "with he whom I am well-pleased," from Isaiah 42, the Servant oracles of Jesus. Some people think the words "Son of God" mean "God Junior." But in the Old Testament, that title was used of the King, the Messiah. Nathan said to David, "Out of your loins will come a line of boys who will be king. When they crown this king, I will adopt him into a father-son relationship." Every time a king was crowned he read Psalm 2, the psalm of coronation,

**"I will surely recount the decree: The Lord said to me,**

**'Thou art my Son,**

**Today I have begotten Thee.**

**Ask of me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance,**

**And the ends of the earth as Thy possession.'" (Ps 2:7-8)**

Every king was adopted as a son, therefore he was called the "son of God." And the weapon he was given to advance the kingdom was prayer—speech: "Ask of me," says the Father, "and I will give you the ends of the earth, not just Israel, the whole earth will be the possession of this king." So God the Father is saying, "Here is that Messiah, to him will go the whole inheritance, all the nations."

And how will this king bring justice to the nations.? God links it to the next text: "In thee I am well-pleased," from Isaiah 42:

**"Behold, My servant whom I uphold;**

**My chosen one in whom My soul delights.**

**I have put my Spirit upon Him;**

**He will bring forth justice to the nations." (Isa 42:1)**

So he links the king with the servant. And in the Servant oracles we know that this Servant accomplishes justice by dying for the transgressions of his own people. By means of a cross—this is how he is going to bring justice. This is announced right at Jesus' baptism, as John heard this voice, and saw with his eye the Spirit descending like a dove. This is very significant. What it is saying is not only is Jesus bringing about this new Israel, but this Israel will be a cosmic new creation—a new heavens and a new earth.

In the opening verses of Genesis, that part that talks about the new creation of the heavens and the earth, we read that the Spirit was there, hovering like an eagle, ready to go to work in his creative power. Then, following the flood, when Noah's ark comes through the flood waters, Noah sends out a dove but it cannot find rest so it returns. Now, at the baptism of Jesus, that dove finds a permanent place to rest. And the Spirit comes upon this One in full measure to bring about a whole new creation: a new heavens, a new earth, a whole new order through his rule. This will be done by the Spirit. So this Jesus is no mere prophet, no mere teacher. He is the King, the Servant who will create a new Israel, and that new Israel will redeem the whole world. That is the significance of the baptism of Jesus.

Then Luke gives the genealogy of Jesus. I find genealogies very interesting. My father-in-law was a historian and librarian who traced

the family roots. I discovered that my wife and I have the same roots that go back to Wales. He left us the history of the Lad-Lewis family, a genealogy written by Jesse Isaac Lewis to his brother in 1878. This genealogy says, “son of Jesse, the son of Daniel, the son of Isaac, the son of Moses, the son of three Jonathans, the son of Samuel, the son of John”—all the way back to 1690. But this genealogy of Jesus goes all the way back to God! It starts with Jesus, son of Joseph, Matthat, Levi, etc., and goes all the way back to “. . .the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.” Here is the significance of this: God called Abraham out from all the nations to create a new humanity, Israel, that would undo the sin of Adam. Not only is this Messianic King the new Israel, he is the second Adam who will create a new humanity to undo the sin of the first Adam. This is Jesus, the new Israel, the new Adam, the new humanity.

Then, following his baptism, having been filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus is led into the wilderness by the Spirit. To what degree are we being led by the Holy Spirit now? It is the Spirit who imparts eternal life to the soul. And eternal life does not mean just living forever. Eternal life is the life of the age to come—the new heavens and the new earth, that new age—the Spirit takes that new life and pumps it into your soul today. The Spirit is the dominant mark of this new humanity. So what I want to ask as we look at this text is, to what degree are you and I living in the Spirit in this new age? Let us ask this of ourselves as we contemplate these three temptations of Jesus, and how he responds to them.

The first four verses of the chapter introduces the first temptation.

## I. Unmasking False Food: The Lust of the Flesh

**And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led about by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days; and when they had ended, he became hungry. And the devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’” (Luke 4:1-4)**

The first temptation has to do with eating, bringing to mind the first sin in the Garden of Eden. Adam was given all the trees that were pleasant to the eye and good for food. God said to him, “Eat! Life is a banquet. Eat. Except one.” Then the devil came and focused on what was forbidden to Adam and Eve rather than what was freely available to them. “Eat from this one,” he suggested. “Would God withhold that from you? Be like God. Take for yourself. Feed yourself, and you’ll have life.” And Adam ate and he died.

Now we find Jesus in a wilderness. Like Israel of old as she was led by the shekinah glory, so Christ is led by the Spirit. For forty days he has eaten nothing. The devil suggests, “Speak to this rock, and turn it into bread.” This is no arbitrary miracle he has chosen. The devil has been to seminary. When Moses was creating Israel in the wilderness, he spoke to a rock in obedience to God who had said, “Speak to a rock. Out of it will come water.” The devil had it backwards: it was water from a rock, and manna from heaven.

This temptation is not for Jesus to act out of his deity, although some commentators think that. This title, “Son of God,” had nothing to do with his deity. It was his title as Messianic King. What the devil is suggesting is, “If you are the new Messiah, the new Moses, if you are creating a new Israel, do what Moses did.” But what is the difference here? The text in Numbers says that Moses was directed, “Speak to the rock that water will gush forth that you can bring drink for the congregation.” The temptation Jesus is facing in the

wilderness is to feed himself, to use his office to feed his own appetite. But Jesus responds, “Man shall not live by bread alone.”

What he is saying is, the new humanity that is filled with the Spirit, that is fed by the life of the age to come, never uses its office to feed its own appetites. On the contrary, what it does, rather, is feed others; then God provides a feast in return. But if you look to and provide for your own appetites, you will end up alone and unsatisfied. Isn’t this true of the alcoholic, the drug addict, of anyone with a perversion or obsession? The more they feed their own appetites the less pleasure they experience—although their appetite increases. When you put off your appetites, however, and use the life of God to feed others he gives you a feast.

In the parallel account in Matthew, we read that when the temptations were over, the angels came and “ministered” to Jesus. That word is used in the New Testament for waiting on tables. When you eat by yourself, you cannot say you have truly feasted. It is an isolated and lonely experience. It is no feast unless there are many at the table. That is a feast to enjoy. God gives, that is the point. You may be thinking, “Well, this was just for Jesus. He lived to God, and God fed him.” But remember this is how Jesus wanted the disciples to live. At Shechem he sent them out to buy food. While he waited, a woman came to draw water from the well, but Jesus offered her living water. She left her water pot there at the well, forgetting her original need, and went back to the village to tell everyone that she had met the Messiah. Then the disciples returned and were told by Jesus, “I have food you know nothing about.” “Who fed him?” they asked themselves. God had fed him.

The miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 was not for the multitude, but to teach the disciples. They had been teaching them, and the crowd had grown hungry. The disciples said to Jesus, “Send them home, we’re hungry and tired.” But Jesus responded, “You feed them.” And they did so. The miracle, however, was not so much that 5,000 were fed, but that there were 12 baskets left over, one for each apostle to feast on.

This is very convicting. I remember the many times I made an illicit reach to feed my own appetite and I ended up isolated and bored. This is saying that in our new humanity, if we make an illicit grasp for anything—food, identity, sexuality, hunger for relationships, whatever—we will die in the wilderness. Use God’s life to feed others, postponing your own appetite, then God will feed you. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you,” said Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. As a gift of God, we might add. Think about this when you go to work tomorrow. Live the entire day serving others, not feeding your appetite, and God will feed you.

That is the first temptation. Jesus unmasks false food, and he unmasks the lust of the flesh.

The second temptation is set out in verses 5-8.

## II. Unmasking Empty Success: The Lust of the Eyes

**And he led him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to him, “I will give you all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore if you worship before me, it shall all be yours.” And Jesus answered and said to him, “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’” (4:5-8)**

Notice that each time Jesus responds to the temptation with a quotation from the book of Deuteronomy, the account of Israel’s wanderings in the wilderness. Here, in a moment of time, the devil

shows Jesus the kingdoms of the world and their glory. His first appeal was to the lust of the flesh, now he appeals to the lust of the eyes. Pointing to all of this glory, he says to Jesus, "It's yours if you worship me." But Jesus is the Messianic King, the Son of God. All he has to do is ask God and he will get these things as an inheritance; they are going to be his anyway. Why, then, is this a temptation?

The devil's suggestion is very subtle and powerful. This word for "a moment of time," *stigma*, is a rare word in Greek. It sounds very much like the common Greek word *stigma*, the word used for the lashings and the beatings that Jesus would receive before the cross. The word, "to be handed over," is the exact same Greek word as "Jesus will be handed over to evil men"—yea, even the devil himself, at the cross. In this temptation the devil is saying to Jesus, "You can have all the glory without the cross. There is no stigma, no being handed over, no punishment. You can have it all without the cross." But there is a problem: there is a price involved.

The same scene is portrayed in Genesis. When Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden, their son Cain murdered his brother. Then Cain, a murderer, built the first city, a beautiful, exciting, glorious place to live. But a closer look at the city reveals the voice of Lamech, Cain's descendant, boasting to his wives, "Adah and Zillah, Listen to my voice, you wives of Lamech, give heed to my speech, for I have killed a man for wounding me, and a boy for striking me; if Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold" (Gen 4:23-24) What is the point? A glorious city, yes, but at a terrible cost. It is built in arrogance, oppression, bloodshed and murder. If you are really seeking success, this text demonstrates that the devil can make you successful. It's his glory to give. He has that authority. But it will cost you—your home, your family, your integrity.

There is another cost involved, too. This word *stigma* ("a moment of time"), is used only once in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, in Isaiah 29:5. There, it is used of God's judgment that comes in a moment of time on those who become rich through their oppression of others. The point is this: If you want glory, and if you do things the devil's way, he will make you successful. But it will only be for a moment. "Everybody will be famous for 15 minutes," said Andy Warhol, speaking of modern man. If you compromise, the world will put you on stage. Ask Jessica Hahn.

Fame is a fleeting thing. Ask last year's Super Bowl winners. When that spectacle was held at Stanford Stadium a few years ago, there were so many television crews present from around the world it looked like they were covering the most important event in the history of mankind. I watched the game on television with my family and some friends. One friend left to go to the store to get something. The grocery clerk said to him, "What are you doing here, with the whole world watching history in the making on TV?" My friend asked him, "Really? Who won the Super Bowl last year?" "I don't know," the clerk replied. "That's why I'm working today!" Who won Wimbledon last year? Does it matter? Who were the Presidential Primary candidates last year? Do you care? How many Nobel Prize winners can you name? Fame is fleeting. The devil has authority to make whomever he will successful. But the glory is momentary. You must compromise in order to get it: You must worship him.

That is why we need to take Jesus' words quite literally: "Woe to you when all men speak well of you"—when you're successful, in other words. When we plan on doing things just because our methods work, because they are successful, we had better be careful. We may have switched our allegiances and begun worshiping the devil, doing things his way. If you do it God's way, however, what will happen to you is what happened to Jesus. He was delivered over to the

devil. He did not get a *stigma*, he got a *stigma*. He suffered. He was beaten. He was put on a cross. And on that cross God exhausted all the energy of sin and death on his own Son. And once it was spent, that energy was robbed of its power. The devil became powerless. Let us resolve to follow that road which our Savior trod and seek the true glory.

Our new humanity does not give into the lust of the flesh. It does not feed itself but feeds others, and then allows God to feed it. The new humanity rejects the lust of the eyes as vainglory, and instead chooses to suffer for the true glory.

This brings us to the third, and probably the most powerful temptation, in verses 9-12.

### III. Unmasking False Authority: The Boastful Pride of Life

**And he led him to Jerusalem and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down from here; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge concerning you to guard you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.' And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'You shall not test the Lord your God.'" (4:9-12)**

Now the devil takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple, and there quotes Scripture to him. Some of the Jewish commentators said that when the Messiah came he would throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple and the angels would protect him. The historian, Josephus, wrote that the ravine below the temple was so deep the bottom could not be seen from the temple, let alone the 50 extra foot high pinnacle. Standing there would cause giddiness, he wrote. But this is where the devil places Jesus and says to him, "Throw yourself down. Prove to all of Israel that you're the Messiah. Use your power and they will follow you. Here is the promise of God, according to the text. You have his angels. You have his strength. Nothing will happen to you."

What does this temptation appeal to? The first temptation appeals to the appetite, the second to the eye. As we have pointed out, the third is even more powerful: It appeals to pride. "Use God's power and his promises to make you look good," is the devil's suggestion. Jesus responds, "It is written, 'You shall not test the Lord your God.'" The wilderness is a place where a man, not God, is tested. Never reverse the roles. That would be to say that God's heart is unfaithful and needs purifying.

Never test God. Do not try to make him come through to make you look good. How many Christian leaders raise money that way? What a tragedy this is. In counseling, I have found that what more and more people naively call faith is actually testing God. Here is what I tell them: God's curriculum for all of us is for him to do the unthinkable. Whatever you thought was unthinkable, that is what he does, because you have been testing, not trusting God. Many schemes begin that way, with good Christian intentions—a project, a relationship, and a leap of faith. You jump, and you cry out, "God catch me," but you may have to pick up your own bones because God sometimes allows the unthinkable to happen. He allows unemployment. He allows a company to go under. Occasionally he allows a marriage to fall apart, or something else which you consider unthinkable. By doing so he unmasks the evil of what appears to be faith, but which actually is a test of God so that you can look good.

You ask, "What is God's power for, then? How do we avail of all these promises? What is the purpose of angels?" Here is what it is for. It is right in the psalm that Satan quotes. But, good seminarian

that he is, he leaves out a verse, thus quoting scripture out of context. Psalm 91 says this:

**“For He will give his angels charge concerning you,  
To guard you in all your ways.  
They will bear you up in their hands,  
Lest you strike your foot against a stone.  
You will tread upon the lion and cobra,  
The young lion and the serpent you will trample down.  
Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him. (Ps 91:11-14a)**

What is God’s power for? Why do we lay hold of his promises? God’s power is for those who love him to conquer evil. It is not to make ourselves a public display. It is to conquer evil in our own lives, to tread down the serpent in our hearts and in the community. That is what it’s for. This is exactly the way the apostle Paul describes the Spirit-filled life in Romans 8. Who are the ones being led of the Spirit? Is it those who are on stage? No, it is those who by the Spirit are putting to death the deeds of the flesh in their own bodies. That is the Spirit-filled life.

Last week, Bob Roe, one of our elders, one of the godliest men I have ever known, announced his retirement from our board. He has been in poor health for the past 15 years. Ten years ago, when he had open-heart surgery, the doctors told him he had two years to live. This man has lived a life of purity and devotion to Jesus Christ. The dominant characteristic of his life has been putting to death the deeds of the flesh that his body might live. God has used him much in my life. Once, when I was college pastor, he unmasked evil in my own heart. Apple Computer had set up a scheme at Stanford University to sell computers cheaply to students, faculty and staff. I had a staff card, but not a paid staff position. But, I thought, Apple was trying to get their computers into the hands of Stanford graduates in the academic field. That’s me, I rationalized. I asked a student if he would get a computer for me, although the contract said that it was a non-transferable item. A man in my discipleship group challenged me, however, and told me I was compromising. I decided to think about it further.

While on vacation later that year—in the wilderness, as it were—I talked to Bob Roe and everything became clear. I shared all the details of this plan, and all of my intentions. He looked at me and said, “It’s not 100% clean. And if it’s not clean, it’s dirty. Don’t do it. You represent Jesus Christ on that campus. That reputation is worth more than any discount that you can get.” I was not left in much doubt about what I should do! When I got back home, I canceled the whole thing. At the end of our conversation, Bob said to me, “If you follow Jesus, God will give you a computer.” He was right. Three years later, God gave me a computer. And not just me, but each pastor on our staff received a computer, by grace, so that it became a feast to many, not just my making an illicit reach for myself. So, as I have often said since that time, “Praise be to Bob!”

There are temptations unmasked: The lust of the flesh; the lust of the eyes; and the boastful pride of life.

Having resisted these subtle temptations, you might imagine that Jesus, the new Adam, the new Israel, would enter Jerusalem and inaugurate the kingdom. But look at what the text says:

**And when the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time. And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit; and news about him spread**

**through all the surrounding district. And he began teaching in their synagogues and was glorified by all. (4:13-15)**

“Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.” Our college team reported that the first sight they saw inside the Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem set the stage for what would happen later in that city: An Arab in full head-dress was engaged in a shouting match with an orthodox Jew. This scene was amplified as they listened to speakers from both sides tell their stories about their dreams for Jerusalem. They met with the press secretary for the Prime Minister of Israel. They met with the official spokesman to the former Prime Minister. These men are labeled the two biggest power brokers in Israel today. They claimed that Israel’s superior technology and superior army were the reason why the nation has survived. Then our group heard an Israeli freedom fighter, with a fine British accent, talk about terrorism. And then they heard from the other side of the megaphone. Arab spokesmen shared about the oppressed Palestinians. Their allegiance is to the PLO, they said, the only ones who can liberate them and exterminate Israel in the process. Following these interviews, the group went on to Galilee. Doug Goins said to me, “When we got to there, I discovered why Jesus brought in the kingdom in Galilee.”

Galilee in ancient times was totally disrupted by the Syrian invasion. It was a place of deep darkness and gloom, a place of despair. And it was an international community: Galilee of the Gentiles, it was called. That is the place Isaiah said this King would go—“to a people who were walking in darkness.” And they would “see a great light,” he said. This new humanity is available to people who are weak, who are not just Jews, to those who have no advantages; those who are in darkness and gloom and who want to be part of a new thing, a new order. This is where Jesus announced his kingdom.

Our text began with one voice announcing the Son; it ends with a multitude of voices proclaiming the glory of this One. Just as Moses came down the mountain, his face shining with glory, so now comes the second Moses. He teaches in the synagogues. He puts the word in the heart, and all glory in him. But this is not the momentary glory which the evil one offers. Neither is it the fading glory of Moses. It is the glory which the Spirit gives, and which changes hearts permanently.

Have you entered into this humanity? You may be in your own Galilee, in darkness, gloom and weakness. You think there is no hope for you, but I say to you, come to the headwaters of the Jordan River and be baptized. Let the flood of judgment come over you and you will enter into the new heavens and the new earth. God will give you his Spirit.

What is the question for those of us who have been baptized, who have identified with Jesus? Here it is: How much are we feeding on his life? I must confess I have a hard time preaching this text. Just yesterday morning I was thrilled about it, but all afternoon I was assailed by the enemy. All these temptations we have just read about came to me: I fed my own appetites. I struggled. I failed. Last night, while preparing to preach this morning, I thought, “I am not worthy to come.” But we have the Holy Spirit. Our Christianity is not based on performance. We may enter in at any moment.

Keep feeding on this new life of the age to come. Let God feed you. Let him give you an eye to penetrate past the false glory of the world to the real glory of the cross. That is when you will use his power to overcome evil.

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