

Hold on to the Word

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Luke 4: 1 – 13

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I. Introduction

- A. Some of you, I'm sure, have visited Niagara Falls
 - 1. And if you have ever been there and seen the Falls, even at a distance
 - a. It's hard to forget the mighty rush of the Niagara River dropping some 180 feet
 - 2. The thundering roar of the water crashing down on the rocks below
- A. For quite a ways above the Falls, the river is full of turbulent rapids
 - 1. Too dangerous for even powerful motor boats to cross safely
- A. But I'm told that farther upstream, the current flows more gently
 - 1. And boats are able to navigate their way up and down the river
- A. However, the danger of being swept downstream toward the Falls is always present
 - 1. That's why you will find a large sign, posted on bridge pylons there
 - a. A warning sign with big letters that reads - "Do you have an anchor?"
 - (1) Followed by the words, "Do you know how to use it?"
- A. Our lives are full of such dangers, both seen and unseen, at times
 - 1. And I'm not even sure whether the temptations that Jesus faced
 - a. Out there in the wilderness were of the sort that he could see them
 - (1) With his physical eyesight or not
 - 2. But dangers they were, with the possibility of an even more disastrous result
 - a. Than being swept over the mighty Niagara Falls
- A. We will never know, at least not in this life, what the consequences would have been
 - 1. Not only for Jesus, but for the whole world, if he had given in to the devil's tricks
 - a. But Jesus' boat had a strong anchor, and he knew how to use it
- A. It was not the time for some supernatural miracle to put Satan in his place
 - 1. It was an anchor that is readily available to every one of us here today
- A. When the devil posed his devious suggestions, to lure Jesus into sin
 - 1. Jesus' heart and mind was anchored deeply in one thing – the Word of God
- A. It gave him something to hold on to, when the current might have swept him away
 - 1. And it is there for us to hold on to, when temptation and evil threaten our lives
- A. Do you have an anchor in your boat this morning?

1. Do you know how to use it?

II. We have come to that time of the year that we call the Lenten season

A. Forty days of preparation for the biggest event on the Christian calendar

1. The remembrance of Jesus' death and celebration of his resurrection

A. It seems appropriate that our text this morning should focus on

1. A period of forty days in which Jesus was preparing for his earthly ministry

A. Not in the way most of us would think of preparing for a career or service opportunity

1. But by getting away by himself, out in the wilderness

a. To spend what might sound to us an extraordinary amount of time

(1) Forty days and nights in prayer and in fasting

2. Time in which an intense spiritual battle between God and Satan would take place

a. Time in which the power of God's sacrificial love would be tested

(1) Against worldly ways of exercising power and authority

A. Several things about the context for this struggle of wills that I find intriguing –

1. One, it appears to have taken place very soon after Jesus' baptism

A. You will remember that he was baptized by his cousin, John the Baptist

1. In the Jordan River, after which the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus

a. In the form of a dove, and a voice from heaven proclaimed –

(1) This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased

2. And so the first verse of our text says that Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit"

a. Perhaps feeling strong, energized, ready to face the challenges ahead

A. Then we read that Jesus was led by this same Spirit out into the wilderness

1. Where he would be tempted by the devil, and would eat nothing for forty days

A. It's not the only time in Jesus' ministry that a mountaintop experience

1. Would be followed almost immediately by a time of testing

a. And I believe that can be true for followers of Jesus today – Amen?

2. Just when we feel closest to God; strong and confident in the Spirit's power

a. Life, or the devil, has a way of coming after us with some cunning plan

(1) To see if we are really trusting in God's power, or in our own strength

A. And I believe God allows us to undergo those times of testing

1. Perhaps we may even be led by the Spirit just as Jesus was

a. Not to destroy our faith, but to keep us from getting the notion

(1) That we can handle everything on our own – that we don't need God's help

- 2. That's one of the temptations I believe Jesus may have faced during those forty days
- A. However, you notice in our scripture that the temptations we have recorded
 - 1. Come at the end of the forty days of fasting, when Jesus was physically famished
 - a. And perhaps spiritually and emotionally feeling down
 - 2. Temptations come in many forms, and I believe there is often a direct connection
 - a. Between our physical condition and the spiritual testing we experience
- A. Temptation that would lead us into sin, whether in word or thought or action
 - 1. Is always, first and foremost, a battle for our eternal soul, our ultimate allegiance
 - a. It's always a matter of our theology, our understanding of God and ourselves
 - 2. But more often than not, the temptation is framed by our physical circumstances
 - a. Our hunger, our fear, sexual desires, envy, greed, the list could go on
- A. There are times when the devil may try to make us doubt in terms of "what I believe"
 - 1. But usually, temptation comes when we are faced with a situation
 - a. In which we must make a decision or a choice about what we are going to do
 - 2. And the choice we make will be a true reflection of what we really believe
- A. A.W. Tozer is quoted as having said - The devil is a better theologian than any of us
 - 1. And [he] is a devil still.
 - a. Correct theology is important, but putting that understanding into practice
 - (1) In our daily lives – well, that's where the rubber hits the road
- A. And so we find that it is at the time when Jesus is at his lowest point physically
 - 1. Hungry and tired after forty days and nights in the wilderness
 - a. That the devil hits him up with the first temptation that we read about
 - 2. Jesus, **if** you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread
 - a. Give yourself something to eat, to satisfy these hunger pains
 - (1) If you have the power to do it – if it feels good – why not do it?
- A. Someone has said - The Devil is easy to identify. He appears when you're terribly tired and makes a very reasonable request which you know you shouldn't grant.
 - 1. From our text, it would appear that Jesus immediately recognized this temptation
 - a. As being of the devil, but I wonder if that is true
 - 2. I don't know what it is like to go without food for forty days
 - a. It's pretty obvious that I haven't even missed a lot of meals in my life
 - 3. But I do know what it is like to feel hungry after a day of hard work
 - a. And how it makes your mouth water just to mention food

- (1) Especially fresh bread right out of the oven, I can almost smell it now
- A. Do we really think that Jesus didn't experience a similar sensation
 - 1. As hungry as he must have been, when the thought of a fresh loaf of bread
 - a. Came crowding into his mind
 - 2. If that happened to me, I think the devil would have been the last thing on my mind
 - a. Turning a few stones into bread – now that sounds like a great idea
- A. And it wasn't the idea of making bread that would have been a problem
 - 1. Jesus performed miracles similar to that on several occasions
- A. It was the use, or misuse, of power that would have caused Jesus to sin
 - 1. "I can do anything I want to" is a temptation for all of us at times
 - a. Especially when we are not feeling very good or positive about ourselves
 - (1) Or about the way life is treating us
- A. And it was a matter of priorities – food would seem to be pretty high on the list
 - 1. When you have been fasting for forty days
 - a. But Jesus is clear – food is never the highest priority in our lives
 - 2. Scripture says - We do not live by bread alone
 - a. If satisfying our physical needs takes priority over our walk with God
 - (1) Our relationship with God will soon fall by the wayside
 - 3. Round one goes to Jesus, but the devil isn't finished
- A. I've been given power over all the kingdoms of the world, he boasts
 - 1. And I can give it to anyone I please – that's a sobering thought, isn't it
 - a. Just pledge your allegiance to me, Jesus, and it's all yours
 - 2. That was a strange twist of the truth when you think about it
 - a. After all, the whole world belongs to God in the first place
 - 3. But God, in his wisdom, gave human beings a free will, the freedom of choice
 - a. And what the devil was offering to Jesus would have taken that away
- A. God's plan for the redemption of the world, motivated only by love
 - 1. Or manipulation and control as the devil offered it, that was the temptation
 - a. Would Jesus control the world by force, or let people continue to choose
 - (1) Even when their choice would lead Jesus to the cross
- A. Again, we don't hear of Jesus struggling with this temptation for long
 - 1. But, from a purely practical point of view, the temptation was very real
- A. Take the world and run with it, isn't that what God desires anyway

1. What did it matter how it was done – if Jesus is controlling the world
- A. It would surely be better than having the devil messing around with everything
 1. And if it would do away with all suffering and pain...?
- A. Sometimes we would like to think that if only Christians ruled the world
 1. All the problems would be taken care of, and everything would be wonderful
 - a. But Jesus is clear that ruling the world is not in God's plan
 - (1) The only rule in God's kingdom is the rule of love
- A. And Jesus throws out the anchor again – It is written...
 1. Worship God alone, don't be sucked into the current of political power
 - a. Follow God's ways, even when they don't seem practical
 2. Obedience to God, reliance on the power of love, would cost Jesus his life
 - a. But submitting to the devil would have meant losing everything
- A. One of the things that I find comforting in this scripture is the fact
 1. That when Jesus resisted the devil's temptations, Jesus always won
 - a. The anchor always held, and it will hold for us, too
- A. But it is in the third of the three temptations recorded in our passage
 1. That the devil pulls out all the stops – he even quotes from scripture himself
- A. It's rather frightening to read that Satan had the ability to take Jesus
 1. To Jerusalem and put him on a pinnacle of the temple
 - a. And I'm not sure if this happened physically or in some other way
 - (1) But either way, it says something about the devil's power and abilities
- A. And in any case, there seems to have been the real possibility that Jesus could fall
 1. I've had a little experience in being in high places, and falling off of roofs
 - a. I'm not particularly afraid of heights, but I understand it
 - (1) And the highest point of the temple would have been very high
- A. But the devil's words sound reassuring – Don't worry, Jesus
 1. The scripture you are so fond of quoting says God will protect you
- A. It is written, I will give my angels charge over you, lest you dash your foot against a stone
 1. So **if** that's true, you can do anything, throw yourself down from this highest peak
 - a. The angels will keep you from harm
- A. The disciples of Jesus would later describe Satan as both a "roaring lion"
 1. And in the disguise of "an angel of light"
 - a. And it seems the devil took on the latter appearance for this temptation

- A. Why don't you just jump, see if the prophet spoke the truth
 - 1. Surely God will protect you, and what an publicity stunt that will be
 - a. This isn't for your benefit, Jesus, it's to show the world who you really are
 - (1) And that would be a good thing, right?
 - A. Jesus must surely have felt the current pulling on his boat again
 - 1. Wouldn't that be a good way to show that he was more than just an ordinary man
 - a. And if the scripture said that God would protect him...?
 - A. But the anchor was there, and Jesus knew how to use it
 - 1. Scripture also says we should not put God to the test
 - a. The promise of protection does not mean we should do something foolish
 - (1) Just to see if God will keep his word – that's not faith
 - 2. And Satan finally gave up...for a while, anyway
- III. The theme for our Lenten season is "Holding On and Letting Go"
- A. We often think of Lent as a time to give up something we like
 - 1. And that can be a good reminder of Jesus' great sacrifice
 - A. But there are some things that we want to hold on to as well
 - 1. As we follow Jesus on his journey to the cross
 - A. Jesus knew the importance of holding on to the scriptures – the Word of God
 - 1. When temptations came, it was the Word that he turned to
 - A. Do we have the Word as our anchor?
 - 1. Do we know it well enough to use it?