



Luke 4:2–4

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Reflection

Let's begin today by reading today's passage from Luke 4:2–4. In fact, I'll start at Luke 4:1,

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This is quite a surprising beginning to Jesus' ministry. Let's think about it for a mo-

ment. Jesus' public ministry began with the heavens being torn open and God pronouncing Jesus his son, the Spirit visibly anointing Jesus, and God's words recalling the kingly Psalm 2 – a messianic psalm in which God's anointed king comes to reign over all the nations of earth. I'm not sure there could be a grander beginning or a more powerful endorsement of Jesus' identity and mission than this. Next, perhaps a little strangely, a genealogy, mapping Jesus' earthly family line right back to Adam – a bit odd in terms of timing and placement by Luke. And now a desert visit all on his lonesome? What's Luke trying to show us? If Jesus is the Messiah, God's all-conquering king, shouldn't the Holy Spirit who's just anointed him as king be sending him to Jerusalem to take up his rightful throne and bring an end to

Roman domination for ever? But instead the Holy Spirit leads Jesus further out into the wilderness. What's going on here? John's prepared the way, thousands have been cut to the heart by his words, a veritable army of people, who no doubt with John's encouragement would follow Jesus and help him reclaim God's holy city by force. And yet Jesus leaves them behind and heads all alone deeper into the wilderness. Why?

Two reasons I think. Firstly, Jesus, the Messiah, God's anointed king, didn't come to do battle with the Romans. He hasn't come to conquer Caesar, he's come to conquer the true prince of this world, Satan. Jesus hasn't come to free his people from Roman occupation; he's come to free all people from slavery to Satan, sin and death.

So his first skirmish, his first battle, isn't with someone as insignificant as Caesar Augustus, it is with Satan himself. Jesus' first act as the Messiah is to go out and do battle with Satan.

The second reason for this surprise move follows the first. In Romans and 1 Corinthians Paul refers to Jesus as the second Adam. That was the point of Luke's long genealogy that ended with

the son of Adam, the son of God.

Only two people have ever rightly been called sons of God. Adam and Jesus. All of us are children of Adam but we are not truly children of God like Adam was because Adam's line was forever marred when sin entered the world at the Fall. Adam was

tempted by Satan and he failed, and all of humankind fell with him, sin entered the world, and through sin, death. In today's passage, Jesus, the second Adam will be tempted by Satan, but he will not fail. Through Adam all of humankind fell and live forever under the curse of sin, but through Jesus' victory over Satan, sin and death all of humankind have the opportunity of life as it was meant to be and eternal life through him.

In all of Scripture there are only two times when a human comes face to face with the devil: right at the beginning, and right at this new beginning in today's passage. Adam was tempted once and failed; Jesus is tempted by the devil for forty days. One single delicious piece of fruit was Adam's undoing; Jesus hasn't eaten anything for

almost six weeks and Satan tempts him with fresh bread. Reading from verse 3,

3 The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.’ 4 Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Man shall not live on bread alone.”’

Satan strikes when Jesus is at his lowest. The devil is like this. He comes right at the end when Jesus is at his weakest. Our passage says that after forty days of not eating Jesus was ‘hungry’ – quite the understatement!

Satan begins,

‘If you are the Son of God.

And already, can you see how crafty and how slippery Satan is? So many insinuations in such a few words delivered with perfectly evil timing. 'If you are the Son of God' – 'If God is actually telling the truth, maybe he isn't? You better show me, you better show yourself just to be sure, and if you are the Son of God, well why is he making you starve out in the desert, sending you out here? He says he loves you but then he does this, you must be starving, but if it's true that you're the Son of God, you've got all the power in the world, you could turn these stones at your feet into delicious, oven-baked, crusty loaves of bread. So show me, prove it to me that what God says is true, prove it to yourself, the son of God deserves better than this.'

And you know if Jesus made himself bread

I'm not sure he would have been sinning. Obviously doing something the devil asked him would be sin but, along with all the best lies, the actual content of what the devil was saying, in and of itself, wouldn't be a sin. Jesus making bread for himself to eat is not sinful. But you see temptation isn't always temptation to sin. Sometimes it can be simply temptation to not go along with God's will for your life. You see if Jesus had gone around using his powers to help himself he would have been going against God's plans for his time on earth. It was crucial to God's plans that Jesus be fully human, living exactly the life that we lead, so that he would be an appropriate substitute for us on the cross. Feeding himself miraculously wouldn't do, he needed to be one of us so that he would be a fair swap for all of us on the cross. So later on

Jesus will miraculously feed 5000 people from a few loaves of bread but never once will he use his powers to feed himself.

I love Jesus' reply to Satan. From Matthew's parallel account, 'It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." 'Enough with your words Satan, I trust God's words. He said I am his son, he said that he loves me, I trust that he'll provide for me. I trust him and his words and that is why I am here.'

Think

I hope this passage is giving you plenty to think about. For me what's stood out is how temptations often come at their strongest when I'm at my lowest. What to do? Per-

haps take better care of myself but also to be extra vigilant when I'm tired or down. I've also been struck by how temptation isn't always a temptation to sin. Temptation can be anything that might keep you from the direction God wills for your life. For example, there's nothing sinful about turning down a new ministry opportunity in church – and sometimes it might be wise. But in the same way, could you be giving in to temptation, and turning down something that is God's will for your life? Or consider your workplace. God tells us that whatever you do, work at it as if you're working for the Lord. Now that means giving your very best in your workplace. But in some workplaces to do this means very little time for relationships outside of work and even sometimes for your wife and family. Working hard isn't a sin, it can bring

great glory to God. But sometimes doing so might be giving in to a temptation that sees your life outside of work go against God's will for your life.

Pray

So how do we know God's will for our lives – well Jesus answers it here doesn't he, when he says, 'It is written.' Finding out God's will for your life comes through talking to him. We speak to him in prayer and he speaks to us in his Word – 'It is written.' So now that he's spoken to us in his word this morning, why not speak back through prayer? Why not ask him today to make it clear to you what his will is in your life? Perhaps this could become a regular prayer. And also, pray that with God's help you wouldn't give in to the tempta-

tions that will no doubt come today.