



Luke 4:5–8

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Reflection

The first forty days of Jesus' public ministry are spent fasting and praying in the wilderness. Then the devil comes. First he places food before Jesus' eyes and today something far greater. Reading today's passage from Luke 4 verses 5 to 8,

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The first thing Jesus does after being

baptised by John is to go out and do battle with Satan in the desert. It's a fight to the death of a different sort. On his shoulders Jesus carries the hope of the world. He's the world's last chance. Thousands of years ago Satan played a key role in the death of humanity. He tempted Adam and Eve who gave in, and sin entered the world, and through sin, death. No longer would humankind live forever with God, instead, because of sin they would die. And humankind has lived in slavery to sin and death ever since, with Satan roaming backwards and forwards on the earth delighting in his handiwork. Until now. The one facing off against him in the desert has the power to defeat him, and sin and death with him, forever. So it is a fight to the death, but of a different sort. If Jesus sins, then all of humankind is lost, be-

cause in sinning he would no longer be the perfect sacrifice for us on the cross. If he sins, God's saving plan fails, and all of humanity are lost forever. But if Satan can't make Jesus sin, then Satan is the one who is doomed. And so Jesus, the prince of peace, God become flesh, fully human, and weak and frail from fasting, does battle against Satan, the powerful prince of this world, prowling around waiting until just the right to attack Jesus. Jesus, the greater David goes out to face the greater Goliath in a cosmic battle with thousands of angels and demons watching on transfixed, as the two champions of good and evil finally face off.

Satan wields lies, Jesus wield the truth. Satan tempts and deceives, Jesus defeats him with Scripture. He's miraculously tak-

en Jesus from the wilderness in Judea to the top of a very high mountain – and all this in a moment. All subtlety is gone, Satan lays his strongest temptation on the table. ‘Here’s the deal Jesus. I will give you all the kingdoms of the world if you bow down and worship me. I will give you everything if you just break the first commandment.’

Now it’s important to understand the force of this temptation. These kingdoms are the very reason Jesus has come to earth. He’s come to gather all of the nations into the kingdom of God. He’s come not just to save the Jewish nation but to save people from every tribe and nation on earth. But before he sits on his royal throne, he must hang on the cross. So the devil offers this shortcut. ‘Why die Jesus? Why be

crucified when you can have it all now, just bow down and worship me, just once and all this is yours.'

Three quick things to notice from this passage.

Firstly, see Satan's power. He transports Jesus from the desert to the top of a very high mountain, all in a matter of moments. Satan's powerful. The Bible describes him as the prince of this world, as one who has authority over the kingdoms of this world, who sits on the throne of this world, he's the small 'g' god of this age, who has the power to blind people when it comes to God, and whose spirit is at work in unbelievers. Satan is a powerful and frightening adversary. We need to be wary of him. The only way to face him is by being al-

lied with Jesus. Without Jesus, Satan wins every time.

Secondly, notice again today that Jesus defeats Satan, by quoting Scripture. Nowhere in the Bible is it clearer than here that temptation is defeated through the power of Scripture. And here's why. All temptations come through distorting reality. A temptation is a twisting of reality. So the antidote to temptation is the truth. When you are being tempted, when reality is being twisted and you're tempted to sin, I know it sounds like a cliché, but the truth will set you free.

And finally, Jesus teaches us in this passage that the Father alone is worthy of worship. Just bow down and worship me and I will give you everything – but Jesus

doesn't budge, despite the strongest of temptation. Because the Father alone is worthy of worship. Perhaps I might illustrate this from history. Henry IV compromised his protestant faith, switching to Catholicism, in order to be crowned King of France. 'Paris is well worth a mass,' Henry chuckled. But for Jesus, the entire world was not worth bowing to Satan for even a moment. And Jesus practices what he preaches. Later on Jesus would say:

26 What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Matt 16:26

Think

And here Jesus is fighting the devil for our souls and even though he's offered the

whole world he doesn't give in. And you know Satan's parading the whole world before our eyes every day with every advertisement we see on television, every new car that drives past us on the street, every snippet of conversation we overhear at work about someone's recent European holiday or how much they've made on the stockmarket recently. 'Just worship me and you can have all this. Turn away from the Father and start worshipping all these temptations, start worshipping my handiwork and you can have all this.' You can feel the power of this temptation can't you? And it represents the very heart of sin. Satan tempts us to worship anything and everything other than God and when we do so he wins.

Is there something in your life right now

that you are worshipping ahead of God? Something you spend all of your time thinking about? Something that is taking his place? Could this something be the devil's hook, his trap, his snare that might eventually lead you away from God? It's worth some sober reflection, as we all have weaknesses that the devil tries to exploit. Another area to think about from the passage is this. Do the ends ever justify the means? Are you tempted at the moment to take some shortcuts in your life? Tempted to do something that you know isn't right because the rewards look so great? How do you think today's passage speaks into your situation?

Pray

Think about these things and then pray

about them. And end with praise. We're witnessing the champion of good, defeat the champion of evil on our behalf. In Matthew's account when the temptation is done angels will rush to Jesus' aid. They've been watching their hero do battle, and when Satan flees at Jesus' command, along with his hordes of demons who'd also likely been watching on; they come to comfort and praise their king. Worship your king as well now in prayer.