

Jesus and Satan

If you weren't able to be here last Sunday, may I encourage you to log onto our website, svcc.ca, and listen to Ken talk about both the work we support in Liberia and the dramatic fire that destroyed his business, his means of supporting hundreds of Liberian kids he had promised to help, and how God moved in and through those events to answer the prayers of hungry children half a world away and to teach Ken to stick with the vision he'd been given, not to accept defeat or to get sidetracked. It's an amazing story and Ken tells it with passion and conviction -- that was a great morning and I'd like everyone to hear that message of hope and determination, trusting in God to see you through the challenges, pressing on with the vision He's given.

This week we return to our series on the interactions Jesus had with many different personalities in the gospels and what we can learn from them. Our focus today is on Jesus and His encounters with Satan. There are a lot of them, so we are going to focus in on Luke 4, which begins with Jesus being tempted in the wilderness and, later in the same chapter, driving an evil spirit out of a man in church! (well, okay, it was a synagogue -- the closest thing to church that you could find in those days)

Jesus had just been baptized in the Jordan River by His cousin, John, and we're told that the Spirit of God descended on Him like a dove. Luke 4 starts out with recapturing this moment, saying that Jesus left the area of the Jordan River "full of the Holy Spirit" and that the Spirit then led Him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. For forty days He ate nothing and verse 2 tells us that at the end of that time He was hungry. I would think so!

The devil said to Him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: Man does not live on bread alone."

The devil led him up to a high place and showed Him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to Him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours."

Jesus answered, "It is written: Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only."

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If You are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written:

He will command His angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

Jesus answered, "It says: Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left Him until an opportune time.

This is not intended to be a manual on how to start your public ministry, but it seems to be a pattern that many have followed. Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit and in the power of the Spirit was led into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. You're anointed, feeling excited and ready for action and you're taken away from the action and into a battle within your own mind. Satan has his agenda that he wants to offer as

an alternative to God's agenda and you can be sure that the time will come when you'll get to make the choice.

Here are the alternatives that he offers Jesus:

1. Use your powers for a selfish purpose: make these stones into bread.
2. Receive the authority to rule the whole earth -- that's the authority Adam & Eve gave me and I can give it to You.
3. Prove to Yourself that God loves You and will send His angels to protect You -- as He has promised in His Word.

Now, that's sneaky. Jesus is hungry - He has the means to satisfy His hunger; why not go ahead?

He came to earth to bring the Kingdom of God, to show the beauty of God's rule in the lives of human beings and that's what He's being offered -- the dominion to rule over all the earth; why not take it?

He's staking His reasons for rejecting Satan's offers on the Word of God and now Satan says, "It is written -- don't you believe it? Don't you trust that Your Father will do what He promised in the Bible? Jump! See if this stuff is real or not.

Satan doesn't come to us waving a flag and saying, "This is a temptation! This is me trying to get you to do something you shouldn't be doing, or to do it the wrong way! You're going to have to choose between my way and God's way." He doesn't announce himself at all. He just plants the thought: "If you're hungry, why don't you feed yourself." "I'll give you what you want - if you just bow down and worship me." "If you really believe God's word to be true, then why don't you show me how real your faith is . . . jump!"

Do you have needs? Don't wait for God to meet them -- do what you have to do!

Do you have desires? Don't wait for God to fulfill them -- I know a much faster route to success; go my way.

Do you have doubts? Prove to yourself that your doubts are unfounded and get rid of them once and for all.

Sneaky. Subtle. Have you ever experienced anything like what Jesus experienced? Yes, you have. We've all heard that voice telling us it doesn't matter how we get there; it's only the destination that's important. We've all heard that the end justifies the means and that a good end is more important than doing things the right way. We've heard the voice question whether our trust in God is real, or if all we really trust is our paycheck, our source of income, the people around us. The voice tells us that those things are real and that God is just a belief, just an idea, that if we're going to be true Christians, we need to prove to ourselves that He is real. So sneaky. So subtle.

But Jesus is not taken in by the voice. He is aware that what the devil is selling is never worth the price he asks, even though it seems a small price to pay at first. Why not turn stones into bread? Because the power of the Holy Spirit is the power that comes from God, the power that represents His character. The power that represents

the character of God is not going to be used, at least not by Jesus, in the way that this world uses power. Because Jesus is God in human flesh, He will show us how to use the power of God and He uses it always to serve others. You don't see Jesus turning stones into bread or dry grass into warm blankets, but you do see Him turning water into wine to save embarrassment to the hosts of a wedding banquet. You do see Him walking on water in order to rescue the disciples who are fighting a losing battle out on the Sea of Galilee in the middle of a huge storm. You do see Him multiplying a few loaves and fish in order to feed thousands of very hungry people. When we see this we see the difference between the way the world uses its limited power and the way God uses His unlimited power. The powerful of this world use their position, their influence, to control, to enrich themselves, to advance their ideologies, to oppress their enemies. God uses power to serve, to heal, to bless, sometimes to warn and often to encourage.

Note that Jesus' response to Satan is to quote the Scripture that says "Man does not live on bread alone." In Matthew's version, He adds, "but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." Later He would tell His disciples, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work." His focus in life was not on serving Himself and His priority was not on meeting His own needs, but on hearing and obeying what the Father was saying -- that was food, that nourished Him.

Second temptation: Why not take a short cut to dominion over all peoples on earth? Because what Satan offered was no short cut. If Jesus had bowed down to worship the prince of darkness, He could not claim to be the light of the world. It would have changed everything. The ruler of this present darkness becomes the ruler of the prince of peace? It's absurd and Jesus rightly responded that there is only one worthy of worship.

Watch out for short-cuts to God's Kingdom purposes. Be aware of what you will need to sacrifice in order to do things the easy way, the quick and efficient way. When the devil makes the invitation, you can be sure that the sacrifice will be massive, life-altering, deadly.

Third temptation: Why not remove all your doubts, Jesus? Because Jesus didn't have any doubts about who He was or who His Father was. He had some serious doubts about the tempter and whether the devil really had His best interests at heart. But Jesus had no need to prove anything to Himself, especially by throwing Himself off the high point of the temple -- the only one who wanted to see that happen was Satan himself. Satan had misused a verse of Scripture, one that promised God's protection for the person who loves the Lord, and twisted it into a test of the Lord's faithfulness. Jesus knew that it's wrong to use the promises God makes in this way, that our putting God to the test is not a loving response to His gracious promise, but a defiant and demanding one. And so He told the devil that He wasn't going to bite and that it isn't right to put the Lord God to the test.

The next confrontation that Jesus has with the devil is the kind you see quite often in

the Gospels -- when Jesus meets with a man who is oppressed by an evil spirit. An evil spirit is an entity who is on assignment from Satan and who is doing the work that Satan tells him to do. We saw a couple of weeks ago that an evil spirit caused one man to be mute. We see elsewhere that an evil spirit had the power to throw a young boy into convulsions. In another story evil spirits would drive the man they were tormenting into the wilderness, far away from his family.

This next story comes from later in the same chapter we have been in, Luke 4, and it starts at v. 31:

Then Jesus went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people. They were amazed at His teaching, because His message had authority. In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, "Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are -- the Holy One of God!"

"Be quiet!" Jesus said sternly. "Come out of him!"

Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him.

All the people were amazed and said to each other, "What is this teaching? With authority and power He gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!"

And the news about Him spread throughout the surrounding area.

"In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit." In the gathering of faith, in the meeting of God's people, there was an evil presence, a person under the control of an evil spirit, which shouted out of him a defiance and fear -- "have you come to destroy us? I know who you are -- the Holy One of God!"

You might think that Jesus would be thankful that at least someone recognized who He was. There was someone in the meeting that day who knew that Jesus of Nazareth was the Holy One of God. But Jesus knew the voice, the voice of the sneering, lying, always rebellious demonic presence.

If you've read the Lord of the Rings, you'll remember an encounter at Orthanc, at Isengard, between Saruman and a party headed by Gandalf. As they approached the tower in anticipation of a confrontation with Saruman, Gandalf warned his companions to be careful not to fall under the spell of Saruman's voice. His speech would sound kindly, reassuring, conciliatory, so that they had to guard against its effect on their minds.

Here's a voice in the middle of a place of worship declaring that Jesus is the Holy One of God and Jesus commands that voice to be quiet, because it's the voice of the wrong kind of spirit, even if it says something that is true. Then Jesus commands the evil spirit to come out of the man and he does so immediately.

Both at the beginning and at the end of this story we see that the people were amazed at Jesus -- in the first place they were amazed at the authority of his teaching and in the second they were amazed at his authority to command evil spirits and have them

obey Him. "With authority and power He gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!" And from there the word about Jesus spread throughout the whole area around Capernaum.

How can we characterize Jesus' way of talking with the devil and his workers?

1. The obvious is to say that Jesus speaks with authority. He commands and they listen and obey. And when He sent out His own disciples in mission, they returned with this testimony: "Even the demons submit to us in Your Name."
2. But the less obvious is that Jesus understood where these beings were coming from. He knew the source of their power, the source of their hostility and He refused to accommodate Himself to those things in any way. He refused to negotiate with Satan in the wilderness, but simply rejected each of his "offers" in turn. Knowing what He was dealing with, Jesus knew better than to take counsel from the father of lies, the one who seeks to destroy, the ruler of this present darkness.
3. The next thing we see from this encounter in the synagogue is that Jesus had great respect for the place and the act of worship, and that when the demonic presence wanted to create a scene, to become the focus of people's attention, Jesus used His authority to shut it down, to release the man the spirit had imprisoned and to allow people to focus again on the God they had come to worship. In other words, He didn't allow evil to gain centre stage for more than a moment. He dealt with this spirit and the man was now free to join with those who had come to worship.

What do we learn from Jesus today?

1. We hear this phrase often: Satan is a defeated enemy. From Luke 4 we see that this is true, but it doesn't mean that he has no power and no ability to negatively influence our lives. "Have you come to destroy us?" are not the words of a confident victor, but of a being who knows he is overmatched and Satan and his minions, not the cute little minions of "Despicable Me", but his demons, know they are overmatched. They know that the person who is trusting in Jesus, who is walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, has greater power and a greater authority than they do. But, they also know that we can become confused on this issue, that we can be led to doubt that authority, to think that the authority might depend on our holiness, our righteousness. And so they will attack us with doubts about ourselves, not doubts about Jesus and His victory, but about us and our areas of weakness. To stand, we must stand against the enemy in the authority and the victory of Jesus.
2. The second lesson I see in this passage is the need to recognize the voice. You've heard the truism that people who deal with money learn what's counterfeit by studying the real thing. They become experienced at handling real bills and then when a counterfeit comes into their hands they can tell right away that it's not what they've become accustomed to handling. This is the application for us: if we are spending time with Jesus, reading His Word and listening to Him through our prayer time, we will know His voice and won't be deceived by the voice of the enemy. We won't mistake Satan's condemnation for the conviction of the Holy Spirit. We won't mistake Satan's arrogance for the confidence of the Lord Jesus. And we won't

mistake the devil's fear-mongering for the warnings of the Lord who loves us and who leads us into safe pathways. It was Jesus who said, "My sheep listen to My voice".

3. Finally, 1 John 3:8 says this: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." Those of us who follow Jesus today are also destroyers of Satan's work. Where he has deceived people, we speak the truth. Where he has condemned people, we speak good news of God's grace. Where he promotes sickness and death, we work for healing and life. Where he destroys hope and peace and prosperity, the Christian comes in and builds all of those things: hope, peace, prosperity. We're not to be like those who take advantage of the poor, who create divisions between friends, who set ourselves up as judge and jury . . . we are about destroying those things, the devil's work, and bringing life, reconciliation, good news.

So, our response is to stand against the enemy. We are most effective in that if we know Jesus' voice, and in His strength, we continue His task of destroying Satan's work.