

How ~~to Train~~ He Killed the Dragon

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“‘You shall worship the Lord your God,
and him only shall you serve.’”

⁹And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written,

“‘He will command his angels concerning you,
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¹¹and

“‘On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”

¹²And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

¹³And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

¹⁴And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

—Luke 4:1-15 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION

- **Avoiding a Common Error**
 - Before we can really dive into this text and begin to look at Luke’s message here I want to take some time and address the misuse of this text. At least in my experience the majority of the times I have heard this passage taught the central point was either completely missed or extremely minimalized.
 - This is not a scouting report. We cannot use this text like archived game footage to create a defense to counter the enemy’s offence. That both misses Luke’s point here and in his Gospel as a whole. Creating strategies severed from the central point of this passage puts us in danger of creating a deadly Pharisaism that will leave us condemned in our self-righteousness.

- I think the primary reason for this is the misinterpretation of Hebrews 4:15, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, ~~yet without sin.~~” So we read that and then come to Luke thinking, “Wow these temptations are the same as mine! I can resist temptation like Jesus and I can overcome the Tempter like Jesus if I just master His strategies!” But that is not what Hebrews says. Yes, He sympathizes with us and He was tempted as we are, *YET* Jesus is without sin! This is the argument of Hebrews.

“¹¹And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹²But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” (Hebrews 10:11-14).

- Unlike the prophets of old with all their failures Jesus comes as the perfect Word of God. Unlike the priests’ whose sacrifices could never take away sin Jesus comes as our perfect High Priest and our spotless Lamb. Unlike the failed kings of Israel Jesus comes as the Davidic King who makes His enemies His footstool. And that is Luke’s point.

- **Jesus Christ the Lord’s Anointed and Divine Warrior**

- Luke’s point is not strategies to resist temptation his point is the victory of Christ over the Tempter. I want to briefly trace how this theme builds through the Old Testament into this conflict.
- I am going to begin by reading from Genesis chapter three in the *Jesus Storybook Bible* right after the first temptation narrative in Scripture.

You see, sin had come into God’s perfect world. And it would never leave. God’s children would be always running away from him and hiding in the dark. Their hearts would break now, and never work properly again. God couldn’t let his children live forever; not in such pain, without him. There was only one way to protect them.

“You will have to leave the garden now,” God told his children, his eyes filling with tears. “This is no longer your true home, it’s not the place for you anymore.”

But before they left the garden, God made clothes for his children, to cover them. He gently clothed them and then he sent them away on a long, long journey—out of the garden, out of their home.

Well, in another story it would all be over and that would have been . . . The End.

But not in this Story.

God loved his children too much to let the story end there. Even though he knew he would suffer, God had a plan—a magnificent dream. One day, he would get his children back. One day, he would make the world their perfect home again. And one day, he would wipe away every tear from their eyes.

You see, no matter what, in spite of everything, God would love his children—with a Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love.

And though they would forget him, and run from him, deep in their hearts, God's children would miss him always, and long for him—lost children yearning for their home.

Before they left the garden, God whispered a promise to Adam and Eve: “It will not always be so! I will come to rescue you! And when I do, I’m going to do battle against the snake. I’ll get rid of the sin and the dark and the sadness you let in here. I’m coming back for you!”

And he would. One day, God himself would come.¹

- That is where we have arrived in Luke today. Jesus Christ, the Davidic King, the Divine Warrior, the Lord’s Anointed has come to do battle with the serpent not to take His people home but to take their home back from this usurper!
- This theme is built upon and built upon in Scripture until its ultimate fulfillment in Christ. We sang the Song of Moses this morning and turning back to Exodus 15 we hear Moses singing:

*I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.
The LORD is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father's God, and I will exalt him.
The LORD is a man of war;
the LORD is his name (vv.1-3).*

- Yahweh comes and redeems His people out of their bondage in Egypt, He carries them through the waters of death, He triumphs over the enemies of His people, and He places them upon His mountain.
- Later as Israel enters into the Promised Land and prepares to launch their assault upon Jericho, Christ appears to Joshua “with his sword drawn” as the “commander of the army of the Lord” (Joshua 5:13ff). Upon entering the land God raises up a series of judges to save His people from their enemies. Yet as the book of Judges comes to a close none of these delivers could offer ultimate victory, their enemies always returned, and

¹Sally Lloyd-Jones, *The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zonderkidz, 2007), 34-36.

they continued in their cycle of self-destruction and sin. And so the monarchy comes to be first with the anointing and eventual rejection of Saul and then with the anointing of David.

- I think we see this theme most vividly in the conflict between David and Goliath. Young David, the Lord's anointed, the future king of Israel, arrives as the army of Israel stands helplessly before the Philistines and their champion, the giant, Goliath. David, as the Lord's anointed, does what the people of God cannot do for themselves; he vanquishes the enemy of the people of God and secures their freedom! This is all temporary and the monarchy spins out of control leading Israel into civil war and exile.
- These Old Testament narratives are not about you gaining enough wisdom or mustering enough courage or crafting a sufficient strategy to take on the giants in your life. They are pointing us forward to Jesus Christ in whom all these promises find their fulfillment. These champions of old are meant to point us towards Christ as He achieves ultimate victory for the people of God. Jesus comes not to deal with their Roman oppressors, with Tiberius Caesar, or Pontius Pilot, or Herod the tetrarch, but to deal with the power behind all of the enemies of God's people throughout history, the Accuser who accuses us day and night before our God (cf. Revelation 12:10).
- Jesus' forty days in the desert should immediately remind us of Israel's rebellion and the forty years they spent wandering in the wilderness. And where faithless Israel failed Jesus as faithful Israel triumphs. Likewise Adam succumbed to temptation in the garden and now Jesus, the second Adam, overcomes the Serpent's temptations. These parallels are one of the reasons why Luke traces the genealogy of Jesus back through David, and Abraham, and Adam.
- The return to the Jordan River, where Israel first entered the Promised Land, for the baptism of John signals a new beginning, not just for Israel, but for the whole of humanity as Jesus the faithful Israel and second Adam secures our place in the *Promised Land*, the new heavens and the new earth. From this I think it is clear that Luke's point here is not that we need a strategy but that we need a Substitute because this Lion of Judah who overcomes our Enemy, who crushes the Serpents head, is also the Lamb who was slain.

I. The Father's Provision or Self-Preservation

vv. 1-4: ¹And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness ²for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. ³The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." ⁴And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'"

A. The text begins “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit.” This is not to argue that Jesus was not previously indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Turning back to chapter 1 beginning in verse 30 we read;

³⁰And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

³⁴And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

³⁵And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.

Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit and what occurs at His baptism, and what Luke continues to emphasize here, is His anointing by the Spirit for His three-fold office of Prophet, Priest, and King. In Philippians 2:6-8 we read that Jesus,

⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

1. The first implication here is that Jesus no longer acts upon His own authority, but is submissive to the Father and the leading of the Spirit.
2. The second implication, at least that we are going to look at because there are others, is that Jesus no longer exercises His divine power, but the power of the Spirit and the authority He possesses as the second Adam, as the perfect image-bearer who has been given dominion over creation.

And what we are going to see here is that where the first Adam made us subject to the Serpent the Second Adam subjugates the Serpent.

B. Towards that end Spirit leads Christ into the desert for a divinely appointed conflict. Verse 2 informs us that He was under attack by the devil, that He was tempted for the entirety of this forty day fast. “And when they were ended, he was hungry.” In Mark chapter three the crowds gathering around Jesus have prevented Him from eating for such a duration of time that His family actually seizes Him because they think He has lost His mind. And it is at this point, this moment of weakness, that the Accuser launches his final onslaught.

C. “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” The phrasing here is not really asking a question but rather making the statement “Assuming you are the Son of God.”² This is not an attack upon His sonship but

²F. W. Farrar, *The Gospel according to St Luke*, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), 143.

upon God the Father who declared Jesus' sonship at the baptism. After all during the *Sermon on the Mount* Jesus Himself would later say, "Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone" (Matthew 7:9)? The Devil is calling the fatherhood of God into question. The same thing happened in Eden long before when Satan convinced Eve that her God was not motivated out of Fatherly concern but out of rivalry. He was not providing for them He was preventing them from becoming as He was, "knowing good and evil." Here the same deception is a play. What kind of father lets his own son starve? "You are the Son of God. Use your divine power and turn this stone into the bread you need to survive the very bread that your so-called Father is withholding from you."

D. Jesus' reply is rooted deep within another temptation narrative where God's people questioned the Father's provision. Israel, after passing through the Red Sea, traveled three days, without water, to Marah and after arriving they discovered that the water was undrinkable (Exodus 15:22ff.) and they grumbled against Moses questioning the provision of God. In response to this God graciously provides for His people and makes the water drinkable and we read in that text,

There the Lord made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them, ²⁶saying, "If you will diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, your healer" (Exodus 15:25b-26).

E. This did not last long; however, and shortly thereafter Israel is at it again. Now they are arguing that the Lord has intentionally planned to starve them to death in the desert and they are convinced that it would have been better to die as slaves in Egypt where at least their bellies were filled (Exodus 16). This scenario repeatedly plays itself out over the course of the wilderness years and as Israel prepares to enter the Promised Land an explanation is given.

¹The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers. ²And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. ³And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. ⁴Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. ⁵Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you. ⁶So you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him (Deuteronomy 8:1-6).

F. Israel originally refused to enter the Promised Land because they deemed the inhabitants of the land to be too strong and their cities too fortified to overcome. And God spends the next forty years teaching them in the wilderness that their survival and triumph over their enemies does not depend upon their strength and their cunning but upon the will and word of the Lord.

G. The good news here is not that we have a strategy but that we have a Substitute. That where Adam and Eve fell, where Israel grumbled and rebelled, that where David and all the kings of Israel sought illegitimate personal fulfillment Jesus Christ comes into this desert recognizing that His survival depends not upon His strength and authority but “by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:3).

II. The Father’s Providence or Self-Glorification

vv. 5-8: ⁵And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, ⁶and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” ⁸And Jesus answered him, “It is written,

“You shall worship the Lord your God,
and him only shall you serve.”

A. Whether Christ sees the kingdoms of the world and their glory by physical transportation or by a vision does not alter the point of this text so I am not going to speculate about that. But it does take place and the Devil offers Jesus authority over all of the nations. As hungry as Jesus was after forty days of fasting I suspect that after thirty years of swinging a hammer as a carpenter’s son in the insignificant town of Nazareth that Jesus was far more desirous of this authority than He was of a singular loaf of bread.

B. We think we know what it is to want something, what it means to desire something and the more I compare that to the desire Christ has for the nations and their glory it becomes clear that I, that we, haven’t a clue as to what those words really mean.

C. Looking back to chapter one verse 32 the angel says to Mary,

³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

We can also look back to Psalm 2 beginning in verse seven,

⁷I will tell of the decree:
The Lord said to me, “You are my Son;
today I have begotten you.
⁸Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.
⁹You shall break them with a rod of iron
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.”

¹⁰Now therefore, O kings, be wise;
 be warned, O rulers of the earth.
¹¹Serve the Lord with fear,
 and rejoice with trembling.
¹²Kiss the Son,
 lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,
 for his wrath is quickly kindled.
 Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Jesus is meant to rule over, to judge, the nations they are His inheritance and the ends of the earth His possession and these nations are meant to take refuge in Him.

D. If we turn to Acts 4 we can better see why this temptation is so sinister. The chief priests have just commanded Peter and John “not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.” They then gather with their friends and pray,

Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, ²⁵who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, [and now quoting from the first half of Psalm 2]

‘Why did the Gentiles rage,
 and the peoples plot in vain?

²⁶The kings of the earth set themselves,
 and the rulers were gathered together,
 against the Lord and against his Anointed’— [How do they understand this Psalm as speaking to their current situation? The remainder of their prayer tells us.]

²⁷for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place (24b-28).

E. The apostles understand that Psalm 2 is saying that the means by which Jesus Christ obtains His inheritance is His substitutionary death on the Cross. And Satan comes to Jesus offering Him a means to obtaining this inheritance apart from that death.

F. Again Jesus’ reply is rooted within another temptation narrative. Moses speaking to Israel, as they prepare to enter the Promised Land warns them,

¹⁰And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, ¹¹and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, ¹²then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ¹³It is the Lord your God you shall

fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear (Deuteronomy 6:10-13).

Despite their previous refusal to enter into the land, as its inhabitants were too strong and its cities too fortified, their temptation upon entering the land will be to think that they have obtained this for themselves. However, unlike Israel and unlike Adam and Eve, who sought to exalt themselves and become like God, as we already read in Philippians,

Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5b-11).

G. While humanity seeks to exalt itself Jesus humbles Himself and is exalted according the predetermined plan of the Father.

III. The Father's Protection or Self-Vindication

vv. 9-12: ⁹And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written [and here Satan quotes Psalm 91],

"He will command his angels concerning you,
to guard you,"

¹¹and

"On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone."

¹²And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

A. At first glance this seems to be the oddest of the temptations but Jesus' reply explains both the history behind and meaning of Satan's challenge. He replies again from Deuteronomy chapter six, specifically verse 16, which reads, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah." There Israel tested Yahweh's provision asking, "Is the LORD among us or not" (Exodus 17:7)? Just like before they argued that He had brought them into the desert to let them die. Then the Lord instructs Moses to go before the people and to strike The Rock at Horeb and then water flowed from The Rock.

B. Unlike Israel in the desert or Adam and Eve in the garden Jesus does not doubt the Father's presence and protection. He does not seek to vindicate Himself by jumping off the temple. Rather He understands the promise of Psalm 91. He understands that His Father will protect and rescue Him and cause Him to trample the serpent underfoot.

IV. Christ our Victor

vv. 13-15: ¹³And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

¹⁴And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

A. Describing this event Sinclair B. Ferguson writes,

Thus, in the power of the Spirit, in the inhospitable desert which the world had become through the first Adam's sin, the second man, the eschatological Adam (*ho eschatos Adam*, 1 Cor. 15:45), regained enemy-occupied territory. . . having beaten back Satan on his 'own territory', Jesus was now in a position to strike fear into his legions and cast them out. . . [This] is the opening gambit in a battle which will proceed throughout the whole course of Jesus' ministry. In various ways the entire Gospel gives expression to this conflict motif. The Spirit's role in Jesus' ministry is now evident. He serves as the heavenly cartographer and divine strategist who maps out the battle terrain and directs the Warrior-King to the strategic point of conflict. He is Christ's adjutant-general in the holy war which is waged throughout the incarnation. Thus, Jesus, Roman-general-like, returns from his hidden conquest 'to Galilee in the power of the Spirit' (Lk. 4:14).³

B. Unlike Israel's first king Saul who was disobedient and rejected by the Lord and abandoned by the Spirit Jesus emerges from this desert in power of the Spirit.

CONCLUSION

- This is but the beginning of the conflict Satan would return "at an opportune time" to resume his assault. And when that day came Christ once again emerged victorious and God would once again strike the Rock only this time the Rock would pour forth living water. And He would pour that living water, the Holy Spirit, upon His people, upon His Son's inheritance the nations. And this Spirit, the same Spirit in whose power Christ triumphed and who raised Him from the dead, now indwells His people. And in that same Spirit we will overcome Tempter not by our might but by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony.

³Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, Countours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 49-50.