

Talk 1. The Three Temptations Faced by Jesus in the Desert

Today, we look at **each of the three temptations** in depth to try to understand:

1. What was at the heart of each temptation?
2. What was so wrong with them?

“Temptation 1: The devil said to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, **command this stone to become a loaf of bread**”

Jesus answered, "It is written, **“One does not live by bread alone.**

John Shea says that “This temptation to turn a stone into bread is a **"good temptation."**”

“A **"good temptation"** does not appear to be wrong at first sight which makes it more dangerous!

- **It has a sense of truth about it.**
- **It is attractive enough to be seriously considered.**

In this case the reasoning would be:

- God fed the Israelites with manna in the desert after they escaped from Egypt (Exod 16-17).
- Therefore, if Jesus is the son of this loving providing God, he should work a similar miracle to feed himself.”¹

Come to think about it, this first temptation of Satan, sounds very like the last temptation by the unrepentant thief on the cross: “If you are the Christ, save yourself and us!”

I can see my own logical mind at work; justifying **an apparently harmless temptation of gaining food.**

"In fact, **as appealing** as this approach is, **it did not work well in the past**. The full story of Exodus shows how this method provided **temporary relief** but in the end produced effects that were not desirable. God provided manna for the Israelites in the desert, but then they wanted **meat..... as a SIGN of God being with them or not**. (Exod 17:7)

Instead of being grateful to God, their Provider, **they became arrogant, insisting God serve their physical needs**.

The people **stayed on the physical level of existence** and never moved beyond it, **dragging God down to the level of a slave."**²

"The problem with miracles is that people passively wait for God to do all the "heavy lifting." (John Shea)

"In this first temptation Satan suggests that people can be appeased if their physical needs are met. What an insult!

Throughout history, **"bread and circuses"** were the proven form of people control. People can be attracted and swayed by just filling their stomachs.

Strategies of this sort are **basically manipulations** of physical needs. They **do not take into account the spiritual and moral** dimensions of people.

But this general type of strategy is not a stranger to both **personal relationships and political campaigns."**³

In this temptation **Jesus was confronted with the choice of what method He would use later to bring people to God**.

Jesus called people to a life of giving, not of receiving.

One way to persuade people to follow Him could be to give them bread, to give them material things.

However, that would have been like bribing people to follow him for the sake of what they could benefit from it.

Enticing people with worldly things would have been the denial of all he came to do.

Jesus came to satisfy the hunger of the heart, which cannot be satisfied with material things.

Jesus answered the tempter in the very words that God spoke to his people in the wilderness: "**Man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord**" (Deuteronomy 8:3).

I found this very insightful: The words used by God in Old Testament are the very words used by Jesus in the desert and are repeated almost verbatim later in his ministry.

25 When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

26 Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.

30 So they asked him, "**What sign** then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?"

32 Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 **For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.**" John 6:25 - 33

Jesus teaches us that God speaks to the human heart in order to transform it.

Satan's strategy is an attempt to distract us from our spiritual growth and transformation by tempting us to focus on our physical needs, here and now.

Temptation 2:

I also discovered something amazing about the words used by Satan in this second temptation: **“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down....”**. **This time, words of Satan** in the desert and are repeated again almost verbatim **against Jesus as He hung on the Cross.**

Mt:39. **Those passing by** reviled him,.... **if you are the Son of God,** [and] come down from the cross!”

Mt:41 **Likewise the chief priests with the scribes and elders** mocked him and said, **“Let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now if he wants him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”**

At the end of the temptations in Luke, we are told that the devil failed in his temptations of Jesus, **he departed for a time.**

Satan tempted Jesus at the beginning of his ministry and at the end.

He tempts us when he thinks that we are **most vulnerable.**

He tempts us directly and, worse still he tempts us sometimes by those around us **at our lowest times and highest time** in life.

I wonder if the temptation by Satan in the desert to ‘Test God’ actually prepare Jesus for the later temptation on the cross by his own leaders?

We will be looking deeper into that tomorrow.

Temptation 3: Matthew 4:8-9: "Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, '**All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.**'"

WHEN I LIVED IN NEW JERSEY, most of my Irish friends lived in Yonkers, just north of New York city. So, I can identify with the following story:

“Basketball referee Al Covino was officiating at a high school league championship game in **New Rochelle**, New York. New Rochelle was coached by Dan O'Brien Their **opponent was Yonkers**. The game was a back-and-forth nail-biter. As the clock ticked down to thirty seconds, Yonkers led by one point.

Yonkers shot and missed. New Rochelle grabbed the rebound and passed the ball up the court. The roar of the crowd was deafening as the New Rochelle player shot for the basket. The ball rolled tantalizingly around the rim and fell off. **A teammate recovered it and quickly tapped it in** for the apparent victory. The home crowd went wild.

Referee Covino looked at the clock and saw that time had expired. But **he couldn't affirm New Rochelle's final basket** because the crowd noise had prevented him from hearing the buzzer. He checked with the other official, but he hadn't heard it either. **Covino approached the timekeeper, a boy of seventeen who gazed up at him with a long,** sad face and said, "Mr. Covino, the buzzer went off as the ball rolled off the rim—before the final tap-in was made."

Covino had no choice but to tell Coach O'Brien that he'd lost the championship game. The coach was crestfallen. His face clouded over and his head drooped. **At that moment, the young timekeeper came up to him and said, "I'm sorry, Dad. I had to tell Mr. Covino the time ran out before the final basket."**

O'Brien looked up at his son. The cloud passed from his face, and he brightened as if the sun had burst through. "That's okay, son," he said. "You did what you had to do. I am proud of you."

The coach turned to Covino and said proudly, "Al, I want you to meet my son, Joe." Then the two walked off the court, the father standing tall with his arm around his son's shoulders.

Can you imagine the temptations that boy had to fight? It was his own school's championship game. **He was the son of the coach.** Only he knew the buzzer had sounded before the final basket.

He held in his hands the key to the culmination of the team's entire successful season. **It would have been so easy to yield to the temptation to say the buzzer had sounded after that last shot instead of before.** No one would have known the difference, except himself!

There was also another potential temptation—the coach's temptation to win at any cost. O'Brien could have said, "Son, how could you do this to me? To your team? To your school? You let us all down."

But neither father nor son yielded to these temptations, and I think we can see why. It's apparent in the pride the father showed in his son's integrity. **The boy had been taught to do the right thing.** Because of that, they lost the game but achieved a much bigger victory that day.”⁶

What the tempter was saying was, "**Compromise! Come to terms with me! Don't pitch your demands quite so high! Wink just a little at evil.**" ⁷

This was the temptation presented to Jesus: to come to terms with the world. **Try to change the world by becoming like it.**

“Jesus came into the world for the very purpose of setting up the kingdom of God. But standing on the path to that goal was the cross.”

So, the devil offered Jesus a shortcut that would bypass the cross:

- Why don't You take this physical, temporal kingdom I offer in place of the kingdom for which You came?
- Surely the end justifies the means.

We can see why this third temptation might have appealed to Jesus much more than the previous ones—**because the devil was offering a way of ruling the world without going through the agony of the cross!”⁸**

Back came Jesus' answer: **"You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve him and swear by his name"** (Deuteronomy 6:13).

Jesus was quite certain that we can never defeat evil by compromising with evil. He laid down the uncompromising nature of the Christian faith.

Christianity cannot stoop to the level of the world; it must lift the world to its own level. Nothing less will do.

“Louis-Charles Bourbon, the son of **King Louis XVI** of France and his wife, **Marie Antoinette**, was the heir-apparent to the French throne. Born in **1785**, Louis-Charles was four years old when the French Revolution broke out in **1789** and his father was deposed. The royal family was removed from the Versailles palace and imprisoned in Paris.

When his father and mother were guillotined in 1793, eight-year-old Louis-Charles was officially the new king of France—in the eyes of those who remained loyal to the ruling family.

But the revolutionaries were determined that he would never rule. Though they held him in prison, they dared not execute him for fear of alienating too many loyalists.

Instead, according to legend, **they devised an alternate plan. They would expose the young prince to all kinds of temptations, and when he inevitably succumbed, he would be discredited in the eyes of his supporters.**

So, Louis-Charles was presented with **rich foods**, hoping to make him a slave of appetite. They exposed him continually to **foul language**, hoping to corrupt his mind and speech. They surrounded the prince throughout his waking hours with **every temptation they could think of** to discredit him and drag him into dishonor.

But the boy did not slip or yield to the temptations set before him. Astounded at his resistance, they finally gave up their program and asked him why he never partook of the extreme pleasures constantly dangled before him. The young Louis-Charles replied, **"I cannot do what you ask because I was born to be a king."**⁹

In the rite of baptism, we are anointed with the oil of Chrism, which is reserved for priests, prophets and kings. **So, each of us is a king and should live up to that standard.**

And this is the most compelling reason for living pure lives in the face of the lure of pleasure, pride, and position that assails us every day. We, too, are born into a kingly family, and we are promised a glorious destiny. As the apostle Paul wrote, "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2:12).

Now, I can see why Jesus, repeatedly said that his kingdom is not of this world.

1. Satan's strategy is an attempt to distract us from our spiritual growth and transformation by tempting us to focus on our physical needs, here and now.
Jesus teaches us that God speaks to the human heart in order to transform it.
2. Satan tempts us directly and, worse still he tempts us sometimes by those around us **at our lowest times and highest time** in life.
3. "Compromise! Wink just a little at evil" ⁷
Christianity cannot stoop to the level of the world; it must lift the world to its own level. Nothing less will do.

At the end of Mass

Tomorrow we look at: **Jesus was led by the Spirit**

The context of the temptations of Jesus

The Spiritual Journey of Jesus: Our Spiritual Journey Too

Baptism – Temptations – Public Ministry – Led by the Spirit

Did the temptation by Satan in the desert **actually prepare Jesus for later in his ministry?**

¹ Paraphrase of “First Sunday of Lent “The Relentless Widow” by John Shea pages 64

² Paraphrase of “First Sunday of Lent “The Relentless Widow” by John Shea pages 65

³ Paraphrase of “First Sunday of Lent “The Relentless Widow” by John Shea pages 69

⁶ Overcomer by Dr. David Jeremiah page 141 & 143

⁷ Bible Commentaries by William Barclay's Daily Study Bible Matthew 4

⁸ Overcomer by Dr. David Jeremiah page 153 & 154

⁹ Overcomer by Dr. David Jeremiah page 158 & 159