

Jan 21 – Leader’s Guide - Luke 4:1-15 “Good Fruits of Temptation”

Read Luke 4:1-15; Deuteronomy 7:6-9; 8:1-3

1. What are the connections between Luke 4 and Israel’s time in the desert? (Consider both the Deuteronomy reading and what your group knows of the episode in the life of Israel). What do you think Luke, the Holy Spirit, is desirous to show us with these connections?

Jesus goes through baptism in the Jordan – Israel goes through baptism in the Red Sea

Jesus is there 40 days – Israel there 40 yrs

Hunger was present – Jesus invited to turn stones to bread – Israel was provided manna by God.

A choice was brought to bear – serve God alone or participate in idolatry

A choice was brought to bear – do things your own way, or God’s way.

For each then it was a time of testing – refining, strengthening, deepening trust, proving and improving call and character.

Luke seems to be inviting us to use Israel’s testing in the desert as a “lens” to understand what Jesus is going through.

Jesus is the “new”, the “true” Israel – faithful to the covenant and call – that they would reveal the character of God and so draw all nations to the Lord.

The Greek word that is here translated temptation is the word *pierasmos*. It is used to refer to the challenging life circumstance that can either be a test, that is proving one’s character and in so doing improving it. I can also be a temptation, enticing a person to sin, dragging them down in some way. Whether the *pierasmos* is test or temptation depends on who is behind it, and our response to it.

2. We pray into this reality every single Sunday. In the Lord’s prayer we pray – “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil (the evil one)” In this we are praying: Lord, as I navigate the *pierasmos*, the circumstances of life, may they be used by the Spirit to test, to prove and improve my character. Let them not be used by the devil to tempt me, to entice me to sin, to drag me down in some way. Discuss.

It may be that for some in your group the idea of a Devil will be difficult. I think you could likely navigate this question without coming to a consensus around how your group views the Devil. I suspect everyone has experienced a situation where one response tests (proves and improves your character) – and another response

tempts (entices you to sin, drags you down in some way). You likely don't need to see the Devil behind that to navigate this question.

If it becomes a "stinking point" you could either just take the Devil piece off the table or ask those who are struggling with it to suspend judgement for the duration of the question to allow others to engage with the question openly.

3. Can you think of a situation in your life that depending on your response is either test or temptation?

Here is the example I (Tim) used in the sermon that might help trigger some of your own reflections. Having a situation in mind to share will help others think of their own.

Let me give an example – a situation I suspect every single one of us has faced this week – be it at work – home – relationship – we've done something that has caused some degree of harm to another – when faced with it - we have one of two options – one - we can take a path of repentance and reconciliation – I did that – I'm sorry I hurt you – how do we move forward here – that would be test – proving and improving character

Or – two - we can't bear the thought of admitting wrong – so we justify – make excuse – blame shift – go silent – and as a result we can't move forward – the relationship erodes – that would be temptation – bringing us down.

Pierasmus - a difficult life circumstance that either tests - proves and improves our character – or tempts - drags us down in some way - whether that circumstance is test or temptation depends on whose behind it – depends on our response to it.

4. As we seek to live into the new life Jesus has won for us, as we live into the patterns of the kingdom, we're going to have to deal with three things – the world, the flesh, and the devil. How do each of these pull us away from the way of Jesus?

Here is an unedited section of the sermon where I touched on this:

As we seek to live into the new life Jesus has won for us – as we live into the patterns of his kingdom – we're going to have to deal with three things – the world – the flesh – the devil – we're going to have to deal with the world - the impact of others – the culture on us – the ways in which our society as a whole lives out of step with the way of Jesus – were going to have to deal with that - were going to have to deal with our flesh - our internal drives that undermine the work of the Spirit – be it pride – self-absorption – self-centeredness – we're going to have to deal with the flesh - and we're also going to have to deal with the devil – the accuser – the liar – the deceiver - who seems to operate at the level of our thinking

If you've been doing the bible in a year reading challenge you've already seen this – the devil coming to Adam and Eve – did God really say you can't eat of that tree – common now – he's keeping good stuff from you – he doesn't love you – or with Job – you don't really love God – you only love the good stuff you think he's given you – the devil seems to operate at the level of our thoughts – accusing – lying – deceiving – undermining trust in God...

Let me give an example that might resonate – in a moment of temptation - thoughts begin swimming in your head – ah it's not all that bad – it won't cause you or others any harm – and besides God is a forgiving God – full of grace – its playing down holiness in favor of forgiveness - and then we give into that temptation – and a whole new set of thoughts come flooding in – how could you do that – how can you call yourself a Christian when you do that – keep doing that - there's no way God will forgive you – playing down forgiveness in favor of holiness - and shame and condemnation begin to swirl.

The last thing that Jesus heard from his father was – “This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased”. These phrases are quotations from scripture. ‘This is my beloved son’, is a quote from Psalm 2 that speaks of a messianic King who will rule over the earth with peace and justice. ‘In whom I am well pleased’ is a quote from Isaiah 42, where Isaiah is beginning to speak of the suffering servant who will be bruised for our iniquities, crushed for our transgression, who by his wounds we are healed. He is being commissioned as Messianic King and suffering servant. The one who will bring about a kingdom of justice and peace by way of laying down his life for the sake of others.

5. In what ways does the devil seek to chip away at that call at every turn?

Here is an unedited section of the sermon where I engage with this question:

The Devil begins - If you are the son of God – turn these stones into bread – in other words – use your power for your own sake – to meet your own needs – Jesus never ever used his power for his own sake – instead he laid it down in love for the sake of others – and so he responds – no - man does not live by bread alone – in other words I trust in the father's provision – in that response – piasmos becomes test - proving – improving his call – his character.

The Devil next takes him to the heights of the mountains – shows him all the kingdoms of the earth in an instant – all of this is mine to give to you – just bow down and worship me - how can all the kingdoms of the earth be Satan's to give? – well to some degree have not all the kingdoms of the earth been established – preserved - by way of the means of Satan – violence – fear – oppression – conquest – injustice – death? – to receive such would be to affirm the means by which it was attained – no – I will not bow down – serve your way – I will worship and serve God alone - in that response – piasmos becomes test - proving – improving his call – his character.

Next the devil takes him up to the pinnacle of the temple – why there – well at the time there were all sorts of people who would claim to be Messiah – and so it became necessary to discern – how will we know if it is truly God’s messiah – and so they developed all sorts of extrabiblical tests – one of them was – well Messiah will be able to leap off the pinnacle of the temple and survive – the devil takes him to that pinnacle and says - you can win the hearts of the people – simply by leaping off - but up on that pinnacle Jesus would have the city of Jerusalem and surrounding area - laid out in front of him – I wonder how much he knew of what was coming – did he know of that moment there in the upper room where his beloved friend would betray him – did he know of that moment down below him in the valley where in a grove of olive trees he would sweat drops of blood agonizing over what would come – did he know that moment over there in that courtyard where he would be flogged – beaten - ridiculed – did he know up that road he would carry a cross being mocked and spit upon by a jeering crowd – did he know that there on that hill in the distance he would breath his last nailed cruelly to a cross – did he know – Satan then begins to twist scripture – I can see that you are rooted in your calling – and Psalm 91 is all about that – isn’t it – about the King of the line of David that the Lord will protect – will keep even from stubbing his toe – if that’s you – than why are you facing such a future – no – no – says Jesus – there is no kingdom without a cross – I lay claim to a new future by way of suffering and death – a death died for those I love – you shall not put the Lord your God to the test - in that response – pierasmos becomes test - proving – improving his call – his character.

6. What was the Holy Spirit’s goal in this “testing” of Jesus? What do you believe the devil’s goal was?

It appears that it was intended to refine Jesus’ calling and build his trust and confidence in who he was and who he was called to be by his father.

Jesus if fully human so these would have been “real” temptations. The writer of Hebrews brings this out to say that because Jesus has been tempted in every way as we are he is able to help us in our time of temptation.

¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

The Devil’s goal was to undermine not only Jesus’ identity but the means by which he laid hold of his kingdom.

7. How does Jesus respond to temptation? What does this reveal to us about how our piasmos can be test and not temptation?

The following is an unedited section of the sermon where some of this was explored that may help your conversation.

David Brooks – Toronto Born Journalist - now columnist for the NY Times – wrote an opinion piece about a decade ago on temptation – and in it - he said it used to be that 100s of year ago people thought you could resist temptation by just saying no – say no to sloth, greed, lust – whatever it is – but if willpower were enough to resist temptation - most of our new years resolutions would still be intact.

Today it's more common to think of overcoming temptation by changing our ingrained habits – manipulating the cue – routine – reward process – like leaving your workout gear on the floor before you go to bed so it's the first thing you see in the morning – triggering you to take that run – but changing habits he says – is also insufficient because it lacks a true understanding of human behavior – for our habits are burned in to us by emotion and fortified by strong yearnings – like the yearning for love – admiration – acceptance

I mean reflect of the things we immediately think of when we consider temptation – tempted to have an affair – is it really about the sex – only secondarily – isn't it rooted in the strong yearnings to be known – loved – affirmed.

Tempted to cook the books – cheat on your taxes – is it really about the money – only secondarily – isn't it rooted in the strong yearnings to feel the safety money gives us in the face of an unknown future – or to be seen as successful – or to have the money to buy the things that give us joy – comfort.

Tempted to manipulate the truth – isn't in rooted in the strong yearnings to be seen a certain way – avoid consequence preserve comfort – protect reputation.

Given that Brooks concludes his article by saying - if you want to see victory over temptation – you need a commitment to a global belief that addresses those yearnings.

Jesus points to this reality every time he responds - it is written – it is written – it is written – each time he quotes from the same section in Deuteronomy – retelling the 40 yr story of Israels desert testing – and buried right in the heart of it – our first reading - the global story he wants them – wants us to hold on to - behold who you are in God's story - beloved – treasured – known – delighted in – forgiven – heirs to a glorious future – the global belief we're invited to hold onto is ultimately revealed through coming to know who we are in Christ.

John Owen affirms this when he writes: the greatest preservative against the power of temptation is to keep the heart full of a sense of the love of God in Christ.

You see temptation comes to us and says you need this to be accepted – to be loved – so lie to protect your reputation – manipulate to be recognized – let go of that conviction to be accepted – cut that corner to be successful – and Jesus invites us here to apply the gospel – to apply his work - to every one of our temptations.

Tempted to lie to protect your reputation? He has seen what you've done, are doing, will do – he took all of that sin to the cross – gave you his perfect record – delights and treasures you - only his view of you carries any lasting weight.

Tempted to manipulate in order to be recognized? In Jesus you have a recognition beyond compare – he left heaven for you – died a death for you – recognized you as son, as daughter – heir of his future – what more recognition would you want.

Tempted to let go of that conviction to be accepted? The one who had every reason to reject you has accepted you in Jesus.

The greatest preservative against the power of temptation is to keep the heart full of a sense of the love of God in Christ – a commitment to a global belief that addresses our deepest yearnings – and it will be that which will turn any piasmos from temptation to text – proving and improving our character – forming in us the way of Jesus – shaping us to living out the patterns of the kingdom.