

The character of Jesus

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[0 : 00] The first reading is from Genesis chapter 3, and we're reading from verse 1, and that's on page 3 of the Bibles on your chair. Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

He said to the woman, Did God actually say, You shall not eat of any tree in the garden? And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden.

But God said, You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die. But the serpent said to the woman, You will not surely die.

For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.

And she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked.

[1 : 28] And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.

And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, Where are you?

And he said, I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself. He said, Who told you that you were naked?

Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat? The man said, The woman whom you gave to me to be with me, she gave me the fruit of the tree, and I ate it.

Then the Lord God said to the woman, What is this that you have done? And the woman said, The serpent deceived me, and I ate. The Lord God said to the serpent, Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock, And above all beasts of the field.

[2 : 43] On your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your offspring and her offspring.

He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. To the woman, he said, I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing.

In pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. And to Adam he said, Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, And have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, You shall not eat of it.

Cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the plants of the field.

By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground. For out of it you were taken, For you are dust, And to dust you shall return.

[3 : 54] Well, our second reading is from Luke chapter 4, Which is on page 1035 in the church Bibles. And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, Returned from the Jordan, And was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, Being tempted by the devil.

And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were over, He was hungry. The devil said to him, If you are the Son of God, Command this stone to become bread.

And Jesus answered, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone. And the devil took him up, And showed him all the kingdoms of the world, In a moment of time.

And said to him, To you I will give all authority, And their glory. For it has been delivered to me, And I give it to whom I will.

If you then will worship me, It will all be yours. And Jesus answered him, It is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, And him only shall you serve.

[5 : 20] And 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.

For it is written, He will command his angels concerning you, To guard you. And on their hands they will bear you up, Lest you strike your foot against a stone.

And Jesus answered him, It is said, You shall not put the Lord your God to the test. And when the devil had ended every temptation, He departed from him until an opportune time.

Good morning everyone. Lovely to see you. Thanks very much Bruce for reading. Please do keep Luke chapter 4 open, As we continue to look at these early chapters of Luke on Sunday mornings. Why don't I pray for us as we start. Let's pray together. Luke tells us he writes to give us certainty concerning the things we have been taught.

[6 : 32] Heavenly Father, We thank you very much for Luke's eyewitness account of the Lord Jesus, And his life and his teaching. And we pray this morning, Please would you give us confidence and certainty to live for Jesus, And to proclaim the message of Jesus.

And we ask it in his name. Amen. I want to begin by asking a question this morning, Which is, How are your New Year resolutions going?

The chocolate, The booze, The caffeine, The exercise regime, Or perhaps actually, Or thinking to yourself, Well hang on a moment, That's rather an unfair question to be asked at the end of January.

I mean, It's fine to ask the question three weeks ago, At the beginning of January, But actually by the end of January, Then it feels slightly unfair to be asked. Certainly in our household, Some of those resolutions have had to be redefined, Or spun, Over the course of the last few weeks. Well how timely you may then think, As we look at Luke chapter 4, Verses 1 to 13, And the temptations of Jesus. Perhaps we can learn from Jesus' example, And pick up a few tips, For how to resist temptation, And get those New Year resolutions back on track.

[7 : 53] But before we get too excited, This passage is not about the temptations that you and I face. Rather, it is about a unique temptation that Jesus Christ faced.

Because remember, Luke is writing to give us certainty and confidence about Jesus. Last week, In chapter 3, Verse 22, We saw Jesus' public commissioning as God's son.

The one who both ruled the nations, And the one who will be the suffering servant. The words at Jesus' baptism, You are my beloved son, With you I am well pleased.

We saw last week, That sonship is the big idea of the genealogy of Jesus. It begins with sonship, Chapter 3, Verse 23, Jesus, When he began his ministry, Was about 30 years old, Being the son, As was supposed, Of Joseph, And it ends with sonship, Verse 38, The son of Enos, The son of Seth, The son of Adam, The son of God.

And it's sonship as well that is at stake in these temptations. Did you notice as Bruce read the passage for us just now, How twice the devil says the same thing to Jesus.

[9 : 11] So chapter 4, Verse 3, If you are the son of God. Again, Chapter 4, Verse 9, If you are the son of God. It shouldn't surprise us that straight after Jesus' public commissioning to be the son of God at his baptism, that immediately afterwards, Satan goes on the offensive.

Because as in every area of life, whether it's at work or whatever it is, simply being commissioned for a task is not enough. How will Jesus stand up to the onslaught and opposition that will inevitably come as it does to every leader?

Will he be faithful to God? Or will he be faithless? The issue is far greater than how much chocolate or caffeine we have consumed over the last four weeks.

Well, you'll see there are two headings on the back of the outline. You might like to turn to that. Hopefully it's helpful. We're going to think about, first of all, spiritual failure, and then spiritual victory.

First of all, then, spiritual failure, in the garden. Because Jesus is not the only son of God in this section of Luke. In chapter 3, verse 38, Adam, the first man, is also described as the son of God.

[10 : 37] So let's turn back to that first reading which we had from Genesis chapter 3, the very beginning of the Bible. page 3 of the Bible.

Here we are at the very beginning of creation. Adam has been made in God's image. He is placed in this wonderful garden, a place where he can flourish, and where he has everything to need to thrive.

And there's just one prohibition. Chapter 2, verse 16, And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.

For in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die. And then, the beginning of our reading, chapter 3, verse 1, Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

He said to the woman, Did God actually say, You shall not eat of any tree in the garden? Now you'll know that throughout the Bible, Satan is real, the devil is real.

[11:49] We are not to think of a character in red tights, pointy horns, and a pitchfork. Nor are we simply to think of the devil's involvement in our worlds as simply, in cases of what we might say, are extreme wickedness.

You know, the kinds of things that hit the headlines, that hit the media, and which there is simply no other human explanation for, it seems, and therefore it is regarded as the work of the devil.

In the words of the 1994 cult film, the usual suspects, the greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist. The devil is the personal force for evil in the world that is behind everything and everyone who rejects God and rejects his rule over us.

It's just what we see here, isn't it, in Genesis chapter 3. So, God speaks, Genesis 2, verses 16 and 17. The devil challenges chapter 3, verse 1.

Did God actually say? In other words, at stake, you see, is who is in charge of the world? Who runs the world? The devil is the personal force for evil in the world that lies behind everything and everybody who rejects God and rejects his rule over us.

[13:10] And Adam made the wrong choice. A disobedient, unfaithful son, resulting, as we read through the chapter, in death and exile from the garden.

And although also Genesis 3 contains the wonderful promise in verse 15 that one day a descendant of Adam will defeat Satan, he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.

Nonetheless, the whole future of humanity, as you know, hangs on this one encounter because each one of us naturally follows Adam. It is at the heart of what the Bible calls sin as it is the attitude that I say I will be the one who decides how I run my life and not God.

Spiritual failure in the garden. Secondly, spiritual failure in the wilderness because Adam is not the only son of God mentioned in Luke 4 other than the Lord Jesus.

There is a second son who is harder to spot and we need to have our Sherlock Holmes wits about us. But there are clues. Verse 1, back in Luke 4.

[14:29] Verse 1, the reference to the wilderness. Verse 2, the 40 days. Verse 12, the putting of God to the test. And then the fact that actually for each of these temptations, Jesus' response is from the Old Testament.

It's from the same part of the Old Testament. It's from Deuteronomy chapter 6 to 8 which looks back on Israel's time in the wilderness. Indeed, in Exodus chapter 4 verse 22 God describes Israel as his firstborn son.

So please will you turn to Deuteronomy chapter 8 on page 183. Here are God's people on the edge of the promised land.

They've been rescued from slavery in Egypt. They've spent years wandering in the desert, 40 years wandering in the desert as God's punishment for their testing of him, their disobedience, their grumbling.

And now God says, Deuteronomy chapter 8 verse 2, And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these 40 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.

[15:53] God's purpose for those 40 years in the wilderness was to test them, to show and to reveal what was in their heart. But like Adam, they failed the test.

And they would continue to fail when they went into the promised land. They would rebel against God, eventually resulting in death and exile from the land. Spiritual failure in the garden and in the wilderness.

You and I live in a world where the results of the fall and human sin are everywhere apparent. And where the need for a saviour, a rescuer is also everywhere apparent.

Solutions are legion, but for every would-be saviour who seems to be raised up, disappointments are corresponding. Barack Obama, elected on a platform of change, yet the Wall Street Journal

claiming last week that much of his legacy has been built on sand.

Just last week, someone was telling me how recent events in their life had revealed to them the sheer depths of their sin. How they generally think of themselves, as I guess most of us do, as a nice, reasonable, decent person.

[17 : 15] But all it took was for an unexpected event to happen and to take place and suddenly the ugly reality of what was going on in their hearts had been revealed.

Listen to how one Christian writer speaks of the disappointment of reaching middle age. I think probably middle age refers to more of us than we might like to think.

He writes this. I thought I'd be more mature by now. I thought I'd have greater faith. I thought I'd be more prayerful, less fearful, more patient, less irritable.

There has been progress in all these areas, but not as much as I expected. I thought I'd be a more Christ-like, spirit-filled disciple of Jesus, a better husband, a more skilled father, a more thoughtful friend.

I thought I'd be a bolder witness for Christ and a greater lover of people. I thought I'd be more fruitful and I thought I would have made more progress. He finishes.

[18 : 23] The hardest part of middle age is realizing how much of the me I thought would change still remains. Depravity is still a daily battle on many levels.

Can you relate to that? I can certainly relate to that. Have you come to terms with your own moral failure? Not just your failure to keep your New Year's resolutions and your half-baked standards, but actually your failure, your sin, your failure before God.

But secondly, spiritual victory because back in Deuteronomy chapter 8, remember how God said that Israel's time, their 40 years in the desert, were to test them to reveal their heart.

And now, in Luke chapter 4, Jesus is being tested and his heart is being revealed because although Jesus faces three different temptations, they really simply boil down to one question, which is, is he qualified to save?

Is he going to be faithful to the commissioning he was given at his baptism? Will he go the way of Adam? Will he go the way of Israel, the way of self-interest?

[19 : 47] Or will he go a different way? First up is the trust test. Have a look at verses three and four. The devil said to him, if you are the son of God, command this stone to become bread.

And Jesus answered him, it is written, man shall not live by bread alone. I take it it's the temptation which says you can't fully trust God.

You can look after yourself much better than God can look after you. The temptation to put my advantage above obedience to God when it's a choice between the two.

And it is, of course, a test which you and I fail because we are shot through with self-interest. It's a choice which Adam failed, which Israel failed.

Yet God has spoken on the issue. Verse four, man shall not live by bread alone. The quote from Deuteronomy continues, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

[20 : 56] Jesus passes the test. He will trust God and take his word seriously and trust his word and submit to it.

Secondly, there's the power test verses five to eight. And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time and said to him, to you, I'll give all this authority and their glory, for it's been delivered to me and I give it to whom I will.

If you then will worship me, it will all be yours. And Jesus answered him, it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.

Well, the view must have been amazing, mustn't it? Imagine the cameras panning around, all the kingdoms, all the nations of the world, they can all be yours.

But remember Psalm 2 that we looked at last week, Jesus is the son of God, he is the one who will inherit the nations and he will. After his death and resurrection, he is proclaimed both Lord and Christ.

[22 : 05] You see, so what's going on here? Well, it is the temptation to avoid the path of suffering. The devil is saying, yes, the nations will be yours, but think of the path that you are going to follow, a path of suffering, of hardship and of great cruelty.

It is costly. I'll give you the same outcome for no cost if you worship me. And again, I take it as a test, you and I fail every time we put self advancement over loyalty to God.

every time we say to God, you can have a place in my life, but not first place. But again, God has spoken on the issue.

Because he is God, everyone is to worship him alone. Again, a test, Adam failed, Israel failed. As they worship the golden calf, Jesus passes.

thirdly, there's the test, test. Verse 9, and 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, for it is written he will command his angels concerning you to guard you, and on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against the stain.

[23 : 35] And Jesus answered to him, it is said, you shall not put the Lord your God to the test. Well, the devil is a quick learner, he's got a new trick up his sleeve, he quotes the Bible, in other words, never forget that it's possible to quote the Bible and to do so in the interests of the devil.

He quotes here from Psalm 91, in which God promises to guard and protect his appointed king. And therefore, of course, for Jesus to throw himself down from the temple, it wouldn't be faith, it would be unbelief.

Masquerading as faith, it would be to test God. Just as Israel time and again put God to test in the wilderness, just as we so often want God to jump through our hoops rather than trusting his promises, if you really love me, if you're already for me, if you're already there, prove yourself, do these things.

But Jesus passes. See, Luke is not interested in giving us top tips on how we can be more like Jesus and resist temptation, but rather he is wanting to demonstrate that Jesus is completely unlike anyone who has gone before him or anyone who has ever lived after him.

In the same way that the future direction of humanity hung on Adam's failure in Genesis 3, so here in Jesus' victory over Satan, another future for humanity is being opened up.

[25 : 10] Jesus demonstrates he is God's obedient, faithful son who is willing to walk the road of suffering. And although we're told in verse 13 that the devil then departed from Jesus, that phrase until an opportune time suggests, doesn't it, it is not the last time that Jesus is going to face this temptation.

So turn on, will you, to Luke chapter 23. Luke chapter 23, here we are at the crucifixion.

Jesus hangs on a cross with two others. Verses 35 to 39, line, let me read from verse 35. And the people stood by watching, but the ruler scoffed at him, saying, he saved others, let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his chosen one.

The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, if you are the king of the Jews, save yourself. There was also an inscription over him, this is the king of the Jews.

One of the criminals who were hanged, railed at him, saying, are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us. Once again, three temptations, but once again, only really one temptation, and that is the temptation to save himself.

[26 : 51] Verse 35, the people say, he saved others, let him save himself. Verse 37, the soldiers say, if you are the king of the Jews, save yourself. Verse 39, one of the criminals says, are you not the Christ?

Save yourself. You see, will Jesus go down the path of saving himself, or will Jesus go down the path of saving others? And of course, this is the very point, when he is on the path of saving others. Remember the promise back in Genesis chapter 3, that one of Adam's descendants would destroy the devil? In Luke chapter 4, Jesus puts himself on that path to victory, fulfilled in his death on the cross.

For those who have read or watched The Hunger Games, you may remember this quote, as Caineless Everdeen stands before District 12, with her hands held up in triumph, she says, there is one of us who has conquered the victory of one person on behalf of many, the victory of one person shared by many.

It's one of the reasons, by the way, that the Reformation is so important. You'll know that 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, and yet judging certainly by some articles in the media, you might think actually that it was simply all a big misunderstanding, that the Reformers and the Roman Catholic Church were simply talking past each other, miscommunicating, or that it was just about driving out corruption in the medieval church, but actually there was far more at stake.

[28 : 44] The Reformers had a different view of humanity, they had a biblical view of humanity, that everyone follows Adam, that we are all naturally born into a state of sin, that we cannot by our own

power escape it.

And so they asked the question, how then can a person be right with God? By grace alone, a gift from God, not something that is earned or deserved.

They then asked the question, how then does this grace come to us? The answer, by Christ alone, not through priests or religion or by ritual, but through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And from Luke chapter 4, we might add through the obedience and faithfulness of Jesus Christ, which took him down that path to his death. Martin Luther said, I teach that people should put their trust in nothing but Jesus Christ alone, not in their prayers, merits, or in their own good deeds.

Spiritual failure, spiritual victory. So, some questions as we finish. Do you ever despair at the way the world is going?

[30 : 08] I don't mean the sort of fake despair of so many at the election of Donald Trump. He'll be gone in a few years' time. Rather, I mean the real despair at the pain and evil that is in our world, regardless of who is in charge.

Do you ever despair at that? in which case, remember here that in Luke chapter four, Jesus lights the fuse, if you like, for the overthrow of the devil.

He achieved it in his death on the cross, and at the end of time, when he returns, he'll mop up what is left over. Do you ever despair at your own inability to change?

Perhaps you look at your heart, and you see yourself doing the very things you don't want to do.

You look at your heart, you see yourself not doing the very things that you do want to do.

A sense of slavery, a sense of inability to change. May I say, that is a good place to be, because it is the place of reality.

[31 : 22] Only Jesus can deliver you from that. The unique son of God, who came, who lived a life of perfect obedience, perfect faithfulness to God, who died on the cross for our salvation, the forgiveness of sins, and the wonderful peace with God that follows.

If you have not yet done so, will you put your trust in him? And for those who have done that, who know that Jesus is indeed Lord and Savior, well, we may stumble, we fail, we fall, and it may be that some of us are particularly aware this morning of particular ways in which we've done that, particular struggles, particular weaknesses, particular sins that beset us at the moment.

but it's Jesus' faithfulness and obedience which will make sure that we get to our destination, the destination in the new creation at the end.

There is no one more willing and able to help us than Jesus. Let me read from Hebrews chapter 4 that Rupert read to us earlier.

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.

[32 : 56] Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. If you are the Son of God, God, Heavenly Father, we praise you very much indeed that the Lord Jesus is indeed your Son, your Ruler, the one to whom each one has to give account, the one before each one has to bow the knee on the final day.

And we praise you too for his obedience, for his faithfulness, for his willing to go down the path that will take him to his death on the cross.

We thank you for his defeat of the devil. We praise you that he now lives, the one to offer salvation and the forgiveness of sins and peace with God. And we pray, Heavenly Father, please would you grant us great confidence and certainty in these things.

and we ask it in his name. Amen.