

**“THE SEED OF OBEDIENCE IN THE SOIL OF TEMPTATION”**  
**Luke 4:1-13**

We are surrounded by temptations. (Not those Temptations!) Our culture glorifies temptation and saturates our lives with temptation – a desire for something we don’t have, a belief that fulfillment comes from anything other than God, whether it is relational fulfillment, sexual fulfillment, financial security, good health, long life, purpose, meaning, pleasure, the easy life, the good life. Every one of us is tempted by different things, although we might have many temptations in common. Temptation is not sin. It is a test, a trial that determines our loyalty to God. When we give in to temptation – either mentally dwelling on it or physically doing it, then it becomes sin – flat out disobedience and rebellion against God.

We’ve always had these times of testing. In the Garden of Eden, God told Adam and Eve they could eat of any tree in the garden, except one – the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The *fruit* of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, isn’t even all that great. It’s not nearly as great as the fruit of the Tree of Eternal Life, which they could have eaten from. All the great, delicious fruit on every tree they could eat – just don’t eat from this one. So what one are they tempted to eat from? The one God told them they couldn’t have! We are tempted when we desire what we don’t have or what we are not supposed to do. I liked this picture of Temptation from “The Family Guy.” I’ve never actually watched the show, but I am sure I know what is going to happen here.

The season of Lent, is a season of the Liturgical Church Calendar, which lasts for 40 days (not including the 6 Sundays) from Ash Wednesday to Good Friday. Lent is a time of prayer, reflection, resisting temptation, repentance, and sacrifice (not just giving something up, but doing something unselfish for others). It is a time when we meditate on the Cross and the suffering of Jesus and what it means for us to take up our cross and follow Him. During these remaining 5 Sundays of Lent, we will be looking at “The Seeds of Easter in the Soil of Lent.” What is it in Lent that prepares us for the victory of Easter? We must first know the sorrow of Lent in order to fully appreciate the joy of Easter. Today we are looking at, “The Seed of Obedience in the Soil of Temptation.”

What is soil, anyway? Soil is dirt that’s full of minerals and broken rock. The soil that makes things grow has rotting stuff in it – decaying, organic matter. People who love gardening will sometimes make a compost heap. It’s full of old decaying food, coffee grounds, banana peels – anything that will rot. Temptation is that kind of soil – full of rotting things that once looked good. So how does the seed of obedience grow in the soil of temptation?

Sometimes we look at Jesus and think He had no problem with temptation. But if you read the Bible carefully you can see even Jesus was always surrounded by temptation. The Devil was constantly looking for a weakness he could take advantage of. Like I said, everyone of us is tempted by different things. The temptations the Devil used on Jesus were not random. They were the very things Jesus struggled with – physical desire, shortcuts, suffering and His own mortality.

Before the time of trial for Jesus in the wilderness, Jesus had a powerful affirmation by His Father, when He went to his cousin, John the Baptist to be baptized. Jesus didn't go to be baptized to cleanse Him of sin – He was already without sin. Hebrews 4:5 says, “For we do not have a high priest (*Jesus*) who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.”

I imagine that was a temptation in itself. Jesus could have said, “I am without sin, so I don't need to be baptized!” Jesus went to be baptized, out of obedience to His Father. In the moment of that obedience, was the greatest affirmation of His time on earth – the Holy Spirit descended on Him like a dove, and the Father's voice from heaven said, “You are my Son, who I love. With You I am well pleased.” Immediately after this, Luke says, that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. This was the time of testing, the time of trial – would Jesus give in to temptation or would He remain obedient to the Father who loved Him? This was not a formality Jesus had to go through. This was the real thing. The fate of us all hung in the balance as to whether Jesus would succeed or fail when tested.

Reuben Job said, “These forty days of fasting and prayer with only the companionship of his beloved ‘Abba’ were a time of discovery of self, growing trust in ‘Abba,’ and of offering of self without reservation.” Temptation is the time of trial to discover just what we are made of. People say again and again how they love the Lord, yet when they come to the time of trial in their life, they fail. How can we learn obedience?

For 40 days Jesus wandered the wilderness area. This is like a Martian waste land of rugged, rocky hills where very little grows. Jesus fasted - for 40 days. He had nothing to eat. And the Bible says at the end of that time Jesus was hungry. Last week I had to fast for 24 hours for a medical procedure. I could drink fluids, but no food – nothing. The next morning I was starving. In fact after the procedure, I was ready for breakfast. Jesus fasted for 40 days. Try to fast. Try to miss a meal or two. Fasting is a spiritual discipline that makes us spiritually stronger, when it's coupled with prayer. It is a tough thing to resist temptation. Some of us have a problem resisting the donuts when we walk into the room! After 40 days of fasting without food, Jesus was hungry. So, when the Devil thought Jesus was the weakest, that's when he made his move.

↳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.'" (Luke 4:3-4).

Now this wasn't a giant temptation. The devil always starts small. But, if you can be obedient to God in the small temptations, you are more likely to be obedient in the larger temptations. Even the Olympic skiers started on the Bunny Slope. We build up our strength and confidence with each act of obedience. We remember that we are sons and daughters of the living God, that our Father loves us. But every time we give in to a temptation, we get weaker and more discouraged and we forget who we really are. We forget we are loved; we forget the Holy Spirit is with us to give us the power to resist. We get swallowed up in the quicksand soil of temptation. Obedience can rise up, grow and blossom in the soil of temptation or it will suffocate in it and be smothered by it.

The next temptation comes in Luke 4:5-8 – **“<sup>5</sup>The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>So if you worship me, it will all be yours." <sup>8</sup>Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"**

This was a huge temptation. Jesus could avoid the rejection, the suffering of the cross, a torturous, painful death. If Jesus would just bow down and worship the Devil – Jesus could have it all the easy way. Many of us today are willing to bow down to the Devil to get wealth and power, pleasure and possessions using whatever shortcuts we can take. We'll do anything to avoid suffering. The way to greatness in the kingdom of God is obedience to God's Word, sacrifice, and selflessness – not real great selling points in our world today.

An important side note is that Jesus always used the Word of God, the Scriptures, to defeat the temptations of the Devil. Jesus quoted the Book of Deuteronomy each time. There is little doubt that Jesus had all of Deuteronomy memorized. To use the Word of God as a weapon, you need to know it. Some of us groan about memorizing a couple of short verses on a card. Try memorizing the Book of Deuteronomy. In Ephesians 6, Paul speaks of us putting on the armor of God, and adds, **“Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”** The one offensive weapon against the temptations of the devil is the Word of God. Are you trying to face temptation defenseless? Without God's Word in your heart, you are setting yourself up for defeat when you are tempted.

In the third temptation, Luke says: **<sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>For it is written: " 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; <sup>11</sup>they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" <sup>12</sup>Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Luke 4:9-12)**

Here even the Devil knows the Scripture, and he will use it to tempt us to disobedience. Jesus not only knew the Scripture, He knew what it meant for Him. The only way to rise up out of the soil of temptation is to be obedient to God's Word – to know it and do it. It doesn't matter if you just know what the right thing to do is. Even the devil knows that. You have to do the right thing. If you don't, temptation will pull you down into the stink and rot of sin.

Temptation becomes deadly when we give in to it. When we reach for the forbidden fruit and take a bite. An apple at the Garden of Eden is always seen as the forbidden fruit. Our only problem when we give in to temptation and take a bite into it, we find half a worm.

How do we learn obedience to God? Like the old joke, “How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice, practice, practice!” I would like to learn obedience to the Lord to the point it is automatic for me – no thinking, pondering, wondering or worrying about it. Just trust and obey.

Several years ago when all our kids were living at home, we took a vacation up in the Pigeon Forge area of Tennessee. We met some friends who lived a few doors down from us back home, and we toured some of the old log cabins. Our friends also had two sons close to the age of our boys (about 6 & 8 at the time) , so they had fun spending time together. I remember in one of the cabins we climbed some steep stairs that led through a rectangular hole in the ceiling to the second story. Me and Jude, one of our friend’s sons were up in the second floor, and I saw how dangerous that hole in the floor was. There were no railings, no safety ropes. I warned Jude to be careful of the opening, because he could fall through. No sooner did I warn him, than Jude comes walking directly toward the hole. I shouted, “Freeze!” to get him to stop (first thing I could think of!). But he just looked at me with a curious expression and stepped right into the hole, falling to the second floor. He was crying and hurt – but there was nothing more I could have done to stop him. I was still sick about it. If he just would have simply obeyed without question, he wouldn’t have fallen.

I have heard how combat soldiers have to be trained to obey first and ask questions later. If a squad is on patrol in hostile territory and one of their group shouts, “Hit the dirt!” They drop without question. It could be a matter of life and death. If they pause or hesitate or look around for the danger, it might be too late. They must learn the discipline of absolute obedience. What would life be like, if we were that obedient to the Word of God?

You learn some things about yourself in the times of testing. If the wilderness of temptation was a time of Jesus’ discovery of self, what have you discovered about yourself in the wilderness of temptation? When you are tempted to join in gossip about someone else, do you listen & join in or do you keep your mouth shut and walk away from the conversation? When you are tempted to participate in sexual sin, do you stop what you are thinking and remove yourself from the situation or do you give in to the fantasy and sink into its quicksand?

What about the temptation of seeing another relationship as better than the marriage you are in or to be faithful where you are; the temptation to hurt our enemies, or to love them and pray for them; the temptation to desire the new house, bigger salary, new car, new computer, new tech toy, new clothes, new shoes or be faithful to God’s tithe, as well as give to the poor. What do you discover about yourself and your obedience to God in the wilderness of temptation?

When you are tempted by the devil, remember whose you are. Remember when you came to Christ, God said to you, “You are my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased!” He will never desert you or forsake you – and in your obedience, you will find joy, blessing, spiritual growth. You will rise up and bring life and beauty to the world.