

Luke 4:1-4

Sermon: **Jesus' first temptation**

written by: Danijel Dragaš

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PROPHETIC DECLARATIONS BECOME REALITY

1. Last time we spoke about temptation and what that word actually means. I tried to describe Satan's character and his main motive in this event. His goal was for Jesus to "fail the test," so that God's promises would not be fulfilled.

1.1. We are now at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. Having looked at His baptism, we now turn to His temptations. Today we will examine the first test that Satan presented to Jesus.

1.2. **Luke 4:1–2** "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert for forty days, being tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them He was hungry."

1.3. The text says: "Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit."

The question is: was Jesus full of the Holy Spirit because of the event He had just experienced at His baptism? Or was He full of the Holy Spirit because He was anticipating the uncertainty of the temptations ahead? I believe it is the first. Although His baptism is the introduction to what would come next, the true meaning of "full of the Holy Spirit" – what Luke, as the author, wants us (the readers) to notice – is this: up to this point, Jesus had lived a rather ordinary life as a villager from Nazareth. According to the biblical record, He performed no miracles before His baptism. "Full of the Holy Spirit" is a description of everything that was now about to happen in and around His life.

1.4. Jesus now begins His ministry. God's promises to the prophets are slowly becoming reality. Jesus brings with Him a wisdom and clarity in His teaching that no one in human history ever possessed. He will now tell the world what God has wanted to accomplish from the very beginning of creation. He will perform many miracles and draw multitudes of people who will listen to Him with amazement. The King, the Messiah – promised thousands of years earlier to Israel – has now arrived.

God's promises of the past are to be fulfilled through this man, Jesus Christ. The central character of the story, the One for whom reality itself was created, has stepped onto the stage.

1.5. At His baptism, God declared over His Son: "Now begins the process – the role – the ministry – of My Son." That is what Luke is pointing out here: *"Now Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, begins His ministry."*

1.6. The text goes on: "He returned from the Jordan." Jesus had gone from Galilee with one purpose – to be baptized by John the Baptist, where His Father would publicly testify that His ministry was beginning. After Jesus did this, He returned from the Jordan, but this time He returned to Galilee "full of the Holy Spirit."

1.7. Next we read: "He was led by the Spirit in the desert." How did the Spirit communicate with Jesus? In Acts we see a scene where "the angel of the Lord" speaks directly to Philip: *"Go to that road, the desert road¹."* Clear, supernatural instructions – no doubt about it. Was it the same with Jesus? Perhaps. Maybe the Spirit of the Lord literally told Him: *"Go to this road, near that tree."* It's possible. But it could also have been Jesus' own free choice – that He Himself decided to go that way toward Galilee. Remember, I mentioned that the only witness to this event was Jesus Himself. Maybe, when He later retold it to His disciples, He realized: *"Even though I decided to go that way, I now see that the Spirit wanted me to go that way. Why? Because I had to be tested."* Jesus may have understood later: *"To be led by the Spirit means my Father wanted to test me, and now, looking back, I see it. Now I understand that the Father wanted to see how strong my faith, love, and perseverance toward Him truly are."*

1.8. Then the text says: "forty days." Was this a symbolic number, or a literal one? We don't know for sure. But it was certainly a long time Jesus spent in the wilderness. From this account, we don't know if He brought food with Him and later ran out, or if He went into the desert without any food at all. Remember that John the Baptist also lived for a time in the same wilderness, eating locusts and wild honey. Survival was possible there. However it was, the text makes clear: "During that time He ate nothing." Whatever the exact length, Jesus went without food – and He became hungry.

THE STONE WOULD HAVE REMAINED A STONE

2. (Luke 4:3) – **"The devil said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.'"**

2.1. Before us now in the text stands Jesus' first temptation. Chronologically, this is the first temptation listed in all the Gospels. Why? Because we see that this first test – the one Satan presents to Jesus – is directly tied to His hunger.

2.2. Until recently, I thought Satan was "challenging" Jesus. What do I mean? As a child, and like other children in my neighborhood, we often challenged each other: *"Go on, prove you can do this! I*

¹ Acts 8:26

won't believe you until you show me!" That's how I used to see this event between Satan and Jesus – as Satan daring Jesus to prove He is the Son of God. But now I believe such an interpretation takes us in the wrong direction. Satan doesn't approach Jesus doubting that He is God's Son; he comes with the assumption that He is. He had heard what God declared at the baptism: *"You are My Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased."* With that certainty, Satan approaches, seeking to drive a wedge between Jesus and His Father.

2.3. Let's try stepping into Jesus' shoes. Since childhood He had been taught that He was the Son of God, the Messiah, the One for whom this entire history had been written. He was the central character in God's story. The apostles themselves would later make clear in their writings that humanity exists as the stage on which Jesus, the central figure, fulfills His role². He is unique. He is the reason humanity itself exists. And as this first temptation is presented, I believe Jesus knew and understood that reality – that He was the Father's central character.

2.3.1. The question arises: if Jesus is truly that "unique one," shouldn't His Father take care of Him in every way? Shouldn't He, the Beloved Son, be fully provided for? And this is exactly what Satan tries to exploit: *"Jesus, You're starving in the desert. Shouldn't Your Father be looking after You? Where is He? Why hasn't He fed You? Perhaps You can't count on Him after all. Why not take matters into Your own hands – turn this stone into bread. After all, You're the Son of God! Provide for Yourself, because it seems no one else will!"* Satan's intent was to plant division in the relationship between the Son and the Father – to tempt Jesus to refuse His Father's will.

2.4. My question is this: what if Jesus had obeyed Satan and said: *"You're right. I'll turn this stone into bread and feed Myself."*? I don't believe He would have succeeded. I believe the stone would have remained a stone. Jesus would only have embarrassed Himself – a man in the desert talking to a stone. That's how it would have looked, I think, had Jesus tried to act on His own will.

2.5. His response to the temptation suggests that Jesus was fully aware of this reality: that as a man, He could do nothing by Himself. Throughout the Gospels we see that whenever Jesus performs miracles, the Holy Spirit is present. Without the Spirit, Jesus could do nothing³.

2.6. Yes, He could have tried to use His status as the central figure – the One for whom all things were created – and said to God: *"I am Your Son, Your Beloved. Because of this, I want this stone to become bread."* But if the Holy Spirit was not present, if it was not the Father's will, if God did not want the stone to become bread – then the stone would have remained a stone. This is crucial for understanding the relationship between the Father and His Son while Jesus was on earth.

2.7. Of course, God the Father wanted to show people through Jesus' miracles that He was the Messiah, the King, the Son of God, the Son of Man, the One for whom all things were created. But

² Luke 2:49; Matthew 3:17; Colossians 1:16–17; Ephesians 1:9–10; Hebrews 1:2

³ John 5:19; John 5:30; Luke 4:1; Luke 4:14; Matthew 12:28; Acts 10:38

Jesus could not perform any miracle apart from the Holy Spirit and the Father's will. Jesus knew this, and with that awareness, He entered the temptation.

2.8. One of Satan's main strategies – one of his lies – is to convince us that we as human beings have the authority to take care of ourselves independently of God. That we can write our own destiny, chart our own course, and decide the direction of our lives. That is the lie Satan continually presses on us.

2.9. On the other hand, I don't want to give the impression that being passive – simply sitting and waiting for God to do everything – is the spiritual ideal. That's not the point. There is nothing wrong with responsibly providing for ourselves. That's entirely reasonable. But if over time we see that life is moving in a direction completely opposite from our expectations – our plans, our desires, our "written destiny" – then we must stop and ask: *"What is Your will for me, God?"* If we refuse to do that, and stubbornly push against God's direction, we fall into sin – we reject the Father's will, we reject the role He appointed for us before the foundation of the world.

2.9.1. The best and most adequate person to prove this is true is Jesus Christ Himself. Let's look at how Jesus responds to His temptation (to Himself). The text says: "Jesus answered." I believe that here, Jesus is not primarily speaking to Satan, even though the text records it that way. This is not so much a debate with Satan as it is an inner dialogue. Jesus is speaking to Himself – deep within. With the knowledge and truth He possesses, He preaches to Himself. He weighs it, discerns it, and concludes: *"Should I do this or not?"* He discerns between the lie and the truth – between deception and wisdom.

2.9.2. When we study the Bible, we must grasp the idea the author wants to convey. That's why I believe Jesus was primarily speaking to Himself here, and then confirming the truth outwardly to Satan. He wanted to give us a model (an idea) to follow: that when we face temptation, we too can recognize what is false and what is true wisdom.

FOOD IS NOT EVERYTHING

3. (Luke 4:4) **"Jesus answered him, 'It is written: Man shall not live by bread alone.'"**

3.1. After a deep inner examination Jesus answers Himself: *"Man shall not live by bread alone."* To understand what Jesus means here we must go far back in time, to when Moses was giving his last instructions to the people (Deuteronomy). The people of Israel, miraculously freed from the hand of Egypt by the glory and power of Yahweh, now listen to Moses' final words. Moses is really reminding them of the Covenant the nation made with Yahweh. Yahweh had led them through the desert for forty years and supernaturally fed them with manna, so biologically and physically they were fully provided for. Now the time had come for him to lead them into the Promised Land. Before they entered, Moses gave his final speech to the people.

3.2. (Deuteronomy 8:1–4) “Keep and do the commandments of the LORD your God, that you may live and multiply and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to your fathers. Remember the whole way which 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. He humbled you, allowed you to 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 everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD. Your garments did not wear out on you and your feet did not swell these forty years.”

3.3. What exactly is Moses alluding to when he reminds the people of this fact? What is the real meaning of his statement: *“Man does not live by bread alone, but by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD”*? In verse 3 we read that Yahweh “humbled” the people and “afflicted” them with hunger. We see the parallel with Jesus’ situation—he too was exhausted by hunger. The Israelites frequently complained to Moses: *“Why did you and Yahweh bring us into the desert to die? Wouldn’t it be better in Egypt, where we had melons, meat... everything⁴?”*

3.4. Moses prays to God to feed the Israelites, and Yahweh supernaturally sends manna from heaven every day except the Sabbath. The people only had to gather the manna from the ground and eat it. That was all required for them to be physically satisfied and cared for. After a while they began to complain: *“We are sick of this manna every day! It was better in Egypt—we had fruit, meat, wine, everything⁵.”* Then Yahweh sent quails for meat as well⁶. Moses struck a rock and fresh water gushed forth. Remember: all of this happened in the desert. A desert has no resources to sustain such a nation for a long time. So the Israelites were painfully aware that the only reason they were alive was because Yahweh had decided to supernaturally care for their physical needs for forty years.

3.5. And what happened in the end? “They went mad from boredom.” They kept complaining, playing the martyr, every day grumbling: *“Why must we be here? We’d rather be somewhere else. What kind of life is this...?”*

3.6. Let’s try to apply that event to our lives today. Every person at some point asks: *“What is the purpose of my life? I work to eat, I sleep, I get up, I work to eat—round and round. Is that the purpose of my existence? Wouldn’t it be nice to move to a tropical island, pick fruit from a tree, swim and sunbathe and live like that forever, worry-free?”*

3.7. That was the Israelites’ situation—they were cared for, they didn’t have to struggle; everything was served to them. And what happened in the end? “They went mad from boredom.” That is what Jesus understood Moses to mean. The question that arises is: what does Moses mean by: *“Man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD”*? I believe Moses meant this—and Jesus understood it: Yahweh is the Author of your life and mine. He already predetermined and wrote every second of your life. If, as an individual (or as a nation), you accept this truth and embrace it, if

⁴ Exodus 16:2-3; Exodus 17:2-3

⁵ Numbers 11:4-6

⁶ Numbers 11:18-20

you understand that God wants to use your life to tell a story, if you realize you have a role to play in this created reality—then your life takes on meaning. Even in your worst moments you can grow spiritually in the role Yahweh has assigned you.

3.8. But if the purpose of your life is only “not to die” and to “survive,” living this life with the least possible worry and the greatest physical comfort—believing that this life is all there is—then over time your life becomes meaningless and dull.

3.9. Jesus, studying Deuteronomy, grasped what Moses meant and, based on that understanding, answers the first temptation. Satan comes to Jesus and says: *“Jesus, look—apparently your Father will not take care of you. You will die of hunger in this desert. Take your life into your own hands!”* In Jesus’ mind that might have seemed sensible if he truly believed the purpose of his life was to survive and not die. But Jesus did not believe that was his chief purpose. He believed the true purpose of his life was to carry out the role his Father had written for him. Jesus reasons: *“If I must die here—I will die. If the Father has decided I will live—I will live. The purpose of my existence is to obey the will of my Father and fulfill the role He created me to play.”* In the end Jesus rejects the temptation because he knows it is not the Father’s will for him to turn the stone into bread.

YOU TOOK FROM ME WHAT I LOVED MOST

4. Now I will try to apply this biblical perspective to us — people today. I believe Jesus gives us a model by which we can deal with the troubles and temptations that life will surely serve us.

a) The goal of our life must not be the avoidance of death. The whole reality unfolding around us unfolds for the purpose and idea of the Author who created it. I personally — and I believe you too — know that feeling when your heart jumps into your throat because you think you are going to die, or someone dear to you might die, or you witness tragedy. The point of life is not to avoid death — it is inevitable! The purpose is to willingly accept the role God has assigned us. If we do that, even in the most dramatic moments of our lives we will see the glory of the LORD.

b) We must not fall into the temptations that Satan or our own sinful nature serve us: *“Take care of yourself.”* In the desire to make our lives better, happier, and more fulfilled, humanity rushes forward recklessly to reach that goal. We will do anything to achieve it. Of course, God — that is, life itself — will show us in different ways that it is impossible. Even if we succeed: a new car, a new house, traveling the world, fame, wealth, parties, social status... all of it in the end becomes boring and meaningless. Just as the Israelites received a juicy goose instead of manna, and soon it became inedible — so wealth, power, and fame become empty for us. While we lack them, we believe they are the meaning of life. With that said, I want to share something very important: there is a strong truth about us humans — we are very good at deceiving ourselves. Even if we have realized that this is not the true meaning of life, we continue to think that way because we “do not want” to embrace the biblical perspective — the one Moses and Jesus had. The truth is: we do not have the authority to control our lives however we want. We are not the screenwriters of our lives — that is the lie the world wants to make us believe. The script always goes the way God as Author intends. “Man lives

by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” In other words: “What comes out of His mouth, so it will be.”

c) We must not believe the lie that God is obliged to take care of us in the way we want to be cared for here and now. God owes us nothing. Most people today have this perspective (especially in hardship): *“God, I heard You are good. Fine, I want to see that in my life — prove it to me!”* And when it does not happen, most people become victims — indulging in self-pity, which then becomes the central thought of their life. It also becomes visible to everyone around them. Personally, I have realized — thank God — how destructive self-pity is. It seizes us and consumes us — we become spiritual cripples, unable to deal with reality. We see and live from the perspective: *“I am a victim, no one understands me.”* Horrible — what slavery! I shudder when I remember that I lived like that for a long time. And while in that state, we become blind to all the good we have in life, to all that God gives us through His grace.

4.1. How can we be freed from this evil — from self-pity? We must change our perspective — the way we look at life. If we do that and begin to trust in Jesus’ model, then even the most tragic moments become — and truly are — full of purpose. Then we believe that God as Author, the One who knows the “bigger picture,” is doing incredible things through our role. Through that process we discover that He is a good God, and we begin to believe that even our suffering has meaning within God’s plan, script, and design. Although we personally may not like what is happening to us, we choose to trust God: *“God, I do not like what is happening to me, but I accept the role You have given me. If I must die — I will die. Thy will be done, my Father!”* This is impossible unless we change the perspective of our existence. If we do not change it, then logically we surrender to self-pity: *“God, You took from me what I loved most; You are not a good God!”* And we become bitter toward Him.