

Temptation & Testing Feb. 1, 2009

Primary Text: Mark 1:12-13:

[after his baptism], ***“At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.”***

Overview: (1) Testing and Temptation are ubiquitous or universal aspects of the human experience, and they are likewise a central aspect of what it means to be God’s people. Testing & temptation are purposeful within God’s economy for probing our hearts and forging the pure and loving character of God within us; and as such are best understood within the relational language of how a loving parent or father corrects and disciplines his or her children – as opposed to neglecting them. (2) Jesus the Beloved Son is also Jesus the Tempted, or Tested, One, and this aspect of Jesus’ experience is perhaps *the* most important part of his enduring role as (what the Letter to the Hebrews calls) “our great High Priest over the house of God,” because it means that, rather than us worshiping a little-“g” god who disdains or despises our weaknesses in the face of trials and temptations, we worship a God who is WITH US in the midst of these things, in a singularly compassionate and sympathetic way, to “give grace and mercy in our time of need.” (3) So I want to conclude by discussing two or three very concrete practices for our daily lives by which we can start to know God as the “with-us-God” in a way that helps us, then, when we face of testing and temptation – which we most certainly will.

(1) Testing and Temptation in God’s economy:

(A) – *Unpacking the gospel scripture: what do you see and hear?*

- Matthew, Mark & Luke all say that Jesus went into the wilderness *by the direction of the Spirit*
 - Matthew & Luke use variations on works meaning, essentially, “led” (“led by the Spirit”)
 - Mark’s is more violent: “ekballw” = “thrown” or “thrust” out into wilderness by Spirit – perhaps NIV’s choice of “sent” is a bit tame, depending on how one reads “sent”
- What does this evoke, from your recollection of the story of Scripture:
 - Israel in the wilderness for 40 years
 - (Moses in the wilderness for 40 years)
 - (David “on the run” for 17 years before becoming king)
 - (even – the first temptation in the garden: “with the wild animals” – same word as is used in LXX for “wild animals”)
- Note also – “angels attended him” – literally – “ministered to” (diaknoia)
- So – it was at the leading of the Spirit of God; the Accuser (Satan) was there; and the Lord was there – angels often synonymous in scripture for the presence of the Lord. [and note the importance of each of these things]
- Why would the Spirit of God do this – right after this amazing experience at Jesus’ baptism in which the heavens are rent open, the Spirit descends so as to rest on (and in) Jesus, and the voice from heaven says, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased”?

(B) Testing & temptation in “God’s economy” – a biblical pattern

- teaching at bible college this week on life of David & Psalms ... got into discussion of testing and temptation in the life of David and how that tends to show up as a biblical pattern:

- Abram/Abraham – calling, testing, fulfillment
- Moses – calling, testing, fulfillment (then repeated with...)
- Israel – calling, testing, fulfillment
- David – calling, testing, fulfillment, temptation (2 big ones)
- (even Adam & Eve – creation, temptation [fulfillment coming ... ???])
- Jesus – the new Moses, leading God’s newly formed people out of slavery to sin; and also the “son of David, son of Abraham” (Mtw 1); and ultimately the “New [or Second] Adam,” who goes into the wilderness to win back what Adam lost – baptismal affirmation, temptation, fulfillment;

- A biblical example, or summary, from the history of Israel:

Last fall, we spent two or three weeks in a section of scripture starting in Exodus 15, right after the Israelites had come out of Egypt and crossed through the Red Sea. Immediately they are confronted with a major logistical problem for a tribe of what may have been at least several hundred thousand: they were in a desert, and both water and food were in perilously short supply. To make matters worse, the way the story reads, it appears that God was leading them here and there, and would sometimes lead them to camp at places where there *was* no water or food: for example, Exodus 17:1 – ***“The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Zin, traveling from place to place as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.”*** This raised the important point for us, in looking at testing from a perspective as disciples, which is to understand that you may be simultaneously right in the center of God’s will, and be in the middle of a test. How we *navigate* that test, of course, may or may not be according to the Lord’s will; but if you find yourself in a place of testing, it doesn’t necessarily mean that you’re in the wrong place or doing the wrong thing.

So, in any case, the people of Israel experienced repeated challenges along these lines during their years of wandering – frequent tests and trials and temptations. A quick summary of the issues at stake in those early Exodus experiences (e.g., chapters 15-17) would suggest that the Lord used the Israelite’s experiences of hardship, lack, etc.(re: water, manna, food) to test ...

- Whether they would **“listen carefully to the Lord”** (15:26)
- Whether they would (having listened,) **obey / follow instructions** (15:26, 16:4)
- Whether they would **believe that the Lord is with them** (17:7)
- Whether they would **fear the Lord**, and thus keep from sinning (20:20) [where the “fear of the Lord” was *itself* a test]

When I look at that summary, what it suggests to me is the highly **relational** nature of following the Lord – it’s not a “god-at-a-distance” sort of deal, but a living relationship with a living, always-present God: it

really boils down to two things: (1) that I learn to listen for His voice and follow Him, in keeping with his Word; and (2) that I learn to trust and believe that the Lord is with me. That might be one very simple way to summarize discipleship: and when we look at a couple passages next week in which Jesus calls disciples, it's really a call to just that: learning to listen and follow, and learning to trust that He is with us (and that He is good).

Deuteronomy 8: but what I want to highlight from the testings and trials of the Israelites is how Moses summarizes those experiences when giving a history lesson to the next generation, some 40 years later, that was about to enter the land of promise. ***As we read this, listen for how Moses summarizes the purpose for the testing experiences – why God might not only allow these things, but even engineer these kinds of circumstances.*** Starting in verse 1 of Deuteronomy 8:

(8:1-5) Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. 3 He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that people do not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. 4 Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. 5 Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you. ... (v. 15-16) He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions [note “wild animals” comparison to Mark 1]. He brought you water out of hard rock. 16 He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you.

(And also talks about the risk, in the land they are about to enter, of forgetting the Lord and the lessons of the wilderness – in other words, that situations of plenty can be just as much of a test as situations of lack or want.)

What did you hear in this section related to God's purpose(s) in testing and trials? [discuss]

- ***“to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands” ...***
- ***“...to teach you that people do not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”***
- ***“Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.”***
- ***“...to humble and test you so that it in the end it might go well with you ...”***

(And note Deut. 13 – talking about false prophets ... ***“The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love Him with all your heart and with all your soul. ...”*** At the end of the day, as Jesus summarized it, it's a question where our love and affections are set.)

(C) What are testing and temptation, and how do they work in God's economy?

- General definitions:

- Testing and temptation, in scripture, are closely related – so much so that the two new testament words usually used for test and tempt can be translated either way. Thus the footnote many of your bibles have for the Lord's Prayer in the gospels, noting that the line, "Lead us not into temptation," could also be translated, "Lead us not into [hard] testing." (The choice of 'temptation' in that translation is probably best because, in keeping with the way Hebrew poetry is written in parallel, the next line – "but deliver us from evil [or, the evil one]" suggests 'temptation,' given that 'temptation' in scripture is nearly always associated with explicit attempts and efforts by the devil and his minions – more on this in just a moment.)
- You might say that "Testing," in a biblical sense, is any specific situation or circumstance that requires of us a decision as to whether, and in what ways, we will follow the Lord; and in so doing reveals the thoughts and inclinations of our hearts and minds. Any variety of things can test us – hardship and adversity in all sorts of forms, "an endless succession of meaningless days," prosperity, praise, etc.
- "Tempting" is, in a way, a subset of "testing", in that all temptations test us, but not all tests are rooted in a temptation (e.g., losing your job may be an occasion of 'testing,' but not be (in itself) a temptation). Note, in relation to temptation:
 - All experience of temptation is an experience of suffering (cf. Heb 2-3)
 - (James 3, gives something of a breakdown of the anatomy of temptations, which I won't repeat here, except to note that ...)
 - God tests, according to scripture, but doesn't "tempt," in that tempting, in scripture, always has a third player present, whether in the foreground or the background – the sly one who shows up in the garden with adam and eve, the one who prompts David to take a census of his people and so distrust God's promises, and one who is in the wilderness with Jesus.
 - So temptation, in scripture, is the experience of being presented by that-which-is-not-God [i.e., the devil] with an opportunity to choose or pursue something that is not in God's will – that is, to step outside of oneness with God for the sake of something that, whether it's a 'good' thing or not, is gained through setting ourselves outside of God's will. In short: it's the intersection of our desires with the invitation from outside us to secure for ourselves something that may be, in one sense, something that God can/does/will provide for us, but to secure it through disobedience – through agreeing with evil rather than Good.
 - In that sense, as author Leanne Payne points out, the devil's purpose in temptation is always twofold: (1) **to cause us to step outside of oneness with God** – the relationship Jesus speaks of in John 15, of "abiding" in Christ or "living in the light of His presence"; and (2) **to impair our capacity to collaborate creatively with God to bring forth lasting fruit in His Kingdom:** if, as Jesus said,

“apart from me you do nothing,” then temptation aims to separate us from God so that ... we can do nothing ... so that we will *not* bear fruit, and fruit that will last. We were created to be co-laborers with Christ in the coming of the New Creation ... and this is only truly possible as we walk in oneness with Christ – as Jesus describes so well, again, in John chapter 15.

- **But temptation and testing also reveal what is in our hearts** (viz., Deut 8) so that we may be healed, that we may mature, and so that we may avoid misleading others by living out of hidden sins that have not come into the light.
- **In other words, testing comes to refine, purify and strengthen us; and bring about in us “a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it** [that is, by discipline or hardship]” (Heb. 12:11) (One might say that testings and temptations work on the “garden of our hearts,” to identify things growing there which would best be removed, and thus make space for other, much more lovely things to flourish and grow (namely, our true selves and all that pertains to them).
- Summary from my earlier notes: Testing does something IN us:
 - **It purifies our affections** (all of the issues addressed in testing and temptation can be summarized as aspects of Loving God or Loving One Another)
 - **It brings forth the core of who we are, in a ‘refining’ sort of way** – cf. Job 23:10, “But He knows the way that I take; / when He has tested me, I will come forth as gold.”
 - **It brings forth fruit (the character or nature of God, the fruit of the Spirit)** – the “harvest of righteousness and peace” described in Hebrews 12:11, that comes as we “endure hardship as discipline,” out of the understanding that God is “receiving us [or, treating us] as sons and daughters.” Not because, as we sometimes are “tempted” to believe, that God is a stern taskmaster concerned only with making our lives miserable so that we grow, but because God so deeply wants us to share in the “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” that are the heart of life in His Kingdom – and is more interested in helping us grow so we can share fully in *that* than in simply letting us, as either spoiled and selfish, or fearful and frightened, little children, do whatever we’d otherwise do if left to our own devices. To be parented by God is to be loved by God.

Summary of Point (1): Testing and Temptation are ubiquitous or universal aspects of the human experience, and they are likewise a central aspect of what it means to be God’s people. Testing & temptation are purposeful within God’s economy for probing our hearts and forging the pure and loving character of God within us; and as such are best understood within the relational language of how a loving parent or father corrects and disciplines his or her children *for their own good*.

(2) Jesus as Son, Jesus as Tested One: Jesus the Beloved Son is also Jesus the Tempted, or Tested, One, and this aspect of Jesus’ experience is perhaps *the* most important part of his enduring role as (what the Letter to the Hebrews calls) “our great High Priest over the house of God,” because it means that, rather than us worshipping a little-“g” god who disdains or despises our weaknesses in the face of trials and

temptations, we worship a God who is WITH US in the midst of these things, in a singularly compassionate and sympathetic way, to “give grace and mercy in our time of need.”

Put another way, if you’ve been listening and are wondering the inevitable question, “Great, but how do *I* go through testing and temptation?”, the answer – just like in Sunday School – is Jesus. So, let’s look for a moment at “Jesus the Son, Jesus the Tested One” and then see a couple ways that we can apply that practically in day-to-day lives.

As we noted earlier, Jesus the “Beloved Son” is “the tested [or, tempted] one,” who enters creation as the “Second Adam” in order to redeem humanity broken by the “First Adam’s” fall. He is also the “new Moses” who goes through the testing in the wilderness before bringing us into the promise; and He is the true “Son” of which Israel was a ‘type’ or ‘foreshadowing’ – and who, like Israel, experienced hardships, testing and temptation as an aspect of how “a father disciplines his son.”

The letter to the Hebrews brings this out most clearly, and I want to turn briefly to a couple of verses from there. In the author’s discussion of Jesus “the Son” in chapters 1-5, the writer describes how Jesus took on the fullness of human experience – including, or *particularly*, the experience of being tested and tempted, and suffering in the course of that. Starting in chapter 2 verse 10:

“In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. Both the one who makes people holy [that is, Jesus] and those who are made holy are of the same family [that is, they both experience suffering!?!]. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters...” (v10-11)

(17) “For this reason [that is, in order to help flesh-and-blood humans] he had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God [a priest represents or mediates between God and humans], and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ***Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.***” (over to chapter 4, verse 15)

“For 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. Let 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.***” (and finally over to chapter 5 verse 7)

“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ***Son though he was, he learned obedience through what he suffered***, and once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him ... and was designated by God to be a high priest [of an everlasting nature].” (And in Chapter 7:24-25, “...[and] because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely [or, forever] those who come to God through him, because he *always* lives to intercede for them.”

What do I hope you can hear from this section:

a) Jesus is not ashamed to call you his brother or his sister. He's familiar with suffering, with temptation and testing, and so views your experience of those things, and your suffering in the face of them, as a point of fellowship and connection with you – not a point of turning you away.

b) Jesus helps those who are being tempted and tested out of his own experience of being familiar with temptation and testing: he understands the suffering involved in temptation and testing, and relates to you on a deep emotional level: "he is not unable to empathize with your weaknesses."

c) His role and relationship to you at this point in history, beyond having fellowship with you (as a brother to brothers and sisters) in the experience of suffering, is twofold: (a) that when you approach God through Jesus, you are approaching a "throne of grace" – a human God, if you can accept it, who wants to give you mercy and help you find grace in the midst of your suffering; and (b) that the one through whom you approach the "throne of grace" is in a posture of "perpetual intercession" *on your behalf* with the purpose of *saving you completely* [or, forever].

And because He is God, he can do it.

Now here's the main thing I want you to hear this morning, and to receive:

In the midst of temptation and testing, probably the *main* temptation we face – underneath all of that – is **the temptation to believe that we are alone in dealing with what we are going through** ... versus the knowledge of God's gracious presence with us and for us in and through His Son, Jesus-the-Tempted-and-Tested-One. The work of the tempter, ultimately, is to get us to believe that we are on our own, and have to go through this alone: it's the lie that says, "God is [for one reason or another] NOT AVAILABLE TO YOU in the mist of your suffering, trials and temptations." THAT, MY FRIENDS, IS A LIE FROM THE PIT OF HELL, and the reason Satan wants you to believe it is so that he can make this life a living hell for you now, and eventually take you there with him.

(3) Three simple practices or disciplines, all "means of grace" by which we open ourselves to the reality of God being with us and for us:

a) "Invoking the Presence" – in the midst of temptation ("Come Lord Jesus" // and listen for the 'healing word' He is sending)

b) The "Examen" – a day-to-day discipline of calling to mind evidence of the grace of God, and reminding ourselves that God is with us. (see related handout, "Prayer of Examen")

c) "Confession" – the essential one-to-another sharing of life with a brother or sister by which we "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 5).