

# Who Tests Whom?

Read Luke 4:1-13

Sermon: Luke 4:9, "Who tests whom?"

The temptations of Jesus by the devil in the wilderness identified the issues which defined Jesus' ministry. They are key points – each of them – of what Jesus must struggle with in order to be the Messiah. That is why it takes place before his public ministry begins – he must prove to be worthy through private struggle against the devil, against the demons that haunt the hearts of us all. They are also issues that were relevant to Jesus.

There were three temptations but I don't want to deal with each of them - only with the last. And I've described it thus: Who tests who?

The most deceptive part of Satan's temptations is that they seem so desirable and yet harmless. What Satan invites Jesus to do (to turn stones to bread after fasting for 40 days; to become the great king without wading the path of suffering and death by just bow once before Satan; and now to force God to show that he was special to God) these seem quite reasonable. In fact, they are things that resonate with us, and they would have resonated with Jesus too. So let's have a look at this third one.

Luke tells us that Satan had Jesus stand at the highest point of the temple. The temple was a magnificent structure and it had towers that reached extremely high – almost half as high as the CN tower – 700 feet. A priest would climb to that height and watch for the rising sun so that the morning sacrifice might not be delayed but offered exactly with the rising sun.

To this tower Satan brought Jesus. Because it was sacred, closely associated with the morning BO, it was considered to be closely watched by God. That fit nicely with Satan's words: "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 carefully  
They will lift you upon their hands,  
So that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

What did Satan have in mind here? Well, if you are the Son of God, then get God to show his parental concern for you. Every child needs to have encouragement. What parent watching their daughter or son play some sport and does not cheer for them and encourage them to play well? And does that ever work!

Satan is playing on this emotion. Jesus has already had one rush of pleasure – when he was baptized, God the Spirit came out in the form of a dove and God the Father publicly announced how proud he was of his Son. Satan is saying: Do it again. Get your Father to show how much he loves you. Cry out to him for attention.

Get him to show that he loves you. It's all very good that God says that he loves you, but wouldn't it be nice to see his love, to feel his arms around me, to hear his voice call your name? Do you ever get tired of living by faith alone? Wouldn't you like now and then to get a little extra from God?

It's why people sometimes make little tests for God. We get into situations and we don't want to make up our minds about what to do, so we make a test for God to decide for us. The story is told in our neighbourhood of a

person who wanted to begin a ministry but needed a building, so he came to a building for sale and stood on the curb and prayed: God, if the door on the left side of the building is orange, then I'll take that as a sign that you want me to buy this building and begin this ministry. Well, as it turned out, the door was just as he had prayed, so he began the ministry. But that's just lazy and puts God to the test.

What Satan wants Jesus to do is of the same order: God, I'm going to throw myself down from this cliff and I want you to catch me. Send an angel, okay God? Send an angel to catch me. O Lord God, I believe in you, do you believe in me?

Now to support this idea, Satan quoted a passage from Psalm 91. That tells us something how Satan works. He comes dressed in sheep's clothing. He quotes the bible as though he were a godly teacher or prophet, but when he quotes the Bible, he is actually misrepresenting it.

Psalm 91 is a poem about how safe we are in God's care. We never need to worry. We need not fear diseases; nor a bullet that flies in the night; 1000 might fall at your side and 10,000 at your right hand, but those who trust in the Lord will never fail. And then the poet says:

Quote Psalm 91:9-12

Nowhere does the poet quote God as saying, "Test me and see if I'll do this". No, the psalm is simply a promise from God to take care of his people. And that is where Jesus has a problem with Satan's quote. This is completely the opposite of what the poet means. Jesus replies, "do not put the Lord your God to the test."

Yes, the bible says that many times. God often complained that Israel tried to test God. Moses said, "Why do you put Yahweh to the test?" Why do you test him? Don't you believe him? When he says that he loves you, do you doubt it? If he promises to take you home, do you question him? Faith is about believing even though you do not see.

Do not put him to the test for it is time for him to test you and for you to prove that you love him. God deserves to know if it is true and to enjoy the expressions of your love for him. So sometimes he will test you – you will suffer and feel afraid – and God will sometimes seem far away. Will you continue to love him even then? Will you keep on serving him even if you must sacrifice for him, suffer for him? Or will the songs of praise cease when the season of trouble come?

God is testing you. How could it be otherwise for he tested his own Son – he tested his resolve to see if he would remain faithful even in the pit of hell? They taunted him on the cross to come down and prove that he was chosen by God, precious to his Father in heaven. But he chose to remain on the cross – because that was the cup which the Father had handed to him. That is what the Father wanted him to do in order to save those whom he had chosen. Jesus was tested and he was the purest gold.

Do not test God. Let him test you and you will be pure gold too.