**Re-Writing the Story. Luke 4:1-13 March 6 2022.**

Some people change our lives. I recall reading a story of a school teacher in America who took an instant dislike to one of her students. He was terribly unkempt and had struggled academically throughout his schooling. The teacher was surprised by her response to this boy, she thought she would always be able to act with impartiality towards her students. The boy fell further behind, and the teacher did nothing significant to address his needs. She knew that his home life was tough, his mother had died a little over a year ago and his father showed no specific interest in the boy’s schooling. At Christmas time the children brought gifts for the teacher. The gift from this boy was clearly something he had found at home a partially used bottle of perfume and a damaged bracelet. The other children snickered and the teacher’s attitude to the boy began to change. She affirmed the gift of the boy as delightful, and the boy told her that they had belonged to his mother. The teacher immediately invested strongly in this boy for the remainder of the school year, and he made amazing progress. She finally realised that he had great potential. He moved to another town but 6 years later she heard from him, he was graduating from high school, second in his class. Four years later she heard from him again, he was graduating from University as the top of his class. The a few years later she heard from him again, he was graduating from medical school and invited her to attend his wedding and sit where his mother would have sat.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Sometimes our life stories can be turned around. The actions and attitudes of others may form part of this transformation. It can be like we are rewriting our life story.

The story of Jesus being tempted would take the Israelites back to their history. In this account it is as though Jesus is offering them a re-written story. It would bring to mind their wanderings in the desert, their hunger and God’s provision. They were allowed to hunger and to learn that they were not to live by bread alone but also by the Word of God which would likewise nourish them.[[2]](#footnote-2) Jesus in his first temptation identified with the starving Israelites in the wilderness whilst also affirming his trust in God. He was challenged to abuse his sonship, to use his power for his own needs rather than relying on God to provide all he needs, but he refused.[[3]](#footnote-3) Jesus was acting out a re-written version of Israel’s history. Though tempted in somewhat similar manner to their temptations for food whilst in the desert, Jesus provides a better response.

The core of God’s teaching to Israel involved their undivided and whole-hearted worship of God. They reminded themselves of the importance of this repeatedly every day by reciting the Shema.[[4]](#footnote-4) *“The Lord our God, the Lord is one! 5You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”[[5]](#footnote-5)* At various times the Israelites failed to stay true to God and followed other gods.[[6]](#footnote-6)Jesus second temptation was an attack on the concept of an undivided and whole-hearted worship of God, it is a test of allegiance, but Jesus affirms his allegiance to God. Israel often wandered away from their fidelity towards God, but Jesus embodies faithfulness in these circumstances. He is re-writing the story they lived.

During their wilderness wanderings the Israelites manifested their doubts by testing God,[[7]](#footnote-7) however in Jesus third temptation he quotes from one of these incidents when refuses to test God.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The third temptation is set on top of the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was seen as the locus of God’s presence and a place of protection from danger. It was the place where you met with God. Psalm 91 speaks about living in the shelter of God, making God our dwelling place and being secure in God’s protection. It is from this psalm that the devil quotes in the third temptation, emphasising one concept in the psalm without the context in which it was placed. The devil seeks to portray Jesus’ entitlement to protection whilst inherently challenging Jesus relationship with God. Jesus again points to faithfulness to God, maintaining relationship with God as at the core of being able to resist temptation, including the temptation to test God.

This account of Jesus temptations highlights that these temptations were designed to thwart the purposes of God. It points to the reality of evil in the world. There is a sustained attempt to encourage Jesus to question or defend his identity with two of the temptations being prefaced by the words *“If you are the Son of God”.[[9]](#footnote-9)* The temptations were seeking to disturb Jesus’ relationship with God. They seek to point to ways in which Jesus power could be used on earth, but this use of power is contrary to the ways of God revealed to Israel. “Jesus ears are attuned to the voice of God in Scripture.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Therefore this is what he uses to rebuff the temptations. Likewise *“those who would understand Jesus must have their minds open to the Scriptures.”[[11]](#footnote-11)*

“Jesus was full of the Spirit and followed the Spirit’s guidance, Israel rebelled and grieved the Holy Spirit”.[[12]](#footnote-12) Through his obedience and response to the temptations Jesus fulfils the Shema. He effectively rewrites the story that Israel had lived. He fulfills the challenge of loving God alone whole-heartedly, and thereby resisting the temptation to use power to meet his own needs or to test God’s faithfulness. “[H]e rejects the temptation to compromise his devotion to God for the sake of the world’s mammon; he loves God with all his might”.[[13]](#footnote-13) Jesus affirmed the fact that his supreme purpose in life was to worship God alone, he recognised that anything which diverted him from this purpose was not from God.

In our Context

Sometimes we need to be reminded of who we are as children of God. Our identities are grounded in what Jesus has done for us not in our own capacities. Yet we are also called to live out that identity as children of God, giving respect to God and faithfully seeking to live out God’s purposes.

The reality of life is that we all face temptations. Temptations are subtle and deceptively attractive but they always seek to distract us from God’s purposes.

We are called like Jesus to be open to being led by God’s Spirit, to dwell in relationship with God, nurtured by God’s Word to overcome temptation and to enable us to deal with the times when we fail.

Sometimes we need God to re-write our stories, to free us and heal us from habits, attitudes and experiences which weigh us down and inhibit our ability to move forward.

1. Elizabeth, Silance Ballard, “Three Letters from Teddy” in Alice Gray, *Stories for the Heart,* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2001) 63-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Deuteronomy 8:3 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. R. Alan Culpepper, “The gospel of Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” In Leander E. Keck et al (Ed.) *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes,* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1995) 99 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Deuteronomy 6:4-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Exodus 32:1-3; Deuteronomy 29:26 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Exodus 17; Deuteronomy 6:16 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Luke 4:12 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Luke 4:3, 9 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1997)195 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Culpepper, “The gospel of Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections”, 98 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Isaiah 63:10; Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1997)192 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Culpepper, “The gospel of Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections”, 100 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)