

# Luke 4

by John Nelson Darby

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*John Nelson Darby's sermon on Luke 4 explores Jesus' nature as a servant, His obedience in the face of temptation, and the transformative power of grace in His ministry.*

**Scripture:** Luke 4:1

**Topics:** "Obedience", "Grace in Humility"

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## Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on Luke 4, illustrating how Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, embraced His role as a servant and was publicly tested in the wilderness. He emphasizes that Jesus' obedience and dependence on God were paramount, as He faced temptations from Satan without succumbing to them. Darby highlights that Jesus' mission was to preach grace to the poor and marginalized, demonstrating God's power and love through His actions. The sermon reflects on the significance of Jesus' humility and the rejection He faced, yet He remained steadfast in fulfilling His Father's will. Ultimately, Darby encourages believers to follow Christ's example of obedience and reliance on God's word in their own lives.

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## Transcript

We saw the Lord taking His place of servant with the excellent in Israel, and thereon the heavens opened, and Himself owned by the Father as His beloved Son. His delights were with the sons of men, and He is traced up, not to Abraham only, the root and depository of Jewish promises, but to Adam and God Himself. Independently of His proper divine glory as Son of the Father, Jesus should be called the Son of the Highest, the Son of God. As man on earth, He was sealed with the Holy Ghost. He took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. His entire perfectness now was to fulfil, as a servant, the will of Him who sent Him; for a servant doing his own will is a bad servant. Dependence, waiting, and obedience, were the characteristics of this place, and they are found in Him to the uttermost. Hence, as in the Psalms, "I waited patiently for the Lord." He would not ask for power, but waits on God. "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" Put thoroughly to the test, He would do nothing but His Father's will. He was to learn obedience. Having taken the place, He would go through it wholly, not in one act, but experiencing the force of that expression, learning obedience, without one comfort here, with enemies around, bulls of Bashan besetting, dogs compassing. He had to learn obedience where obedience was always suffering, even to the yielding up of life. Every single step was humiliation till the close came in the cross, where the wrath of God was borne in love to us. No doubt He found, in His rejection, fields white for harvest, and so

shall we, in our measure, when walking in the same path. But the cross was always before Him, - everything that could stop a man. Nevertheless He went on, patiently waiting, and not asking for deliverances. Thus He presented perfect God to man, and perfect man to God.

52 Verse 1. In this chapter He begins the walk of suffering obedience publicly. And the first thing to be remarked is that, being full of the Holy Ghost, He is led by Him into the wilderness, where He is tempted by the devil. There are two ways in which the enemy has power; first by allurements, and secondly by terror. In the one he works upon us through our lusts, presenting what is calculated to attract, and so he rules over us naturally. In the other he has the power of death. Thus, Judas being a covetous man and without the faith which purifies the heart, Satan suggested the occasion and gets him. He has no right to rule over men, but he acquires dominion through the lusts of the flesh. Another way is through the terror of death. In both he assailed the Lord, but found nothing in Him.

Here, then, we have the devil meeting man in the power of the Spirit of God - man tempted, not in paradise, but in the wilderness. Jesus does not say, "I am God, and you are Satan; go away." That would not have glorified God, nor have helped us. But as the Lord was led into the wilderness, not by lust (God forbid the thought!) but by the Holy Ghost, so in His blessed grace He puts Himself in the place where man was. He has help from none, not even from John the Baptist. There was all that might have stumbled rather, had it been possible; through all He goes as man. He must be tempted, and must overcome where man not only had failed, but was lying under the power of wickedness.

Verses 2, 3. There was no harm in hunger: it was no sin. He could have commanded stones to be made bread, but to do so, save at His Father's word, would have been doing His own will, and then He had not been the perfect man. Satan tries to introduce into His heart a desire which was not in the word of God; He succeeded in insinuating a lust into the heart of Adam; he fails with Jesus, though He was for forty days exposed to his presence and power. Jesus had to know by experience what it was to have working at Him, without a single support, without a friend, in solitary dreariness (save indeed the wild beasts) with the devil! Thus He measured the power of Satan. The strong man was there, putting forth all his weapons, but the stronger than he overcame: Jesus binds the strong man. He was abstracted from human condition for forty days, not like Moses to be only with God, but as the one who was always with God, to be exposed to Satan. None other man needs to be abstracted in order to be tempted, he has only to go along with men. In this case, this extraordinary separation was to be with the devil. To be with God He did not need anything out of His every-day path, for it was His natural place; but to be with Satan, He needed it. Others were strangers to God, and at home with Satan. He, in the most adverse things, is a stranger to Satan, and dwells in the bosom of the Father. But He emptied Himself as God to become a servant as man, and there He waits in dependence on the word of Him whom He served. The living Father had sent Him, and He lived by the Father. He was as man under His authority, and His meat was to do His will. "By the words of thy lips, I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer."

53 Verse 4. It is the written word He ever uses, and Satan is powerless! What amazing importance Jesus gives the scriptures! God now acts by the word, and Satan is resisted morally in this way. A man cannot be touched by Satan while the word is simply used in obedience. "He that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." It was not as an exercise of divine authority He dismissed Satan, but the enemy is proved unable to grapple with obedience to the word of God. If he cannot take out of the path of obedience, he has no power. What more simple? Every child of God has the Holy Ghost acting by the word to keep him.

Jesus does not reason with Satan. A single text silences when used in the power of the Spirit. The whole secret of strength in conflict is using the word of God in the right way. One may say, I am not like this perfect Man: it might be so with Christ, but how can I expect the same result? True, we are ignorant, and the flesh is in us; but God is always behind, and He is faithful, and will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able. Temptation may be simply a trial of our obedience, as in Abraham's case, not a snare to lead us astray. Satan presents what has no appearance of evil. The evil would be - doing one's own will. Now it solves every difficulty to ask - not, what harm is there in doing this or that? - but, why am I doing it? Is it for God or myself? What! am I to be always under this restraint? Ah! there the secret of our nature comes out; we do not like the restraint of doing what God will approve. It is restraint to do God's will! We want to do our own will. To act merely because one must is law, and not the guidance of the Spirit. The word of God was the motive of Christ, and such is Christ's guidance. Not fencing the old man, but the new man living on the word is defence against Satan.

54 Verses 3-13. The first temptation is an appeal to the need of the body. The second in Luke (not in Matthew) is the inducement of the world's glory. The third in our Gospel is the religious temptation through the word of God, and therefore morally the hardest of all to one who values that word. And this is the reason why Luke departs from the actual order of the events, in order to group them morally, as is the habit of this evangelist elsewhere also. Thus we have the tempter assailing the Lord Jesus, first, as to man's life; second, as to the power given to man; and third, as to the promises made to Christ Himself.

The Lord might have argued with the devil, but He does not even tell him that the dominion of the world would be His by-and-by. He takes His stand on that which settles everything, and is a perfect example for us. He stands to God's word, and God's worship. He awaits His word, He worships Him, He serves Him only. How simple and how blessed! It was the immediate link of an obedient heart with God. The question was one of relationship to God. So of old, Eliezer receives blessing, but before he begins to enjoy it, he gives thanks. He had the word first, then the blessing-and what follows forthwith? He bows his head and worships. God is the first thought of his heart. And so still more fully with the Lord here. The last and subtlest temptation was grounded on the promises to Messiah (v. 9-11). If thou art the Son of God, why not try? But why should He try, who KNEW that God was for Him? Why should He be like presumptuous Israel of old, who would go up the hill in disobedience, to prove whether the Lord was among them? Not even when Lazarus was sick would He stir, till it was the Father's will, though all nature would have moved: and He knew well the sorrow of that house which was His refuge; for "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus."

55 The Lord did not listen. Who would? you say. But you do listen to Satan, every day of your lives that you seek a very little bit of the world. But was there not a promise? Doubtless there was; yet why should He throw Himself down to see whether God would be as good as His word? Did He not know that God was with Him? And so with us: let us only have the word behind us, no matter what may be before us. Never should we raise a question whether God is with us. If He does not send, let us not move, but let us never question His presence. If we are in the simple path of His will, the Holy Ghost will act in us to guide, and not merely on us to correct.

Thus then, in the order of Luke, which, as we have seen, is not historical, but moral, we have the progressive exercises of a man. First, natural lusts; secondly, worldly lusts;\* and lastly, spiritual temptations. The Lord Jesus was tempted here, not in Eden, but in the great system where we are. He put Himself, by the will and wisdom of God, in the place of our difficulty in the world, where man is. He has gone through all the difficulties a saint is in. Who wants His help? Not a sinner, for he wants salvation: but

a saint needs help and sympathy in his path. We have practically to keep our first estate, as renewed. Satan cannot touch the new man, but he tries to entice us out of the path of godliness. We want the succour to walk as obedient ones where Christ walked.

{\*Satan's saying in Luke 4:6 ("All this power," etc.) was false as to right, but true in fact, through men's lusts. So far as these go, he gives the power; but God, after all, is above him, and governs in providence.}

Verse 14. "And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee; and he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all." In all things His obedience is shewn. Untouched by Satan, He goes forth in unhindered power: as we shall in a measure, if like Him we pass through temptation, so as not to be touched by Satan.

56 Verse 16. "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up" - the low, despised place, but just the place where spiritual power is found. Was it not ever thus? When was it [power] found allied to the great things of this world?

Verse 18. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor," etc. It was the characteristic of grace to come to such. The great business of Christ was to preach, that is to present God. The Holy Ghost gives the right word at the right time, and in the right way. "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears," v. 21. The Lord does not reason; He says, Here it is. The way of God is to present what we want. You want salvation, there it is; you want mercy, and there it is. God alone can thus come, by grace, into the place of a sinner. They wonder, for His were precious words, but soon they ask, Is not this Joseph's son? Was He ashamed of being the carpenter? Grace goes down to the lowest need. But man will take occasion to despise grace, because it is clothed in humiliation: he cannot but see God, but he steps aside to look at the humiliation, and so shew out the hatred of his heart. God's grace is despised and His sovereignty is hated. God did not despise Nazareth, but man despises Jesus because He came out of Nazareth. Even the guileless Nathaniel asks, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" How little appreciation of the way of grace there is even in the godly! Christ comes into man's misery, and finds him where he is. Could an angel? No: he stays in his proper position, doing the Lord's commandments, and hearkening to the voice of His word. An angel ought not to come down to me in my sins: God only can in His grace. And man despised the lowliness to which grace brought Him - wretched man!

But Israel ever resisted grace, and yet it was ever the way of God's delight. Witness the widow of Sarepta in Sidon, and Naaman the Syrian leper. Grace overleaped the bounds of Israel (v. 25-27) They might be enraged, but grace does over-step their limits. They rose up to thrust down Him who had denied their privileges, but He passed through (v. 30) to renew the work of grace elsewhere (v. 31, 32). This does not move Jesus; it tries Him and breaks His heart, but it does not move Him. The reproach of man turns Him to God. His comfort in His rejection is His Father's will: "Even so, Father." It was perfectness in the scene of grace, as before in the scene of temptation.

57 There was also the manifestation of power, and not merely promise. There was the accomplishment of promise for the deliverance of man in power as well as grace: and this remains true for us, who know Him as a man risen, and at the right hand of God. Mere promise does not give a centre for the affections: Christ Himself is that - Christ to whom promise pointed. He awakens divine feelings and thoughts in us, which find no response or satisfaction from anything in this world. It is the special character of Christ: when He presents Himself, it is perfect peace and grace; and in fellowship with Him, the soul can praise

and rejoice in what He is.

This grace adapts itself to all difficulties, so as to bring man into peace with God. The very demons knew who He was; man alone was dull and blind. The demon held captive, but a single word of Jesus sets the captive free. He was there, not a promise merely, but power accomplishing, the living power of the Lord Himself among men, the power of God in man overcoming Satan. Such was Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum, dealing with the unclean spirit (v. 33-37). And it is the same when He goes out and enters Simon's house. Disease disappears, the weak is made strong. He ministers unto Simon's wife's mother, as she lay taken in a great fever, "and immediately she arose and ministered unto them" (v. 38, 39). What can resist this delivering power in the person of the Lord Jesus? "Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases, brought them unto him, and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them; and demons also came out of many." He went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil. Therefore when men stayed Him that He should not depart, He pleads His mission to preach elsewhere also. He is ever the obedient One.

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