

This afternoon we are in Luke 4 and the last temptation of Jesus here, at least at this season of temptation. Let's pick up a reading in verse 9 and before we do, let me pray. Father in heaven, we bless you, O Lord God, for your mercies to us, mercies that are new every day. We thank you for Jesus and his power and presence here in this place through his word. And we ask you, our God, that you would be pleased to take this brief meditation upon scripture and drive it home to our hearts. Search us, our Father. Show us where we face this temptation and where, unlike Jesus, we fall down again and again and again. We fail to trust you. We put you to the test. We ask you, O Lord, that we look to Christ, our Savior, and thank you that we are justified by his righteousness and not our own, which is no righteousness at all. Help us to follow his example and to learn how to stand strong against the devil's wiles. We offer these prayers in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Let's pick up the reading in verse 9, and we will read to the end of this section. Excuse me. Not sitting properly. That's better. And the devil took Jesus up to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, 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. And on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone. And Jesus answered him, it is said, you shall not put the Lord your God to the test. And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time. Amen, the grass withers and the flower falls off. The Word of God endures forever. Well, I wonder this morning, are you confident that God is with you? Are you confident, are you sure that God is on your side? Perhaps you're one of God's doubting children. that you live under the shadow of fear. You worry that God's forgotten you, and in your darkest moments, you're frightened that in the hour of your deepest need, that the Lord will forsake you. Such fear, and it's common to all children, I find it in my heart as well, on any given day, has a voracious appetite. It can be fed by our feelings, by our circumstances, by our insecurities, by the memories of our past failures, by our sins, our transgressions, and of course our devil, our enemy, loves to come and to stoke that fear and to feed it. with his hellish temptations. And in our text this morning, or this afternoon now, we see that Jesus himself is not immune from this temptation. Satan comes and tests him, and tempts him. Are you sure God is with you? Are your disciples sure? Are your people sure? Wouldn't it be good for them Wouldn't it be good for you if God were to give you some visible evidence, some visible manifestation, some tangible proof that you are the Messiah? And in his hellish genius, the devil quotes the Bible. It's a solemn thought. The devil

knows the Bible better than you do. He knows the Bible better than I do. He knows the gospel better than you do. He knows orthodox theology better than you do, better than I do. He just doesn't believe it, but he knows it's true. And he can use even truth against us, even the scriptures. Wouldn't it be good, Jesus, if you had some visible evidence for you and for the people that you're Messiah? And I can help you there, Jesus says, or Satan says. And he takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple, the highest of all of the ramparts of Jerusalem, on that parapet at the corner, 450 feet above the Kidron Valley, and he stands on there. And you stand beside Christ there and feel the dizzying height, feel the wind blowing through your hair, or gentlemen, what's left of it, feel the wind tugging at your jacket or your dress, ladies, threatening to pull you off the edge into the abyss beneath. Feel the vertigo. Taste the fear. And Satan comes alongside Jesus and quotes the scripture. Psalm 91, a psalm of confidence. He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, you are my God, my refuge, my fortress, my God in whom I trust. It's he who delivers you from the snare of the trapper, from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his pinions and under his wings you will take refuge. And so forth. His faithfulness is your shield and your buckler. And you remember that Psalm goes on. He will give his angels charge concerning you to guard you in all of their ways. They'll carry you up in their hands that you don't even dash your toes against a stone. The devil should have remembered.

The devil didn't quote the next verse, of course. You will tread upon the lion and the serpent, the cobra and the young lion. You'll trample underfoot. Devil leaves that bit to the side. But he comes to Jesus with this promise of God, a promise fit for Christ's present circumstance. You're standing, Jesus, just step off into the void and the angels will catch you and they'll lower you down into the temple courts and just think, Think of how good that will feel for you, and not just you, Jesus, but think about the people. The people will see, your disciples will see, and they'll never doubt you again. Remember the pain, you came to your own, and your own did not receive you. I can fix that, the devil says. Just step off, let the angels catch you, and Israel will never doubt you again. Now, you remember, the secret to understanding every temptation is not the actual temptation the devil sends. The secret is found in the answer Christ gives. Jesus sees through the appearance of every temptation the devil sends. He sees the reality. He gets to the heart, and his answer's always perfect, perfect. And Jesus here, just like the other temptations, he quotes from Deuteronomy 6, verse 16. You shall not put the

Lord your
God to the test as you tested him at Massah. That's interesting. Jesus sees straight through you
the lie. It appears as if the devil is giving Jesus an opportunity to trust God. Prove that you trust God. Here's a promise. Do you believe it, Jesus? Claim it. Step out. Let the angels catch you. It looks as if the devil is giving Jesus an opportunity to trust God, but the reality couldn't be more different. He's actually setting before Jesus a trap that he would test God. Test God. Now what's it mean
to test God? To get to the heart of that, we have to do a bit of digging. Notice what Jesus is quoting, Deuteronomy 6, 16. Do not put the Lord your God to the test as you tested him in Massah. What happened to Messiah? Well, if you turn back in your
Bibles, if you have your Bibles, that's good. If you don't, you just can listen. But if you turn back to Exodus 17 a second, we get a graphic picture of what it means to put God to the test. Verse one, all the congregation
of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of sin by stages according to the commandment of the Lord, and count it Rephidim. Israel are following God's command. They're in the path of obedience. They're not just wandering hither, thither, and yon. God has told them where to go. But there's a but. There always is. At Rephidim, there was no water
for the people to drink. So they're in the path of obedience, they're following God, and problems arise. And they face a choice. They can trust God or not. And actually, Israel forget all about God and they blame Moses. It shows you the deceitfulness of unbelief. Therefore, the people quarreled with Moses and said, give us water to drink. They forget all about God. They lose sight of God and they see Moses, the human mediator, and they blame him. And we can be like that too, isn't it? When trouble arise, we'll immediately blame Maybe our husband, or our wife,
or our parents, or our children. We look for some human mediator to blame, and we lose sight of the fact that when trouble arises, the first cause of all of our troubles is always from God. God allowed trouble to happen. But so often unbelief blinds us to God's presence, and we tend to root the first cause of all of our earthly troubles down here. So you're having some handyman do a work at your house, and he drops some nails or some screws in the driveway, and you reverse out late for a busy meeting, and you reverse over one of his screws, and it goes through your tire, and you've got a puncture. And you get out and you start cursing the handyman. How could he be so stupid? And
yes, the man was stupid and he was careless dropping his nails there. But who caused the nail to fall at precisely that place in the driveway that would be in the perfect alignment for your car to reverse over? The Lord allowed it to happen.

Can there be disaster in the city? Amos says, and the Lord has not done it. But so often unbelief blinds our eyes to the first cause, and rather than submit to God and say, it is the Lord, let him do as seems fit to him, we often get bent out of shape and blame earthly mediators who are the second or third or fourth cause for our present predicament. And we miss the real cause. So

they blame Moses and they demand from Moses, a man, what only God can give. Moses, give us water to drink. And Moses, you remember, cuts to the heart of the issue. He does say, why do you quarrel with me? But then he says, why do you test the Lord? We read on. But the people thirsted

there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses. Something's gone wrong and they aren't happy. And again, they're grumbling against Moses. Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock? We're thirst. See, they've lost sight completely of God's promise. I am the Lord thy God who have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. But they don't see that. All they see, it's Moses, it's your fault. It's your fault. You're responsible. We followed you. We wish we hadn't. It was better in Egypt with the cucumbers and the leeks and the chains than it is here with you and God in the wilderness. And you have brought us here not to redeem us, but to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst. So Moses cried to the Lord. What shall I do with this people?

They're almost ready to stone me.' And the Lord said to Moses, Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.' And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel." This is a mysterious passage. The rock is clearly associated with God. He stands on the rock, uniting himself to it. And he has Moses strike the rock. Why does he have Moses strike the rock? Well, a couple of ideas come to mind. First of all, in striking the rock, they're really striking God. It's a picture of their sin, their attack against God. So it exposes the reality of their sin, but it also, in a sense, exposes the cost of their redemption. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10, and we'll go there at the end of our lesson this morning, if there's time, but Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10, says that rock actually was Christ. And Moses strikes the rock. It's a picture of the judgment of God coming against Christ. Interestingly, in the passage, and I never even noticed this before until reading it just now, it was the staff with which he struck the Nile. And the Nile, you remember, was a river that was deified by the Egyptians. They worshipped the Nile. It was the mother of their nation.

And so in striking the Nile with that rod, it was an act of judgment against the Nile, showing it up as being under the judgment

of God, and it turns to blood. And in striking that rock, which is a picture of Christ, there's a clear picture of our redemption as God himself strikes Christ. to bring living water out from his side, which John specifically mentions in his account of Christ's crucifixion. So it shows both the reality of their sin, the attack against God, but also shows the cost of their redemption, that God will have Christ struck to provide living water for his people, which is another major theme in John's gospel. Whatever the case, the next verse is key, verse 7. And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarreling of the people of Israel. And because, listen carefully, and because they tested the Lord by saying, is the Lord among us or not? And so you see, what does it mean to test God? It means to live in constant doubt of God's presence, of God's faithfulness, and of God's promise. And to have that grumbling, brattish disposition of a child that's not fully weaned yet, that has to have its own will, that is self-centered, is always crying out and won't submit to mummy like a weaned child on his mother's knee, remember the psalmist speaks about that, like a weaned child that's still and is at rest and has learned that mummy's boss and I am not. Well, a heart that tests God is a heart that God's word's not enough. Yesterday's faithfulness, God helping me in the past, that's not enough. God's yesterday's help is a day late. I need fresh evidence today that God can be trusted. God must show himself today in this trial, or I'm not going to trust him. And that is the essence of testing God. And that's what Christ is facing. The devil is appearing to give him an opportunity to trust God, but actually, if Christ had stepped off that temple, he would actually have been testing God, demanding on his terms and for his comfort. a fresh evidence that God is faithful and that God can be trusted. How does that sit with you this morning or this afternoon? When troubles arise in your life, big troubles, small troubles, Do you find fear and doubt controlling you the way only God should? Do you allow fear and doubt to blind your mind to the vast riches of God's promises for you? Do you find fear and doubt blinding your eyes to the thousands and myriads of ways in the past God has provided for you, he's helped you, he's protected you, he's preserved you, he's come through for you again and again at just the right time and in just the right way in the past? But oh no, today is a new problem and I'm gonna forget about all of that, all that God has done, all that God has said, and I'm gonna be like a spoiled child raising my fist to the heavens and say to the Almighty, what have you done for me recently? It's gotta come today or I'm not going to trust you. And you know, I'm not immune from that. I live a charmed life, right? God has blessed me. We've had 17 people look at our house in Greensboro and no one's made an offer in the house yet.

And you begin to think, all these, I could think of the times during seminary when God provided for me. I remember, and I've used this illustration recently, I think, in a sermon in the evening service. But when I left medicine to go into the ministry, my dad said to me, how are you gonna feed your family now? And I said, God will provide. He said, faith won't put food on your table. And I said, dad, God will provide. And God did. He provided every step of the way. Even one time we had a huge medical bill. Very, very, it was a massive medical bill. We were far beyond our savings. And we just prayed. We didn't mention it to anyone. We prayed. And that next day in our post box arrived a check that covered the bill to the dollar. And to this day I have no idea how that person knew we had a bill. Maybe they didn't even know God put it on their heart to send that amount to our student account and the bill was covered. But today, right now, as my house is not selling, I'm thinking, oh, I forget all about that. God's kept me in the past, but I don't care about the past. A day late, I want to know is God gonna keep me today, right? And if I allow a grumbling disposition in my heart to take over, what I'm really doing is testing God. How are you doing? How does that sit with you this morning? It's a searching word. And it's a, whenever we give in to that kind of temptation, it's actually a blasphemous strike against God himself, after all of his kindness. As God would say to you, whatever you're worrying about, some of you, I feel embarrassed to even mention the house. There are several people in our church looking for a new kidney, because they're in kidney failure. That's far greater trouble than a wee house not selling up in Greensboro. And God says, I did not spare my son, my only son. When I was talking in eternity with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, talking together about my people rebelling against me, departing from me, and the only possible answer would be that my son, whom I love, would become flesh, and then become sin, and then become damned, cursed. And I sent him. And as I was sharing that plan with my son, and my son said, Father, here I am, send me. And I said to my son, but son, there would be hell to pay for their redemption. Not in part, but in whole. You'll feel the full weight of my eternal, infinite fury in those hours of darkness. Not a highlight reel of hell, but all of it compressed in its fullness. And you'll experience it in your human nature upon that cross. And my son, because he loved you, he went. And when he went, I did not spare him, but delivered him up for you. How will I not with him also freely give you all things? Don't you trust me, God says, to give you things you don't want to have? To take things

you'd rather want to keep? and to withhold things that you desperately want. And in those moments of test, what God is really doing, he's exposing my heart and yours. He's asking you the most profound of all questions, am I really enough for you? If you just have me and nothing else, is that enough? Or do you want me and something else? your health, an easy life, happy marriage, successful children, whatever the something else is, am I enough for you, or do you have to have these other things as well, or you'll not be content? And whenever we give in to that temptation, when God is not enough and we're demanding something more, something different, something else, what we're really saying is that's our functional God. God is a second-rate character. What we really want are his gifts. and if he won't give us the gift, we'll not be content with just the giver. And when Paul unpacks this season in 1 Corinthians 10, and if you have a Bible, turn there, and if you don't, I'll read it to you, he gets to that very heart of the matter as he's kind of meditating on the tests Israel failed and the tests we must learn He quotes this whole time. 1 Corinthians 10, for I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, he says, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. And they all ate the same spiritual food, and they all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, With most of them, God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness." Now, these things took place. To leave you saying, I'm thankful that I'm not living in the Old Testament. Those days have no relevance to me. No, these things took place as examples for us that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were, as it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. We must not indulge in sexual immorality, as some of them did, and 23,000 fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Remember that trial, whenever Israel wanted to go back to Egypt? And what Moses is saying is, in that moment, they were testing Christ. How? They were saying, Christ is not enough. We'd rather go back to Egypt. must not grumble as some of them did and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore, let not anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." Anyone can fall prey to these temptations. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability. But with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape that you may be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from

idolatry. When trials come, They reveal us, don't they? They reveal our allegiance to God and our commitment to the first commandment. Is God enough? Am I going to allow this trial and the discomfort it brings, the dissatisfaction it offers, Am I going to allow that trial to rock my confidence in my Father? And it's in those moments, my brothers and sisters, we have to learn contentment. It doesn't come naturally, we have to learn it. Even Paul said, I have learned in whatever state I am. Contentment doesn't come naturally. Paul had to learn it. It doesn't come externally. In whatever state I am, Paul says, I can be content when I'm asleep or bathing in the glorious marble bathroom of Lydia and Philippi, and I can be content on the road, sitting under a tree in a rainstorm with water dripping on my nose trying to sleep. I can be content in whatever state I am. I've learned it. It doesn't come naturally. I've learned it in whatever state I am. It doesn't come externally when the circumstances of life align to please me. No, I have learned in whatever state I am therein to be content, for I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. That contentment is a grace. We find it spiritually in communion with Christ, drawing strength from him, reminding ourselves of his love, reminding ourselves of his providence, reminding ourselves of his care of us, that he's our good shepherd, he is keeping us kept. As we look to Christ, and remind ourselves of what is true and what is really going on in my life. And I learn to be still and know that He is God and I am not. And His will is right and mine is not. So as I learn to submit to Him and trust Him, that's where the flowers of contentment blossom. And one of the reasons why I find it so hard to be content, and why I rather suspect some of you find it so hard to be content, is we think contentment can only be found when all of the affairs of life are in order, when all of our fears are, there's no reason to fear whatsoever, there's no reason to worry, there's no reason to fret. Everything's going well, we're sitting at the beach or in the mountain house, and the children are playing quietly over in the field, and we're just sitting there with an Arnold Palmer in our hand, with our feet up on the deck, and just enjoying a cool breeze, and it's just wonderful. And we think, oh, those are the seasons I can be content. But if that's where you find contentment, those are the only seasons you can find contentment, when everything's right, and they're rare seasons. We find contentment in the arms of Jesus, with his word, and the promise of his presence, and the promise of his providence and his care. And we let go of that grumbling disposition that is always wanting more. More evidence from God, more blessing from God, more trial-removing providence from God. No, on my

terms. Instead, no, we look up to Jesus
and say, Lord Jesus, you're enough. I'm content to receive what you
give. to relinquish what you take,
and to lack what you withhold. And bless God for a Savior who
shows us not just how to do that, but also who justifies us with
his righteousness for all of the many times when you and I
have failed to do that. And some of us are failing to
do that right now, and our standing before God is not on whether
we pass the test. But it's fine that Christ has
passed the test. And in that we can be content.
And in that God is content. And so we can be confident and
rest. And yet, Paul says, learn from
the Israelite's example. Let's pray together. Our Father
in heaven. These are sober realities. We
remember in the psalmist, the psalmist says, today, if you
hear God's voice, do not harden your hearts as Israel did at
Masad, at Meribah, when they tested me, when they tried me,
though they had seen my work. Therefore, I swore in my wrath,
they will never enter my rest. There are people who do err in
their heart because they do not know my ways. Lord, deliver us
from unbelief that blinds us to the truth of your ways. and
that leaves us demanding more, leaves us thinking that we're
God and you're the genie in the lamp that we rub up to arrange
life our way and for our pleasure and in our terms and in our timing.
Give us grace, oh God, to rest content in your Godness and your
providence and your promises and your goodness. We offer these
prayers in Jesus' name. Amen.