

Luke 4.1-15 Trials that Prove our Purpose WWC 01.14.24

Good morning, the Lord bless you and give you peace. This morning we are continuing in our study of Luke, and we find ourselves in one of the most interesting and powerful passages in the New Testament. How do we understand trials in the Christian life? How do we overcome trials? Why am I suffering in something that wasn't a result of my sin? These are the kinds of questions that can and should be asked from a text like this.

We know, of course, that this gospel is addressed to a person named Theophilus. What we know about him is from chapter 1 of this gospel and from chapter 1 of the book of Acts. We know that he had been taught about Christianity and can only presume that Theophilus was a Christian given the fact that these works written to him were indeed passed along to the Church. We know as well from the book of Acts, and from non-Christian sources, that this was a brutal time of persecution for many Christians. How should they understand their pain? How does pain even fit into the Christian experience? Are you experiencing any of these things right now and wondering why now that you are a Christian life seem to have gotten harder? In this text we actually read about Jesus Christ ***being directed by God to a place of pain***, but it had a purpose such that if it didn't happen, we would not be here today as Christians. This morning I want to consider **why it was necessary to include this story for the edification of Theophilus, what this story teaches us about how God works with Christians and why He chooses to work in these ways, how to live through and redeem the pain of trials, and finally, what this teaches us about the Christian experience, or what we call salvation from sin and to eternal life.**

.I. Why was it necessary to include this story for the edification of Theophilus?

Simply, what this does for Theophilus is that it shows that what is happening with Jesus was intended to show Christ's identification with His people from Adam until Christ's coming. It was an identification that was spoken about prophetically and distinguishes the unity and harmony of the scriptures so that when Jesus came everyone could discern that Jesus was the one sent by God to accomplish salvation. Only God could cause there to be such harmony and intentionality in stories that span thousands of years and culminate in the presence of His Son. Theophilus you can trust what you've been taught. It is, after all, in harmony with the ancient plans and purposes of God for redemption. And certainly, if it was faith building for Theophilus, it is for us as well, and it is protective. It is protective in the sense that it shows the Christian community what the formative message of Christianity must be. A Church that forgets the curriculum God has provided in scripture will soon be teaching the curriculum of its culture.

Let me show you three ways that Luke underscores the harmony of this story of Jesus with O.T. themes.

First, Deuteronomy 8:2-3 (ESV): **“And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. 3 And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”** Obviously, we see a very specific identification with Israel in the wilderness. The people in the wilderness wanderings were being led by the Spirit of God just like Jesus was led into the wilderness, and they had to learn that their dependence for sustenance and survival fell solely on God. Jesus is identifying with that experience.

Second, Exodus 16:35 (ESV): “35 The people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land. They ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan.” and, **Numbers 14:34 (ESV):** “34 According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, a year for each day, you shall bear your iniquity forty years, and you shall know my displeasure.” Jesus isn’t just identifying with Israel in being led by the Spirit in the wilderness, but with their wanderings in the desert as they pined away for 40 years before entering the Promised Land. Here Jesus wanders in the wilderness for 40 days in absolute hunger and need being totally dependent upon God for His life. Incidentally, this fasting period is not given to us as an example to try. **The whole thing underscores the miraculous work of God in Christ’s life to satisfy the requirements the Messiah would have to meet to deliver His people from sin and unto eternal life.**

Third, Exodus 4:22 (ESV): “22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son.’” Israel is called the firstborn son of the LORD. This is the essential marker that God the Father uses to speak about Jesus, as we see in **3:22**, “**You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.**” (Hosea 11: cf. Matthew 2:15) What should strike us is that God was not pleased with that first generation of people that came of Egypt. They fought Him every step of the way to the point that God refused to allow that generation to enter the Promised Land. But His Son, who identifies with this generation of deliverance and is Himself coming to lead His people to the eternal Promised Land, this Son pleases God.

In this stream of thought we are introduced to a hermeneutical tool, or a tool for biblical interpretation, called typology. Typology basically takes Old Testament people and experiences and connects them to people or experiences in the New Testament, especially Christ, to show how they were symbolic or examples of who or what would come. **Romans 5:17**, for instance, says that Adam is a type of Christ who was to come. Another example is found in **Hebrews 9:24** which tells us that the Holy Place of the Tabernacle or Temple, was a figure of what was in heaven, a copy of the true Holy Place. Typology is important to interpreting scripture, and it is important to make sure that scripture is identifying the type, as we see in the texts that we read. It’s like God established these things so that when Christ came and served in this world, we might be able to look back and connect the dots, and in doing so, see how much more glorious and merciful Jesus is.

So again, what this does for Theophilus, and now for us as we read this content, is show that what is happening with Jesus and the Church was actually spoken about already. Only God could cause there to be such harmony and intentionality in stories that span thousands of years and culminate in the presence of His Son. The same God who created the world is not aloof, and He is not ignorant of pain and trial. In fact, Jesus is being led by the Spirit of God to experience all the categories of darkness that strike the heart of men and women and cause so much sorrow. You see, we all know how the story ends. Theophilus knows how the story ends. Jesus who identifies with our pain and suffering ends up suffering as our representative before God since as God’s Son He could advocate for us to God, and He could represent us since He took upon Himself humanity. **Isaiah 53:4–5 (ESV):** “**Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.** ⁵ **But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.**”

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.II. What does this story teach us about how God works with Christians and why He chooses to work in these ways?

Let's think through this. Jesus has not committed anything demanding discipline from God. If it had been so He would not be holy and there would be no salvation in His name. The teaching of Christ's sinlessness as we see in scripture would be false, and if that is false, then what else is false? Christianity unravels on every level if Jesus sinned. What we do see in this text, rather, is that **because Jesus was obedient, He experienced this great trial**. Notice how Luke sets this whole thing up. **Chapter 1-2**, miraculous births, miraculous encounters, and the uninhibited worship of Jesus by angels and men, which tells us they believed Jesus to be God the Son because only God is to be worshipped. At 12 years Old Jesus asks His parents while in the Temple, **"why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"** **Jesus was aware of His responsibilities and was displaying an absolute obedience to God the Father.** **Chapter 3**, underscores Christ's divinity in that God declares Him to be His Son in whom He is well pleased, and the Spirit of God descends upon Him. **Chapter 3** also underscores Christ's humanity in that Jesus was there in human form and was baptized, and His humanity and legal lineage of kingship, which identifies Jesus with all the promises of God to David concerning His eternal throne which we know from the O.T. would be given to one who would rule in righteousness. In other words, He would be obedient to what was right and true in all His governance. With that as a background, Luke proceeds to detail *Christ's obedience and subservience to the Holy Spirit's leading to be led specifically into a time of testing*, and that testing would culminate with the temptations of the devil. When Mark in his gospel recounts this event for us, he uses a term that underscore force. He was driven into the wilderness to be tested. Certainly, the devil was badgering Jesus throughout His time, but at this the end of Christ's fast and prayer in the wilderness, when He is at His weakest humanly speaking, the devil attacks.

And here we can begin to answer our questions about what this teaches us. **First** of all, that being obedient does not preclude us from trial, in fact it demands it. We see that with Jesus's life and God has called us to be like Him. Theophilus, the trials are not accidental. **But what are they for then?** Well **second** we can see that God's testing is never pointless but directly connected to what He is calling us to do and preparing us for. Jesus was being called to a unique and singular calling, to be the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. But to be that and to obey the plan of God He had to impoverish Himself in every facet. He left heaven above and all the glory due Him, and He took upon Himself humanity. The consequence of His work is that He gives all those who believe in Him divinity. We experience the Spirit of God in us when we are justified by His grace. But though we are not called to fulfill the role of Christ, we are called to different things as Christians that will be hard, things that God has brought into our lives as we seek to obey Him. Just consider what our fellow Christian James says **James 1:2-4 (ESV): "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."** God is making us perfect and complete as Christians. God is not distant from us in the trial. He is the surgeon who is present and is removing the things that limit us from our calling. God is not absent from our pain. He is the coach pushing us along and spurring us unto maturity in Christ.

Do we remember the story of the man born blind, as we read in [John 9](#)? Christ's disciples are sure that the man's blindness is because of some sin that he or his parents had committed. Jesus answers, [John 9:3](#), "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed through him." By the end of the story, we see the man healed of his blindness and worshipping Jesus, but he had been banished from the Temple because he could see that only God could do what He did, and God's Son was there and the One who healed him.

All of this makes me think about how often we fight against the trials in our lives instead of living through them as a means of being established in the path we should go. It brings to mind when I had my tonsils out. When I was a kid, it became common practice where I grew up to remove tonsils even if there was no tonsillitis. I was a pretty big kid for 9 years old, and by then my dad had taken me to work enough to have gotten pretty strong for my age. My parents were very committed to chasing out the natural laziness that is present in boys. So here I am in my see through robe that wouldn't close in the back and the time came to be wheeled me to the operating room. Finally, I was given a choice. Do you want gas or a needle. By that time, I had been poked enough that I opted for the gas, and when I took the first breath, I immediately ripped the mask off. It took several nurses to pin me down until I had passed out. I know I have wrestled with God in the trials He has put in my life. **The times of most success and blessing are when I surrender to the will of the Lord.**

And in this vein, I think it is that we remember that there is a difference between chastisement for sin, which the scriptures speak about in a variety of scriptures, most notably, [Hebrews 12:4-6](#), and testing for a specific calling. [Proverbs 15:33](#) (ESV): "33 The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor." Consider Peter as well, and for this reference I have always connected with the old King James. [1 Peter 3:17-18](#) (KJV 1900): "17 For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. 18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit."

Here is a question that we must all ask ourselves. **What does my response to God's testing reveal about my heart?** I love what one man said in considering this text: ***do we reveal a good attitude in a bad attitude situation?*** Most of the time our attitude in trials reveals that we disdain the leading of the Spirit into trial, when in fact, the trial in the end brings us into a closer communion with the Holy Spirit and into more power of the Holy Spirit.

Why was it necessary to include this story for the edification of Theophilus? Second, what does this story teach us about how God works with Christians and why He chooses to work in these ways? Third, How do we live through and redeem the pain of trials?

.III. How do we live through and redeem the pain of trials? First, we do what we know we are supposed to do. Jesus was being tempted to usurp the paths of God towards **provision, prominence, and protection** and He waited on God for the trial to finish and for God to satisfy all of these. **Second**, we go out and serve with the things that we have learned in our trial. Notice [4:14-15](#), Jesus returned and went out and taught in the power of the Spirit. Redeem your trials by helping others with what you have learned, and by resting in the things God has shared of Himself with you during these moments of hardship. [2 Corinthians 1:3-5](#), we

comfort with the comfort by which we have been comforted by God. My friends, are you redeeming the pain of your trial or are you allowing yourself to be capsized by it?

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.IV. What does this teach us about the Christian experience, or what we call salvation from sin and to eternal life? Here is what I intend with this question. This entire narrative and the rest of this gospel underscore what one man coins as prerequisite credentials. We have many university students here and many people with different credentials for their jobs. In school we know that there are certain criteria that must be met before we take certain classes and advance in our credentialing programs. One cannot sign up for classes for which they have not satisfied prerequisite classes. It makes sense in the normal experiences of life, so why would we expect anything different from God? There are certain things that the Messiah had to be and do in order to provide salvation. Whatever we say about our ability to satisfy God's requirements for heaven, we have to realize that the Biblical content rejects on matter of prerequisite credentialing, both from experience and pedigree, the notion that we can do enough to save ourselves. Look at what Jesus had to be and what He had to do in order to provide salvation. **What makes us think that we can satisfy something we are not even qualified to stand in examination for? But this is where the encouragement lies. We need only repent of our sin and rest in Jesus to experience all the blessings of eternal life.** Why would we not embrace this grace? I could go through life struggling in the hardships it gives with no eternal significant result, or I could rest on Christ's provision of salvation and know that God will use the trials in my life to become not only a better person, but one whose blessings in heaven and in this life will be increased because of faithfulness.

May our lives be found to glorify God in every way. Amen.