THE ULTIMATE SHOWDOWN: Jesus Tempted by Satan

1. Every time someone gets baptized in the Lutheran Church, they are asked some important questions. One of those questions is: "Do you renounce the Devil and all his works and all his ways? This sounds simple enough, and while we might be able to say *no* to Satan in a particular moment, can any of us claim to be able do that for our whole lives?

   Think about Adam and Eve, our first ancestors. They were stronger and better than we are in every way, and they lived in a perfect world with no sin and no death. They had a perfectly right relationship with God and were in charge of the whole Earth. But even they couldn't resist Satan when he tempted them with just one piece of fruit. If they couldn't stand against him, how can we, who are stained by sin, expect to do any better? Kinda shoots to hell the idea of "free will".

   Let's take a moment to reflect on the story of Jesus' temptation in the Gospel of Luke. Some might argue that if we strive to emulate Jesus' actions and words in this text, we can overcome Satan as well—almost as if His experience in the wilderness serves as a guide for us on how to resist sin and temptation in our own lives. But based on your experiences, do you believe any of us can actually do this and conquer sin and the devil solely through our own efforts? Are we really ever more successful at rejecting temptation than Adam and Eve were?

   While temptation is always something we should resist. And too, often we don't resist enough. At the end of the day, we cannot avoid sin simply through our own efforts. If this were possible then we wouldn't need Jesus' suffering and death on the cross and new life through His resurrection. All we'd need is Jesus's example and then we could save ourselves by following His example. This way of understanding our text ultimately denies the doctrine of original sin. Have the class read Romans 5:6-19

   This means that this text (like all of Scripture) shows us that we need a Savior who can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

2. If we can't overcome sin and temptation by ourselves, why do we ask during Baptism, "Do you renounce the devil and all his works and ways?" Wouldn't that question be pointless?
   In LCMS Lutheran theology, asking "do you renounce the devil" at baptism is not a prerequisite of personal righteousness, but a, declaration of faith and a spiritual transfer of ownership. It marks the transition from being slaves to sin to being rescued by Christ. Even though we are stained by sin, this vow declares a new allegiance to God, renouncing the power of Satan to live under grace.

   Read Romans 5:20 – 6:25. Renouncing the devil does not mean that we try to achieve righteousness before God through our own efforts; instead, it is about placing our trust in Christ's righteousness. If Christ's death and resurrection are sufficient for my salvation, why wouldn't I want to resist Satan?

For example, if previously I had only a dirty source of water to drink from, but suddenly a find a new clean source of water, why would I ever drink from the dirty water again? To say that I have make a choice (free will) about which source to drink from is idiotic. I'd have to be a fool to drink from the dirty water—like a dog returning to its vomit. However, often in sin, we do just that through our fleshly cravings. But to drink from the clean water isn't really a choice it's just the new reality that is ours—we have clean water!

Through baptism, I am connected to Christ's righteousness, and my faith in this connection is demonstrated by how I choose to live. Actively resisting Satan and sin reflects my commitment to this truth. Allowing sin and Satan to influence my life would be like a freed slave willingly returning to serve their former master. I'm obviously, because my flesh is sinful, always going to struggle with sin and temptation, but now I resist with endurance and hope.

Read Romans 5:1-5. Notice how Paul mentions that our hope and endurance is fueled by the Spirit that is given to us. When does that happen? Well, check out Acts 2:38-39.

We receive the Holy Spirit in Baptism. His primary work in us is not just enabling us to do righteous things (sanctification is certainly an important part of our Christian lives), but His true work is to help us endure in faith, trusting the righteousness of Christ as enough for our salvation.

3. In the first few chapters of Luke's Gospel, the Holy Spirit plays a significant role: See Luke 1:35, 41; 2:25-27; 3:16, 22 & 4:1. What is the work of the Holy Spirit in all of these passages and why does Jesus need to be "led by the Holy Spirit' into the wilderness?

Christ's incarnation wasn't just a miraculous event where God took on human flesh; it also marked a moment of humility for our Lord. He set aside His divine glory to adopt a new form of glory—one where He saves humanity through suffering and death. The Apostle Paul captures this beautifully in Philippians 2, stating that although Jesus was in the form of God, He didn't cling to that equality. Instead, He emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant and being born as a human. In human form, He humbled Himself and obeyed to the point of death, even dying on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

This means that Jesus, in His humanity, needed the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Not because He wasn't fully God, but rather because He was also fully man. He became like us—sinners who can't achieve righteousness on our own. However, because He was without sin (as true God), Jesus was able to live a perfectly obedient and righteous life through the Holy Spirit. This is how we are supposed to live. But our flesh is not under sin through Adam. We can't live by the Holy Spirit. But Jesus could and did. His perfectly righteous life is now ours through baptism. He enables us to "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4) through baptism.

4. Read Luke 4:1-4. In this passage, we learn that Jesus is uniquely empowered by the Spirit, having set aside His divine glory to fully live out His humanity in our stead. He humbles Himself to be led by the Spirit. With that context in mind, consider this: What do you think Satan aimed to achieve by tempting Jesus to "command these stones to become bread"? The temptation here is for Jesus to take control of the situation rather than to fully trust God.

To truly appreciate the significance of this first temptation, we must consider that Jesus had fasted for 40 days. Just think about how hungry and exhausted He must have felt—both physically and mentally. Imagine the challenging state His body was in. In such a condition, it would have been infinitely more difficult for Him to remain obedient to the Spirit and resist Satan's enticing offer. Here we see the strongest physical argument that proves that Jesus can do what we can't. Who of us could go without food for 40 days? Our bodies would be emaciated. While a person can technically go for as much 3 months without food, that is only possible if lots of fluids and vitamins and electrolytes are provided and physical exertion is kept to a minimum. Jesus, however, was in an inhospitable place and the hot days and cold nights would have taken a significant toll. Concentration and state of mind would have been a real struggle. He would have been weak both physically and mentally.

5. Luke only includes the first part of Jesus' response: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" In contrast, Matthew adds, "but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." How does Luke's version highlight Jesus' role as the Savior who accomplishes for us what we cannot achieve on our own? Or sinful mortal flesh struggles to see beyond mammon. Jesus could completely tame the desires of the flesh. Therefore, His flesh did not war against the Spirit as Paul describes in Galatians 5:16ff.

6. The devil and his minions know full well that Jesus is the Son of God. So why does Satan preface his temptation with a challenge, "If you are the son of God…" How does this connect with Christ's baptism in Luke 3:22 and Jesus' genealogy, especially Luke 3:38?

   It's is easy for man to doubt God's word. Adam and Eve did this int the garden when Satan asked, "Did God really say…?" (Genesis 3). As Luke mentions in 3:38, Adam was the "son of God." He failed. But Jesus, the one true Son of God, does not fail. We all fell into sin through the failure. We all have righteousness through the true Son.

7. Matthew and Luke say that the Holy Spirit "led" Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan, while Mark describes the Holy Spirit as having "driven" Jesus into the wilderness (Mark 1:12). Through Christ in our baptism, we also receive the Holy Spirit to guide us, what do these passages suggest about the Holy Spirit's plans for us? How might these plans help strengthen our faith? See again Romans 5:1-5. See also 1 Peter 4:12-14. The Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to face Satan. And of course, while God does not want evil and suffering to befall His children in this world, He can and does use it to accomplish His good and perfect will, which as we have already learned, is to save us in and through Jesus Christ. In this way, suffering and temptation can serve to strengthen our faith in Christ.

8. As we reflect on the temptations of Jesus in Luke 4:5-12, we see a striking contrast between the choices made by Adam and Eve and Jesus' response to the devil. Adam and Eve trusted the word of the devil, seeking authority and splendor for themselves. In contrast, Jesus, who was offered the same temptation, understood that His true glory would come not through the easy path of power, but through His suffering and death.

   This leads us to a profound realization: With Jesus, glory comes through service. True worship in this new era of salvation centers on Jesus' humble service and sacrifice. Unlike Satan, God in Christ

doesn't say "Worship me, and then I will give," but rather the opposite. God gives freely by His grace, and in response, we worship.

How can we, in our daily lives, shift our focus from seeking recognition or authority to embracing a posture of humble service, just as Jesus did? What might that look like in our relationships, our work, and our communities? Serving without the need for recognition—avoiding pride and vainglory. Serving by putting our family's needs before our own—cleaning, cooking, helping with homework, changing diapers.

9. In Luke's account of Jesus' temptations , he places the temptation at the temple last, while Matthew has a different order. This isn't just a random choice—Luke is making a point. A clue might be where Lukes Gospel begins and ends. Where does the Angel Gabriel appear to Zechariah? Where do Simeon and Anna hold the baby Jesus? Where is the twelve-year-old Jesus found? And where does Luke 24:52-53 say the disciples were after Jesus' ascension?

   The temple in ancient Israel was more than just a building; it was the heart of their faith, where God was believed to dwell and where major events occurred in their spiritual lives. By placing the temptation at the temple at the end of this sequence, Luke highlights a deeper significance. Imagine the scene: Jesus, the Messiah, standing at a place where everyone came to encounter God. The challenge was for Him to prove His divinity by jumping off and being saved by angels, a spectacle that would undoubtedly draw attention and admiration.

10. In taking Jesus to the temple, Satan was trying to convince Jesus to show His power and authority in a way that bypassed the more difficult parts of His mission—namely, living a humble life, facing rejection, and ultimately suffering and dying for our sake. If Jesus had taken this path, He would have gained acceptance and validation without the pain of the cross. How does this temptation connect with us?
    God's plans for us often involve challenges and sacrifices that build our faith and character. Instead of seeking immediate validation, we're invited to trust in God's timing and purpose, even if it means taking a more difficult path. Jesus said, "Take up your cross and follow me." This means that when hardship or suffering comes our way, we don't just whine and complain and stomp our feet. We, instead, ask God: "What is your will for me in the midst of this trial? How shall I serve you through my suffering?"

Read Luke 4:13-15. Note that Jesus now begins His ministry in the "power of the Spirit" and He being glorified more through His teaching God's Word.