

Luke 4: 1-13 The Devil Quotes Scriptures

I am not sure how many of you are familiar with the term prosperity gospel, although I am sure that most of you have encountered or heard of the concept. Just follow what proponents say and God will reward you with prosperity. I don't find that as a promise which God has given to me through Scripture. God promised Abraham some things, but an easy life was not one of them. God has however promised throughout Scripture to be present. But the reason I brought the topic up is a verse I have seen proponents of this theology use is found in our text today. Luke 4: 6. As used in prosperity gospel accounts, is presented as saying: I will give glory and authority over all the kingdoms of the world to the one who worships me. The understanding seems to be that the speaker is God. What has happened is that the verse has been taken out of context. In Scripture the speaker is not the Lord, but the devil. This is one of the options which the devil offers to Jesus during the account of the temptations in the wilderness. It is a very good thing to keep in mind when someone quotes scripture to you that need to be aware of the verses surrounding the quote which define the situation. Be sure that what is being said is consistent with all of Scripture and not taken out of context. This is something that concerns me about the use of scripture to prove a point. Over many centuries reasonably intelligent men and women have opened their Bibles and used what they have found there for the justification of all manner of brutal actions: from the Inquisition, the burning of witches to slavery. The Bible is central to our faith, so we need to be sure that we know the big picture of the message we have been given. The Bible is our witness to what God has done, is doing and will continue to do. If you search the texts and pluck out a particular verse you can prove just about any point that YOU wish to make. The Bible is not one book, but 66. It was written over a period of a thousand years and tells a story which has lasted far longer. It is that story of God's actions and intent for reconciliation that we should take hold of and trust. I could make a very long sermon about that issue, but don't want to climb on that soapbox this morning. Instead, let us go to the text as Luke gives it to us a message found there. As chapter 3 was ending, Jesus has been baptized and while praying was identified by the voice from heaven which said "you are my Son, the Beloved." Luke then traces Jesus'

ancestors back to Adam, son of God. This genealogy varies in detail and placement from the one found in Matthew, which begins with David and ends with Joseph and Mary. Luke is narrating the things about Jesus which he considers important for us to know: his Jewish heritage which places him in the expected lineage of the Messiah and the identity given to him after his baptism. There is another frequent point raised by the author of Luke-Acts. Jesus has been filled by the Holy Spirit at the Jordan. Before beginning his public ministry this passage tells us the Spirit leads him into the wilderness. Luke tells us that Jesus spends forty days in the wilderness without food. Not only is he without food but for this forty days the devil is also present and trying to tempt him. We are not told exactly what temptations are offered during the forty days, but we are told that when the forty days were over, Jesus was hungry. This information sets the stage for three specific temptations Luke describes Jesus facing from the devil at this time. The first detailed temptation could easily be translated as since, not if, you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread. The Greek uses a conditional particle here with the indicative verb tense. This means the particle is used to express a condition of fact regarded as true or settled, so the meaning is actually better expressed as since or because. This is a subtle, but important nuance to the text. Because the question is not whether or not Jesus is God's Son, because we have already been told that he is. The devil also knows that this is true. The question is whether or not Jesus trusts God to supply his needs or can be tempted to doubt. We often focus on this account using "if" as the initial comment of the devil, as if Jesus' identity is being questioned. But in this respect I think it is important to consider the time frame of the wilderness time. Jesus has spent forty days in the wilderness being tempted by the devil. This first interaction recorded is about physical hunger and the bread needed to satisfy it. We are told Jesus is hungry. There is a certain correspondence to the forty days the people of Israel spent wandering in the wilderness. What was at issue for the Israelites was whether or not they trusted in the Lord to supply their need—fear of being without food and water were both complaints they made to Moses. Trust in the Lord's provision for them was lacking. In many ways this is also the temptation being placed before Jesus. The devil is trying to instill doubt into the relationship between Jesus the son and God the father. Do you trust God to supply your need? The devil tries to sow mistrust-

-you have been in the wilderness for forty days without food. You do not have enough; perhaps God can't be trusted to provide for you. Jesus' response is well known and often quoted: "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" We are often told that we should quote Bible verses as our response to life's challenges because that was what Jesus used to deflect the devil's temptations. While there may be something to that, maybe it's not so much that Jesus quotes Scripture to deflect the devil's temptation as it is that Jesus finds in the Scriptures he knows, the words needed to give voice to his trust in God. Because as we look at these temptations described, at the heart of each response is Jesus' absolute trust in--and dependence on—God for his identity and future. After Jesus rejects the doubt that the devil has tried to create about God's provision for his physical needs, the next temptation is the offer of power—the power of all the rulers of the world—their glory and authority. This the devil says he can and will give if Jesus will give his allegiance and worship away from God and to the devil. Again Jesus affirms his allegiance to the one who has claimed him and given him his identity. Jesus replies with verses from the Torah: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." Perhaps because Jesus has used Scripture to voice his trust and claim his identity, the devil's third effort is also based in scripture. The devil has taken Jesus to Jerusalem, to the top of the Temple and placed him there for this test. It is in this temptation that we find the devil also knows Scripture. Psalm 91 found on page 930 in our pew Bible is a song about the protection God offers. It is a song about assurance and trust in God. The devil quotes verses 11 and 12: "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." This is a promise for safety. The devil is saying: okay Jesus, prove that you trust completely: If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here. If you are so confident that you can trust in God to ensure your safety, jump. Jesus' answer comes from what Moses told the people in the wilderness: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." Bread for the physical hunger he felt, power to rule the world and personal safety—these are the things the devil tried to use to undermine Jesus' trust in God after those forty days in the wilderness. These things can also be temptations for us. We do not want to be hungry. We long to be in control. We want to be safe. But temptations are not just limited to these things. Eternal youth, beauty or wealth

could be the offered temptations for us. Or perhaps fame or success in achieving our goals could be the temptations offered. The things in themselves are not exactly evil. The problem is that they are paired with the suggestion that God is not sufficient to supply what is needed. The problem is not the drawing toward something, but the lure away from something—away from our relationship with God and our identity as God’s beloved child. The forty days of Lent which we have just entered are patterned on those forty days of Jesus in the wilderness. As we contemplate the events leading from the wilderness temptations to the final temptation as Jesus faced the cross, we need to examine the link between trust and temptation. To the extent that we trust God for our daily needs, for a sense of purpose and meaning, for our identity as a child of God—the temptations of this world lose their appeal. To the degree that we allow our natural sense of insecurity to lead us to mistrust God, we become open to the possibility, the appeal, and the temptation of the proposition that it is all up to us, that God is not able to provide and so we should take matters into our own hands. Trust is not always easy. When trust in God is not present, then temptation to place trust elsewhere enters. This is one of the reasons that we need our community of faith around us. The support of the community helps us to grow in trust and live out our lives with a sense of God’s abundant provision for us. We are less likely to succumb to the cultural sense of fear and scarcity. The devil knows Scripture. The devil also knows humanity’s weaknesses. The temptations presented to us are often custom tailored to our particular weaknesses, our unique fears and our individual dreams. They are designed to fit us and to lead us to be less than God created us to be. Luke tells us that when Jesus had answered all three of these temptations, the devil went away until an opportune time. Generally speaking, we believe that the last temptation Jesus faced was the night of his betrayal, but he answered that temptation with not my will but thine, and went to the cross. For most of us our temptations are found more in the barrage of advertising and loud voices which deny God’s love for all the people of the world. There are so many messages which draw us away from our allegiance to God who created and redeems, who offers love and mercy and who calls us to love others. These messages proclaim hatred and fear. If we allow these messages to prevail, then we have allowed them to steal our identity as children of God who loves unconditionally; God in whom we can trust to supply our

need; maybe not our wants, but our needs. As we will later go to God in prayers not only for ourselves, our community and those we love, but also for the world—we will conclude with the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples as a model for prayer. In it, we too, ask that God's will be done and that we not be led into temptation. We offer trust that God's will provides what is needed and ask that we be led away from temptations which will separate us from God. Trust and temptation are not exactly considered opposites, but there is definitely a relationship. This passage is not just meant to illustrate for us that Jesus will not give into temptation, but to provide us with a guide to support us, a voice to express our trust as we try to live and claim lives as beloved children of God. Like Jesus, we need to find our voice of trust in Scripture and allow the Holy Spirit to fill us. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.