

The phrase “First Things First” calls to mind different things for different people. Sports fans might think of Kurt Warner’s book & foundation, both called *First Things First*. Those interested in business, time management, and productivity probably thought of Stephen Covey’s book, also called *First Things First*.

Luke chapter 4 gives us some “first things”—i.e., most important things—about Jesus’ life and ministry. This chapter lays the foundation for all that follows. The events in this chapter are programmatic—i.e., relating to the larger program—and emblematic—representative of larger characteristics of Jesus’ ministry. They give us a paradigm of Jesus mission and ministry.

Three “first things” in this chapter: Who is this man? What is His mission? How does He carry it out?

Before we dig in, let me commend a certain way to listen to and read these stories. I’m afraid these stories from Jesus’ ministry are so well known, they might fail to strike us with their full force. But if we are going to appreciate the full effect of Luke’s narrative, we need to read it as a fresh account. We must imagine that we are there personally, listening, watching, thinking, feeling. Imagine yourself as one of the listeners in the synagogue, a spectator in the crowd, one of the people whom Jesus healed. We must engage all our senses and soul capacities: what would we have seen? heard? felt? said? done?

WHO IS HE? (3:23-4:13)

1. The true and better Adam

The story of Jesus’ temptation exemplifies one of the main reasons I prefer to preach large sections of Scripture at a time. It helps us grasp the Bible’s unity, the broader connections, the bigger picture. And only when we grasp the big picture will we interpret the small details and individual stories correctly.

Let’s take a closer look to see what I mean. The baptism, genealogy, and temptation of Jesus all go together (cf. the phrase “returned from the Jordan” in 4:1 which harkens back to the baptism). The key to understand them correctly is Jesus’ claim to be the “Son of God.”

At Jesus’ baptism, heaven declares Him to be God’s “beloved Son” (3:22). Unexpectedly, Luke’s next move is to record Jesus’ genealogy, running all the way back to Adam and ending with this striking phrase, “son of Adam, the son of God.” So we have two sons of God in view, not just one, not just Jesus.

Satan’s challenge continues this theme. Twice (4:3, 4:9) he challenges Jesus: “If you are the Son of God.” It is critical that we see this connection between Jesus baptism, genealogy, and temptation. We will miss the point of this showdown in the wilderness if we merely look for ourselves in the story and try to glean a few helpful hints for fighting temptation in our own lives. We need to ask better questions than, “What can I learn from Jesus’ example?”

Here’s the question we should ask: Why does Luke emphasize that both Adam and Jesus are the special “son of God”? Here it is... The mention of Adam here at the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry takes our minds back to another beginning – the beginning of redemptive history in Genesis. There, God’s first son, Adam, representing the whole human race, faced Satan in the Garden of Eden, lost the showdown, and plunged our whole race into sin. Now the question becomes, how will this new Son of God do when He comes face to face with Satan?

See, the human race needs more than an example; we need a Savior. We need someone to represent us, face Satan eye-to-eye, and for the first time in human history, WIN! And that is exactly what Jesus does. As God’s Son, Jesus isn’t just giving us a good example; He is giving us a whole new start. As the Second Adam from above, He is constituting a whole new humanity, a heavenly family, a new human race with Jesus the Savior at its head instead of Adam the sinner.

2. The true and better Israel

The temptation story operates at another level in redemptive history. Jesus isn't just the true and better Adam. He is also the true and better Israel. Thus, He is qualified to represent all humanity and God's chosen people both. This identification is more subtle but no less important.

We see it in several ways:

- Hinted at in the language of "son of God"
Ex 4:22-23 ²² *Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son,* ²³ *and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.'*
- 4:2 – "in the wilderness for forty days" calls to mind the forty years of Israel's wilderness wandering
- The fact that Jesus takes His answers from Deuteronomy, particularly from contexts that refer to Israel's wilderness wandering, furthers this analogy.

Here's the point: God intended Israel to be a source of blessing to all nations, but they could not even obey the covenant well enough to keep *themselves* positioned to receive God's blessing much less be a source of blessing for *other* nations. We saw this so clearly in the Minor Prophets... But now Jesus, as the true and better Israel, returns to the wilderness for forty segments of time, keeps the covenant perfectly, and invites us in to enjoy the blessings of His perfect obedience.

3. Trusting Son of the Father

We see this in the nature of the temptations and how Jesus responded to them:

- 4:3-4 The bread temptation was Satan's attempt to get Jesus to use His own power to satisfy His needs, in other words, to take care of Himself instead of relying upon His Father to take care of Him. "Perhaps God has abandoned you. He certainly is treating you poorly. It looks to me like you had better take care of yourself." It was a test of Jesus' self-denial and trust in His Father.
- 4:5-8 Both Satan and God the Father offer universal dominion to Jesus. The question is, will Jesus take the pain-free and immediate road Satan suggests, or will He follow His Father's

path to the crown through the cross? Will He conquer demons by the power of Beelzebub or the power of God?

- 4:9-11 Surely, if Jesus is God's Son and if God's special presence resides in the temple, God will protect His Son from destruction on the temple property. But in reality, the suggestion is "unbelief masquerading as faith" (Bock 381). The underlying premise is this: "I am doubtful that you will take care of me, God, and so I have devised a test that will place you in a situation where you must protect me right now on my terms." But Jesus does not doubt that God will protect His Son, and for Him no artificially arranged test is necessary.

These temptations tell us what sort of Messiah Jesus came to be—specifically, not a self-satisfying, power-grabbing, self-reliant one.

4. Spirit-filled, Scripture-saturated example

Yes, Jesus is an example for us. His life does mark out the path of a faithful walk with God—namely, a life of dependence on God's provision, submission to God's will, and trust in God's promises.

How does He do it? Through the power of the Spirit and the application of the word. Right from the outset in 4:1, we see that Jesus is filled with the Spirit. He battled Satan in the Spirit's power. In fact, He was led to this place by the Spirit – cf. 4:1 "led by the Spirit in the wilderness." Jesus is on the offensive. He is not being passively drawn into this battle by the devil. He is not living at Satan's whim, and by the power of the Spirit, neither must we.

The power of the Spirit and the application of the word. Satan's temptation took the form of arguments, suggestions, ideas. To counteract them, Jesus responded with God's promises and commands. How central and important are the Scriptures in the life of a follower of Jesus!

Earlier we said these temptations tell us what sort of Messiah Jesus was NOT going to be. They define His messiahship negatively. Jesus' first sermon in the next account defines it positively.

WHAT IS HIS MISSION? (4:14-30)

[Read 4:16-21]

1. To fulfill OT Scripture

Previously in Luke, we have heard the testimony of angels, Zechariah, Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna, John the Baptist, and heaven itself as to who Jesus is; but now we hear Jesus' own answer to the question, "Who is this man?" What resource does He use to explain Himself? The Old Testament Scriptures, specifically Isaiah 61.

One of the greatest challenges for Bible teachers is to accurately and consistently teach Jesus from the whole Bible—not just the New Testament! Perhaps it is difficult for you to see Jesus all throughout the Bible—in books as varied as Genesis, Judges, Job, and Jeremiah. That's OK – admittedly, this is hard to do sometimes. But I want to encourage you: at least TRY to see Him there. Be on the lookout!

2. To proclaim good news and deliver the oppressed

Jesus claims to be here with a wonderful agenda:

- Proclaim good news to the poor
- Proclaim liberty to captives
- Proclaim recovery of sight to the blind
- Set at liberty the oppressed
- Proclaim the year of the Lord's favor

Significantly, Jesus cuts off His reading midsentence.

Isaiah 61:1-2 *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God;*

Notice that He stops short of proclaiming "the day of vengeance of our God." We know from the rest of Jesus' teaching and the rest of the NT that that day will come; but for now, Jesus is offering a day of grace and opportunity!

Verses 29-30 foreshadow for us how this grace and deliverance will ultimately come—namely, through an assault on His person and ultimately through His death. The cross casts its shadow forward all the way to the beginning of Jesus' ministry, but He will not be taken until His time has come.

3. To inaugurate the reign of God on earth

Notice the word "today" in v 21. It's the first word of the sentence, the place of emphasis. What He's saying is stunning, not just because He is claiming to be the Messiah but also because He is claiming to be inaugurating the Messianic age right here, in the present, immediately, in the now. Yes, something more is coming—"today" implies a coming "tomorrow" when God's patience will run out and judgment will come. But for now, we are enjoying a 2,000-year "today" of Messianic blessing. The kingdom of God has come, and the ministry of Jesus (and His followers) is to proclaim this good news of God's kingdom everywhere we go (cf. 4:43-44).

4. To redefine the people of God

Consistent with Luke's emphasis on the broad reach of the gospel, the Messiah's ministry will skip over many in Israel and reach out to the receptive Gentiles (cf. 4:24-27).

HOW DOES HE CARRY IT OUT? (4:31-44)

Jesus' authority and power now come into focus (cf. 32, 36). First, Jesus exorcises a demon (31-37); then He heals Peter's mother-in-law (38-39). These two stories complement each other well. In the first, Jesus heals a man; in the second, a woman. In the first, Jesus demonstrates His authority in the spiritual realm—He "rebukes" the demon (v 35); in the second, His authority over the physical realm—He "rebukes" the fever (v 39). In the first, Jesus delivers one from the direct control of Satan; in the second, from the Satan's indirect control wielded through the curse of sin.

This is the sort of deliverance He has come to proclaim, the sort of kingdom He has come to establish. More healings and more exorcisms

follow (40-41). And though the people wanted Him to stay, He kept moving, traveling to every city preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.

How did Jesus carry out His mission? Once again, the answer comes in four parts: via...

- All of it with authority and power (vv 32, 36)
- Conquest over demons
- Healing of disease
- Proclaiming the gospel

Applications:

Those who do not know Jesus should see that He came to rescue, to help, to heal, and to present God's kingdom; they must respond in faith and surrender to Him.

Those who do know Jesus should be reassured that He has power and authority to deliver on His promises.

[Closing Song: "Knowing You" chorus only]

Benediction:

Numbers 6:24-26 ²⁴ *The LORD bless you and keep you;* ²⁵ *the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;* ²⁶ *the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*

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