

Sunday 6th March 2022

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Jesus being Tempted by the Devil

The Greek word for tempted here also means to test, to try and trap, to examine oneself.

This passage teaches us many things, but I think at the centre it calls us to examine ourselves and our identity in God.

When I hear this gospel reading, I'm amazed at how much is going on even though there are only two main characters.

Let's set the scene

In the previous chapter we have just witnessed Jesus being baptised by John the heaven opening The Spirit coming down in the form of a dove and God the father saying this is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased.

So before Jesus, the Messiah has really done anything related to his ministry, the father declares how proud he is in his son, he is the chosen one, and so now we have heard that this Jesus Christ is the son of God, we see throughout this passage his identity is rooted in God.

And just in case Jesus didn't know who he was or needed reminding, through this public affirmation of the father, he can walk in his identity, it is in walking in his identity that allows him to resist the devil.

So Jesus is baptised, the father declares this Great truth, and the spirit is upon him and then we come to chapter 4, we read that he is full of the spirit and now in the wilderness - to the Hebrew reader, the wilderness is the place of demons.

Jesus finds himself deserted, alone, hungry thirsty and I think safe to say going through a low point in his life. Yes, his father has just declared His identity and love for him but here in the quiet Jesus has time to think about what that identity actually means.

What does it mean to be the Son of God, when he leaves this wilderness what must he begin to do, is he up to the task?

And as Jesus may have these thoughts in his mind, and is physically famished, the devil approaches him.

This would be an intense scene in a film - what will happen the moment the two main characters are head to head, who is greater ... except we always know how it plays out when Jesus is there.

Well the devil gets right to his games; he knows the time to attack.

Jesus hasn't yet done anything so great or challenging, but because of his title we know that is coming, the devil is wanting to see if Jesus could actually accept this title as the Son of God. The devil is in the business of testing people's trust in God to prove our failure, and God allows the test to reveal our strength, and sharpen our character.

Notice the first thing the devil does, he questions Jesus' identity.

He says "if you are the son of God..." then do this ...

I am pretty confident that the devil knows who Jesus is, he knows the power he has and the lives that will change as a result of encountering this Jesus.

So if he could just get into Christ's mind, get Christ doubting and thinking he isn't who God has already said he is, then he won't act like the Son, he won't be the Messiah, he won't die for the sins of his people and lives won't be changed.

The devil wants to frustrate God's plans.

What follows from the devil are promises of food, power and protection, the very thing we as humans need and crave for.

The devil is telling Christ I can satisfy you and supply your needs

But Christ knows who he is and whose he is, secure in his identity, so much so that though he is hungry and may not want to be in the wilderness he will trust in his father's guidance, knowing that his father knows best and will eventually satisfy him.

Jesus is so grounded in his father's words, but he may not have known this unless he was led into the wilderness.

The wilderness is lonely, and yet that is the very place he was led by the Spirit.

There was no party after his baptism, it was a test, it was a season of preparation, it was a time of waiting on God to come through.

Perhaps God is leading you into the wilderness, perhaps you feel as though you are there already, maybe not, lent is about stepping into a space of self-reflection, drawing to God, allowing him to prepare you for whatever the next step is.

What is the mission God has put on your heart, how has God called you to serve him this year?

To each of the devil's temptations of food power and protection, Jesus responds with Scripture, the tactic here, the way to overcome is not just let's ignore the devil because he is the father of lies, and he cannot speak truth, so just shut out his voice, but part of the way to overcome seems to be by speaking out loud the words of scripture.

The power of Scripture is so clear in this passage, not just for overcoming but shows us the negative way in which Scripture can be used which is against God's will.

Every author writes with a purpose and here Luke's account makes it clearer than the other Gospels that Jesus was led not only into the wilderness but was being led in the wilderness, the writer wants his readers to understand that even in the wilderness, in testing times, in Christ's loneliness the Spirit was at work leading him.

We are to follow his example, speaking aloud the right scriptures in the power of the spirit is what enables one to overcome the temptations and tests we face.

We know I hope the power of our words, how much more so the words we find In Scripture.

There is a reason for meditating on the word. Day and night, it is our weapon.

Remember in Ephesians 6, Paul tells us to put the whole armour of God on.

The last part of the armour is to take up the sword of the spirit which is the word of God.

Armour is needed when you are going to fight, this is a spiritual battle, Paul says that we need to get everything ready, all your gear on in order to withstand the enemy.

Throughout scripture and particularly in this passage we can't help but see the reality of spiritual warfare at play, something which the West have long been ignorant to and still I would say the average person shies away from any talk of the devil, yet we are told that he goes around looking for who to devour.

But I'm not just here just to talk about the devil because he doesn't deserve much of our time, though we are to be aware of him.

For God does not want his people to be destroyed because they lack knowledge.

So where is the good news in this passage ...?

Well In spite of the devil's schemes and inappropriately using scripture, Jesus has survived, stood well through this rite of passage, his faithfulness is revealed. we can trust that Christ is worthy to hold the title messiah, that he is the chosen one, sent from God and he will bear our sins.

In the frailty of humanness, he reminds us that tests will come and the one filled with the spirit cannot escape this.

The Spirit was upon and within the Son of God as he endured temptation, how much more do we need the spirit to help us, today we can receive the gift of the spirit to be our guide and strength.

This is such great news!

The Spirit can be upon us and within us if we ask.

During lent we have the opportunity to be more intentional about our relationship with God, we are to self-reflect alone and with others.

When Jesus is tempted the second time, he says that we are to worship the Lord your God and serve only him.

May we reflect on our worship to God, and notice the part of our lives we serve another, not him.

And It's not too late to take up something if you haven't already, be intentional about Making room for God.

As Catherine put in her email why not study a book of the Bible, or read a spiritual book or download helpful apps like 'Reimagining the Examen'?

I get daily reflections sent to my email from Tearfund which you can sign up to.

Jesus being tempted by the devil, but overcame with the Holy Spirit, if you have not prayed to be filled with the spirit why not do that today ...

Lord help us to use this lent period wisely, as we draw close to you we trust that you will draw close to us, reveal the parts of us you want to mould and direct our paths in the way we should walk that we may we do all things for the glory of your holy name

Amen