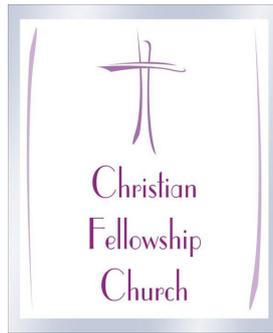


Sunday 01st March 2020



Ministry of the Word
Sunday 01st March 2020
by Vincent Gannon

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-4

Subject: Part 9 - *Temptation in the Wilderness-Part 1: Baptism to Battle.*

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. 3 Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.' "

Last time we saw the commissioning and anointing of the King at the baptism. Now immediately following the baptism, we see another step in the process as Matthew follows on with the temptation in the wilderness. *Why would the Spirit of God lead the Son of God into such a difficult circumstance?* Wiersbe's Expository Outlines:

"Before a king can rule others, he must prove that he can rule himself" (p.21).

It is one thing to proclaim Jesus the King of Kings, but something else to prove it. If the baptism was the proclamation, then here we find the proof, the proof that He is worthy. Zechariah 14 verse 9 says

"And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be— "The LORD is one," And His name one."

If He is to receive the Kingdom; if He is to redeem and reign over His people; He must not only be declared to be King; but He must demonstrate that He is King. Baptism declared it, and now in this account, we will see that the testing demonstrated it. John MacArthur said of these verses that :

"Goodness at its highest has commended Him, and evil at its lowest will be conquered by Him. The combination of both accredit Him as King."

Sunday 01st March 2020

These verses are really showing us a battle between two kings and two kingdoms. We see King Jesus's power over Satan and hell. This is one of the most monumental spiritual battles that we read of in the Gospels because it was a very personal battle between Jesus and the Devil. Jesus showed us how He personally dealt with the temptation of sin. Our Saviour will never bow to the god of this world, even though He faced the full force of Satan's wicked deceptions, yet He remained untouched and uncontaminated. Remember what Hebrews 4 verse 15 says:

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

This account reveals to us Jesus' victory over temptation and demonstrates to us His divine Kingship and royal power over all rulers and dominions in the universe. In addition, it gives us clear and applicable insights into Satan's strategy against God and His people, and also into Christ's way of victory over the tempter. Side by side, we are shown the way of danger and the way of escape, the way that leads to defeat and death, and the way that leads to victory and life. In short, it shows us the way of Satan and the way of God.

Matthew gives us the circumstances of the King's testings (vv.1-2); the character of the testings (vv.3-10); and the consequences of the testing (v. 11). Here Satan was allowed to test Jesus and we see that the test was both physical and spiritual. The test is familiar, we've seen it in the old testament, for example with Joshua the high priest (Zechariah 3v1); and even in the new testament, for example with Peter (Luke 22v31); even throughout church history and today (Revelation 2&3). Tests are familiar to us all. We see in this account Satan's consistent appeal is to invite us to doubt God's provision (vv.1-4); to doubt God's protection (vv.5-7); and to doubt God's promises (vv.8-10). The test of Jesus is threefold; and corresponds to the tactics Satan employed against Eve in the Garden of Eden and for us today. This morning we will look at the first of Satan's appeal - to doubt God's provision, but before that, let us look at the

The circumstances of the King's testings (vv.1-2) : **THE BATTLE GROUND**

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (4:1)

Sunday 01st March 2020

We learn from Mark that *“immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness”* (Mark 1:12). As soon as Jesus was baptised, His forty-day wilderness experience began. There was no time gap. Mark’s use of the Greek word “impelled” indicates the necessity, an internal impulse to go into the wilderness. The same Holy Spirit who anointed Him at the baptism, was the same Holy Spirit who drove Him, who impelled Him to go. Although it was Satan who tempted Jesus, it was very much part of God’s perfect plan. One of the great truths of life, which even the Son of God was not exempt from on earth, is that after every victory comes a battle. God’s Word warns us,

“Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Here is a word to the wise, to every believer in Christ; often when we experience a blessing or a victory we become vulnerable to temptation. This is not a new phenomenon. You will recall in 1 Kings 18 the contest between Elijah and the 450 prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. The Lord gave dramatic and miraculous evidence that He was the true God and Elijah was His true prophet. First He sent fire from heaven to consume the sacrifices and wood that Elijah had soaked with water. Then, in answer to the prophet’s prayer, He sent rain to drought-stricken Judah (1 Kings 18:16-46). But within less than a day Elijah was in despair and asked the Lord to take his life. After being courageous and immovable before the 450 false prophets, he shrivelled before the threats of Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1-4). From the height of exhilarating victory he quickly fell into deep despair. No sooner had Israel been delivered from Egypt, than Pharaoh came pursuing her with his army. No sooner had Hezekiah left the solemn Passover than Sennacherib came against him. No sooner had Paul received an abundance of revelations than he was assaulted with vile temptations (Romans 7).

Have you perhaps experienced something like this? After a victory, often we can think *“well I’ve done it”*, quickly forgetting that Jesus said, *“that without Me you can do nothing”* John 15:5. It’s good to repeat that to yourself a few times a day. Of course we also need the companion verse from Philippians 4:13. *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”* Or perhaps we can feel like we need time out, need to relax, the battle is over, we have prayed and cried enough, when in fact the enemy is ready to make his move, just waiting for us to drop our guard, and be vulnerable.

Sunday 01st March 2020

I've learnt that when victory happens it's not just important to praise God, but it's also important to be sensitive to the fact that I must keep my eyes open because the enemy will be right behind me. If you have observed any of God's children, then you will have noticed, that often our greatest moments of victory can quickly turn to defeat because we have taken our eyes off the Master. The Holy Spirit had just descended from heaven on Jesus and He was as Luke says 'Full of the spirit', but yet it was His time, it was God's perfect time, for Him to face the test in the wilderness. John 3:34 says, "*God gives not the Spirit by measure unto him.*" He was filled with the Spirit. The joy from the word of the Father must have delighted Him. Finally, after 30 years, it was time for His earthly ministry to begin. And then came the devil. There's a lesson here which we need to learn. No sooner had Jesus experienced the first great testimony to His ministry, when He faced the first great test of His ministry. We are no different, when we experience great victory we often, if not always, experience a testing, or a battle afterwards. Especially those who are in ministry, which is why it is so important not to let your guard down and let the devil sneak in. This is why Paul asked in Ephesians 6 verses 18 to 20, after writing about the armour of God, that his readers should cover him in prayer.

There are many names or titles attributed to Satan, all of which inform us of his character, of his dominion and also how he works both in the world and in individuals lives. One of the most common Scriptural names is the devil, from "diabolos", which means accuser or slanderer. The many other names given to him are: "*the ruler of this world*" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), "*the prince of the power of the air*" (Ephesians 2:2), "*the god of this world*" (2 Corinthians 4:4), "*the serpent of old*" and "*the deceiver of the whole world*" (Revelation 12:9), Abaddon and Apollyon, both of which mean "*destroyer*" (Revelation 9:11), and "*the tempter*", as seen in the next verse of our text (Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5).

If ever there was proof needed for the existence of the devil it's here in the Lord's own account. Jesus believed in a personal devil. He entered into conflict with him many times. After being cast out of Heaven by the Lord (Isaiah 14:12-15), Satan's full fury has been constantly and consistently turned against God, the work of God, and the word of God. Satan will, at times, use the people of God to do his bidding, as we see in Matthew 16:22-23. Conflict between Jesus and Satan can be seen numerous times throughout Scripture, for example in

Sunday 01st March 2020

Matthew 13, and at the end of Matthew in the Garden of Gethsemane, and again at the cross. The enemy always tries to thwart the plan of God, the purposes of God and the people of God. We can and do forget that we are in a spiritual battle as God's people and it won't be over till we reach home.

The wilderness that is referred to here is the Judean wilderness, which has been described as a hot barren place, and this area in the old testament was known as a '*place of desolation*'. It has been noted that the first man Adam was confronted by Satan in paradise, in the Garden of Eden where everything was good and perfect, and nothing harmful existed. Yet Adam lost his battle while in the perfect situation. The Second Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45) met Satan here in a desolate place, a forbidding wilderness, where we are told in Mark 1:13 that Jesus was with wild beasts. Luke (4:2) as well as Matthew tells us that Jesus was without food for forty days. We see that what the first Adam lost in an ideal environment, the Second Adam won back in an imperfect one. You see, here is the proof that spiritual and moral failures are not caused by circumstances, but by character and personal response of being tempted.

Many people find it difficult to get their heads around the fact that the Holy Spirit led Jesus out into the wilderness to be tempted, especially because of our relationship to temptation. When reflecting on temptation Robert Orbin wrote **"Most people want to be delivered from temptation but would like to keep in touch"**

But I've said it before and I want to say it again, temptation is neutral. It can be either bad or good. The English word has a bad connotation, as we often think of it to mean, the enticement of somebody to do evil, but not the Greek. In the Greek it does not necessarily mean this, but it can also mean a test of a positive nature.

Strange as it may seem, God can use Satan's temptings for His own means for good. Which is what happened here. When Satan sought to lead the Son of God into sin and disobedience, the Father used it to demonstrate the Son's perfect Holiness and Worthiness. James teaches this in chapter 1 verses 2-4, when he said that such trials, or testing's, or tempting's are for our good. God can and does use (for example: Job) Satan's tempting as a means for strengthening our faith in Him. God allows tests into our lives in order that our spiritual muscles may be excised and strengthened.

Sunday 01st March 2020

We must be clear, God never tests in the sense of enticing us to do evil. That is both contrary to the character of God and to Scripture. James makes this very clear in chapter 1:13 which says *“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.”*

However, God allows a test to prove righteousness. The Lord God never invites anyone to sin. Satan always invites everyone to sin. The devil gratifies but God satisfies. God turns into victory what Satan intended for evil, our failure and our demise. A great illustration of this of course is Joseph in Genesis 37, when a great evil was visited upon him at the hands of his own brothers. When we get to Genesis 50:20 we see that Joseph’s view of things is so different, why? Because Joseph’s obedience and trust in God turned what was meant to destroy, into a great victory. We need to keep this in mind, because we all know that troubles and tragedy can either drive us to or away from God, so instead of going on the warpath, go on the path before the Throne of Grace, casting your cares on Him. We have a great and mighty advocate (Hebrews 4:16). No need to be on your own, never mind trying to figure it all out on your own.

Throughout Jesus’ time in the wilderness we see in verse 2 -

And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.

Why forty days and forty nights? Moses had been separated for forty years; The Children of Israel wandered in the wilderness 40 years. The flood was for forty days and forty nights. Going out into the wilderness or going away prior to ministry is quite common in Scripture. Remember before Elijah could stand on Mount Carmel he had to learn to sit by the brook Cherith. Where are you at in your walk? Are you sitting or standing, or have you begun to run off course? All had testing as part of their preparation for their future mission, and you should be prepared for yours.

After Jesus’ long period of fasting, He became hungry. It would have made him naturally weak. When we are naturally hungry or physically weak, when we are spiritually hungry or spiritually weak, we tend to be vulnerable to do whatever to provide relief from our present distress. Satan therefore usually attacks most fiercely in such times of weakness and unpreparedness.

Sunday 01st March 2020

Temptations that have been anticipated, guarded against, and prayed about have little power to harm us. Jesus tells us to

“keep watching and praying, that you may not come into temptation”

(Mark 14:38)

Victory over temptation comes from being constantly prepared for it, which in turn, comes from constantly relying on the Lord. It is important to note that this points to the humanity of Jesus. Some people think that when the devil came to tempt Jesus that it wasn't really temptation, after all Jesus is God, and *how could you really tempt God?* We have to remember the nature of Jesus, he was as much man as He was God. Christ could not have sinned as Habakkuk noted in chapter 1v13

“of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity”

Jesus' character is without evil. God cannot sin, in fact, in God's own deity, He is not tempted. It is only in His humanity that it could occur. James 1 said ***‘God is tempted by no one’***. But as far as Jesus was concerned, the temptation could come because His humanity was there, but sin could not occur because His deity was also present. The Bible makes it very clear again and again the sinlessness of Jesus Christ. Christ knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus never sinned and had no capacity to sin because of the power of His deity overruled any weakness in His humanity. This does not take away that the temptation was real. Let me put it to you like this, every time you are tempted, do you sin, or do you not? Hopeful you will say you don't! Now, when you don't sin, does it make the temptation any less real? Of course not, it just makes it a victory!

THE BATTLE - The first offensive - Doubting God's Provision

And the tempter came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” (4:3)

After forty days and nights of fasting, as verse 2 tells us, He was hungry. *Surely, He had every right to have something to eat?* It was at this vulnerable time, the tempter came with a temptation involving a great deal more than satisfying Jesus' legitimate physical hunger by miraculous means on the Devil's command, and not God the Father's. There were deeper levels to this temptation.

Sunday 01st March 2020

Firstly, The Devil questioned Jesus' identity *'If you are the Son of God'*. It was the identity that the Father had given him at His baptism. The term 'Son of God' has its roots in the Old Testament. The Son of God was the coming Messiah. He was called My Son in Psalm 2:7. In Psalm 45:6-7, He was God who would rule forever. He was the child who would be born of a virgin in Isaiah 7:14 and called "God with us." He was the child who would rule as king and was called the Mighty God and Eternal Father in Isaiah 9:6. He was the child who would be born in Bethlehem, yet He was from days of long ago. He is the eternal God. Jesus was and is the eternal Son of God. The term Son of God emphasizes that Jesus is God.

Satan targets our identity in Christ, our identity that God gives us - his child. He targets the mind. His weapon is lies. *For what purpose?* To make us ignorant of God's will and God's word, and to make us doubt God's provision in all things. Satan often uses stepping stones of lies. You see, if you doubt God's word, then you will doubt His provision.

The Devil approached Jesus in the same way he first approached Eve in Genesis 3, to cast doubt on God's Word *'If you are the Son of God', 'Did God really say'*. The Devil hates the Word of God, and today we see it being not just attacked but torn apart by the world out there, and unfortunately, the enemy has infiltrated the church. Think about it, *'The name it and claim it'*, or *'gabble it and grab it', movements! They say "You are a god and you are entitled to everything material and otherwise. If you are a "son" why don't you have it?"*

We see that the word of God has been watered down, diluted with untruths or using the Word of God out of context so as to make people feel good, use good psychology and less guilty of their sin, which is actually a death sentence. For those who are Christians, it weakens their testimonies and steals their blessings, and for those who think they are Christians but are not, it's sending them to hell. We are in a battle, we are contending for the doctrine of Scripture, the inerrancy of Scripture and complete authority of the Word of God for the Christian's life (Revelation 22:18). We could write a new chapter in the book of "Fox's book of Martyrs" and entitled it "They won't stand for the truth". It's not my truth or your truth or the way you want to interpret it, it is God's truth. It saves and sets free the captives and gives them purpose for living.

Sunday 01st March 2020

Satan tempted Jesus to satisfy a need by using his hunger against him. There is no sin in being hungry, there is no sin in satisfying hunger, *so what then is the problem? Why would God allow the Messiah to go hungry? How could the Father allow His Son to go hungry, when He even provided manna for the rebellious children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai? And had not Isaiah written of the righteous that ‘His bread will be given him; his water will be sure’* (Isaiah 33:16)? *You are a man, and you need food to survive. If God had let His people die in the wilderness, how could His plan of redemption have been fulfilled? If He lets you die in this wilderness, how can you fulfil your divine mission on His behalf?*

Again this was the same tactic Satan took with Eve in the Garden of Eden (see Genesis 3:5). Satan’s suggestion; *“The Lord must not really love you. If He did, He would take better care of you”*. For Jesus to exercise His divine powers out of the will of God would spell defeat. In John’s Gospel we learn that Jesus always did those things that pleased His Father (8:29). It caused Eve to question God’s command, and also to question if God’s provision for them was enough. The Devil was saying, *‘You know Eve, there’s more out there than what you have and God is keeping it from you’*.

Satan wants Christians to believe that God is being unfair, being unkind; or limiting the things we need. How many of us have been tempted to doubt God's provision for us? Have you ever thought, *“does God actually know my need, it feels like he doesn’t because I still don’t have what I want? This thought process often leads us then, to doubt God’s love for us, to doubt our position in Christ, am I really His?, and even doubt God’s word, “I thought that God said that He answers prayer, but He isn’t, so is this all true, is there really a God who listens to me? Will God really supply all my needs?”* This tactic of causing doubt of God’s provision and His word is an old reliable tactic still used by the Devil. If people doubt God’s provision then they can become self-serving people. Self-serving is not an emotional problem, or a psychological one, but it is a sin problem. This problem has a definite cure which is found in the very person we are looking at, Jesus - Who in verse 4 demonstrated how to overcome this temptation - ***But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”***

How did Jesus respond to the temptation? He quoted Deuteronomy 8:3:

Sunday 01st March 2020

“So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.”

Jesus allowed the Word of God to be His authority and inform His thinking and living! Jesus took this Word and had “hidden in His heart” (Psalm 119:11) and was able to quote it accurately and apply it specifically to His circumstance! It was that absolute trust and submission that Satan sought to shatter. If Satan had succeeded, it would have put an irreparable rift in the Trinity. They would no longer have been Three in One, no longer have been of one mind and purpose. In his incalculable pride and wickedness, Satan tried to fracture the very nature of God Himself. But Jesus, in His incalculable humility and righteousness, answered and said, ‘It is written’. In fact, in this passage we see that this is how Jesus responded to all the Devil’s temptations. He allowed the Word of God to cut the scales off the Serpent. Remember, that the Word of God says it is sharper than a two edged sword and it is our defence against Satan’s attacks.

The word of God is often referred to as the bread of life, in fact Jesus in John 6 verse 48 said that he is ‘*the bread of life*’. Later on in that chapter verse 51, Jesus said ***“I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.”***

Jesus declared that we are better off to obey and depend on God, waiting on His provision, than to grab satisfaction for ourselves when and as we think we need it. Moses had originally said those words to Israel as he recounted to her the great love and blessing God had bestowed on her during her own wilderness experience (Deuteronomy 8:1-18). God’s people are never justified in complaining and worrying about their needs. If we live by faith in Him and in obedience to His Word, we will never lack anything we really need.

“And my God shall supply all your needs,” Paul assures us, ***“according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus”*** (Philippians 4:19).

The Word of God tells us that we have not because we ask not. A lot of people stop there and say, but I keep asking, but they forget to continue down the passage which says in James: ***“You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your***

Sunday 01st March 2020

pleasures.” It comes back to our motive, are we trusting God with our lives or do we want to direct God in the way we would like Him to serve us? Do we believe His Word and allow Him to guide us in the way He wants us to go?

Jesus tells us that God knows what we need even before we ask Him (Matthew 6:8). Later in the same discourse He says, *“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you”* (Matthew 6:33)

We are always better off to obey God and to trust in His gracious sustenance than to impatiently and selfishly provide for ourselves in ways that disobey, or in any way compromise, His Word.

CONCLUSION

Jesus was tempted to doubt the Father’s Word, the Father’s love, and the Father’s provision. But remember, what was meant for evil, God used it for good, and it demonstrated that Jesus is indeed King, Jesus is sinless and that Jesus is our perfect example.

The Lord will often test us in the ordinary things of life, like eating and drinking and personal relationships as well as in extraordinary circumstances. *So what should we do about this?*

Firstly, **Purpose and Intention.** We need to understand, that like Jesus, the purposes and intentions of our lives should only be the purposes and intentions of our heavenly Father. The guiding principle of His life should be the guiding principle of ours.

Secondly, **Preparation.** We need to always be prepared for Spiritual battle and be sensitive to it particularly after victory. Jesus was led by the Spirit, immediately after the moment of His greatest triumph, be aware. He was led by the Spirit for a test to prove that He was a worthy king but from the devil's viewpoint, it was a temptation to prove that He was unrighteous. And so, we need to be aware, the things that come into our lives can either prove us righteous or drive us to sin, depending on how we respond. Satan came when Jesus was at His weakest and most vulnerable. Satan then tempted Him to try to push Him into sin. Don’t think that he won’t be after you in the same way.

Sunday 01st March 2020

Thirdly, the **Precious and Powerful** Word of God. It is extremely important to not just know the Word of God but to apply it into our lives, every minute, of every hour, of every day. When in battle, use the word as a sword to defend as well as to cut down the temptation. This is how Jesus did it. It was not that his circumstance was nice, unlike Adam in the Garden of Eden, He was in a place of desolation. But He knew the preciousness and the power of the word of God and he used it.

“It is not food,” Jesus says, “that is the most necessary part of life. The creative, energizing, and sustaining power of God is the only real source of man’s existence.”

Finally, **Provision**, with all this in mind, we can rely on God’s love and provision for our lives. He gives us His best. Remember He gave himself so that we may live. Jesus asked,

“Why are you anxious about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith?” (Matthew 6:28-30).

Following our Lord’s example in the wilderness, no matter how urgent and important a need seems to be, we are to wait for our heavenly Father’s provision, *as believers is it not our desire to glorify the Lord?* I hope as a Christian, you're really watching and being alert, because you're no use to God if you keep falling into sin. It's in the times of victory that we have the times of fruitfulness.

Amen.