

## WAR IN THE WILDERNESS

### Matthew 4.1-10

Next week we begin Lent and for Lent we plan to use the exiting series, Better Together. I hope you all plan to do the 40 days of devotion, get in a study group, and make an extra effort to be here for those six Sundays.

Today I want to talk from a passage traditionally used at the beginning of Lent.

It is found in both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Mark has the condensed version. It is about Jesus in the Wilderness. He is being tempted by the devil.

I think we can learn some things about handling temptation. Sometimes we even know how to handle it and yet fall prey to it. Take my daughter for example.

She likes to spend money, really likes to spend money. When the toed shoes came out, she bought three pair. I asked her why one wasn't enough. She said she it probably would have been but she got a deal on them, they were each a dollar off. So in my mind she spent X number of unnecessary dollars, in her mind she was tempted by the good deal and saved three dollars.

Anyway, we were just down there a month ago and she bought this outfit. Jess looks good in most colors and styles. She comes out with this new outfit on and guess what I asked. Well, first I said, "It looks great honey, then I asked, "how much did cost?"

She said, "I know it was too much dad but I couldn't resist the temptation. Besides the devil said I looked good in it.

I said, "Well you know what you're suppose to say. "Ya, I know, "get behind me Satan."

"Well, why didn't you?" I asked. She said, "I did, and he got behind me, but then he said, it looked good from behind, too."

Did you like that? It's good to have some fun with that, but you also know that when

someone has fallen to temptation, people are hurt, lives can be damaged or destroyed.

We all know folks who have made a decision for a night, for a moment. They've taken another drink, a bite, a piece, a slice, a sniff, a snort, another toke, another partner, or another thing that didn't belong to them. Maybe they had to play another card, another token, push another button, gaze just one more time at the

picture. Maybe they've just had to get in the last word, which instead of restoring or reconciling a relationship deepened the division. Or maybe they just had to say those words, tell that story, as unwholesome and unfounded it might be.

Who knows...well I guess God does...but the temptation is all around us, isn't it.

Sometimes, we give in to it, we fall head long into messy and miserable consequences, at worst separating us from God, from others, and from who we are truly suppose to be.

Now hear this if you don't hear anything else today. No matter what we've done, how far

you or I have fallen, how much we've given into temptation...God still loves you and me and Jesus has died for you and me. **It is in Christ we can be restored, redeemed, and renewed.** In the life of Jesus Christ you have hope, can get help, and are given healing.

Not only is he our hope, help, and healing; Jesus provides a model for us as to how to deal with temptation. Jesus endured and dealt with temptation too.

He focuses and prioritizes. Let's see how he does it.

Matthew 4.1-2 says, *Jesus was lead by the Spirit into the wilderness...did you catch that?*

((Circle the words Spirit and wilderness))The Spirit lead Jesus into the wilderness...why? He had just been baptized, affirmed as the anointed one, dubbed for duty as the death slayer of death and evil, marked by the Spirit for service...isn't that enough? Why was Jesus moved into the wilderness?

We know that out of the wilderness God has promised to bring life. It is like a retreat, a vision quest in which one is looking for the their life mission and service. In the wilderness they have to learn to rely on God's presence and provision.

So, I like to think of it as this way...Jesus is going from Baptism to boot camp. Let me ask you why do our soldiers go to boot camp? They enlist, sign on the dotted line...shouldn't their enthusiasm and desire for duty be enough? No, they have to be disciplined for duty. So it seems for Jesus too. **If he fails to make this earthly mission, we fail to make our eternal destination.**

*"To be tempted by the devil."* ((Circle the devil)) CS Lewis has said we make two mistakes about the devil.

One is some don't believe that he exists. That is hard to imagine as we look at all the evil

in our world. Why would there not be a personification of evil?

The other mistake is giving too much press and power to the devil. He becomes bigger than life and God's love. My brother-in-law had a hard time in church for a long time. The preacher literally scared the heaven out of him.

If Jesus lives in your heart, I John 4.4 says, you always have him, and, "*He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.*"

Now adding to the circumstances, Jesus tells us that, "*After fasting 40 days and 40 nights he was hungry...40 an interesting number. ((Circle 40)) It means preparing for something, coming to a time of completion where you're ready to move on to something else. Have you ever heard of being over the hill. When? 40<sup>th</sup> birthday-right? Well, actually you've used all those years to prepare for the next phase, next experience in life, and it may be the most important.*

Remember Moses was 40 when he murdered the Egyptian, he spent 40 years marooned in the Midian, and the last 40 years wandering in the wilderness.

Hey, remember it rained 40 days and 40 nights on Noah in the ark. There was a time of soul searching, cleansing, and clinging to God, much like in the wilderness, much like what the season of Lent is suppose to be.

So, "after fasting 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry." Ok, there you have the intro,

shall we start the sermon?

How did Jesus handle temptation and what can we learn?

Well, first we learn, **THE WAR in the WILDERNESS IS REALLY ABOUT THE WORD OF GOD.** In your outlines put WORD.

Let's read verses 3-4, "*The tempter came to him and said, "If (now circle if, that's a big if) you are the Son of God, speak the word that will turn these stones into bread."* Jesus answered, it is written, "*It takes more than bread to stay alive. It takes a steady stream of words from God's mouth.*" (you have probably hear it more like, "*man shall not live by bread alone but by the word of God.*")

At first it seems the War in the Wilderness is more of a physical battle rather than a spiritual one. It seems it is about meeting our physical needs. And that is true to a point, but when our needs, desires, and wants distract us from God...well, then we've entered the spiritual arena, it is not about flesh and blood anymore.

The devil digs deeper than just our physical needs to distract us from our work and discredit our witness.

I want you to hear the words, “**IF** you are the Son of God” on a different level. Get it?

You know how this works when someone dares you. They say, “If you’re such hot stuff,

so cool then why don’t you do this or that. They may call you chicken, geek, sissy, or loser in an effort to get you to do something that is usually not in your or someone else’s best interest. Well, whether the circumstances are right or wrong—something inside says, you have to prove yourself, you have to do it and something else whispers, “don’t do it”.

Now if Jesus gives into this temptation, remember, it isn’t that he has filled his stomach and hushed those hunger pangs... Think about it, if he gives in He destroys the integrity of his identity and fails his earthly mission. And if he fails his earthly mission, we’ll fail to get to our heavenly destination.

Now think about where Jesus had just come from? His baptism. He came out of the water, a dove descended and a voice shouted, “*This is my son in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him.*” Matthew 3.17 or from the Message... “*This is my Son, chosen and marked by my*

*love, delight of my life.*”

He will hear it again at the transfiguration just before going into Jerusalem. As God clears the confusion and the cloud, the disciples see Jesus and hear the voice, “*This is my*

*Son in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him.*”

And he will hear it still again, this time from people standing at the cross. Jesus on the cross, bloody, bruised, and beaten, would hear the haunting words, “*If you really are Son of God, come down from the cross.*” the Matthew 27.39-40

Amazing isn’t it, God gives words of affirmation and assurance to build up and evil uses those same words to deceive and destroy, to break down.

Well Jesus doesn’t take the bait, he doesn’t bite...he doesn’t become distracted...he focuses and fixes on God’s provision, he changes the rules, his response, “*It takes more than bread to stay alive. It takes a steady stream of words from the mouth of God.*”, That tells us Jesus has another priority.

That verse is from Deuteronomy 8.3. Think about it, God gave the Hebrews direction

and guidance in the wilderness and they were given his presence and his words. Deuteronomy was their experience. Jesus, as a good little Jewish school boy had learned those words just for an occasion such as this. And we're given those words to use as well.

Basically, by using scripture, Jesus is saying I'm not going to play your game...the important thing is not whether I have something to eat...the important thing is my ministry and mission, my reputation, responsibility, and that my relationship with God stays on track and intact.

Isaiah 55.2 encourages us to refocus, "Why spend money on what is not bread (on junk food) and your labor (hard-earned cash) on that which does not satisfy (cotton candy), eat only the best, and your soul will delight in the finest. Pay attention, come close now, listen carefully to my life giving, life nourishing words."

Psalm 19.10 tells us, "Your words are more precious than gold, than even pure gold, they are sweeter than honey, the purest honey." That is what God wants us to feed on.

Jesus used the Scripture to deal with temptation to focus, to stay on track. When we're tempted we're shown that we need to focus on the Word, on Jesus. In Hebrews 12.2 it says, "let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race set out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus...study how he did it. He never lost sight where he was headed..."

So here is the **FAITH APPLICATION: GOD'S WORD GIVES AND PROVIDES, WE'RE TO REFOCUS AND REPRIORITIZE.**

The second temptation tells us that the WAR IN THE WILDERNESS IS REALLY ABOUT THE WILL AND GOD'S WAY.

Matthew 4.5-7 tells us, "*Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. If you are the Son of God ((sound familiar-circle the phrase)), throw yourself down. For it is written, "He will command his angels to take charge over you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone"* (Did you catch that, we've got the devil quoting scripture now. That is a good warning for us we must be careful in how we use the Bible.) "*Jesus answered, Do not test the Lord your God.*"

This second temptation is about being irresponsible with the responsibility you've been

given. It's about not getting too bored or too busy. It is about not getting sidetracked

but staying on track.

A month ago we talked about separating faith and foolishness. This is a good example. Remember we're not talking about enjoying or just having a good time, we're talking about taking license, about abusing privileges and practice.

This isn't trusting God, it's testing God. Again we see, rather we hear Jesus. He uses another verse from Deuteronomy, It's verse 16 found in chapter 6 and the sword of truth once again exposes the motive and mind of evil, "Do not test the Lord your God.

**OUR FAITH APPLICATION: IT'S GOD'S WILL AND GOD'S WAY, WE'RE ASKED**

**TO BE RESPONSIBLE AND OBEY.**

Last, we find out that THE WAR IN THE WILDERNESS IS REALLY ABOUT THE WORSHIP OF GOD.

*Verses 8-9..."For the third temptation, the Devil took him on the peak of huge mountain. He pointed out all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. All this I give you((lock, stock, and barrel)) if you will bow down((go down on your knees)) and worship me."*

Ya right. There you have it, what a pitch...sell your soul and it's all yours. As we read it today, we might think that is sort of interesting. But in our day and age we miss those subtle and seductive suggestions of power and pleasure that permeates our culture.

In a survey people were asked what they would do for a million dollars. Do you know that I'm sure they thought the million dollars would make their lives better...it would take care of every thing...life would be manageable.

You'd have power and prestige, control over much of life. But the real questions are who and what is life about?

You heard today something you already knew. Life is about God. It is about living a

life devoted to God. It is about dealing with temptation by turning to God. It is about worshipping God..."loving the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Our last FAITH APPLICATION: "IT IS TO GOD ABOVE WE'RE TO WORSHIP AND LOVE"

Let us thank God for the wonderful WORD of Life and the wonderful words of life

As we sing, "Sing Them Over Again To Me Wonderful Words of Life."