

Brackenhurst Methodist Church 15 March 2009 all day (baptism 09h30)
The Tempted Follower — With Jesus in the Wilderness

Welcome

Call to Worship: Psalm 119:97-101

Oh, how I love your law!

I meditate on it all day long.

Your commands make me wiser than my enemies,
for they are ever with me.

I have more insight than all my teachers,
for I meditate on your statutes.

I have more understanding than the elders,
for I obey your precepts.

I have kept my feet from every evil path
so that I might obey your word.

Opening Prayer

- Hymn 74 — At the Name of Jesus

Notices

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

All our hearts and tongues confess him King of Glory, Holy Lord and Mighty Word.
The name before whom every knee shall bow and all that is not holy and not true will
be defeated...

...

Lord, how often we need those qualities in the wilderness of our daily lives!

We look to the example of Jesus and see his strength, yet we are weak!

How we wish we could have the power to resist the temptation that the satan brings
to us.

...

Yet Lord, we know that we do not have to do this in our own strength because you
have gone into the wilderness before us.

So now we invite you into our wilderness to help us deal with our temptations and
the places where we have fallen...

- Hymn 136 — I heard the Voice of Jesus say

Offering

Prayer and Preparation

Scripture:

Matthew 4:1-11

- Hymn 251 — All for Jesus

Message

Introduction:

- We're on a journey with Jesus as we journey through Lent together
 - We're looking at some of the key stops that Jesus makes through his time of ministry
- I want to say this morning that a lot of what we're saying comes from Trevor Hudson
 - He spoke on this theme at a ministers' retreat last year
 - * And at the very least the titles for each week are his
 - The sermons are a mixture, but probably if it sounds good it comes from Trevor!
- This week the theme is "The Tempted Follower — with Jesus in the Wilderness"
 - and we pick up the story of Jesus going into the desert and facing temptations
- Now I just want to remind you of what I said last week about Jesus being prepared to for this moment, being prepared to enter the wilderness
 - Last week we looked at being with Jesus in His baptism and we saw how heaven was opened and he was given having a vision of an alternative reality
 - * The reality of the spiritual was revealed to him
 - We saw how Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit as the Spirit came down in him like a dove
 - And then how Jesus was affirmed in who he is by God.
 - * And you remember that he heard the voice of God saying, "You are my son, whom I love. With you I am well pleased"
- And so now, filled by the Spirit he is led into the wilderness.
 - And I just want to note here that it is not the Spirit leading him into temptation, but leading Jesus into a place where temptation is possible.
- God sends you and me into the world, every day.
 - A world that is often a wilderness
 - A world where there is temptation
 - A world in which we are tempted to forget the real reality of the Kingdom of God being at hand.
 - * A world in which the physical seems far more real.

- And it is in this world that we are called to live out lives that glorify, not our humanity, but that glorify God
 - And it is in this world that we are called to face and struggle with our temptations
- I understand that psychologists have identified three main areas of temptation
 - Of human striving
 - * Areas where men and women seek to achieve
- And it seems that these are very similar to the three areas in which Jesus is tempted
- So as we journey with Jesus into the wilderness
 - Where we are tempted by the satan, the accuser
 - * As we stand as tempted Christ followers
- Let's understand that all of our temptations can be classified in one of these areas
 - Hunger
 - Fame
 - Power

(1) Hunger

- Firstly Hunger
 - Jesus is tempted by satan in the area of physical hunger — he was in the desert for forty days fasting
 - * And it was at this time that satan came to him and tempted him to turn the rocks into bread
- Story goes like this in verses 2-3:

“After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”
- Now as I read those words I am reminded of Moses in the desert dealing with the hunger and the thirst of the Hebrew slaves as they escaped from Egypt
 - There's a story of how the people grumbled in the desert against God and Moses (Ex 17:1-7), the words used are “they tested the LORD”
 - * And so Yahweh takes Moses out and tells him to strike the rock with his staff, and as he does that water comes out for the people to drink
- It seems to me that the story about Jesus could intentionally invoke these associations
 - In the desert, with physical cravings

- And so as we look at the temptation of hunger we are reminded that our hungers are not just about food, but also in terms of our lusts, our greeds, our desires for material things, our sexuality
 - things which often have very little to do with the spiritual reality which was revealed to us
 - * But sometimes are necessary for our survival in this world.
- The temptation, I think, is to take more than we need for survival and to accumulate and hoard and be greedy.
- The rock group Queen sings a song that epitomises our generation's attitude towards life
 - "I want it all"
- Some of the lyrics go like this:

Listen all you people, come gather round
 I gotta get me a game plan, gotta shake you to the ground
 But just give me, huh, what I know is mine
 People do you hear me, just gimme the sign
 It ain't much I'm asking, if you want the truth
 Here's to the future for the dreams of youth
 I want it all (give it all - I want it all)
 I want it all (yeah)
 I want it all and I want it now
- And of course we can have it all now, can't we?
 - With this — hold up credit card
- And it seems to me that this little piece of plastic is like carrying the satan around with us all the time
 - satan says to Jesus if you're hungry, turn these stones into bread
- It's a temptation that we face every day!
 - He says to us if you want it, turn this plastic into money, into the things that you long for
 - * And we do!
- And we say to ourselves, and we try to justify what we're buying because it's one sale or whatever
 - But we think to ourselves, hey, I can get it now!
 - * I'll just pay a bit extra next month
- The problem is that by the time next month comes we've seen something else, and before we know it our card is maxed out
 - And we've got more debt than we know what to do with
- That's the temptation that we're dealing with here, people

- Very few of us will find ourselves hungry in the desert after fasting for 40 days!
- But most of us are probably tempted to get things that we don't really need with resources that we don't really have
 - And look at where that's got us! World finances down the tubes
- As Moses journeyed through the desert with the Hebrews, and as God miraculously provided food and water for them from the rocks
 - The people were taught not to gather more than they needed
 - * They had to gather, otherwise they would have gone hungry
- But the big thing was not to take more than they needed, and not to hoard.
 - So the first temptation is in the areas of our physical hungers.

(2) Fame

- Do you remember that tv show from years back
 - I don't, I never watched it because we didn't have Mnet in those days, before Dstv
 - * But I heard about it from friends who had wealthier parents than what I did
- It was called Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous
 - And as I understood it, every week they would take you into some celebrity's house and show off their lifestyle to the viewer
 - * They would give the viewer something to aspire to
 - Not just the wealth, but also the fame
- See fame is another one of those things that we all crave
 - We want people to recognise us when we walk down the street, we want someone to say, hey, there goes Neil.
- And as I was reflecting on this, while we group them together, I realised that fame and hunger are really two very different things
 - Have you noticed that the famous are very often not rich
 - * Or for very long, anyway
- Look at Britney Spears, Michael Jackson
 - He's been bankrupt for some time
 - * Carl Niehaus!
- And I think there is sometimes an attitude that if I'm famous enough I don't have to worry about money because it will always come from somewhere
 - Now Whacko Jacko is doing a series of concerts to get the money flowing again
- Jesus was tempted in this very area.

- The devil takes him to the highest point in the city and suggests that he throws himself off to prove that the angels will catch him.
- We read the story in Matt 4:5
 - “Then the devil took him to the holy city and made him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down...”
- Inherent in this temptation are a number of little things that all of us struggle with at some point
 - fame — can you imagine how Jesus would have immediately been famous?
 - Invincibility — nothing can hurt me — Queen had another song about that!
 - Immortality — proof that we can live forever — because we do something great, or simply get very old
 - Godlikeness, where we can do what we like without regard for the consequences
- Again, these are characteristic of the way we live our lives today
 - We all want immortality and invincibility - whether that is by doing great things that we will be remembered for, or whatever else we do to get fame.
- So the second temptation that Jesus — and we — face is that of fame.

(3) Power

- The third temptation that the devil gives to Jesus is that of power.
 - “The devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in all their splendour. ‘All of this I will give you,’ he said, ‘if you will bow down and worship me.’”
- the desire to be in control over everything that we see before us. To rule the kingdoms of the world.
 - The desire to be in charge
- And again, how prevalent is that in our lives
 - And I’m not just talking about wanting to be an executive, to climb the corporate ladder
- but about wanting to lord our power and authority over other people
 - At home, at work, in relationships
- And it’s interesting that Jesus is not tempted specifically in a sexual way in this story
 - I think it’s because so much of our sexual temptation is not really about sex
- but rather is about broken humanity where we either see it as our right to take what we want
 - we’re hungry so we take what we need

- Or about power — I want to enforce my power over you by forcing or coercing or manipulating you into doing my will
 - Thus proving that I am more powerful
- And so the issues of temptation around sexuality are dealt with in temptations of hunger and power
- But we see this desire for power played out all around us
 - On television, not just in the dramas and news and politics
- But on Survivor: out wit, out last, out play — the whole thing is not about how can you best work together to win as a team
 - But rather how can you manipulate and scheme and do in your team mates to be all powerful, to end up as king of the hill.
- Man, If there is a satanic show, and anti-christ show on television at the moment it has to be Survivor
 - Teaches us to live according to principles that are the opposite of what Christ taught
- Espouses the very opposite of what Jesus did being tempted — that is anti-Christ, by the way — Jesus refused to play this game!
 - Facebook — who are your most powerful peers?
 - * Pyramid thing about how high up the pyramid you can climb
- The temptation of being king of the hill
 - Again, I'm reminded of Moses in the desert with the slaves from Egypt.
- Do you remember that Moses wasn't allowed to enter the promised land?
 - Dt 34:1-4
 - “Then Moses climbed Mt Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There Yahweh showed him the whole land [and it is described]. ‘This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob... I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it.’”
- And if you remember the story you will remember that the reason why was because according to God, he did not trust him and when asked to speak to bring water from the rock, instead he struck it (Numbers 20:6-12)
 - He forgot who he was
 - Instead of trusting in God, he preferred his own power
- So the third temptation is that of power.

Conclusion

- So those are the temptations that Jesus faced in the wilderness, and the temptations that we will face in our wildernesses

- Essentially, the accusation that we are not really children of God...
 - * As we know, the wilderness is not an easy place to be, and it is easy for the vision of an alternative reality, the presence of the Spirit and the words of God encouraging us and affirming us to fade into insignificance.
- It is in these times of temptation, when the satan, the accuser, comes to us
 - The one who tells us that there is really only one world and that is the one we live in
 - * and therefore only one way of doing things
 - the one who tells that we do not need God's spirit because we are wise enough on our own
 - the one who constantly whispers in our ears that we are not beloved of God, who tells us that God is not pleased with us
 - * And in that offers us an easy way of doing life
- It is very easy to be tempted in this way.
 - It is easy to start thinking that we are not God's beloved and in order to be good enough we have to have the money, the car, the house, the clothes
 - * And satan says, you can do it with credit
 - We think that in order to be good enough we have to be famous
 - * And satan says, you can do it if you have the right friends
 - We think that in order to be good enough we have to have power
 - * And you can get that by walking over other people
- But Jesus says, you don't need any of these things!
 - You don't need any of these things
- because you are already my Father's children, and he loves you and is pleased with you
 - You don't need fancy clothes to please him, or to be famous to catch his attention, or to be powerful enough to consort with him
 - * You are my child, whom I love, with you I am well pleased!
- How do we cope? How do we respond when we find ourselves in the wilderness?
 - Firstly, I think that we need to know where it is that we are tempted
 - * Are we tempted because of hungers — whatever they may be?
 - * Are we tempted by fame?
 - * Are we tempted by power?
- And then, once we have recognised the area of temptation
 - To invite Jesus into the area with us and dialogue with him
- Ask him to reveal to you why that is an area of temptation for you

- Maybe money because you didn't have any growing up and vowed that you would never be poor again
- Maybe Fame because you were a nobody at school and determined to make a name for yourself
- Maybe Power because you were taken advantage of
 - * abused
 - * bullied
 - * And you decided that from that day on you would do the bullying instead
- Then, as Christ reveals those areas to you, to invite Christ to help you deal with those temptations
 - When Jesus was in the wilderness being tempted, he turned to the written Word.
 - * Every time the devil said that it was written, Jesus would say, but it is also written.
- We can turn to the written word, and we should
 - But more than that, we can turn to the Living Word — Even Jesus Christ!
- So we can go confidently into the desert knowing that he goes with us
 - being reminded of the reality of an alternative kingdom
 - being filled with the Spirit
 - * And knowing that we are God's beloved
- One last thing to close off with
- In Mark's gospel it is after this time in the wilderness that Jesus goes forth to proclaim the kingdom of God at hand
 - To proclaim that new reality to the world — because now he knew it — and to call from the world those who were to follow him
- And you will notice that those he first called were not rich
 - They were not famous
 - They were not powerful
- They were young fishermen who left even the little they had to follow Jesus
 - But we'll look at that next week
- May we pray

Prayer of Response and Intercession
The Lord's Prayer

- Hymn 437 — Guide me O thou great Jehovah

Benediction
Doxology