

**What kind of messiah? Out of the wilderness the Messiah enters the world stage.**

**The Jesus we never knew x07 VPBC 12 Feb 2017**

**Matthew 4:1-11(READ from the Message translation)**

Continuing our theme for this year “the Jesus we never knew” and **we return to the place of wilderness and times of testing.** GTH last week gave us all the background we needed to look at Jesus facing his time in the wilderness following his Baptism by John. Rather than temptations the language and word used indicates that these are better described as character tests. **These are best seen as the testing of Jesus’ understanding of his life’s mission and his relationship with his Father God under conditions of hard ship. They are also seen as the lead in to his 3 years of public ministry. They are clearly not his only time of testing (as one gospel at least tells us the tempter returned) but it does seem an intense time.** It must have been Jesus himself who told his disciples about this.

Luke and Matthew change the order of the second and third tests as they look to draw different emphasis from the way they tell the story- but both agree that the **first challenge is to meet his material hunger by turning stones into bread.** His fast is seen both as a preparation for the test but presumably in a way his weakened state presumably brought about the test. I can only assume that the fasting was all about praying and seeking God the Father’s input as to what exactly he was called to do.

Geoff emphasized that:

**What is being tested is the way power is used and for what ends – what is it going to achieve.** This is always a significant issue in the world as we know. So, what is being tested here is just what kind of Messiah is Jesus going to be. What is the character of this Kingdom that is being brought in by his presence? Even now many in the world are confused about what power Jesus is seeking to exert in our lives.

All 3 tests are linked and examine Jesus’ choices and use of his power. Geoff argued that **Jesus is not about imposing Empire but about explaining and introducing God’s Kingdom?** How do things get done when “God in Jesus” is in charge? What and how would his power be exercised, extended and maintained? Just how different would it be from the rule of the say the Herods or the Romans?

**Jesus in his rebuttals of these challenges which are said to come from “the devil” also called “the tempter “draws from the writings of Deuteronomy where Moses gives a series of talks to the people of Israel in the land of Moab (still in the wilderness) where they had stopped before entering and occupying Canaan. The wilderness – or lonely places feature greatly in the history of the Hebrews, the Israelites. The loneliness and the places of solitude play a significant place also in the life of Jesus – he is the faithful and obedient Son of God as opposed to the disobedient and unfaithful people of the Exodus.** (Many of us may be afraid of being alone or in places of

solitude. Many of us keep ourselves very busy to avoid being alone with God or even alone with the devil (St B's 8-day silent retreat experience).

There are lessons to learn from Moses in the wilderness. In the chase of Moses, he fled the Egyptians and later returned and took the people of the Hebrews with him into the wilderness towards the Promised Land. He initially wrongly used violence and murder to bring freedom but had to flee and work in a despised occupation (sheep farming) before **in the wilderness God met with Moses again. It is in the wilderness stripped away of all forms of normal dependencies and distractions that Moses spends forty days and nights (twice) on the mountain and Elijah also fasted in the desert.** Moses gave the law, Elijah restored it, the Messiah will perfect and renew it. **Moses fasted at the middle, Elijah at the end, Jesus at the beginning of his ministry- but only Jesus is said to have been tempted by the Devil.**

In his time of testing Jesus "encountered" the Devil who began proposing some enticing suggestions. Firstly, for Jesus to eat and taste bread without being subject to hunger and of agricultural process, and also to face risk with no real danger. To enjoy fame and power but not a cross. In this [short clip](#) is a depiction of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. (How do you experience trials of your character?)

**Trials of faith and trusting God (I think) often come when we are at our weakest and also when we feel most isolated and alone.** When we are at our lowest point, not our strongest. Jesus in his teaching about prayer asked that we *be kept from hard testing and to be delivered from evil (the Evil One)*. We cannot turn stones into bread! It isn't up to us or in our power to make bread out of stones. It isn't up to us to create the miraculous draught of fishes, or extend the small lunch of a boy to a banquet for thousands, or to turn water into wine. **(This is in the power and gift of God)**

***"Man (or all human beings) cannot live on bread alone, but needs every word that God speaks."*** And we need to know the true teaching of Scripture about how to use the power we have.

**This is an "upside-down kingdom" but it is knowable, and discoverable.**

Particularly in those wilderness spaces and places of our lives where despite the absence of bread we can find rest for our souls and learning to trust the God who provides. It is a testing place but it is also a worthwhile place discovering grace in the wilderness because God's grace is sufficient for you, for me, for us.

**Jesus also faced the temptation to put God's power and protective care to the test.** *Matthew 4: verses 5 -7.* Here Jesus experiences the devil taking him to Jerusalem to the high tower in the Temple and goading him to throw himself off the tower. Tradition said that when Messiah appeared he would be seen in this exalted place in the Temple. Now you may have experiencing something like this: why not jump off this kerb and see if God protects you from a number 8 bus, or fling yourself off a ladder! In Psalm 91 it says God will send his angels so that you don't stub your toe on a stone.

Do you ever think you put God to the test? Its specifically forbidden. Sometimes I think we do...

We may be tempted to behave badly just to see if God loves us?

Jesus knew the faithful love of God and his mercies and care each day and yet he had to prepare and be strong enough for when the days come when he would experience great struggle. Jesus had to learn obedience and to face suffering and even crucifixion and still trust God. (Even when he was on the cross the soldiers and other taunted him to come down from the cross and save himself. He had to learn to resist a temptation even such as this).

*Fulfil the popular expectation – produce a dramatic miracle: throw yourself through the air, without a parachute and show everyone that the angels will catch you!*

Jesus (submitted in obedience to the Father) resisted again. “You shall not put the LORD your God to the test!” The devil may have thought he had the right to test God – but what arrogance is this to DOUBT THE LOVE OF GOD! God who proves each day his goodness in so many ways.

And after the exhausting trials – God does indeed send his angels Matthew says to minister to Jesus.