

The Jesus we never knew x08 VPBC 12 Feb 2017

Matthew 4:1-17 (READ from the Message translation)

What kind of messiah? What sort of Kingdom? Tests in the wilderness the Messiah enters the world stage.

Continuing our theme for this year “the Jesus we never knew” and **we return to the place of wilderness and times of testing.** Jesus facing his time in the wilderness following his Baptism by John. Rather than just 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 Luke’s gospel tells us the tempter returned) but it does seem an intense time. It must have been Jesus himself who told his disciples about this.

The first challenge is to meet his material hunger by turning stones into bread. Tradition said that when Messiah came manna would again be given. 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 and how.

Both Geoff and I have emphasized that:

What is being tested in all 3 tests is the way Jesus’ 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 and what sort of Kingdom he is bringing in. What is the character of this Kingdom that is being brought into the world by his presence – his incarnation? Even now many in the world are confused about what power Jesus is seeking to exert in our lives. (They are confused even about the person of Jesus. *L.J. Ross* in the book “*Angel*” describes Jesus as “*the beardy one, with sandals and a castle in the sky*”.

Jesus is about God’s Kingdom on EARTH (as in heaven) – not about fairy tale castles in the sky. Just how different would his rule it be from the rule of the say the Herods or the Romans? From the rule of Putin or Trump?

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 especially chapter 6 to 8 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.

We have noted that it was God the Spirit who took Jesus – God the Son into the wilderness in the wilderness he encountered not just weakness and aloneness but also the Tempter. Moses and Elijah encountered God in new ways in the wilderness but only Jesus is said to have been tempted by the Devil. (The combination of God, his servant and the tempter reminds me of Job's trials).

(Question: How do you experience trials of your character?) Temptations as regards dishonesty, or promotions if you compromise... Temptations to feel sorry for yourself...

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. “**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 Kingdom of God is an “upside-down kingdom” (Kraybill) as far as Jesus use of power goes, He refuses to use the weapons of this world. He never accepts that we can use whatever means we will to achieve the end we want. No, the ends must be achieved by being in right, obedient relationship to the Father God. He learned obedience not just by obeying the commandments but by choosing to please Father God.

Last week we heard that 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. *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 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).

The third test Jesus faced before the tempter left him for a while involved him being taken (whether in his thoughts, in vision, or physically) to a high mountain to view the kingdoms of the world.

The high mountain also reminds us of Moses' experience on Mt Sinai and Elijah's journey there. But it is also reminiscent of Moses' view of the promised land from Mt Nebo. These allusions would not be lost on the Jewish readers of Matthew's and other Gospels although they may not mean so much to us. In this test, Jesus sees the

glorious kingdoms of the earth and the Devil says – *you can have them all if you will only fall down and worship me*. Jesus is offered earthly kingdoms – power – something many want. We are told in another scripture that Jesus came to destroy the works of the “Prince of this World” and maybe the Devil feels that he has a rightful authority or power on earth – given by men rather than God. See Luke 4:6; 2 Cor 4:4 and 1 John 5:19. But Jesus wastes no time – he tells the Devil to depart and quotes again from Deuteronomy: *Worship the LORD your God only. Serve him with single heartedness*.

Why would Jesus ever make himself subordinate to the devil. Only God is to be given our singlehearted loyalty. Jesus himself accepted worship later on from others. Jesus comes to push the cuckoo out of the nest, to oust the devil by the cross and to give us the true basis for further victories in the centuries to come. (All too many earthlings worship the tempter, the devil without even realising it). Jesus’ loyalty is to God’s Mission – he will not compromise and nor must we. EVERY TIME we turn to worship God we challenge the usurper and we cannot expect him to enjoy the experience. JESUS is therefore the Saviour of the World.v17 **“God’s Kingdom is here”**.

God allowed these temptations and Jesus followed the Spirit’s leading into this time of trial. These temptations related to Jesus and his mission in life. (you may not be tempted as Jesus was but in other ways that relate to your calling). But you and I can learn from this nevertheless. The ordinary people kept trying to make Jesus into a King – but he repeatedly refused what they were offering. He turned it down again and again – not just once.

Satan offered him universal dominion – but he would have to strike a bargain with the usurper and Jesus refused. ONLY GIVE FULL LOYALTY, FULL WORSHIP TO GOD. Jesus succeeded where Adam failed! Israel failed the tests but Jesus succeeded. Jesus knew the truth of God’s Word: ***Deuteronomy 8: 3; 6:16 and 13.***

Satan tried to divert Jesus from going towards the Cross and sacrifice. He tried to get Jesus to use his power wrongly to dominate and thrill – rather than to speak the truth and cry out for justice. Jesus resisted – “not my will, not my choice but yours”. Temporal power is not the same as moral power and authority: Jesus had moral and spiritual authority. How do we measure success?

After these 3 great trials Jesus was ministered to by angels and strengthened to leave the wilderness and begin his public life. **He began speaking out about living changed lives because God’s Kingdom had arrived.**

PP5 Photos of those who spoke up for justice. 3 of the 4 shot...we are not worthy to undo Jesus’ sandals. These had some of the characteristics of Jesus: Malala (Pakistan girls education); Martin Luther King Jnr (US Civil Rights racial justice); Oscar Romero (El Salvador; spoke against poverty, injustice, assassination and torture); Mother Theresa (Austrian in India: poverty and loneliness).