

## 'The temptations of Jesus' – SJD Family Communion – 5/3/17- Matthew 4: 1-11

These temptations take Jesus to three different places. Let us go there and see what they were all about.

### 1. The desert ground – (Food - priorities of life)

What was it like? Dry, sandy, covered in stones, lacking vegetation, missing water.

Deserts can be of 4 types – sandy, stoney, rocky (great slabs of rock) and ice/snow. All are harsh environments but in all of them some forms of life survive adapted to the environment. BUT few human being can survive for long.

Been 40 days – Jesus had not eaten or eaten very restricted diet (fasted) so was hungry. Devil appears and tempts him to change the stones into bread. ***If you are the Son of God tell these stones to turn into bread***'. This is a physical temptation- food so important that nothing else matters.

For us, our physical needs can appear overwhelming at times. If the world is to be believed – it is these we should strive after. But it is not so! Without realising it we can live in another type of desert – a spiritual desert where nothing is there to nourish us spiritually. Perhaps we come to an oasis once a week – on Sunday – and get fed, but the rest of the week we starve. Jesus said, ***Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God***'.<sup>1</sup> God knows we need food and other physical things and these he will provide, but we also need spiritual food daily – through prayer, Bible study, etc. How well do you feed your inner as well as your outer person?

### 2. Top of the Temple- (Focus – How we live)

The rabbis had all sorts of expectations about the coming Messiah. One of them ran like this. ***When the Messiah comes, he will stand upon the roof of the holy place. Then he will announce to Israel, 'Ye poor, the time of redemption draws nigh'***.<sup>2</sup> By standing at the top of the temple, Jesus would draw a great crowd wondering who he was and what he was doing. If he were to throw himself down and people saw him caught and brought safely to the ground by angels they would quickly realise he must be the Messiah.

The challenge to Jesus is not to change his goal in life, but rather to find an easy and unacceptable way to reach that goal. This way offered minimal risk to Jesus and above all avoided his death on the Cross. So many of us find we live in a world where to stand up for the standards of God is increasingly difficult. To get 'to the top', we compromise the very qualities we hope to find in others. We can become corrupted by our success and even begin to believe some of the false adulation we hear from those around us. Jesus rejected this path because he knew his path to Messiahship was via Service, obedience to his Father and ultimately the Cross. Do we compromise God's standards or are we faithful even if it costs us?

### 3. Top of a high Mountain (Faith – Who or what we worship)

Satan takes Jesus to the top of a high mountain and offers him the world if he will only bow down and worship him. This final temptation Jesus experienced is one which we all face. We all need to worship something or someone. It can be money, or a famous person, or even ourselves. Who or what do we worship? What or who is the most important person or thing in our life? It is interesting to see what Satan asks Jesus to do. While taking him to a high place, Jesus is asked to stoop down and elevate Satan to an even higher place. Whatever we worship, we elevate – to the place that God alone deserves.

We also know from Scripture that Satan's rule is only temporary – there will come a day when he will be judged and destroyed<sup>3</sup>. So, in essence, Jesus is, at best, being offered a temporary rule here and now.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 4:4

<sup>2</sup> Michael Green (1988) , 'Matthew for Today' Hodder & Stoughton p. 63

<sup>3</sup> See eg Revelation chapter 20.

Satan is no fool. He knows he cannot ultimately defeat God but he is into making his victory as difficult to achieve as possible. He seeks to do the same with us by offering all sorts of false hopes and promises now. He is not known as the 'great deceiver'<sup>4</sup> for nothing. Yet nothing can satisfy and fill the God shaped hole in each one of us. I read again this week another statement from an extraordinarily rich woman who said that riches do not buy happiness. Nothing can truly do that except a real, living relationship with God.

To conclude:

Jesus went from the top of the temple – to the depths of a cold tomb – yet because he was faithful God raised him up to the place of greatest honour, sat at his right hand. God has great things planned for each of us too if only we will also turn from the temptations put in our way, and follow the path of life Christ opens through the Cross.

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<sup>4</sup> See revelation 20: 3,8. Cf Genesis 3:13