

REFLECTION MARCH 9TH 'JESUS IN THE WILDERNESS' LUKE 4:1-13

The story of Jesus in the wilderness where he is faced by the devil who is tempting him. It's a quick move from his baptism in the Jordan river to him standing in the wilderness for forty days and nights in the company of evil itself. This event sets the stage for Jesus' public ministry with an emphasis placed on his role as the Messiah – the Great I Am, the one who Paul in Hebrews 4:15 writes: *in all points tempted like we are, yet without sin.*

During this time Jesus is fasting which is often done in preparation for a time of reflection and deepening of one's spirituality. Spending time in the wilderness is often seen as a representation of time or space of trial, temptation, and an encounter with God. In this case Jesus experiences physical hunger, instilling in us his human vulnerability. It's in this state of weakness that the devil approaches him with three distinct temptations – the flesh, the aesthetic and the spiritual or intellectual temptation.

The first temptation presents itself with the devil telling Jesus to turn a stone into bread, striking at the heart of his immediate needs of feeding his desire for sustenance. As a man of flesh and bone He was indeed tempted at his most vulnerable and weakened physical state. If Jesus had given in to Satan he would be moving himself from God and handing himself over to what's unthinkable to us – to Satan. Even in his vulnerable and weakened state Jesus' reply was the scripture from Deuteronomy, Man doesn't live by bread alone, but through every word out of the mouth of God. His answer reminds us of Jesus' reliance on spiritual nourishment and his commitment to God's word over physical sustenance. Jesus' response should be our encouragement in understanding that true life doesn't come from what we do here in our earthly pleasures alone, but on obedience to God's message to us through the work of Christ. Jesus the obedient Son of God had no word

from God commanding him to change stones into bread. So, Jesus wasn't given such power in obedience to the Devil.

Satan isn't finished with Jesus – there is more! The devil takes Jesus to a high place and shows him all the kingdoms of the world, offering mastery over them if Jesus will worship him. This temptation addresses the allure of power and authority, promising immediate dominion and glory without the suffering that the impending crucifixion entails. He declares all this belongs to him; he is the god of the world; he is its prince; the kingdoms of the world have been given to over to him by man. It was offered to Jesus, without the cross. Christ's response probably annoyed the Devil. Jesus came into this world to rule as King, but firstly he had to give of himself so as to be able to give his life as a ransom for many, so Satan's suggestion makes little to no sense to Jesus at all. The response for Jesus this time is to simply tell Satan to get behind him; *because it's written, to worship the Lord your God and to only serve God.* Jesus knows straight away who's tempting him, calls him by name, spurns his suggestion and again overcomes the temptation through the Word. The Devil thought Jesus could be drawn into his web through what the eye could see. Jesus was able to call out the devil for trying to be opportunistic.

The third test was an endeavour to appeal to the pride of the natural heart – the spiritual or intellectual temptation this being the most audacious. The devil challenges Jesus to throw himself off the pinnacle of the temple, using scripture as assurance that the angels would protect him from harm. This temptation plays on the idea of testing God's faithfulness and authority. In response, Jesus rebukes the devil once again with words from Deuteronomy *"You shall not put the Lord your God to the test"*. Jesus' response captures the understanding that faith is rooted in trust, not in manipulation or spectacle.

Through these temptations, Jesus not only clearly shows his resistance to sin but also models for us what we can do when confronted with temptation. Through reliance on scripture and an unwavering

commitment to God. What we see offered to Jesus represents common struggles – a desire for instant gratification, the lure of power, and the temptation to manipulate faith for personal benefit. Jesus’ steadfastness in the wilderness affirms his identity as the Son of God while also providing a blueprint for spiritual resilience.

The temptations Jesus faced have significance for us, offering timeless lessons about faith, resilience, and the nature of temptation.

In a few points we learn about:

1. **Understanding Human Vulnerability:** Jesus’ experience in the wilderness emphasises that even those who are spiritually strong can face significant challenges. His fasting stresses the depths of human hunger and weakness. This reminds us that feeling vulnerable or tempted is a normal part of the human experience. It encourages us to acknowledge our own struggles without shame, as they don’t signify weakness but rather humanity.
2. **The Importance of Spiritual Sustenance:** Jesus’ response to the first temptation—turning stones into bread—demonstrates the necessity of spiritual nourishment. In a world often driven by materialism and the pursuit of instant gratification, it is crucial to remember that true fulfillment comes from a relationship with God and from his Word. This challenges us to prioritise our spiritual lives, ensuring that we seek God’s presence and teachings amid our daily pursuits.
3. **The Challenge of Power and Success:** The second temptation, where Jesus is offered authority over the kingdoms of the world, speaks to the allure of power and success. Today, it isn’t unusual to be tempted to compromise our values or integrity for recognition, wealth, or status. Jesus’ rejection of this shortcut teaches us that true greatness comes from serving others and staying true to our moral convictions, rather than succumbing to worldly temptations.

4. **Faithfulness in Testing:** Jesus' refusal to test God by jumping from the temple shows the importance of living out faith with trust rather than manipulation. In contemporary life, people might feel driven to create events or seek validation of their faith through dramatic actions. Instead, this passage calls for a deep-seated confidence in God's care and timing, urging us to express faith authentically rather than through demands or tests.
5. **Scripture as a Weapon:** Throughout his responses to temptation, Jesus uses Scripture as his defense against the devil's challenges. This demonstrates the power of God's Word in combating temptation. For those of us who believe, engaging with the scriptures regularly helps build a spiritual foundation, equipping us to face challenges and discern right from wrong. It serves as a reminder to actively embody the teachings of Scripture in our lives. I read this week that we should keep reading the scriptures until we hear God.
6. **The Reality of Temptation:** Jesus' experience illustrates that temptation is inevitable, even for those who are faithful. Recognising this reality helps us to prepare and respond more effectively. Rather than feeling discouraged when faced with temptation, we can remember that Jesus, too, was tempted, and we can draw strength from his example of resistance.

The temptations faced by Jesus in the wilderness serve as a guide for navigating our spiritual journeys. They remind us of our humanity, the need for spiritual sustenance, and the importance of integrity and authenticity in our faith. By reflecting on what we have heard, we can cultivate a deeper relationship with God, better resist temptation, and find meaning in our own spiritual battles.