



HG271: Mountain Top Experiences (Part 2)
Quarantania: Mount of Testing

Matthew 4.1-14

Home Group Study Notes

11 February 2024—James Van Cleef



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

What is the correct way (and there is only one correct way!) to eat cream tea—clotted cream first then jam, or jam first then clotted cream? (Do you favour Devon or Cornwall? If there is disagreement, then perhaps at your next meeting you can try it both ways and come to a definitive conclusion!)



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



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Home Group Sermon Notes

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Right at the start we need to declare the supremacy of Jesus Christ and read this story in light of his surpassing greatness. The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness is as crucial for our redemption as is his becoming man and his baptism. Together, these have to be seen as the outworking of his self-emptying as found in Philippians 2.6-7 where Paul writes *‘who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.’*

Why is this so important? The answer is simply: *‘For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God’* (2 Corinthians 5.21). Simply staggering. St Gregory of Nazianzus wrote of Jesus’ taking on our flesh in this way: *‘That which is not assumed is not healed.’* In other words, if Jesus did not take on our flesh—our fallen human nature—there would be no possibility of reconciliation and union with God.

So the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness is not some story that has no bearing on us. We cannot read it and disassociate ourselves from it because it appears as a ‘cosmic’ contest between supernatural beings. No. We have to see the Son of God, the Son of Man taking on our flesh so that in him we become the righteousness of God. Therefore, this story invites us in, for the temptations Jesus faces are faced down for us, as one of us. This episode is an important piece of Jesus’ undoing of the curse of sin, which climaxes in his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. In it we may glimpse what Paul was thinking when he wrote: *‘just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one*

man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all' (Romans 5.18) and, 'as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ' (1 Corinthians 15.22).

There is another reason why the testing of Jesus in the wilderness is so significant: it is an attack on Jesus' sonship. The Father has already declared that he is his beloved Son (Matthew 3.17), and it is as Son that Jesus is wholly obedient to the Father. The theme of sonship also has great significance for us, for from eternity God determined that in Christ we are to be holy and blameless before him, and that in Christ we are destined for adoption as his children (see Ephesians 1.3-14). This is something the devil will not tolerate, and at every turn, he has worked to destroy our union with God. So, if the devil can undermine the Son of God, he can destroy the possibility of our adoption in Christ. An assault on Jesus' Sonship is an assault on the eternal purposes of God..

Bread

The backdrop and imagery in the temptations of Jesus is the history of Israel in the wilderness, in their forty years of wandering, their forty years of self-centredness, their forty years of rejecting the God who delivered them from slavery. For Matthew's Jewish readers, the parallels would not be missed.

The devil does not question whether Jesus is God's Son—the 'if' is not a challenge to his identity, but an enticement for him to use his power for his own ends. In other words, 'You are the Son of God, and you are hungry. You can command these stones to become bread.' The devil tempts Jesus to use his Sonship in ways that are at odds with the Father. When Peter tried to dissuade Jesus from going to Jerusalem, he is soundly rebuked: 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things' (Matthew 16.23). He even faced this temptation on the cross: 'If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross' (Matthew 27.40). Jesus' refutation comes from the Word of God: "It is written, 'One does

not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4.4).

Jesus does not determine his Sonship; the Father does, and the Son will do only what the Father gives him to do. It is not for the devil to tell him what he can and cannot do.

Safe

The devil then tests Jesus by taking him to the highest point in the Temple and using a ‘surefire’ Scripture. *‘Throw yourself down; for it is written, “He will command his angels...”* (see Matthew 4.6). What’s this about? You cannot use or interpret Scripture to contradict Scripture. There are no Bible ‘loopholes’. For example, we read that we are to love: *‘Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God...’* (1 John 4.7). But the Scripture is also clear: *‘Do not love the world, nor the things of the world...for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world’* (1 John 2.15-16). So, if we are loving the things of this world, which are anti-Christ, we cannot claim to love as God commanded because God commands that we love not the things of this world. Scripture cannot be broken, and the devil tests Jesus to break the Word of God.

Shortcut

The final temptation is quite insidious: knowing the cross is before Jesus, the devil shows the kingdoms of the world in all their splendour and offers them to Jesus if he simply falls down and worships him. However, what the devil presents is a sham: he cannot reveal the kingdoms of the world in all their splendour—without sin—for it is Jesus the Lamb of God who comes to take away the sin of the world. The devil offered Jesus a shortcut—a path without the cross. But if there is no cross, there is no redemption:

‘For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile all things to himself all things,

whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross' (Colossians 1.20)

'Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins' (Hebrews 9.22)

Conclusion

'That which is not assumed is not healed' (St Gregory of Nazianzus). The triumph of Jesus in the wilderness opens the door to the commencement of his ministry. He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, found the lost, raised the dead and revealed the love of the Father. Jesus stood in the love of the Father, and in himself brought together heaven and earth.

Now for us this means that because Jesus faced temptation as human—as one of us, and for us—he knows our weakness, and in the presence of the Father intercedes. As Hebrews 7.25 tells us, *'He is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.'*

The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness is not to give us technique in the face of trial, but complete confidence in the Son of God, the Beloved of God the Father, and to enable us to live out the truth of our adoption through Jesus the Christ to the glory of God. Amen.

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Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. There are many mottos that people live by. Contemporary examples are, 'Living my best life,' or 'Being the best version of myself,' or 'Being true to myself.' How does this kind of thinking hinder people from seeing the truth of Jesus?

2. Think about Jesus being led into the wilderness by the Spirit. How can we cultivate an environment of being led by the Spirit? What will we have to let go of to follow the Spirit's leading?

3. 'That which is not assumed is not healed' (St Gregory of Nazianzus). What are some of the ways Jesus has brought—and is bringing—healing to you? Does this give you confidence to trust Jesus?

4. Does the truth of Jesus becoming human free you from guilt or shame? Can you believe that God actually loves you?

5. How far does contemporary culture shape our lives as Christians? Do we set our minds on the things of God or the things of this world?

6. Meditate on this verse: 'For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Corinthians 5.21). Allow the Spirit to direct your responses and worship...



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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