

BUMC Weekly Bible and Sermon Study

Sermon: “The Temptation of Power” (from the Lent sermon series)

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11

Key take-aways from the Scripture

- In this section of the Book of Matthew, we find Jesus being led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit shortly after His baptism.
- Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights before the devil begins the temptations. This recalls the amount of time Moses fasted prior to receiving the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 24:18 and 34:28). The significance of going into the wilderness is to help us recall Israel’s testing for 40 years in the wilderness.
- With each temptation, Jesus replies with three texts from Deuteronomy that were given to Israel when they experienced temptation in the wilderness. Note that Jesus begins his replies with “It is written...”. This was a common expression at the time for citing Scripture (see Joshua 8:31; 2 Chron. 31:3; and Ezra 6:18).
- The first temptation involves the devil challenging Jesus to turn stones into bread. It was common practice for magicians, and those who claimed divine power, to try and convince people that they were given the power to change one substance into another. Jesus responds by saying “One does not live by bread alone” quoting Deuteronomy 8:3-5.
- For the second temptation, the devil takes Jesus to the “pinnacle” of the temple (which is the highest part of the structure) and challenges Jesus to jump off and let the angels come and rescue Him, citing Psalm 91:11-12, which promises God’s protection for those that put their trust in Him. Jesus replies by saying “Do not put the Lord your God to the test” quoting Deuteronomy 6:16.
- For the third and final temptation, the devil took Jesus to a high mountaintop to oversee “all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor”, which the devil believes were his to give and offers all of this to Jesus to if Jesus would bow and worship the devil. Jesus replies by saying, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only Him” quoting Deuteronomy 6:13.
- Jesus resisted each of the temptations, and “...the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on Him.” The devil will return and try to tempt Jesus several other times throughout His ministry.

Key take-aways from the Sermon

- We begin the season of Lent, which has to do with the lengthening of days as we move toward spring. It is a period of reflection, repentance and recommit ourselves anew to the way of the cross. This is the path of self-denial and sacrifice (Matthew 16).
- We are part of a community of cross-culture and cross-bearing, which are voluntary acts of shared suffering. In this season of Lent, we often practice the act of fasting or abstaining from something (food, certain activities, etc.). We abstain from something we value or find good, to focus on that which is *ultimate* in our lives.
- In today's Scripture text, we find Jesus fasting in the wilderness and focusing on His identity and purpose as Messiah. During this time, He was put to the test.
 - *Temptation* tends to follow *revelation*. Wilderness follows water: baptism by fire usually follows baptism by water.
- In Matthew 4:1, we read that the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted. God is with us even in barren places, not to sabotage us but to *sustain* us!
- The crux of the Devil's test is about what it means to be the Son of God and get Jesus to use His powers for His own benefit, which can be described as a "disordered love" (love less important things more, and more important things less).
 - Temptation is always about self-fulfillment and self-glorification.
- We must surrender our ego, so we can let God work through us.
- In all three tests, Jesus responds by countering temptation with Scripture. As disciples, in the Wesleyan lineage, we believe in the primacy of Scripture.
- The second test is tricky...Satan uses Scripture to trip Jesus. Jesus quotes Scripture with Scripture, demonstrating the importance of interpretation and context.
 - Jesus doesn't just *recite* Scripture...He *embodies* it!
- The season of Lent is not about the false sense of self. It is about becoming real with God. It's about becoming clean with God. Jesus has cut a path for us and we wander and become distracted.
- During Lent, we sometimes need to say "no" to some things that might be good for us, in order to focus on God and say "yes" to what is best for us. All of this to a God whose unfailing love reorders our life and enables us to follow Jesus without fear...all the way to Calvary.

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- What were your key take-aways from the sermon? How can you apply this to your everyday life?
- Read Matthew 4:1. Why did the Holy Spirit lead Jesus to temptation in the wilderness?
- Why did Jesus fast for forty days and forty nights before the temptations took place? What is the significance?
- What can we learn from the way Jesus resisted each of the devil's temptations? How can this help with your temptations in life?
- What is Christian fasting? In what ways can we fast during this season of Lent (i.e. giving up something we deem as *good*, to focus on that which is *ultimate*)?
- What is the significance of the number "40" in regard to the number of days Jesus is in the wilderness?

