

The Temptations of Jesus

I am increasingly challenged by the story of Jesus' temptations in the wilderness. Read Matthew 4:1-11

God felt it necessary for Jesus to be tried and tested in this way before he began his ministry. It was the Spirit who led him there, not the devil! I am also amazed and challenged by his responses. Note: they all came from Scripture. Jesus used God's eternal truth to respond to Satan.

Much has been written & there is much to be learnt from these temptations. If these temptations were vital for Jesus' success in ministry, can they not be for us too? I encourage you to meditate on them. I will try to humbly highlight what God has shown me and what I believe is particularly relevant to this ministry.

Ist temptation: to turn stones into bread.

Jesus, a very hungry man by this time after 40 days without any food, is tempted to use miraculous power to meet his own personal needs. It seems a very plausible thing to do. He's extremely hungry, even close to death? He can turn stones into bread. Why not? Wasn't that a legitimate need? After all, God had done this with manna in the desert. What was the actual temptation? Can I suggest it was: **Why not use your position to your own advantage.** What was wrong with doing that, and how could that apply to us? What do you think? Could there be a temptation to use the ministry to satisfy our own needs? Note: Satan tempted him at the point of his greatest weakness physically.

Maybe it's a need for significance – to be a Somebody, someone special. Is there anything wrong with that? This is particularly attractive if we have grown up feeling we were nobody special, had no particular value, nothing to commend us and make people look on us with favour. Maybe we even try to impress God??

I told God many years ago that if I ever started to find my significance in the ministry, rather than simply in being his beloved daughter, he should take it away from me. Note Satan's introduction, which was repeated in the 2nd temptation too: **If you are the Son of God...** Jesus's response was that the only one who can really meet our needs is God and his words of life. What had Jesus just heard at his baptism? This is what gave him the strength to overcome. **Our security and strength to overcome temptation can only come in embracing how God sees us.** It's being sure that we are his precious sons and daughters who have received his unconditional love and acceptance and that does NOT depend on our performance. All our ministry needs to begin in the embrace of the Father.

Another aspect to mention before we leave this temptation: I trust we are all people of total integrity, but could there be a temptation to 'borrow' some money from the ministry funds when we are in a particular personal or family crisis that desperately needs finance? Of course we would be planning to pay it back as soon as we were able... Would there be anything wrong with that?

2nd temptation – to do something sensational to get credibility.

He is tempted to do something spectacular, dramatic, supernatural to gain credibility, to win people over to him, **to prove himself to the watching world.** Satan takes him in a vision to the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem. That's where the important people were, the powerful influential people, not in Galilee.

(Note: Satan used Scripture here to tempt him, but this is an example of how Scripture can be twisted and misused to prove our point. This was done in South Africa to justify apartheid. It originated from the church!!)

If he had done what Satan suggested, and demonstrated clearly that God had miraculously rescued him, surely people would flock to follow him. They would know for sure that God had sent him. How would people ever be able to doubt who he was and his right to teach God's message? So why did he decline?? Why didn't he do that? Didn't he understand anything about how to promote his ministry, & prove who he really was? Jesus' response to this temptation: 'Don't put the Lord your God to the test.' How could that apply to us?

Note: not one of Jesus' miracles was done to impress, or to gain himself a following. The motivation was always his compassion. It was his only motivation. In fact, he dissuaded people from talking about his miracles. He wasn't at all concerned about gaining credibility & popularity, but even made it hard for people! He was saying, 'Think carefully before you choose to follow me. It will cost you!' I'm amazed that he totally refused to do this, and chose to stay 'low key'. He gradually revealed himself to ordinary people, invested in a small group of weak, fallible people, who didn't always get everything right! When you think of the brilliance of his glory on the mount of transfiguration, he could have walked round this way the whole time. Everyone would believe who he was. Isn't that what he wanted?? But he didn't. He chose to walk round incognito, his true identity hidden. People passing him in the market had no idea they were rubbing shoulders with God!

I also wonder about his resurrection. Why didn't he show himself to Pilate? To Caiaphas & all the religious leaders, to Herod?? In our day, that would have been headlines on all the world's media. The whole world would believe. Yet Jesus totally refused to use the sensational to try to make people believe his message. He refused to manipulate people in any way.

3rd temptation – to bow down and worship Satan.

What on earth was this one about? To be a real temptation it has to be a true temptation – something that tugs on our hearts that we would like to do. Jesus being really tempted to worship Satan? Surely not! What sense can we possibly make of this?

I thank God for the one who gave me a lit cigarette at the age of 9, telling me to inhale it. I thought I was going to die coughing and choking! I can truly say that

cigarettes were never a temptation for me after that. So what was the real temptation for Jesus?

To worship is be impressed with someone or something. People 'worship' sports celebrities, politicians, film stars... There's no way Jesus could have been impressed with Satan *as a person*. He was there when Satan was licked out of heaven. He knew who he was, the enemy of souls. Could it be that Satan was trying to make Jesus impressed with *his way of doing things*? He uses coercion, control, deception, lies, half truths, even Scripture! ... He forces people to do his will. He doesn't give people freedom to choose. He traps people and they don't realise what he's doing. And we have to agree that he has been extremely successful. 'This time Satan didn't start with, 'If you are the Son of God'. Rather it seems to be: 'Ok, so you're the Son of God with a mission to fulfil. How are you going to go about doing this? Look, my methods work! I have so many followers who are enslaved to me, who do my bidding. This is clearly the way to be successful!' Why did Jesus refuse this seemingly attractive offer?

I am amazed at Jesus' total refusal to be impressed with Satan's methods. Jesus' response: God and his way of doing things is the only one I'm impressed with, and worship and serve. He refused to use manipulation, or control, or force people to believe and receive his truth. Instead he took the huge risk of giving us the dignity to make our own choices, as we teach in this workshop, in order to have a love relationship with us. In Matthew 11:29, Jesus says, 'Take my yoke upon you, and *learn from me*, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.' There's a very challenging worship song that we sometimes sing in the UK called, 'The Humble King'. Can I recommend that as a study for you? How did Jesus' life & ministry demonstrate his humility?

When Luke writes this story, he concludes in chapter 4:13, 'When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him *until an opportune time*'. When did those times come? When people tried to make him their king? When Herod tried to get him to work miracles for him? When he refused to call on those legions of angels to rescue him? He didn't call on the legions of angels, but willingly subjected himself to his enemies. And he disarmed his enemies by making himself totally vulnerable to them. That's mind-blowing!

Conclusion

These temptations will keep coming. We need to constantly stay on our guard. Satan isn't going to walk away and leave us to it – though don't we wish he would! He hates what we are doing. It seriously threatens the kingdom of darkness!

It's a constant challenge to us to keep walking in humility. To stay small in our own eyes, to resist anything that would make a big impression & gain us credibility and popularity, to want to make an impact on Important Big People. To stay in that place of total dependence on God, knowing that without him and his spirit, we could do nothing. Remember Jesus' teaching in John 15. Unless we stay connected to the Vine we cannot produce lasting fruit. Do we really continue to believe this? It's tempting when we experience success to begin to

trust in ourselves and in our methods. Handling success is far more difficult than handling failure!

Somewhere at the start of this ministry, I attended a conference where the speaker was teaching on Uzziah touching the ark. God spoke very strongly to me: 'NEVER TOUCH MY GLORY!' I had no idea at that point how this ministry was going to develop, but I knew God had given me a clear warning. I found myself face down on the floor, weeping and weeping, and asking God to help me never to do that.

Several years ago when this ministry was spreading into many countries, God said to me, 'Stay small (in your own eyes, in the way you see yourself) and cling close (to Me), and then there's no limit to what I can do through you'. We are very privileged people. We have been incredibly blessed to see God working miracles, to see hearts that have hated turning into hearts that love. Jesus said in Matthew 13:16-17, 'Blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men have longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.' Obviously that was referring to his ministry as the Messiah, but I believe it also applies to all believers who now have the privilege to see him at work in the world.

I don't know if it's the same where you are, but in the UK we sometimes see these words on parcels: '**Fragile. Handle with care**'. And I believe that's what God is saying to us about the ministry he has entrusted to us.