

SERMON: 10 March 2019 – Rev Alistair Cowper

“Jesus Shows Us How To Use The Scriptures” (Deuteronomy 8:1-10 and Luke 4:1-15)

[SLIDE] How can we read and live out the Scriptures in such a way that extends our reach into our community and engages with the things people are passionate about so that we can create and discover opportunities for communion?

But what has this question to do with the temptation of Jesus?

Where are the connections?

How did Luke know this story? Did Jesus tell him this had happened? Was it inspired, God-breathed?

However he got it, it rings true. The temptations Jesus faced were not unlike the temptations we humans now face on a daily basis.

First of all, there are some obvious things to point out:

[SLIDE]

Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit after being baptised

He was led by the Spirit in(to) the wilderness, alone - place of solitude is the “furnace of transformation” or “place of conversion” (Henri Nouwen). In solitude we discover Christ as our true self and “become passionate people”.

He was tempted

He was hungry

The devil could speak to him (*ho diabolos* - slanderer, accuser; *the satan* - enemy of the good)

The devil could lead him

He knew the Scriptures

He resolved to worship only God

This temptation wouldn't be his last - in order to bring the kingdom of heaven there would be further battles ahead, his death on the cross would be the final battle.

[SLIDE] “Temptations and struggles will remain to the end of our lives , but with a pure heart we will be restful even in the midst of a restless experience” (HN)

What can we say about the devil? Well, as little as possible without falling in to the trap of saying that there is no such thing. Clearly we only need to look around, or switch on the TV news to see that there is evil in the world. There are non-human, malevolent forces capable of using us humans in the service of evil.

How else can we explain why a young man turns his back on life to become an ISIS suicide bomber who kills innocent women and children? Or who sends parcel bombs to Glasgow Uni or Heathrow airport?

[SLIDE] N T Wright in his book *Simply Jesus*, writes, “there is such a thing as a dark force which seems to take over people, movements and sometimes whole countries, a force or (as it sometimes seems) a set of forces that can make people do things they would never normally do”.

So, before we look at the tests Jesus faced, let’s think about the reason temptation or testing comes.

[SLIDE] Tests come about when there is a clash of kingdoms.

Here is Jesus bringing, announcing the kingdom of heaven in the face of the earthly kingdoms and empires of the world. Inevitably, there would be a conflict. Whenever we go with the kingdom of God, we’re going to clash with earth bound kingdoms.

But God wants to use that clash to bring blessing to the world; to turn evil into good. So that, out of the conflict, the true kingdom will emerge, will come about, will evolve.

The Book of Deuteronomy was one of the Scriptures Jesus knew and used and each of the three tests set by the devil is answered by Jesus quoting from Deuteronomy, words spoken by Moses to Israel in the wilderness, preparing to enter the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy 8 tells us that the LORD led Israel through the desert for 40 years, humbling them and testing them to prove their character and to see if they’d be obedient.

[SLIDE] Testing proves whether something is genuine or not.

[Story of crush testing concrete cubes and steel reinforcing bars at HWU laboratory.]

Let’s look at the tests Jesus faced that humbled him and proved his character was genuine and that he was obedient.

[1] There are temptations to doubt who we are and to misuse power for our own gain.

If you are the Son of God, **change** this stone into a loaf of bread (4:3).

Jesus was hungry. I can imagine him thinking to himself, hearing a diabolical voice in his head saying, 'if I'm supposed to be God's Son, surely I don't need to feel hungry'.

Imagine what sort of Jesus we would have if he didn't know what it felt like to be hungry. A God who doesn't know what it's like to be poor. I'd rather my God knew what it felt like to be hungry.

And I'm glad that my God and yours, this Jesus, knew how to live by the Scriptures in the time of need.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, we know that our struggles in life are not with flesh and blood but with evil spiritual forces (Ephesians 6:12). We are to make use of a weapon especially designed for the battle, the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (6:17).

As it was for Jesus, so it is to be with us, we have the same armour so as to resist the enemy in the time of evil, in the heat of the battle, in our time of need.

[2] Then there is the temptation **to have it all**.

I will give you the glory of these kingdoms and authority over them, the devil said, because they are mine to give to anyone I please. I will give it all to you **if** you will worship me (4:6-7).

I can imagine Jesus thinking to himself, hearing that diabolical voice saying, 'if I'm supposed to be God's Son, surely everything belongs to me. I can have it all'. But imagine what sort of Jesus we would have if he got things without asking God, if he could exist without the relationship with God. Imagine what sort of Jesus we would have if he had given in and sold his soul to evil. We wouldn't be here. And because the temptation to have it all, is, as the devil says, the invitation to worship evil. If we humans don't worship God then we will end up worshipping things that are not God, because humans are made for relational worship. We will end up giving our time, our energy and our money to the 'not gods' in this world.

So, once again I'm glad that my God and yours, this Jesus, knew how to live by the Scriptures in the time of need. He knew that all things come through

relational worship with the God he had met in his baptism, the God he knew from his childhood, the God his ancestors had trusted and the God the Scriptures spoke of.

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
Will rest in the shadow of the Almighty
He is my refuge and my fortress
My God, in whom I trust
(Psalm 91:1-2)

You can't read that Scripture and meditate on it and not worship God the Most High, so that when the time of testing comes, you're able to stand firm. What a gift to us.

Evil will come, testing will happen, we need to be prepared, equipped in advance, so that when it comes we know God is with us in our troubles and will deliver us (Psalm 91:15).

[3] Then there is the temptation **to be more than we are**. The temptation to show off, to be spectacular, to be a know it all, to be super spiritual and to misuse Scripture to prove that we 'chosen ones' are more special than others.

If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say you'll be guarded by angels (4:9-11).

Notice, Jesus is taken by the devil to Jerusalem and to the highest point in the Temple. Ok, so this is for the ears of the religious. We have to listen carefully here.

True religion isn't about preaching from positions of dominance. It's not about great majestic buildings. It's not about drawing attention to itself.

I can imagine Jesus, with the diabolical thought that he could just get himself to the Temple and do something spectacular to prove to everyone who he was. We had that question this week at Alpha. Why didn't God just do something to prove that he was who he said he was?

But time and time again in the Gospels, we see Jesus living a different way. He has no need to prove God in that sort of way, because that's not who God truly is, and it's not how God goes about things.

Despite being all mighty, God is gentle, humble, kind and is prepared to wait out the long game so that his creatures would finally get it when they look at Jesus and model their lives following his way.

So, for the third time, once again I'm glad that my God and yours, this Jesus, knew how to live by the Scriptures in the time of need. He knew the mistakes the religious ones had made in the past, grumbling and complaining in the desert, enduring slavery, suffering exile, stoning prophets, and he wasn't going to go down that way.

His calling was to a higher path and gazing at the God he knew, he left all things in his care, knowing that he alone would deal with getting the message out. He didn't need to jump off Temples to prove God. God would prove himself. God would defend himself. God could be trusted to carry all of that.

Let's stay with that third temptation a bit longer. The context which Jesus refers to is the Israelites exodus from Egypt and they argue and complain with Moses that there is no water. Moses calls the place *Massah* which means 'test'. There the people asked the question, is the Lord here with us or not?

Are you in a dry place? What's your *Massah*? Is there a place in your life, your family, where you're asking the question, is the Lord here with you or not?

And remembering that testing, whilst it will humble us, aims at improving our character and obedience.

Where are the temptations that, if we allow ourselves to be humbled, will be opportunities for improvement and a new obedience?

Are we being tempted to doubt who we are?

[Are we, or have we been tempted to misuse power for our own gain?

Are we trying to have it all?

Are we trying to be more than we are?

Are we testing God rather than entrusting it all to God?]

Are we needing to see the Scriptures with fresh light, the way Jesus saw the Scriptures?

Where do we need the Spirit of Jesus to help us in our time of need?

[SLIDE] Transforming Poor Thinking into Positive Affirmations

- from this time of solitude together which can help us live more fully in acceptance, grace and peace.

Let us pray