

The Wilderness – Pr Jim Sprengle – Lent 1 – March 6, 2022

- I. **Luke 4:1-13 previously read...**
- II. **Are you familiar with Jack Handey?**
 - a. He is a humorist who wrote all these deadpan one liners and stories.
 - i. He was on Saturday Night Live for a while, and they called his segment “*Deep Thoughts*, by Jack Handey” – Anyway, he got so popular that he wrote a silly book about his childhood called *Fuzzy Memories*.
 1. Handey writes the story of a bully who demanded his lunch money every day when he was a child. Because Handey was smaller than the bully, he simply gave the bully his money.
 2. “Then I decided to fight back,” Handey says. “I started taking karate lessons, but the instructor wanted \$5 a lesson. That was a lot of money. I found that it was cheaper to pay the bully, so I gave up karate.”
 - ii. Unfortunately, many Christians have the same attitude about satan and the temptations that come their way...It’s easier to pay the bully than to learn how to fight him.¹
 - b. Temptations to turn from God’s will in our lives are a constant pressure.
 - c. Each day, we have all kinds of choices to make, and some of them are choosing to give in to temptation.
 - i. I think it was C.S. Lewis who said that we can never know how bad a temptation is until we try to fight it... and there’s all kinds of tough, bad guys out there who are actually weak because they give in to temptation their whole lives.
 - d. If I took a poll of your experiences with temptation, probably every person would say that the minute you decided to give something up, it became all the more difficult avoid it.
 - i. It’s kind of like Paul says in Romans 7, “I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway,” (Romans 7:19).
 - ii. A good example is going on some diet plan... The moment we tell ourselves no ice cream, or chocolate, or fast food... what do we want?
 1. All of the sudden, the thing we weren’t even thinking about that much becomes an obsession that we have to fight and fight!
 2. Tell us we can’t have something, and our minds cannot let it go – whatever is off limits takes up a ton of space in our heads.
 3. Pretty soon, we are making excuses to fall back into old habits and behaviors that are no good for us – and if they are outright

sinful, the payment can become very heavy... in fact Paul says the payment, or the wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23)

- e. Where did all this come from anyway?
 - i. The first people who were told “no” – Do not eat the forbidden fruit.
 - ii. Satan approached Adam and Eve with the same method as he did Jesus in the wilderness... He tries to create doubt to take away the fight... “Did God *really* say not to eat this fruit?” (Genesis 3:1)
 - iii. They both gave in to the temptation, and the first Adam fell... So we needed a new Adam who could save us from the curse of sin and help us to return the paradise of Eden.

III. **Jesus was driven into the wilderness to begin His ministry...**

- a. In our reading, it says that Jesus endured forty days of temptation.
- b. Adam and Eve fell to temptation over one conversation... Jesus spent days and days under pressure from satan.
- c. We can learn how satan attacks... but we can also learn from the response that Jesus gives.
- d. First, the devil goes for Jesus’ personal needs... hunger.
 - i. Certainly, he wanted to challenge Jesus as God’s Son to use His powers to feed Himself – but the physical need of food can weaken the fight against temptation.
 - ii. We also find ourselves weakened for the fight when we are hungry, angry, lonely, tired... or in physical pain.
- e. Second, the devil tries for the temptation of authority and power.
 - i. Even though it’s a lie, satan offers all the kingdoms and power over the world – if Jesus would just worship him.
 - ii. Power, authority, and wealth play on our pride and ego – and the temptation is to let these things be gods to us.
- f. Third, satan tempts Jesus to recklessly test the promises of God.
 - i. Note, satan misuses Scripture because the Psalm writer didn’t mean to test God but trust Him!
 - ii. We are tempted test God as we seek signs... or maybe we do things that are clearly not wise and expect God to support us with His help.
 - 1. One example is going deeply into debt with no plan and expecting God to make everything okay.
- g. In all of these temptations, Jesus used one thing – “the sword of the Spirit, or the Word of God” (Ephesians 6:17).
 - i. For every attack satan worked against Him, Jesus went on the offense and used the Word...
 - ii. He did not fail like Adam centuries before, because He couldn’t fail and still be our Savior.

IV. **Jesus went through it all without falling... without giving in...**

- a. It's important to remember that even though Jesus was God, He did not use His divine power to get through these things – He was a human being just like us when He was tempted by the devil.
- b. Not only did He stand up to satan, but He also became the first person to walk away without the stain of sin.
- c. You see, only an unblemished lamb was fit for sacrifice, and sin of any type in Jesus would have changed everything...
 - i. Jesus was the perfect “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)
 - ii. The stakes were so high that satan knew Jesus could not complete His mission as the perfect Lamb if He fell to temptation... so he did everything he could – not only on this day, but throughout Jesus’ ministry to keep Him from His final destiny – the cross.
 - iii. Remember when Peter rebuked Jesus for saying He would die on the cross and rise again? Jesus says, “Get behind me satan!” (Mt 16:23)
 - iv. Satan was at work through people and situations even through the night Jesus was arrested and tortured.
 - v. Rather than fight, Jesus surrendered to His death.
- d. Yet, Jesus never once failed or fell to the temptations to avoid suffering and to preserve His own life.
- e. By His death, the curse of Adam and Eve’s sin could be reversed.
- f. The wilderness that they were driven into, or the world we now live in, is not the end... we have the promised land of eternal life and paradise thanks to Jesus.

V. **As we continue in the wilderness, Jesus is now our Savior and guide.**

- a. We see how He used God’s Word to fight against temptation and send satan away.
 - i. To know God’s Word is a huge support in the battle for our souls
 - ii. The devil may try to trick us, but when we know the Word, we are well prepared to stop his attacks.
- b. And yes, we might even fall for temptation... maybe time and time again – but as we turn to God for forgiveness and restoration, He promises to give us these things on account of Jesus who won them for us.
- c. Each of us is in the wilderness of suffering and death – this cannot be avoided... but God is with us in the battle – we can trust that He will protect us from anything that might separate us from Him.
- d. And finally, know that we walk together... we are not alone in all these trials and temptations – we are connected by Christ.
- e. So, let’s walk together as God’s people – no longer afraid or subject to that bully, satan... but instead looking to the Promised Land. amen

¹ Greg Laurie, *Lies We Tell Ourselves* (Regal, 2006), pp. 99–100; as quoted in the July 19 entry of *Men of Integrity* (July/August 2009)