

# Coach House Church BEACONS

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## WILDERNESS TEMPTATIONS

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3RD NOVEMBER 2020

As I prepare this beacon, we are on the cusp of having meeting together in the church restricted once again. Not because of persecution, but because, as a nation, 'we are in this together' battling the Covid 19 pandemic which is affecting all corners of the earth.

We are following government guidelines as closely as possible in order to minimise the spread of this virus and to protect our loved ones. It isn't easy as we have just had the joy of meeting together in person on Sundays for a number of weeks, an oasis of blessing in what has been a difficult year.

The balance is a difficult one and I am sure that there are many difficult challenges and decisions being faced in family groups also. It all may seem very oppressive and restraining, and it may even seem unnecessary if you have not encountered Covid 19 knocking at your door, but nevertheless we are asked to do what we can to limit the spread of something which is 'somewhere out there'

It may be seen as being over reactive to close down social gatherings and to behave in a way that removes our liberties, but surely, we should be thinking of others perhaps a little more than ourselves?

I was reminded that we battle sin, every day. Whether that comes from changing learnt behaviour, shaped by our environments we exist in (we would call this our nature) or whether it comes in the form of temptation – pulling at our senses and pleasures – to entice us to do something which may seem harmless but could, spiritually speaking, kill us.

I am mindful that God sent Jesus, as a man, to face the challenges and temptations that we also will face – and there is a many faceted reason why God chose to do this.

We often use the expression 'I couldn't help it' - to somehow make our wrongdoings acceptable and even forgivable, as though uttering the words draws a line underneath our transgression and allows us to bury them in the past. We have probably all done it – I certainly know that I have – but actually the response shows us the real problem.... I.

Let's consider this well-known passage from Matthews account of Jesus life in his Gospel.

**Matthew 4:2-11 (NLT)**

***Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry.***

***During that time the devil came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread."***

***But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say, 'People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, 'He will order his angels to protect you. And they will hold you up with their hands So, you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.'" Jesus responded, "The Scriptures also say, 'You must not test the LORD your God.'" Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. "I will give it all to you," he said, "if you will kneel down and worship me." "Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say, 'You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him.'" Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.***

OK. Let's start with something which is possibly overlooked on first reading. When Jesus was tempted it is easy to assume that he only faced the three questions we have had outlined to us. Tell these stones to become bread  
Jump off the temple without harm  
Bow down and worship in exchange for the world

Now these may be the main targeted areas of Jesus temptation but we are in danger of missing the point that Jesus was led into the desert by the spirit to be tempted – and this period of time was 40 days and nights.

Jesus didn't just have to fight the temptations of the devil on three occasions, but on every day and night that He spent in the desert! During that time, the tempter came to Him!

We do Jesus a disservice if we believe that he batted away the temptations on three occasions only – God sent His son to prove to us that sin can be overcome. Now we would get into some serious theological debate surrounded questions as to whether Jesus could sin or not – to which I would rather simply reply that if it was not possible then why would Satan try?

It makes much more sense for us in our humanity and our understanding of our own failures today to realise, that Jesus has been tempted in every way for our sake.

We are told this in Hebrews chapter 4

So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe.

This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testing we do, yet he did not sin. So, let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

This is amazing stuff. We can boldly approach God, because He looks upon our failure and unrighteousness with Mercy and forgiveness and Grace – because Jesus had already obediently met the standard that God requires.

Basically, if we trust Jesus, have faith in Him – believe in Him – then His righteousness, His sinlessness, His payment for sin is given to us as God acts graciously towards us.

Let's just let that settle in for a moment. The whole point of Jesus being tempted, was to show that sin can be resisted, that temptations that we face every moment of every day – can be resisted. But more than that – because Jesus fully resisted temptation, we are covered by this as well when we boldly approach God.

We have spoken before about 'putting on Christ' but in a literal sense, this is what we do whenever we come before a Holy, Righteous, Just God – we cover our sinful nature, with Jesus' pure, hard fought for, persevered for, blood stained and nail pierced body. We are hidden in Him. So, why I am bringing this to our attention?

Well, simply this.

We are not going through anything that Jesus does not know about. Isolation, being cut off, being in restricted access to His friends and family. Being tempted in new unfamiliar surroundings – being faced with the desire to make things stop and to take our eyes off God.

These are all known to Jesus. It is the knowledge that we have that Jesus faced all this and more, that gives us the faith to stand firm. We pray in these difficult days ahead, that we will stand firm, unbowed in our faith and will continue to demonstrate Gods love to a hurting world.

40 days and forty nights from a Jewish perspective, would remind gods people of Gods provision and promises to Israel as the wandered in the desert after the Exodus. They may have been exhausted and demoralised, but when you keep your eyes on God, the promised land is still just that – a promised land. It is a promise of God. And we know it is true.

Maybe we will face temptation and trials in the coming days, and in these times of isolation, they are often the times we fear as we think we stand alone.

We should be reminded that God never left His people, never abandoned His promises and in Jesus we have the perfect solution to the worlds and mankind's problems.

Sin is the basis of our downfall, but Jesus' perseverance and ability to remain without fault, means that we have access to God that we do not and cannot deserve. I for one am thankful that Jesus resisted temptation, because when He did, He was thinking of me.



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