

SM003 – The Wanderer in the Wilderness

Forty days he had wandered in the wilderness. The days were hot. The nights were cold. Water was scarce, and there was no food. He had not eaten in over a month. Weakness descended upon him. His bones ached. His muscles slow to respond. His flesh hung on his thinning frame.

It had been forty days since Jesus was baptized, forty days since he had heard the voice from heaven, forty days since the Spirit of God had come upon him. And when the Spirit came upon him, it drove him deep into the desert away from all mankind, away from all voices and into the bleak landscape, this no-man's land where there was only quiet and the occasional howl of a wild animal.

How he longed to hear the voice from heaven again. How he longed to hear any voice – any words from another man, any sign of companionship, any sign of friendship.

He hung his head with weariness and then, something stirred inside Him. Someone was with Him. Someone spoke to Him – at last, another voice!

“If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”

The voice – the anti-voice. The voice that would drown out the pure word of God and the praises of people made in his image. The voice that controlled and caused the clamor of kings who went to war against each other, and all of them against God. The voice that had spoken in the Garden of God so long ago deceiving the first woman and inciting the first man to rebel. This was the voice speaking now.

“Jesus, you are so weak. Command that these stones become bread and save yourself. You are the Son of God, the king, are you not? That’s what the voice from heaven said. I heard it too– ‘This is My Beloved Son.’ You are the Son, the true king of Israel – the one promised by the prophets who would rule the world. Save yourself.

“This is not what kingship is about – performing a cheap trick to satisfy hunger.”

“Hunger! Yes, I know how hungry you must be. How long has it been, 40 days since food passed between your lips. You must now be hurting – I hear that at this point, starvation sets in. Just say the word, turn the stones into bread. Eat to satisfaction. Regain your strength, and then, make more for the people. Others in the world are starving. You could feed all mankind. You could satisfy the desires of every hungry man, the mothers, and babies with bloated bellies. They would see who you are. They would give their allegiance to you when you fill their stomachs. It would come so easily. I know! I know they give their allegiance for such small favors.”

Jesus thought on these words and then he asked – “Is that what life is about – filling one’s stomach? If I satisfy myself, and others, what would I be saying? Has my Father told me to do this – to turn these stones into bread? Is the Spirit of God directing me to delight myself in the desert?”

Stories of the Master

Web – www.StoriesoftheMaster.com email – info@WGSministries.org

Jesus thought back on another time in the desert, many hundreds of years before. His own people had wandered there for – how long was it? – 40 years? Yes, just as he had now wandered 40 days in the desert. God had provided bread for them, but what good had it done? Yes, they survived, and God was good to them but they never got the bigger message. For them, life was about getting as much food as they could in their bellies and oh, how they complained bitterly and whined about how hard life was in the wilderness.

Those sons of God never seemed to get the point God was trying to teach them – *man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God*. Man's existence was not wrapped around food and the satisfaction of every desire. Man's primary purpose was to hear the word of God, to live by the word of God, and to worship the God who gave His word.

Jesus turned his head in the direction of the sweet and subtle voice that had spoken to him, and said, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

The presence drew back – momentarily flustered by the resolve of this man who refused his offer. It had been so much easier with the first man. The first man was in a garden and he fell. This man was in a wilderness and resisted. The first man spurned the word of God and reached out for delicious food. This man turned away from it and listened obediently for the voice of God.

It had been so much easier with Israel in the wilderness. They were a caustic crowd of complainers. They were so easy to lead astray. If it had not been for that prophet Moses, no telling what he could have done with them. But this man was stronger than Moses. Just as God had led Moses up into the wilderness to receive the very words of God, now the Spirit was leading this man into the wilderness and He was placing His faith totally in the words of God. He had the power to change the stones into bread and to satisfy the desire of every person on the planet, but he was refusing.

The tempter narrowed his eyes in concentration and reached for a second strategy.

"Your people, Jesus. Your people have built a magnificent temple for the worship of God. Jesus, come with me."

And the devil took Him into the holy city and stood with him on the roof of the entrance to the Holy Place where God was said to reside and where incense rose like the prayers of God's people who worshipped far below.

The tempter said, "You say that you are the Son of God, Israel's king. You say that you are going to trust every word that comes from God. If You are the Son of God, jump, throw Yourself down; because it is written in God's word, that word that you so cherish, it says, 'God will command his angels concerning you'; and 'on their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not even strike your foot against a stone.'"

Oh, how the tempter was clever. Jesus had resisted his first temptation by submitting to the Word of God. The Word of God was a weapon in his hand to ward off the attack of the evil one. But the tempter

Stories of the Master

Web – www.StoriesoftheMaster.com email – info@WGSministries.org

knew all about the Word of God and its power. So, this Son of God wanted to be obedient to God's word. Then he would use it against him.

"It is said in the Word of God that God will command his angels to bear you up. Throw yourself down from this place and He will send his angels to rescue you and bring you safely to the courts below. All will see the Messiah suddenly coming to his temple and with the power of God, and when they see you descending to the temple courts surrounded by angels, they will know who you are."

Is this not why Satan took him to the temple? The Judean wilderness had plenty of places from which he could throw himself from a cliff down into a valley. But here, in the Temple grounds, if He were to do this, His people would see Him. They would see Him on the rooftop of the Temple just as some rabbis believed that is where the Messiah would be revealed. They would see the Father's care for him. They would see the angels bearing him up. They would see the Lord suddenly coming to His temple as the prophets foretold.

"One step is all it will take, Jesus, – one step off the pinnacle of the Temple – and God will come through for you and it will all be over. People will recognize that you are the king of Israel. Isn't that what your Father wants to happen? Does not the rest of the psalm declare that God is a shelter to His people and what better place of shelter than the Temple of God! Surely God will protect you here with the shadow of His wings.

Jesus looked down. He could see the people worshipping far below. Had the Father ordered his steps *in this way*? Was this the path for him? What did that Psalm say?

¹¹ He will give His angels charge concerning you, to guard you in all your ways.

Yes, God would guard His Son in all his ways but was this the way God had chosen for him? Yes, the angels of God would bear him up in their hands lest he stumble over a stone. But this passage wasn't about testing God. This passage wasn't about throwing oneself unnecessarily off a high place to see if God would come through, to force God to act. This psalm was about walking with God in faith and humility and the protection of the angels as one obediently walked with Him.

What else did that psalm say? "You will tread upon the lion and cobra. You will trample down the serpent." It was time to take a step. Not a step off the temple but a step on top of a serpent's head.

Jesus backed away from the edge, turned to the evil one and said, "It is written, you shall not put the Lord your God to the test."

The tempter stepped back. He was defeated again. He could feel the weight of this man's obedience coming down upon him. But one more test remained. This would be the toughest yet.

Interlude

Jesus had gone up from the Jordan Valley where he was baptized to the high plateau of the rocky Judean wilderness. For forty days he had been there, alone, hungry, weakening, and waiting upon his

Stories of the Master

Web – www.StoriesoftheMaster.com email – info@WGSministries.org

Father. For forty days he had obeyed his Father and done what the first man, what every man and what every nation had failed to do – he had lived in complete obedience to God.

In the first temptation he had refused to satisfy himself – unlike the first man who had reached out for the fruit that would make him wise and strong and independent of God. But this new man chose to live by the words of God.

In the second temptation, the devil led Him to the pinnacle of the Temple and told him to trust the words of God that said that God would protect him. But he refused to test God and to walk only in those paths that God had placed before him. One test remained.

The tempter took Jesus to a very high place, a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and all their glory.

“Look Jesus – here is great Egypt, the country that held your people captive. See how the Nile cuts a line through it and gives it life! But oh, I’m sorry, look - the people are worshipping the river and the sun – not to speak of a thousand other odd things they call “god.” I know your heart aches for them! You can do something about that.

“And what is this – the pride of Persia, standing strong against the Roman might. You could lead them against the Romans who oppress your people, you know. Or, you could go to Rome, the great city sitting on seven hills which rules so much. Imagine what you could do if you commanded one of these armies. You could conquer the whole world. You would make the great Alexander and his successors look like children playing games.

“Here is great India – such confusion, such suffering, and the East with its masses of people and untold wealth. See how they fight endless wars? The land is red with the blood of its people as dynasty fights against dynasty. You could stop all this. You could become their king ... the king of the world. Of every nation. You could take all this wealth and ensure that all have enough.

“This is why you have come, is it not? Isn’t this what that insect-eating prophet of yours said, ‘the kingdom of God is at hand’? You have come to reign. I know this and you know this. And this is what your people long for.

“Jesus, all of these things, I will give you. They are mine to give. The kings of the world have handed their authority over to me, and I will give it all to you. I will let you be the king of the world. I give it all to you.

The vision ceased and the tempter stood before him like a father, like a friend, like a wise counselor helping someone achieve his destiny and he said,

My friend, it will be so simple and so easy. We know where your path leads now. We know of the suffering that is ahead. But you don’t have to.

Stories of the Master

Web – www.StoriesoftheMaster.com email – info@WGSministries.org

“Just, fall before me and worship. It’s that simple. Switch sides. Declare that I am the great power. Give me your allegiance and all this that you have seen, all the nations, all their wealth, all their power, all their glory will belong to you.”

And he had seen it all – every empire, every nation, every tribe, every family, every man, woman, and child that He dearly loved was now within His reach. He could feed every person. He could heal every disease. He could end every war. Earth would become what it was supposed to become – a paradise of praise for God.

Wait ... would it? A paradise of praise for God?

Jesus stood weakly on the mountain. He was thirsty. He was so hungry. He felt so alone and so battered by the words of the wicked one and with his last bit of energy he said,

“No. You are standing between God and man. You are blocking his light. I will not fall on my face before you for that would make you the supreme authority. I will not switch sides. I will not give my allegiance to you. I will not go for the quick fix for the world and abandon everyone to an eternity without the Father’s love.

Then, Jesus faced the tempter, and said, “Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.’”

The tempter seethed in anger and recoiled in fear. He could not believe it. How could this man resist? How could this man obey God even as his life ebbed from him? And then Heaven opened and the angels of God were revealed in their full array before him. “Better to fight another day,” and the devil fled from heaven’s armies to await another chance to tempt this perfect man and steer him away from the destiny God had placed before him that would save the world for eternity.

The angels came to the place where Jesus had fallen in exhaustion. One placed Jesus’ head in his lap. Another gave him a cool drink from heaven’s fountains and another gave him a small portion of food to restore his strength. The fast was over. The tempter had fled. Jesus had overcome for all mankind.

But what did it mean? What did the complete obedience to God mean for you and me?

Everywhere you and I have failed, Jesus has succeeded. Everywhere mankind has turned away from God, one man did not turn away from God. One man obeyed completely and he did it to return us to the one true God.

You have failed haven’t you? I know I have. I feel so weak and vulnerable at times. I’m sure you do too. But there is a Man who has faced Satan head-on and overcome him in every way.

My friends, whatever wilderness experiences you have had, are having now, or will have in the future, remember that Jesus has already been there and has already conquered the evil one for you. If you are stumbling in the wilderness, focus your eyes on the Perfect One.

Listen to these words from the writer of the book of Hebrews. I’m reading from 4:14-16.

Stories of the Master

Web – www.StoriesoftheMaster.com email – info@WGSministries.org

¹⁴We have a great high priest, who has gone into heaven, and he is Jesus the Son of God. That is why we must hold on to what we have said about him. ¹⁵Jesus understands every weakness of ours, because he was tempted in every way that we are. But he did not sin! ¹⁶So whenever we are in need, we should come bravely before the throne of our merciful God. There we will be treated with undeserved kindness, and we will find help.

Did you hear that? Jesus understands every weakness! What is your weakness – the area where you are most vulnerable? Jesus knows about it and understands it. He does not judge you for it but He understands. And why does he understand? Because he was tempted in every way that we are!

What else does this passage say? – he did not sin! We sin. We fall short, but he did not. He met the enemy in battle and defeated him. And he did it for us! Remember the story about Jesus' baptism – The Voice from Heaven? Remember why he was baptized? – it was that he might enter into our sinful world. He didn't need to be baptized. He was without sin. But he voluntarily entered into it that he might identify with sinners. Then, as soon as he was baptized he entered the wilderness to face the great enemy of sinful mankind – Satan.

God's people had faced temptation and testing many times before. Israel faced temptations in the wilderness and failed. But Jesus reached back into the wilderness failure and found the word of God to overcome.

The tempter had tempted a perfect man once before. This man was in a garden, not a wilderness, and he tempted him with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Oh it looked so good and Adam knew that if he ate from this tree he would have authority and could set up his own kingdom without God. And he ate.

But Jesus did not eat! Jesus did not turn the stones into bread. Jesus did not hurl Himself down from the Temple heights. Jesus did not bow the knee to the evil one that he might gain the kingdoms of the world.

Adam's race has fallen into sin. Adam's race has been captured by the strategies of Satan. But a new Adam has risen. A new Adam has conquered. His name is Jesus and He did it for you and for me.

The passage in Hebrews ends this way:

¹⁶So whenever we are in need, we should come bravely before the throne of our merciful God. There we will be treated with undeserved kindness, and we will find help.

Are you in need today? Do you need to find help today? Do you need the undeserved kindness of God? Come bravely, come boldly before the throne of God in the name of Jesus and you will find help. Jesus was "The Wanderer in the Wilderness" and there He won a great victory for you and for me.