

Prayer

Jesus Christ, You lived a life of love. You knew what it was to laugh, to cry to mourn, to jump with glee, to live life to the full. Teach me to live life to the full, and where I have lost something of my humanity through the wear and tear of the years, inspire me to rediscover, by faith, the joy of truly living. I ask this of You, Jesus Christ, my Lord and Saviour. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: the sick in mind

*Pray for parents of children who are born with little prospect of normal mental development.
Pray that there will be proper support networks to help families with such needs*

On-going prayers

- *Pray for those worst affected by rising food prices and poverty*
- *Pray for recent converts to Christ*
- *Pray for the armed forces of your country and the work they do*

Meditation

(a blessing)

May Jesus Christ, who sacrificed His life for all,
Bless, preserve and keep you from the Evil One.

May the Lord deliver you from the tyranny of the world,
And from all sins which foster anger and greed.

May the God who made everything, make you new again,
Remaking your mind and spirit in the image of love.

May the Spirit of God, who is ever active around you,
Inform and direct you towards everything that is good.

Now to Him who is your strength, your joy and your salvation,
Be all glory, all honour, all power and majesty. forever.

AMEN

Bible Study - Matthew 4:1-11

¹ *Then Jesus was led up to the wilderness by the Spirit to be tested by the Devil.*

² *After fasting for forty days and forty nights, He was famished.* ³ *The Tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."* ⁴ *He answered, "It is written, 'People cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from God's mouth.'"*

⁵ *Then the Devil took Him to the holy city and placed Him on the highest point of the temple* ⁶ *and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning You,' and 'They will lift You up on their hands so that You will not dash Your foot against a stone.'"* ⁷ *Jesus answered him, "It is also written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

⁸ Then the Devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; ⁹ "All these I will give You," he said, "if You will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰ At this, Jesus said to him, "Go away, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only Him.'"

¹¹ Then the devil left Him, and angels came and attended to Him.

Review

The testing of Jesus in the desert is one of the famous stories of Jesus' life and is also used a great deal by preachers, not least because of its three-fold structure and its focus on Christ and His use of scripture. This incident comes just after Jesus' baptism, and it seems that before Jesus could begin his ministry not only did He have to receive the Holy Spirit in baptism, He also had to face the full force of the devil's temptations. Then, in the strength found through both of these experiences, Jesus could usher in the Kingdom of God with power and with authority. The world Jesus came to claim was, and is, a place where the devil wields great power through sin and evil, so it was only to be expected that he would attempt to divert the purposes of God. It was the first battle in the Messiah's fight to the death with the devil, or Satan; a fight that Jesus would continue throughout His ministry and on the Cross, and a fight which will be finally won when He comes again in glory (Rev 20:11f.).

The first trial was to turn stones into bread (4:33). This was not merely a temptation to feed people who were hungry in order either to help them or to gain their allegiance. Jesus did indeed perform miracles of this nature in His ministry, when He twice fed the crowds, the five thousand (Matt 14:15-21) and the four thousand (Matt 15:29-39). It is more likely that this temptation arose because of Jesus' own hunger, and by resisting the temptation, Jesus asserted His desire and ability to rely on His Father, and not on His own feelings. He quoted back to the devil the words of Moses when encouraging the people of God in the wilderness 'people cannot live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from God's mouth' (Deut. 8:3). He was the Messiah, and His work was dependent primarily on the spiritual resources of the Father rather than earthly resources.

Something similar is true of the second trial. The devil took Jesus directly to the 'highest point' (a high, winged architectural ornament) on the new Temple compound in Jerusalem. It has been suggested that this could be a temptation to identify with the Temple (a clear Messianic sign), to create an artificial crisis (falling off the temple) or perform a selfish miracle (by not being killed from the fall). It could be any or all of these, but none of them was God's way for bringing in His Kingdom. We should remember that when Jesus did indeed go to the Temple towards the end of His ministry, He went in fulfilment of another scripture (Zech. 9:9), like a suffering servant rather than a miracle doer and crowd pleaser! Jesus knew full well that God had promised to keep His Messiah safe (Psalm 91) and He rebuked the Devil again with the words of Moses 'do not put the Lord Your God to the test' (Deut 6:16).

The final test was the crucial one, and in it, the Devil boastfully showed Jesus what he regarded to be his own property to give away; he showed Jesus the whole world. This must have been a visionary experience, in part, because there is nowhere anyone could go to 'see all the Kingdoms of the world', even the ones known in Jesus' day. But the whole devilish vision was based on the false premise that God would create His Kingdom by taking back the world by some kind of bargain with the devil. No, God had sent Jesus to claim the world, and it was Jesus' to win and not the devil's to give away. Jesus angrily rejected the devil and rebuked him (4:10) with the words of Deuteronomy 6:13 which affirmed belief in one true God. He dismissed the Devil by calling him 'Satan', the enemy of God whose name means the 'Accuser' (in Hebrew).

This last test was about 'who has the authority to do what'. It exposed a truth which we should all know, which is that although Satan has authority in this earth (see also 2 Cor 4:4, and John 12:31 and 16:1), we can escape Satan's grip through Jesus Christ, and submit to God's Kingdom and authority on earth, not Satan's. Let there be no mistake; people in the world do not like the idea that Jesus Christ is in the business of taking over the whole world to establish His Kingdom, and neither will He compromise with any other authority! However, having won through every test thrown at Him by the devil, Jesus received the help promised Him from Psalm 91 (v11), and with angelic assistance was restored for all that was about to come.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Which do you feel is the best word to describe these events, 'trials' or 'temptations'?
2. Do you agree that the main reason for the temptations was to test Jesus' resolve to set up the Kingdom of God?
3. Are you comfortable with talking about the devil and Satan in this passage of scripture? If not, why not?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

This is a most powerful passage of scripture which has much to teach us. I do believe that this is a trial of strength which God allowed Jesus to endure which signalled to Satan that the Messiah had come and meant business. Satan's defeat is comprehensive, and thus empowered, Jesus was able to be effective in deliverance ministry.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Is it possible to think about your own house and home as part of the 'Kingdom of God'? If so, should you honour it and use it specially as a gift of God, and do your best to keep Satan out of it, and make it a place of sanctuary.*
- *If possible, talk to a child about this story. Sometimes, children have a very different perspective on these stories of Jesus, and see things in them that we do not.*

Final Prayer

Creator God, I do not understand why the world has become so full of the sin and evil I see around me. Give me the courage to face up to reality and confront evil wherever I find it, in Jesus' name; for Jesus has won the victory over all evil, and in Him I have total confidence. Thank You, Lord, AMEN