

Erev tov (Good evening). Shalom be to you all! May the Lord's peace be with you. I come to you this evening bearing more of a heavy message than a light one. Today we will be focusing on Jesus and His time in the wilderness. The biblical story of Jesus' journey to the wilderness can be found in Matthew Ch 4, Mark Ch 1 starting at verse 12, and Luke Ch 4. I will be using Matthew (NKJV) to read the story.

(NKJV) Matthew 4:1-11 'Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.' " Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.' " Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.' " Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.' " Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.'

Jesus, Yeshua, our Lord, our God subjected Himself to temptation. He "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." Now take notice, Jesus went into the wilderness without His disciples or any other humans. To me, this represents how this was a one-man job. No other human being who has ever lived or will ever be born can or will accomplish what Jesus did in the wilderness. Absolutely resisting the devil, temptation, and sin. Temptation affects us proportionately with our inner character. Sinning had little appeal to Jesus because of who He is. He is God in the flesh. There was no hesitation from Jesus when denying the devil. You can think of it like this: A good married man, when seduced by a woman who is not his wife, is offended at the idea of committing adultery.

I can speak with utter confidence, no doubt in my mind, saying that all of us here have already failed. You may be failing now. You may have failed while coming to Church, when driving maybe someone cut you off so you got angry and cursed them. Or you didn't make a light and were upset that you'd be late and miss all the wonderful treats before service. Well, I have a treat for you. I have an entree that can never be fully consumed. Jesus succeeded where we failed and continue to fail. The Word became flesh and overcame temptation, overcame sin, overcame everything we couldn't overcome. For us.

Why? Not "why" we need it, we know we're sinners. Or "why" He came down in the sense of His mission, He came to die for our sins. But why did Jesus do that for us? He didn't do it because he owed us, **alone** we're sinful people, unworthy, evil, deserving of death. (NKJV) Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death". He didn't do it for Him. It wasn't some sort of sick, twisted, painful vacation. He even prayed to the Father once saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." John tells us why He did this for us, John writes "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." That's why. For God so loved the world, so much, that He gave his one and only Son Yeshua (Jesus Christ), a mission to save us.

That's why Jesus 2000 years ago came down here giving up His perfect comfort in Heaven. Came down to a place riddled with evil, pain, suffering, disease, death nowhere not to be seen! That's why He didn't call His legion of angels to slay the people unjustly taking Him away to be unjustly judged. That's why He willingly let the Romans set a crown of thorns on His head and push it down. Starving, dehydrated, had his back all sliced up being flogged. It's believed the tool the Romans used to do this flogging was a flagrum, imagine a short whip with two or three ends knotted with small pieces of metal. Then He carried the cross for about a 1/3 of a mile to the place where He was nailed to that cross and hung up for the whole world to see. He did that for the person you see in the mirror when you wake up in the morning, He did it for the people you curse at when they cut you off, He did that for the person sitting next to you, He did that for your friends, family, enemies, the people who had Him crucified! And then what'd he say? "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

We are in the season of Lent right now. Now observing Lent, though not required, is good. Therefore you should do it. Lent is the season of preparation leading up to the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. It's a way of remembering and personalizing the great sacrifice that Christ made on the cross for our sins. It's a time of self-denial, self-reflection, prayer, generosity, and good works. Martin Luther said in his book *Concerning Christian Liberty*.

*Concerning Christian Liberty* Page 35-36 "... a man is amply enough justified by faith, having all that he requires to have, except that this very faith and abundance ought to increase from day to day, even till the future life; still he remains in this mortal life upon earth, in which it is necessary that he should rule his own body, and have dealings with men. Here then works begin; here he must not take his ease; here he must give heed to exercise his body by fastings, watchings, labor, and other moderate discipline, so that (1) it may be subdued to the spirit, and (2) obey and conform itself to the inner man and faith, and (3) not rebel against them nor hinder them, as is its nature to do if it is not kept under control... In doing this he offends that contrary will in his own flesh, which is striving to serve the world, and to seek its own gratification."

Lent is meeting Jesus in the wilderness.

1 John 2:6 tells us "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked." In other words, we are supposed to be like Christ, in word and deed. Speech and action. One who claims to walk with Christ but likes to jog with the devil, is simply poison running through his own veins. So, let's walk.

We're at war. Spiritual warfare. We're in the trenches in the wilderness being attacked from all sides. Our only reinforcements are from Heaven! We live in a world full of beauty, but it is torn down by evil chaos. The Bible says "the whole creation groans". Many people come to be a theist just by looking at the beauty of the world. In a similar way, many people when they see that beauty destroyed, refuse God. I'm sure we've all had our moments, maybe not all to the point of doubting faith but at least screaming "GOD WHY?" at the sky or in your head. We must understand that we can't fully understand or comprehend the magnitude of the situation. I'm not saying to not ponder and think about it, many people have done amazing work by doing so. I'm saying you have to know that God is the only solution to the problem of evil, He is not the cause.

The Lord has promised to restore Eden, and He is faithful to His promises. Peter writes in (GNT) 2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is not slow to do what He has promised, as some think. Instead, He is patient with you, because He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants all to turn away from their sins.” This patience does come at a cost, but like Christ with His sacrifice we should obey our Father’s will. The payout is having more brothers and sisters in eternity. Any amount of finite pain for the benefit of eternity is far worth it.

Paul in (NASB) Ephesians 6:10-17 tells us to “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having belted your waist with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having strapped on your feet the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” Yes, let us equip ourselves with these so that we may fight in this war. There are no compromises. We don’t fight this war by fighting Satan, if that’s your mindset you’ve already lost, it’s too small, we fight this war by following Jesus. If that involves tearing down the kingdom of darkness, then let it be. But the “fighting the devil” mindset is a trap set by the devil because it takes your focus off what God is doing, and the moves He’s making, and focuses on what you’re doing and the moves you’re making. We all know from experience that when this happens, you lose. Don’t isolate yourself from the pack, that is when lions strike.

Let us go back to the passage of Jesus in the wilderness recorded by Matthew. Certainly, if we are to follow Christ then we must analyze how He deals with temptation. There are three core temptations for the devil to use. The devil has used these on everyone ranging from Adam & Eve, to Jesus, and to us now. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. Notice the first time the devil came to Jesus. Jesus was hungry after 40 days and 40 nights; He was physically weak and tired. The devil

knows when to come, he strikes at the opportune moment. Many people will fall here at the lust of the flesh. The devil says to Jesus “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” You may ask “why is this evil? The devil seems to be offering a solution to Jesus’s hunger”. I tell you the devil is not doing what he seems to be. It always starts out seemingly innocent, but it is a deadly trap. How many times have you said “okay, just this once”? It’s never just once. When you give the devil an inch, he knows how to take miles. Jesus in return quoted scripture. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” Jesus had a mission, and the devil was trying to take Him off course.

The devil then takes Jesus up into the holy city, Jerusalem, and sets Him on top of the temple and says “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’” The devil here is taking a page out of Jesus’ book. He is quoting scripture. He is quoting Psalm 91:11-12. Let us read the psalm.

Psalms 91:11-12 'For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'

The devil is misquoting scripture. He is leaving out the central part. “To keep you in all your ways”. Jesus had His mission; He had His way! The devil was trying to make Him go a different way. He was justifying Jesus to sin. Have you ever seen a person justify their sin with holy scripture? The pride of life. Jesus in response quoted scripture. “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’” When faced with temptation Jesus quotes scripture, make sure you read the Word of God for it is a powerful weapon against temptation.

The devil, frustrated, then takes Jesus up on a high mountain. Ready to try his last trick, the lust of the eye. The devil rips off his beautiful angel disguise and shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. He says “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.” The devil wants to be God. Now what the devil is doing is using all he’s got, the world. He’s trying to buy Jesus. The Bible says we as Christians were “bought with a price”. That price of course being the sacrifice of Jesus, Jesus said in (NLT) John 15:13 “There is no greater love than to lay down one’s

life for one's friends. The ultimate payment. How much does the devil offer to pay for you? He buys many for cheap. Jesus then overcoming the devil, temptation, and sin says "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" And that we shall.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, let us put on the full armor of God, let us walk with Jesus the Christ our Lord and Savior, let us be faithful in this war and forever after! It will not be easy. There will be hard painful bloody times of suffering. Yet is that not what He did for us? Therefore we shall honor the Lord our God with all that we are. We shall live not according to our will, but our Father's in Heaven. And we are not abandoned! Immanuel! God is with us! Even if we live the rest of our lives in suffering, we will live in Yeshua's shalom! Jesus says in (HNV) John 14:27 "Shalom I leave with you. My shalom I give to you; not as the world gives, give I to you. Don't let your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful." Let us be the faithful Church Jesus called us to be. Proclaiming the Truth in love and the gospel of Christ to every corner of the Earth! Let us take up our cross in these trenches, this wilderness. For we are in spiritual warfare.

Yet I have good news for you, gospel for you.

"The war is won! Soon every tear will be wiped away. Let us be patient! Remain steadfast in the faith, steadfast under trial. Pray for yourself, for others, and for future believers. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love one another as yourself, and as Christ loves you. Shalom be to you all. May God be with you, and may you be with God. Amen."