

Pastor T.C. Arnold
1st Sunday in Lent
Matthew 4:1-11
March 10th, 2019

40 Years in the wilderness for Israel and 40 days for Jesus in the wilderness in the midst of temptation. Brothers and sisters in Christ, welcome to the wilderness. This season of Lent is our 40 days with Jesus in penitential preparation for the greatest of all greats to come.

This morning I would like to draw for you a parallel with the life that Jesus led for us, the life of Old Testament Israel and the life we live as new Israel today. Jesus was willing to face every temptation because He knows that we face them too. He shows us how He overcomes these temptations – and He doesn't use His divine powers to do it. He was tempted like Israel was tempted. He was tempted like we are tempted each and every day.

Have you ever thought about how Jesus was led out into the desert as being so much like what His own people went through centuries before? Have you ever thought of the temptation of Jesus, this account before us today as a parallel to our lives in the midst of temptation as well? I want you to see this parallel today. The reason I want to draw this to your attention is because I want you to notice that we have a God that knows who we really are and what we go through each day. I want you to see a God that is not somewhere out there – ruling from a distant throne. I want you to see a God, your God, who came to be like you, and would go through the same things you go through each day – doing it for you.

You see, Israel was led into the desert thousands of years before Jesus walked the earth when Moses was called by God. He would lead the people who were in slavery for 400 years back to the land that God gave to them through a covenant promise. This land was called the Promised Land – flowing with milk and honey. It was a rich and bountiful land. But before they could get to the great land of peace and tranquility, they had to go through the desert. They were led out to the desert so they could get to the Promised Land. And they were out there for forty years.

During the 40 years they were tested in many ways. They would be without water – and they grumbled against God and Moses. They would be without food and they grumbled against God and Moses. They would say, “At least in slavery we sat in front of big pots of meat and had our fill. But Moses, you bring us out here in the desert to die.” The people of God were expected to trust God. God doesn't break promises. God promised to take care of the people but the people didn't trust in God. So they grumbled and even plotted to kill their leader.

And it's not just Israel. We are led out into the desert of life each and every day. Each day God gives us this gift. Each day is another opportunity to serve the Lord. But we grumble. I'm not saying we don't have good reason to grumble. Our lives are a wreck. Our jobs are hanging in the balance. Our homes are less than desirable. Our teacher just doesn't understand. My spouse and kids don't understand either. The stress that life puts on us – it's all too much. And we call out to the one who can hear us – who has charge over us and all circumstances. We cry out to God and ask Him, Why?? Why is this happening to me, Lord?

What happens in life will always remain a mystery for the greater part of all of us. God puts us to the test – not so that we might fail. Rather, we are put to the test so that we might endure and grow in strength and reliance on the Lord. I'm not about to answer that question of “why” for you or anyone else. The way that the Lord works is a mystery. But I do know this, He remains in control. And through the trials and tests that we endure, the Lord remains the Lord of all things and He promises not to let us down.

Just like Jesus didn't let us down in the wilderness. Jesus was led out – by the Spirit no less – to be tempted by the devil. God led God out to the desert so that the great deceiver could have his crack at the

Savior. God was willing to give up His only Son to certain doom because He trusted that Jesus would get the job done. And guess what. He did. He did it for you and for me as He came through bloodied and bowed but not broken.

Jesus was tempted in the desert. “You are hungry Jesus. Go ahead and pick up these stones and turn them into bread.” Jesus would respond, “*It is written: ‘Man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’*” Brilliant! A response given by a true King above all kings. Who could have said it better? No one.

“Jesus, throw yourself down!” Jesus said, “*It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’*” Another stroke of genius. The Savior is passing the test.

And then the big one... “*All this I will give you if you will bow down and worship me.*” And Jesus said, “*Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’*” And that would be it for the devil. No more temptation. Jesus has passed the test.

You see, Jesus passed when Israel could not pass the test. Jesus was in that desert 40 days with Satan on His back the whole time. Israel was in the desert 40 years and grumbled continuously against the Lord. Israel could not pass the test. So Jesus was sent in Israel’s place to take care of what Israel was not able to do – fulfill the will of the Father. Jesus remained perfect in the place of Israel. Therefore, Jesus became the New Israel and we look to Him for life and salvation and not to a people who couldn’t get it right. We look to Christ Jesus the Lord who fulfilled the law through perfect obedience and took our place.

And He had to take our place, because we are like Israel. We grumble and we complain. We are put to the test and we do not pass. We are God’s creation that has been tainted with sin. And now we have no hope. In ourselves we have no hope. If you ever wonder why we go through what we go through. If you ever wonder why our lives that we lead today are so difficult and riddled with sadness and pain – look no further than the great deceiver, your own sinful nature, and the nature of this fallen world. Look no further than the temptations that are around you – that you have not done a very good job of avoiding. Look no further than our own scheming, conniving ways to tilt the scales in our favor. Look no further... we have ourselves to blame.

We are at fault. But our Lord does not leave us to waver in the wind without any support or strength. No, our Lord has come to give us what we need so that we can endure the hardships and the temptations. He has not only given us this great example here in Matthew chapter four, but He has given us life through the work on a cross that actually saves us.

Today we focus on a Savior who would be led out into a desert by His own self – God leading God – to face ruthless temptation. That’s our Savior. See how He loves us. He didn’t give in. He didn’t fall or waver. He did it for you.

Don’t give in beloved in the Lord. Stay the course and lead that life that God has set out for you. Why? Because our Lord has done it for you first. He has made a capable and able person to put off the world and put on Christ. He has made you to serve Him and Him alone. He has made you to make disciples.

And His disciples – you and me – receive life through the perfect obedience of Christ – not our own – but from Christ. We look to this, all the way to the blood-soaked cross and rejoice because He did it.

We are just starting our journey into Lent. Like we will talk about in our midweek services – we focus on Jesus, the Man... the man like you and me... who is tempted and endured. Rejoice and know that Jesus has won the victory for you and for me. Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.