KINGDOM *of* HEAVEN

A SERIES IN THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Matthew 3:13 - 4:11

(Sermon from Sunday 26 March 2023, Richard van Lieshout)

1. Information

a) Read the passage, perhaps twice using two different versions

b) Fill in any info that didn't make it into the sermon.

- There is additional information in the CG guide from **page 32-34,** as well as information on the theme/title of 'Son of God' on **page 9**.

- At the time of writing these notes I have planned to be fairly comprehensive in covering a lot of the important details in these two stories (the baptism and the temptation), but there will always be a few missing pieces for you to fill in!

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- It may be helpful for you this week to get a sense of how I divided up the passage, and the resulting sermon outline.

- Essentially, these two stories outline the a) **credentials** of Jesus 'Son of God' and b) the **character** of Jesus 'Son of God'.

a) Credentials

- The **credentials** are highlighted in the Baptism story where we see the 'heavens open' (3:16), resulting in two supernatural events:
    i. The descent of the Spirit like a dove: highlighting the credentials of Jesus the '**Messiah**'
    ii. The voice issuing from heaven: highlighting the credentials of Jesus the 'beloved **Son of God**'

b) Character

- Whilst the Baptism story highlights Jesus's credentials, the Temptation story reveals his **character**.
- This is clear in the first two temptations, where the devil specifically 'tests' Jesus by saying '*If you are the Son of God*' (4:3, 5)

- Thus Jesus's response to the three temptations reveals something about the **kind of Son of God & Messiah** that he will be.

- I then ended by spending some time **applying** the temptation story to our lives, by focusing on the '**testing**' element of temptation.

- For your records and discussion, I defined 'temptation' (also translated 'testing') as:
    - '*a challenging set of circumstances that reveal the truth about who you are*'[1].

- Thus not all testing is meant to induce sin: certainly God would not have that as His outcome!
- Instead, God led Jesus into a time of 'testing' ('*Then Jesus was led up **by the Spirit** into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil*' v1) in order to reveal **to us** the truth about Jesus Son of God.

- Christians certainly face times of testing too, where the truth about who we are, and what we believe, is revealed through challenging circumstances.
- Make no mistake though, the devil uses these challenging circumstances to tempt us to abandon trust in God, manipulate God, and pursue our own power and glory (the three temptations, respectively).

[1] Credit to a sermon by Tim Mackie on Matthew 4

2. **Activation**

- Since I spent a lot of time unpacking the two stories, and less time on the application, it would be beneficial for you as a group to spend time 'activating' the point of application as it relates to 'testing'.

- To do this, a helpful starting point would be a discussion on **1 Corinthians 10:1-13**. I highly recommend studying this (**the whole passage, all 13 verses!**) to 'activate' the application of Matthew 3/4!

- I mentioned this passage in the sermon, and I think it's a very helpful bridge from the OT, to Matthew, to the NT, in that:
    - There are **very clear references** to the Old Testament stories that Jesus refers to in rebuking the devil (eg 1 Cor 10:9 '*We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents*' refers to Num 21:6, which also connects to Ex 17:7, which is what is referenced in Deut 8:1-3 which is what Jesus quotes!), and which also correlate to the 40 days in the desert.
    - There is a **clear call** for us to be instructed by these stories, especially as it relates to temptation, especially v11-13:
        - "*Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it*"

- Another passage that could be helpful is Deuteronomy 8:1-3:
    - "*The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers. A**nd you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not**. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD*"
    - This was also mentioned in the sermon, and it helps us see the purpose of 'testing'

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- ***If all else fails, your group could benefit simply from talking about the definition used of 'testing'** (ie difficult circumstances that reveal the truth about who we are), **and asking each other:***
    a) **What difficult circumstances have you been through recently?**
    b) **What did the 'squeeze' (ie the pressure created) reveal about your belief in God, your obedience to God, and your ultimate loyalty to him?**

- Our times of testing are not in order to 'pass' or 'fail' us, but in order to lovingly reveal the truth, so that we can grow by God's grace in our faith!

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- A helpful closing reflection could be from later in Matthew's Gospel, a passage we will enter into next week Thursday in preparation for Easter:
    - "*Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*" (Matt 26:41)

- This is similar to the closing line of the Lord's prayer:
    - "*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*" (Matt 6:13)

- I loved how Darrell Johnson expanded on this theme in this prayer, which would be a great closing prayer for your group:
    - ***Our Father, we cannot stand up under very much pressure. We are not wise enough to recognize and then counter the work of the evil one. When you lead us to the test, when life itself brings us to the test, do not let the test become a temptation, but rescue us. Rescue us from the subtle strategies of the evil one, and help us to trust you***.

3. **Implementation**

- The 'transformation equation' can similarly be described as:
    i. What? (Information)
    ii. So what? (Activation)
    iii. **Now what? (Implementation)**

- What resolutions can your group make together for the coming week?