

'THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP' – 2010 LENT NOTES FROM THE LEPROSY MISSION

WEEK ONE - LENT AND THE TEMPTATIONS OF JESUS

Lent is the 40 day period before Easter starting on Ash Wednesday. Traditionally people may fast or give up something which is important or a temptation to them as a way of preparing themselves for the journey towards Easter Sunday. It is a time when people may focus on some of the issues and costs of being a follower of Jesus Christ. Whether we deny ourselves or not, it may be used for meditation or contemplative prayer, for spiritual cleansing and renewal.



DISCUSS:

What is the value of Lent? Do we treat it as just a token gesture or does it still have real meaning for us today?

Lent is also a reminder of the temptations of Jesus and what it cost Him to obey and follow God his Father.

We shall look at the temptations of Jesus to help us focus on the things that tempt us and possibly draw us away from Christ.

Bible passages: Matthew 4: 1-11, Luke 4:1-13

NOTES:

The temptations are also found in **Mark 1: 12-13** – a very short account which gives no details and in which Jesus, the obedient servant, is “cast” or “sent” into the wilderness (rather than “led”);

Luke 4: 1-13 – very similar to Matthew’s account except that two of the temptations are reversed in order. It is interesting to note that Luke adds that when the devil had finished tempting Jesus, he left Him ‘until an opportune time’ – ie., temptation would be ongoing for Him and, by implication, for us.

John’s gospel contains no account of the temptations of Jesus.

The temptations occur immediately after Jesus’ baptism. This is no coincidence. The baptism of Jesus was God’s confirmation that He is God’s Son. This brought responsibility and challenge and Jesus had to determine God’s will for His life and ministry. **Matthew 3: 17 ‘This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.’ NKJV**

Following Jesus involves responsibility and challenge.



DISCUSS:

What responsibilities and challenges do I have as a Christian? What personally do I find most challenging?

(If no one has any suggestions, here are a few possible examples)

- to put God at the centre of my life
- to put my faith into practice
- to attend regular worship
- to give financially
- to change my behaviour
- to be compassionate and caring

Take a few moments for people to talk about these issues. Perhaps this prayer could be used:

Almighty and Eternal Father,

We give thanks for your love and mercy;

a love that was fully shown through the sending of your Son Jesus.

In accepting Him as Lord and Saviour we acknowledge that our lives are going to be turned around, that this presents us with challenges and responsibilities. Help us to put our faith into practice. Give us a compassionate and caring heart so that we can love the unlovely, reach out to those who frustrate us or who are difficult to deal with. Give us courage to embrace change and give of ourselves through our worship, time and resources so that we can serve you to the honour and glory of your name; in and through your Son, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Matthew 4: 1-2 - Material temptation



DISCUSS:

How do I discern God's will for my life?

Going off into the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights is not an option for most of us. Perhaps God is calling you to volunteer for some kind of Christian service, or take some office in the church, or even full-time ministry? How do you test that call; to be sure it is from God?

Can any of the group share their experience of God's calling to a particular form of service? Were there obstacles put in their way – how did they know that the call was from God and they were not following the desire of their own heart?

Read from Eddie Askew "Edge of Daylight", Chapter Two, about his call to work with The Leprosy Mission in India – available from TLM Trading.

Matthew 4: 3-4

Jesus was not just being tempted to satisfy His physical appetite but also to use His power to provide people with the material things they so often crave and thereby win their support. Jesus could have promised His followers many things if they said 'yes' to following Him. "**Man does not live by bread alone**" reminds us that life is about more than just material and physical things.

Jesus was asked to turn stones into bread and satisfy His hunger. If you have been on a diet and someone tempts you to break it with the words, 'Go on, just have one; it won't do any harm,' you know how difficult it can be to resist.

Do we sometimes convince ourselves that there is no harm in indulging in certain things or activities which may be harmful – what examples could the group offer?



DISCUSS:

Are there any temptations that you think Christians should definitely avoid?

eg., pornography, alcohol, gambling, viewing certain web-sites or playing certain video games, swearing etc.

As the church of God do we have to be careful with what we promise people? Do we promise material blessings? Do we promise that people will be free from life's problems?

It is worth noting that Jesus was tempted in every way but He did not give in. He was without sin. We are all tempted and should not feel guilty because of this. The question is how we react to and deal with temptation. Jesus is our example.



DISCUSS:

Jesus promised life in all its fullness but what does that mean?

Matthew 4: 5-7 - The temptation of power and popularity

Jumping off the temple roof would certainly gain attention, bring acclamation and popularity but how lasting would that be? Compromising one's beliefs to gain popularity and support is one temptation that many churches, individuals or organisations such as The Leprosy Mission may have to face today.



DISCUSS:

Are there any methods a church or Christian organisation should not use to raise funds or awareness of their work?

Satan quotes Scripture to Jesus to justify his case:

"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'."



DISCUSS:

Are we sometimes guilty of using Scripture to justify a particular standpoint without first studying God's word and praying about the situation?

Matthew 4: 8-11 - Unlimited power

Jesus was offered unlimited power if He bowed down to Satan. This is a theme we shall explore later on in the series, looking at power and authority and the cost of being a servant, but for now:



DISCUSS:

Has there ever been a time in your life when you feel you have been affected by the abuse of power either by the state or individuals?

PRAY

- For each other and the temptations that people are faced with each day (always being sensitive and treating any matters discussed in confidence).
- For governments and regimes that are corrupt - that God's rule of justice and mercy will prevail.
- For any known to the group who are a victim of bullying at home, in the workplace or in school.

Some useful quotations:

Aristotle: 'I count him braver who overcomes his desires than him who conquers his enemies; for the hardest victory is the victory over self'.

Sir Edmund Hillary: 'It is not the mountains that we conquer but ourselves'.

Unknown authors:

'The road to success is dotted with many tempting parking places'.

'Opportunity may knock only once; but temptation leans on the doorbell'.

Suggested hymns/songs:

Forty days and forty nights (George Smyttan 1822-70 and Francis Pott 1832-1909)

I need thee every hour (Annie Sherwood Hawks 1835-1918)

Thanks be to God who gives us the victory (Robert Stoodley 1978 Mustard Seed Music)