

021824 Mark 1:9-15 "As Lent begins..."

As we celebrate the first Sunday of Lent, today's Bible verses tell us Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, went into the wilderness, fasted for 40 days, was tempted by the devil, and then preached the Gospel, telling people to repent because the Kingdom of God is at hand. This story is recorded in more detail in Matthew 4 and Luke 4. Turning stones into bread, bowing down to Satan, and putting God to test were the three temptations with which the devil thought he could win over Jesus.

Remember, when Jesus was tempted, he turned to Scripture to help him resist Satan. You and I should do the same thing. When you are tested and discouraged, pray and read the Bible. If you don't know where to start, start reading Proverbs, Psalms or the Gospels.

This prayer is found in Proverbs 30:7-9. "O Lord; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God." This prayer is called the prayer of Agur, the only prayer in the book of Proverbs. "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread." He doesn't ask for more than he needs or less than he needs. But only his daily bread. Then he explains why that's important! Imagine finding new purpose and contentment in your work, and relationships. It might rescue you from the extremes of your hectic times.

Continually Growing

Pablo Casals was considered the greatest cellist to ever live. When he was 95 years old he was asked why he continued to practice 6 hours a day. He

answered, "Because I think I'm making progress." When Christians read the Bible and pray for God's will for themselves every day, we're making progress.

The temptations given by the Devil to Jesus is this: to prove that Jesus is the Son of God by His own strength with His own plan whether by making a stone into bread and pursuing expediency and instant gratification, or jumping off a high tower and proving to others and being famous, or bowing down and worshipping the devil and possessing all of this world. Satan tells Jesus not to worry about the will of God the Father who sent Jesus into the world, but to focus on his own desires and his own will.

Jesus answered the devil with Scripture. He said, "It is written: 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Jesus said, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Jesus finally answered, "Go away from me Satan! It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

What do these answers say about Jesus? Jesus was thoroughly about putting the Heavenly Father first! He had the power to do whatever He wanted, but He placed himself in the position of the one who was sent! Making bread out of stone is a piece of cake and Jesus can jump from the tallest building easily, but that's nothing to do with what the Heavenly Father wants. He can dominate all the powers of the world, by mobilizing the angels, but it is also irrelevant to what God sent Jesus to do: To save people from the power of sin and death. Jesus walks the path of the Cross one day at a time.

In Matthew 6:33 Jesus said, "strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." What we should always pray for is to ask that God's will be done rather than our own, no matter what the situation is. In the Garden of Gethsemane, before being arrested, Jesus

prayed fervently: Take this cup from me. In other words, please do not let me face this test. But not my will, but your will be done.

What we must prove as Christians is to live our lives faithfully in front of God wherever we may be. Sometimes God allows us to have success and fame in life and wants us to glorify God and love our neighbors through that success and fame. However, we should not be enslaved by that, because once we chase after success and fame, those things become the masters in our lives. Even we are successful, we must stand faithfully and even when we fail and lose, we must also stand faithfully in front of God.

Refining Silver

In the 1800s, a group of women met to study the Bible in Dublin. They were puzzled by the words of Malachi 3:3, "And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." One of the ladies promised to call on a silversmith and report to them what he said on the subject. She went accordingly and without telling the object of her errand begged to know the process of refining silver which he fully described to her. "But Sir," said she, "Do you sit while the work of refining is going on?"

"Oh yes, Madam," replied the silversmith, "I must sit with my eye steadily fixed on the furnace. For if the time necessary for refining be exceeded in the slightest degree, the silver is sure to be injured."

At once she saw the beauty and comfort of the expression, "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." Christ sees it needful to put His children into the furnace, but He is seated by the side of it. His eye is steadily intent on the work of purifying, and His wisdom and love are both engaged in the best manner for His children. Their trials do not come at random.

As the lady was leaving the shop the silversmith called her back and said he had still further to mention that he only knew when the process of purifying was complete by seeing his own image reflected in the silver. When Christ's image is reflected in us His work of purifying is accomplished.

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, during this season of Lent, remember, Jesus rejected the wealth and glory of this world and went to the cross to save us from the power of sin and death. Despite your suffering and trials, YOU ARE NEVER ALONE! He promised that Jesus would be with you until the end of the world. Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you, your family, your business, your studies, and with the lives of your children. To Christ be thanks and praise. Amen.