



## Lent Reflections Week 1 - *What is Lent?*

Last Wednesday was Ash Wednesday which marks the beginning of Lent. During this 6 week period on the Christian Calendar (46 days - 40 days of Lent + 6 Sundays) Christians are encouraged to review their spiritual lives in preparation and repentance as we anticipate the death of Jesus look forward to the celebration of Jesus' resurrection at Easter. One writer said that Lent is about the gospel making its way deeper into our lives.

One of popular views of Lent is that it is a time to 'give something up'. People try and give up all sorts of things such as smoking, alcohol, chocolate, biscuits and cakes, and these days Facebook and social media. This 'giving up' has its origin in the ancient biblical practice of fasting, which is found in both the Old and New Testaments. For example in the prophet Joel 2:12 we read:

***"Even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping and mourning."*** He was calling the people of Israel to repentance.

In the New Testament in Acts 14:23 we are told:

***'Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.'*** So they were fasting when making a big decision.

Fasting during Lent also reminds us of Jesus spending forty days fasting in the wilderness and being tempted by the devil after his baptism and as a preparation for his ministry. See Matthew 4:1-11

The whole point of fasting is to help us to reflect on our spiritual life and focus more on connecting with God. I suspect that the 'giving up' part sometimes becomes the main focus and if we are not careful God can get left out. A good way to keep the fast can be to do something extra to help with our reflections. It might be a Lent Course, or reading the Bible more or reading a particular book; it could be giving up something and putting the money we would have spent into a good cause; it might be setting aside time to pray more or possibly to get together with one or two others regularly to pray together; it could be going to extra worship services during Lent. The opportunities are plentiful but we should remember it is all about improving our spiritual life and making connections with God and spiritual discipline. We are disciples - in other words we are learners, learning to follow Jesus and to be part of God's family. Maybe we could ask God for His help in living lives that are totally dedicated to serving Him and giving glory to Him. This can help us to gain a fresh perspective and a new reliance on our Father God.

## Prayer

*Dear Lord,*

*Please help me today and give me eyes to see how You are at work in every one of my circumstances. Lord, give me perseverance to increase my understanding of You; give me a hunger to read your Word and to seek to know You better each day. Help me to trust that You will move in my life, in Your perfect timing and in Your beautiful way.*

*In the precious Name of Jesus, I pray.*

*Amen*



## **Lent Reflections Week 2 - *Experiences in the Wilderness***

*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*

Matthew 4:1

Jesus was about to start his ministry. He had just been baptized by John and witnessed a sign from heaven, the Holy Spirit descending like a dove and heard the voice of God the Father proclaiming from heaven, *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."* It is a spiritual pinnacle as he sets out on his great mission of redemption. He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness and Luke tells us that he was "full of the Spirit", on a spiritual high, (Luke 4:1) and that same Holy Spirit lead him into the Judean wilderness. This wilderness was thirty-five by fifteen miles. It was called Jeshimmon, which means "The Devastation." The hills were like dust heaps; the limestone looked blistered and peeling; the rocks were bare and jagged; the ground sounded hollow to the horses' hooves; it glowed with heat like a vast furnace and ran out to the precipices, 1200 feet high, which swooped down to the Dead Sea.

After Jesus had fasted for forty days and nights the devil came to him to tempt him. He moved from spiritual high to temptation by an implacable enemy who was determined to destroy his mission. *"If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."* (Matthew 4:3) This temptation was doubt; to doubt that he could fulfil his mission as a real human being and persuade him to use the divine power which had laid aside on his own behalf to assuage his hunger, to do a miracle for himself, rather than trusting God.

Reminds us of an earlier confrontation when that same lying serpent had said to Eve, *"Did God really say you shall not eat of every tree in the garden?"* He was trying to get Jesus to doubt His Father's care for Him and use His power to get a quick fix. He is challenging Jesus' identity as the truly God and truly man. Doubt and unbelief are among the devil's most favoured weapons. He loves to get us to doubt God's word, or to doubt God's love for us, or to doubt who we really are in God, to doubt even our salvation! It is easy to fall into this temptation. The world says, "Look after number 1", "I'm alright, Jack." This undermines our belief that we belong to God. John reminds us in that wonderful 1st chapter of his gospel that as many as received Jesus were given the right to become children of God. That is our identity. Jesus was totally comfortable in his identity and we need to be sure of ours. If we have believed in the Lord Jesus we are children of God.

Jesus answers the devil by quoting from Deuteronomy: *"It is written: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God"* (Deuteronomy 8:3). We shall see that he answered

each of the three temptations by quoting from the divine law that God gave in Deuteronomy for men to live by. God's word is our principal weapon against the enemy. The word of the Lord is the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). This was the only weapon Jesus used against Satan.

We can learn a lot from this account. Watch out for the enemy's subtle whispers of doubt. Don't listen! Make sure we know the word of God well enough to use this Sword of the Spirit to protect ourselves. Remember that Jesus was tempted just as we are and he resisted without using his divine power. So can we! (*"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin."* Hebrews 4:15)

### Prayer

*"Lord Jesus, during Lent, I seek spiritual renewal and a deeper connection with you. Fill me with your Holy Spirit, cleanse my heart, and draw me closer to your love and grace. Help me to have a strong faith and not to allow the doubt of the enemy to touch my life. May I learn more of your word so that I may be able to use it as the Sword of the Spirit. I pray in the precious and mighty Name of Jesus. Amen."*



### **Lent Reflections Week 3 - *Experiences in the Wilderness 2***

<sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. <sup>6</sup> "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

<sup>7</sup> Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Matthew 4:5-7

The second temptation that Satan tried on Jesus was pride. It also demonstrates just how subtle and manipulative the enemy can be. He tries to get Jesus to use divine power to perform an amazing miracle. He uses a quote from Psalm 91:11-12. So he used the word of God, which is true, to try and tempt Jesus.

We need to beware of those who quote God's word, usually out of context, for their own ends. This can be a very devious action. We should always be careful how we use God's word so that it gives glory to Him, and not glory to us, which would be the sin of pride. We can sometimes be tempted to take individual verses out of context to prove a point.

Jesus was well aware of Satan's nefarious schemes. Remember in John 17:17 he prays to his Father for his disciples: 'Sanctify them (*i.e. make them holy*) by the Truth; your word is truth.' He held his Father's word in the highest regard. So must we.

Jesus answers the enemy with another quotation from scripture, Deuteronomy 6:16, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' This is something we are also sometimes tempted to do, but it can imply a lack of faith. There are examples of both acceptable and unacceptable ways of testing God in the Bible. You might like to think about this and see if you can remember any. There is only one example of God telling his people to test Him. It is in Malachi 3:10: 'Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,' says the Lord Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.' Interestingly the word used here for 'test' can also mean 'prove'.

So there is much that we can learn from the second temptation of Jesus.

## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, help us to have hearts of trust and obedience, seeking to understand Your will through prayer and Scripture. May I stand firmly on Your promises and remember Your past faithfulness to me.*

*May my resolve be strengthened by studying Your word, prayer and fellowship so that my life may continually give glory to your precious and mighty Name.*

*In Jesus' Name. Amen.*



### **Lent Reflections Week 4 - *Experiences in the Wilderness 3***

<sup>8</sup> *Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour.* <sup>9</sup> *"All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."* <sup>10</sup> *Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"* <sup>11</sup> *Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.* Matthew 8-11

Finally, the devil takes Jesus to a high mountain, showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and offers him all authority and all glory if Jesus will worship Him. This was an attack on Jesus' identity. As the second person of the Trinity He already had authority over all the earth. He had set aside his authority to be born as a human being but he was totally comfortable in his identity and was not at all phased by Satan's temptation. Once again he counters this with *"It is written . . ."* and quotes from the Torah (Law), *"Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only."* (Deuteronomy 6:13)

Like Jesus, we need to be totally confident in our identity. We are children of God. Jesus answered each of the temptation by quoting from the word of God. *"It is written . . ."* We too need to be confident in our identity and know what the scriptures say. In his introduction to his gospel John reminds us, *"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."* If we are tempted to doubt who we really are, then like Jesus we need to say, *"It is written . . . he gave us the right to become children of God!"*

So of the many lessons we could learn from the way Jesus resisted Satan perhaps one of the most powerful is for us to be sure and steadfast in our identity - who we are in Christ - and to make sure we know the scriptures that support this.

**When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast.  
When the tempter would prevail, He will hold me fast.  
I could never keep my hold through life's fearful path.  
For my love is often cold, He must hold me fast.  
He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast;  
For my Saviour loves me so, He will hold me fast.**

## Prayer

*Heavenly Father, I come before You seeking a deeper understanding of who I am in Christ. Your word tells me that when I am in Christ, I am a new creation. The old, sinful nature has passed away, and a new life has begun. Lord, help me to fully embrace this truth and live as a new creation.*

*In a world that often defines identity by external factors, I choose to find my identity in You. I am not defined by my past mistakes, my circumstances, or others' opinions. My identity is rooted in being a child of God, redeemed and transformed by the blood of Jesus Christ.*

*Lord, just as Jesus knew who He was as the Son of God and confidently lived out His purpose, I pray that I may also understand my identity in Him and live in accordance with Your plan for my life. Grant me the wisdom and discernment to recognize and reject any false identities or worldly labels that may try to define me.*

*Dear Lord, help me to follow Jesus' example of unwavering identity in You. Just as He resisted temptations and stayed true to His divine calling, may I stand firm in my identity as Your child and faithfully walk in the path You have set before me.*

*In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*





## **Lent Reflections Week 5 - Anticipating Passion and Resurrection**

**<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; <sup>26</sup> and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”** John 11:25-26

The fifth Sunday in Lent is beginning of the period leading up to Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter sometimes called “Passiontide”. During the next couple of weeks the church’s focus will be moving through the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus and the to his triumphant resurrection. We will be thinking about the sacrifice of Jesus as he died to bear the weight and punishment of our sins.

In one way it all begins with the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, remembered on Palm Sunday. I think it is significant that in John’s gospel immediately before this we find the account of the raising of Lazarus from the dead. (John 11:1-45) The key verses are 25 and 26 which are noted above where Jesus reassures Martha that her brother will rise again. Jesus then goes on raise Lazarus physically after he had been dead for four days.

Jesus is showing his followers that he has power over death just before he himself will die on the cross. As we go through the darkness of his passion and crucifixion we have light in the distance because we know that on Easter Sunday we will be celebrating the resurrection of our Lord. The grave could not hold him. He burst out into glorious new life. Paul assures us that resurrection is for all believers:

**<sup>4</sup> We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. <sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.** (Romans 6:4-5)

Is it not also interesting that Paul regarded belief in the resurrection as a requirement for salvation.

**<sup>9</sup> If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.** (Romans 10:9)

This reflects what Jesus asked

in our first quote, ***“Do you believe this?”***

### **Prayer**

*Most merciful God,  
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ  
delivered and saved the world:  
grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross  
and who rose from the dead on the third day,  
we may triumph in the power of his victory;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen.*



## Lent Reflections Week 6 - *Jesus predicts his death and Resurrection*

***<sup>32</sup> They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. <sup>33</sup> “We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, <sup>34</sup> who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”***

Mark 10:32-34

Coming towards the last week of Lent we are approaching Palm Sunday, when Jesus entered Jerusalem. This is sometimes called “The Triumphant Entry”. I have sometimes thought of this period as “The Countdown to Calvary”.

Jesus was heading towards Jerusalem coming from Jericho, known as the “City of Palms”, which is down in the Jordan valley, well below sea level. He and the disciples would have been making the torturous journey of about 17 miles climbing up the ancient road to the Holy City which was 2500 feet above sea level. They would have been travelling through the desolate and rocky landscape which had been the backdrop to Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan.

While they were on their way Jesus tells them that he is going to be betrayed, condemned and killed. But three days later he would rise again. It was a sort of summary of the events of Holy Week and Easter. The odd thing is that his friends did not really seem to get it, even though this is the third time he had told them. (See also Matthew 20:17-19 and Luke 18:31-34) The real meaning seems to have been hidden from them, but they would certainly learn what Jesus meant as the events of Holy Week unfolded.

Maybe they had difficulty in believing that Jesus’ death could be part of a definite plan of God, a vocation, of which Jesus was well aware.

There are several hints about his death in John’s gospel as well.

In John’s gospel 14:29, after one of these hints Jesus says: ***“I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.”***

So the scene is set for what is perhaps the most important week in history; the week which would seal the destiny of humanity.

I am reprinting the same prayer as we had last week. It is the most appropriate.

### **Prayer**

*Most merciful God,  
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ  
delivered and saved the world:  
grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross  
and who rose from the dead on the third day,  
we may triumph in the power of his victory;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen.*