

“Finding Joy in Being Led”



Luke 4:1-2a

- 1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,**
- 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. (NIV)**

Special Music: “All the Way My Savior Leads me” Chris Tomlin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OizfOARelfA>

I was a 'runnin' from my Master
And I tried out every new thing I could find
But my life turned into one disaster
Without the Lord I almost blew my mind

I was sittin' in the front seat
Tryin' really hard to be the driver
Thinkin' I was makin' real good time
But always windin' up the late arriver
But now I been tryin' out the back seat
And I find it is a very great relief
Now I'm ridin' in the back seat
And I'm leavin' all the drivin' to the chief

I went barrelin' out full speed ahead
I went a 'runnin' every stop sign that I'd see
Thinkin' I'd give the Lord a shortcut
But I found out He don't need no help from me

I was sittin' in the front seat
Tryin' really hard to be the driver
Thinkin' I was makin' real good time
But always windin' up the late arriver
But now I been tryin' out the back seat
And I find it is a very great relief
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Traditionally, the season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday which was this last Wednesday and it lasts continues for six weeks ending on Holy, or Maundy Thursday which is the Thursday before Good Friday. It is actually 40 days (not counting Sundays) to represent Christ's forty days in the wilderness and the temptations that He experienced. For many people, Lent becomes a time of self-

reflection, self-denial and fasting. And for so many Christians it is a time of darkness, self-flagellation and ridden with guilt. The day before Lent begins is called Fat Tuesday because it is a day of over-indulgence as manifested in Mardi Gras, before beginning the fasting and sacrifices of Lent itself.

I don't want to buck tradition or downplay the significance of Lent in the Church Universal, but at the same time, Lent is not and never has been a Biblical event. It is something that the church has embraced as a matter of tradition providing a time of penance, sacrifice and self-reflection so that Christians can show their devotion to God. But if you have learned anything from me in the time that I have been here, then you will not be offended when I suggest that it is good to sometimes question our traditions, tenets and beliefs. We need remind ourselves of what is important and what is just a semblance of important. Do we embrace Lent because we truly want to commit ourselves to a process of reflection and renewal or do we embrace Lent because we are told it is the proper thing to do.

When we talked about worship last month, we spoke about how it is possible to come into a sanctuary of worship and leave with the same empty soul we can in with if we do not allow Christ to refill our basket and cup. Simply put, worship is not attendance. Worship is an ongoing conversation with our God. as we praise our creator and He in turns refills us so that we can meet the needs of others.

Likewise, some of the ritualistic practices that we indulge in can become somewhat meaningless if don't allow ourselves to experience the joy of the process, but instead look at these things as difficult and non-productive things that we do just because we belong to the church.

To put it simply, the season of Lent is not about giving up something or beating ourselves up over the head because of our own inadequacies. Jesus did not spend 40 days in the wilderness beating Himself up. He spent 40 days in the wilderness preparing Himself for what God had planned for Him. That is how we should view our participation in Lent, as a time to prepare ourselves for what is to come.

We understand what Christ is expecting of us. We have the great commission. We have a purpose. But we have a tendency to coast rather than to prepare for what is to come. We don't look for the Holy Spirit to lead us. We see that worn path before us has been taken by other Christians for centuries, and blindly trust that that is the path that God wants us on. We believe that if we do what we have been told by the church and embrace the established formats of Lent that we will be the better for it when we are finished. But I fear that too often Lent is embraced with its practices and with the expectation that the ritual nature of it will somehow will feed us. Our participation comes from a place of expectation rather than anticipation. We do what is expected of us and don't envision the anticipated

result. It is somewhat like coming to worship and leaving with our souls still hungry and thirsty because, instead of participating, we are just bystanders.

Let's look again at our scripture from Luke 4

- 1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,**
- 2. where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.**

Let's break this down a little. Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit. What does that tell us? Before this process of Jesus meeting Satan head on, Jesus tops off his tank. We've been talking about this. We talked about how our worship experience with our Heavenly Father fills our basket and our cup. We can't go anywhere or do anything significant for God without topping off our tanks. We need to be in communion with God to ensure that we have God's grace, God's resources, God's strength and God's endurance before we take that first step of faith. Jesus understood this. He didn't just blindly head out on this journey without making sure that He was prepared.

Then He took that first step. He left where He was at. He stepped out of His comfort zone. He knew that by doing so, He was stepping into His ministry which let His father know that He was ready and prepared to handle the task at hand. He had no destination. He was leaving his support group behind. He was blindly trusting that what God had in store for Him was exactly what He needed to be doing. But He had to take that first step.

We've talked about moving outside of our boxes. We do this because we cannot envision God's plan from inside a box. We have to trust that God knows exactly what He is doing, and our sole focus should be on serving Him to accomplish His will to His glory. The glory of God is not going to be found inside of a box. Yes, we are comfortable there. Yes, we feel secure and protected there. But we have to understand that our comfort and security come from our creator, not from the virtual boxes we build around our lives.

Jesus says, "Okay Father, here we go!" And leaves the Jordan behind. He moves outside the box of His family and friends. He leaves His livelihood. He takes that step that isn't really about leaving the box, so much as it is stepping into the presence, guidance, and security of God. He knows that the box was just an illusion and that His acceptance of God's guidance is His new reality.

Now, I know that there are people that are going to say "But He was Jesus. He was the Son of God. He had an advantage." As much as Jesus was the Son of God, He was also fully a man, given to doubts and questions. If that were not the case, the journey that God was putting Him on here wouldn't have been necessary at all. This journey was to cement the path before Him not only for His own sense of purpose but ours as well. Jesus came to show us that we could live the lives that God would have us live rather than accept that accept that our inadequacies and failures were inevitable. Yes, we are all sinners, but because of

what Christ has done for us He became an example of how we could live our lives. He showed us that it was possible to have compassion and love for even the vilest of individuals that we meet. By facing what He was about to face, we learned that it was possible to resist Satan, and fix our eyes on our purpose by allowing God to guide us.

You see, that is the next part of our passage as we follow what Jesus is setting out to accomplish.

and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,

Our perceptions of Christ generally don't include the idea that Jesus was a follower, only that he was a teacher, mentor, leader. But when we look at this scripture, we clearly see that Jesus did not head out into the wilderness to confront Satan. He didn't simply wake up one morning and tell himself that He was going to head into the wilderness to do battle with the devil. We don't see that as His purpose at all.

What we see instead, is that He is open to what God needs from Him and that the spirit of God leads Him into the wilderness. We do not know if He was even aware at the time of what He was about to face. We only know that God was leading Him, and that Jesus' was allowing Himself to be led to whatever fate awaited Him.

But let's break that down for a minute. More often than not, temptation is spontaneous. It presents itself when we aren't really looking. We don't go to a banquet expecting chocolate cake, but when it is presented, that's temptation. We don't always see the ramifications of our poor choices when it comes to temptation. We just see the chocolate cake, not the extra pounds.

I truly don't want to read more into this scripture than what is there, but I do believe that it is possible that Jesus was not aware of the temptations that He was about to face. He was allowing Himself to be led into a situation that would allow Him to strengthen His resolve for the ministry that was before Him. I truly believe that for Him to be fully realized as a man, that the temptations and the consequences needed to be somewhat unknown until He actually faced them. And, not to confuse anyone, but if Jesus was only fully God and not fully human as well, would they have actually been temptations? In order for the temptations to actually be temptations they would have to appeal to the human side of Jesus, because the deity of Jesus would never have had the potential of falling prey to those temptations.

In order for Jesus to show us that, as humans, we can resist temptation then the temptations had to be real. Think back to when we were discussing "The Lord's Prayer." We talked about how the request in the prayer is that God "lead us not into temptation," but we understand that He will lead us to temptation in order to

solidify our resolve and strengthen our nature so that we can resist temptation when we presented with is. And here we see God leading Christ right up to temptation. And just like us, Christ has a choice to make. He can either give in to the temptation or He can resist the temptation. But we also see that it isn't enough just to resist it but that we also need to understand why we need to resist. Each temptation that Jesus faces comes with a rationalization as to why the temptation needs to be resisted in the first place. We need to do the same thing. It is how we gain the strength to resist the same temptation in the future. Let's face it, sometimes temptations don't look like temptations until we are in the middle of them. That does not make them any less of a temptation. It still needs to be validated and we still have to make a choice and that choice is a choice that can be determined if we just stop to ask ourselves, "Does the choice bring glory to God?"

“where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.”

We focus on the three temptations of Christ, but we forget that just placing Himself in this position of being led into the wilderness was in and of itself temptation. Jesus was probably tempted not to go in the first place. He had to choose to allow God to take Him down this path. And we know from our own personal experiences that He was hungry

and thirsty long before He reached day 40. That again was temptation. He could have turned back at any time. He could have just said that it was all too difficult; that the expectations were too high. But He didn't. He held fast to the path for the full 40 days. You see, if He had turned back, then the journey was as good as over and there would have been no reason for Him to come to earth at all. He had to be tested and remain an unblemished sacrifice for our sins. He had to face the trials and overcome them to show that world that He was worthy. He wasn't proving anything to God. God already knew He was worthy. But we didn't. Up until this point, He was just a carpenter in Galilee, following in the footsteps of His earthly father. To show the world that He was unblemished and worthy, He had to let the world know that He was also responsible to His Heavenly Father from whom His strength, tenacity, grace, mercy and love were obtained.

As we enter this Lenten season, I have a new challenge for us this week. I'm not asking anyone to give up anything. We can keep on eating chocolate, drinking coffee, or chewing our fingernails. If we want to give those things up, there is nothing wrong with doing that and we will probably be the better people for it. But wouldn't it be more challenging

and fulfilling to find opportunities to “Pay it forward” this week. You know what I mean. Rather than give up something that we are just going to renew doing again when Lent is over, why not instead pay for a stranger’s lunch, give someone \$20 simply because they look like they need it more than we do, drop off a donation at the Presbyterian or First Baptist food pantry, offer someone a ride or buy some gas for someone who appears to be stranded, clean out the clutter at you house and donate items that can be reused. There is a huge garage sale on March 28 at First Baptist to help defray the adoption costs of the Warren Camp family. Do you have things that you do not need that you could donate? Can you possibly attend the garage sale and help by buying something or making a donation? There are plenty of opportunities in Fort Stockton to pay it forward and I would ask that you be open to God leading you to those places where you can help someone else with the resources and gifts that God has provided to you. I can promise you that if you will allow God to lead you that you will find blessings that are far more valuable than what this earth has to offer. You will find Joy in being led.

AMEN

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