

It's amazing to me that out the 35 courses I took in Seminary that one lesson – a short comment made by a professor, would be so memorable.

The comment was in preaching and worship class regarding the text we read today – often referred to as the temptation of Jesus.

This is the gist of what he said;

“Preacher shouldn't jump too quickly to the application of this text...This is the wrong text to preach on the theme of how to “overcome temptation”.

The reason he gave was, we (human beings) will never be tempted (tested) as Jesus was, this was unique to the Son of God. Like all good professors, he never said anymore, challenging the students to reflect and study to determine if he was right. By blocking the temptation to turn this story into “pastoral example” story, the professor was challenging us to think more biblically and deeply about what was really happening in the story. I have to confess that I never preached on this text for several years after graduating Seminary because I couldn't really see beyond the surface of things.

So what's really happening here? Why was Jesus tempted or tested in this way? Every Sunday, we pray the prayer Jesus taught us, asking, “And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.” So, why was Jesus led by the spirit into the wilderness when He was the beloved Son of God?

To experience the text, we have to see how the Old Testament story is echoing in this story. First passage that is being echoed is Deuteronomy 8; Notice who leads the people into the wilderness...*“Lord your God led you...”* *For how long?...”Forty”*. *Why? “To test you...”* The word, to “test” and “tempt” are synonyms in the Bible. The significant words and themes are repeated in the Lucan version almost verbatim; *Led by the Spirit...into the desert or the wilderness...for forty days...and was tempted or tested.*

The parallels continue as we read further in Deuteronomy;

“Causing you to hunger”...and then the statement, “That man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”

The circumstances and Jesus' reply is exactly the same; He was “hungry” and restates the teaching, “Man shall not not live on bread alone.”

In fact, when we summarize Jesus' three responses to the temptations, they are recitations of the lessons Israel – who were called, first, as the sons of god.

Deuteronomy 8:3 – “To teach you that man does not man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”

Deuteronomy 6:13 – “Fear the Lord your God, serve him only...do not follow other Gods.”

Deuteronomy 6:16 – “Do not test the Lord your God as you did at Massah.”

So what’s happening here?

Why are there so many parallels to the first test stories in the Old Testament?

What is it telling us?

To get the answer, we need to the main difference between Israel – first sons of God and Jesus – the son of God. Isaiah tells us that in their test, “They rebelled and grieved the Holy Spirit.” But in Luke, the Holy Spirit descends as says, “This my son, whom I love, in him I am well pleased.”

Jesus temptation story is “re-do” test after the first test ends in abysmal failure. Jesus steps into the wilderness on our behalf and “nails” the test in complete trust and obedience to God’s will. He trusts God for the provision and will not use his own means and power to satisfy his own desperate need. Jesus trusted that God will come through, whereas, Israel continued to fail to trust God throughout their journey.

But more important thing to recognize is that this “victory” over temptations is the “foreshadowing” of the “ultimate victory” that will come through His perfect obedience even unto death, and through it, he takes all of us with him as our representative to his Father.

Two things jump out at me, which can be summarized as “Trust and Obey”.

Trust – our salvation comes from believing and trusting that “Christ’s merits - his righteousness, moral perfection, his absolute obedience” was more that a personal achievement for Himself. He did it on our behalf. This is why he is truly, the “Son of Man” who leads us to salvation. The Gospel is not about whole much of people trying really hard to appease the Father through moral perfection of our own – that is already proven to be impossible – hoping that on the judgment day, somehow we did enough to “pass”. That is no goof news at all!

The Gospel message is that Christ’s righteousness is “imputed” to us!

Obey – Obedience has a negative connotation in our culture, but obedience is not adherence to set of do and don’t. It is about following someone.

Following in the footsteps of Jesus...doing what he did...if he forgave we forgive...if he gave, we give...if he fed the hungry, we do the same.

We are “dustkickers”...Jesus taught their students by journeying through the villages and towns and the the disciples were literally “kicking up the dust” to keep up with him. And so we are too, we are “dustkickers”, walking behind his trail, doing and saying what he did...that is obedience!