

March 1, 2020

Led by the Spirit
(Matthew 4:1-11)
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Last week we heard some very surprising news regarding the coronavirus outbreak. The coronavirus has spread across the world at a very rapid speed, especially in South Korea, Italy, and Iran. Many European countries have confirmed cases of coronavirus. And several states in the U.S. have also reported some virus-infected cases. Though nobody knows what will happen in the future, one of the news articles seemed to make us more worried about the spread of the coronavirus. Marc Lipsitch, a Harvard University epidemiologist, was predicting the coronavirus would ultimately not be containable and, within a year, would infect between 40 and 70 percent of humanity.

Several countries have closed their borders to protect their countries from the spread of the virus. And it has been said that some violent incidents involving racial discrimination have happened in some countries. Those who have invested in the stock market are shocked to see that their stocks have declined dramatically in the last few days. When I was searching the news, I found that the Heineken beer company has been so cautious about what it says about the corona virus. I wondered why and clicked on the link page and found out the reason. Do you know there is a brand name of beer called 'Corona'? It is a coincidence that the names of the virus and the brand of beer are the same. Because of the corona virus people are not buying as much of the Corona beer and the Heineken beer company seems to be sarcastically marketing its brand of Heineken beer.

Amid this challenging world health crisis, we have heard the good news that better coronavirus test kits have been developed and will be released soon. While we are not aware of the details, countless scientists and doctors are working around the clock to develop the vaccine to prevent, and the medicine to treat the virus. Please continue to pray for the people and countries infected with the coronavirus, and for an effective medical treatment to be available as soon as possible.

Lent started last Wednesday. To come closer to God, all of us may be engaged in spiritual exercises. Whatever spiritual practices we do, it would be the starting point for us to look into ourselves. By the way, the closer we look into ourselves, the more we will find ourselves infected by sin in both our inner beings and our outer lives.

It is interesting to observe that while the coronavirus is infecting the real world where we live, in the spiritual realm, sin has infected all of us. It seems that the coronavirus and sin have a lot in common. Both of them are invisible during their spreading period, but we see the critical damage they cause in our lives. Both are very contagious and dangerous, threatening both our personal lives, and our society. With both the virus and sin we could become infected by others and then spread the infection to others. Both of them could be a matter of life and death, and we must conquer this deadly virus and sin at all costs.

This morning I would like all of us to gain spiritual wisdom from Jesus Christ about how we could overcome our sin and come closer to God. The more we strive to follow the example that Jesus showed in confronting temptations, the more we can become victorious over our sinful desires and lives.

Let's get into the story itself. It seems to be very spiritual and mysterious but shows what exactly happened to Jesus when He had his 40-day spiritual discipline in the wilderness(desert)

First of all, I think it is most important to know what verse 1 meant to Jesus and what it says to us.

"Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." (verse 1)

Why did Jesus have to go through that temptation? To answer this question, we need to consider that Jesus was a human being and, at the same time, a divine being, the Son of God. We cannot understand precisely how the divine and the human nature coexisted in the person of Jesus.

However, we can imagine how Jesus, as a human being, would face many temptations during His ministry for the kingdom of God as He proclaimed the Gospel and showed that the Kingdom had come through His ministry of healings and miracles. He would be famous and could get many rewards, including the power from the world if He might want it. At the same time, He will soon face all kinds of suffering from religious leaders. Threats and violence and trials would be predictable situations. If we consider these things, we can be sure that the Holy Spirit had Jesus trained well enough to be victorious in a future full of temptation and suffering.

Now, look at the temptations Jesus faced.

Because Jesus had fasted for 40 days and nights He was physically weak and His human desire to survive would be at its peak. Satan took advantage of that situation and stirred the most basic survival instinct in Jesus. "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."(verse 3)

Yes, Jesus could have done that. However, He made sure it was more vital for him to live on God's words. 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' This was His confirmation that He would obey God's plan even in the situation when His physical life would be threatened and He would be killed.

Some of you may decide to fast during the Lenten season. I also chose to consciously and prayerfully fast in the morning. But I also found that during lunch and dinner I have eaten a little more unconsciously. I can see some of you smile at me. You seem to feel the same as I do.

In some ways, we are more likely to live to eat, not to eat to live. We know what costs we will pay if we continue to live by that rule. There would be more health issues, more medicine, and more medical costs. It is not easy, but we have to think about the choices and their consequences, because we are not created to live on physical food alone, but we are created to live by God's words.

Jesus shows us how important it is that we live by the Words of God in obedience to Him. We have to look into ourselves as we are and realize that we are not just physical beings, but spiritual beings, who should live on the Words of God and grow in faith.

How much do we want to live on the Words of God? How much do we strive to obey the words of God? We need to think about rearranging our energy, efforts, and money from meeting our human physical desires to pursuing and obeying God's words and will.

The second temptation Jesus had to overcome was about the absolute trust in God. The devil had Him stand on the highest point of the Jerusalem temple and tempted Jesus to throw Himself down. The devil reminded Jesus that He would be unharmed because God had promised to protect Him. For it is written: "' He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" (verse 6)

The point of the devil's temptation was to make Jesus doubt God's faithfulness in caring for him, make the wrong choice, and finally disobey God.

Jesus knew all about the intention of the devil and made it clear that He would not doubt God's faithfulness at any time. "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (verse 7)

Jesus showed that He would not doubt God's faithfulness no matter what situation He would face in the future, and we know He did so to the end of his human life on the cross.

Are there situations when you have doubts about God, His existence, His love, His power, His will, or His protection? When we would find ourselves in uncontrollable turmoil of a serious disease, a broken relationship, or the loss of a job, or unexpected accidents, it seems inevitable for us to feel worried and to doubt God's love and power.

However, we should remember that we can't justify our doubts at any time. And that our doubts only result in unbelief and disobedience in our life of faith. We need spiritual exercises to overcome our doubts and to keep on trusting in God's faithfulness no matter what issues we will face.

"God is good!.... All the time!" "All the time....God is good." This phrase is what the men always repeat when they start their bible study every Tuesday morning, and it should be true for all of us who want to trust in God's faithfulness in our lives. Throughout the Lenten season, how about starting every day with this proclamation. "God is good!.... All the time!" "All the time....God is good."

The third temptation was about what we as worshippers should remember. The devil took Jesus to a very high mountain, showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor, and suggested that they would be given to Jesus if He would bow down and worship the devil.

In response to the devil's deceitful suggestion, Jesus made sure that it was only God who is worthy of our worship, not the devil. "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" (verse 10) We could see that Jesus lived out this faith by rejecting people's intention

to make Jesus king by force after they had experienced the miracle of feeding five thousand people with five loaves and two fish (John 6 14-15).

In His remarks, we could see, He made sure that He would not allow Himself to sin against God by pursuing His personal interests and glory. Instead, He confirmed He would only worship God.

We are living in the secular world where the values of success, money, and power are highly regarded and supposed to be achieved by our own abilities. The pursuit of materialism and worldly success are deeply embedded in our faith and more often than not praised in the name of faith. We continue to face these kinds of temptations.

What or who are we worshipping now? If we find ourselves worshipping anything or anybody other than God, it would be a good time for us to make changes in our life of faith. Let's face ourselves as we are and humbly confess our weaknesses to God. God already knows all about us. We are deceiving ourselves if we think we can hide ourselves from God's view.

There is something we should not miss in the scripture today. We read that Jesus was led to the wilderness by the Spirit. Do you wonder where the Spirit was while Jesus was being tempted by the devil? Did the Spirit drop off Jesus in the wilderness and then go away somewhere? We are apt to think in that way!

I believe the Holy Spirit was with Jesus from the beginning to the end of his 40-day battle with temptation. The Holy Spirit dwelling in Jesus would have guided Him to react to the temptation with the concrete Words of God in Deuteronomy. (Deut 8:4, 6:16, 6:13) The Holy Spirit was working through Jesus with the Words of God.

Jesus, as a human being, might not have been successful in overcoming the temptations of the devil. But with the Holy Spirit beside and within Him He was able to get through all temptations in both the wilderness and the His public ministry of building the Kingdom of God.

We also are often struggle in overcoming all kinds of temptation and sin with our will power. However, the most powerful Holy Spirit could work through us and enable us to win over the temptation and sin. Set aside time to read God's Word every day and to pray for His guidance!! Experience the joy and power which the Holy Spirit brings to our mind and heart and life. These blessings are what we should get from the spiritual journey of the 40-day Lenten season.