



Week Two: Stridence / un-Patience & un-Gentleness

OPENING PRAYER:

Dear Eternal God, you have created us out of the depth of your love. We lack the perfect words to describe your perfect love. Strengthen us by the work of your Spirit in us to withstand the tests of the evil one. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen!

ENCOUNTERING GOD:

Where have you seen God at work in your life this week?

What good have you done for others this week?

How is your relationship with God?

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WEEKLY SCRIPTURE READING:

Text: Matthew 4:1-11

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’ But he answered, ‘It is written, “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”’ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you”, and “On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”’ Jesus said to him, ‘Again it is written, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”’ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, ‘All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! for it is written, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”’

Additional Texts: Numbers 13-14:35 (Wandering for Forty Years), Exodus 16-17 (Bread from Heaven and Water) Exodus 32 (Golden Calf).

SUMMARY AND CONTEXT:

As soon as Jesus was baptized, the Spirit of God descended like a dove upon Jesus. Jesus yielded to the direction of the Spirit of God, which led him into the wilderness. Jesus’ 40 days of fasting in the wilderness strengthened Jesus in preparation for his earthly ministry. Jesus’ purpose was to bring salvation to the world and set up the kingdom of God on earth.

Conversely, after Israel’s exodus from the land of Egypt the Israelites wandered for 40 years in the wilderness, due to their disobedience. After the sinful generation died off, they continued their journey to the promised land. The Israelites were supposed to be a light to the world, reflecting the character of God, love and holiness; however, they succumbed to temptation. They did not live up to their calling as chosen people.

Although the Israelites fell short as a chosen people, God promised the Israelites a chosen One, the Messiah. The Israelites waited for the

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Messiah, hoping that he would restore them to their rightful place as world power. Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus' encounter with Satan in the wilderness demonstrates the kind of Messiah Jesus would be and how his kingdom would be different from the kingdom of this world.

First, Satan asked Jesus to turn stones into bread. Instead of accepting the challenge, Jesus responded with scripture. "One does not live by bread alone, but every word that comes from the mouth of God." Jesus acknowledged that humanity needs bread to live, but we also need spiritual food. During Israel's time in the Desert of Sin (Exodus 16-17) the people became strident, making their feeling known in a very strong way about their desire to return to Egypt because there was no food or water in the wilderness. In response, God sent manna (bread) from heaven and water from a rock. The people did not respond with gratitude and faithfulness to God. They continued their stridence and disobedience. Their disobedience led to death. Their disobedience was spiritual issue, not a physical one.

Secondly, Satan told Jesus to jump off the highest point of a building because scripture says that angels will rescue him. Again, Jesus responded with scripture. "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." Jesus demonstrated his obedience to the will of God. Additionally, he does not need to prove anything to Satan. Jesus shows us what it looks like to be led by the Spirit, instead of the need to prove our worth or show off our power, position or possessions.

Lastly, Satan told Jesus to bow down and worship him exchange for all the kingdoms of this world. For the third time, Jesus responded with scripture. "Worship the Lord your God and serve only him." Satan was promising Jesus something that was not his to give. God is the creator of the Cosmos and everything in it. It all belongs to God.

Conversely, the Israelites demanded that an idol god be made so they can worship it because they lost their patience when Moses went to speak to God and does not return by the time they had expected. In the absence of Moses, the people turned to golden calf, which lacked the power to save them or provide for them. They turned to a created thing rather than the Creator.

The Israelites longed for a Messiah that would defeat their enemies in battle and establish their political, military and economic might in the world. Jesus' kingdom of is not of this world, but it will overcome and transform the world. Instead, Jesus demonstrates how to overcome evil: being led

by the Spirit of God, fasting, studying scripture and obeying the Word of God. While we wait for the second coming of Jesus, God has given us the Holy Spirit to empower us to live and love like Jesus.

GROUP REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Encounter the Head:

What is temptation? How do we react to temptation? What is fasting?

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What rots our patience and gentleness?

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What lessons are only learned in the waiting?

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Encounter the Heart:

Share when you spent time in the wilderness, a place of waiting and total dependence on God. What did you learn about God? Yourself? Others?

Have you practiced the spiritual discipline of fasting? If so, please share your experience with the group.

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GROUP REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What was the most impactful thing that you learned from the podcast, Lenten Devotional, Sermon Discussion Guide, sermon, from the group discussion?

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Encounter the Hands:

Take a moment to think about any harm you may have caused this week. Now silently confess your sin to God, ask forgiveness. If possible, apologize to the person that you have caused harm.

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Share your prayer concerns and celebrations.

Announce: An Encounter Group Huddle will be held March 22 in Evans Hall at 12:15, following the 11 a.m. worship service. We will be discussing next steps for our groups and doing a mission project: assembling hygiene kits for the homeless.

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PRAISE AND PRAYER REQUESTS

Encounter The Hands:

Please go around the group and have each person share a praise for this week and a prayer request/

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CLOSING PRAYER

Have a volunteer lead closing prayer: asking for prayer concerns and lifting up the needs of the group.

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DAILY REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

We encourage everyone to do a daily reflection. This can be done alone, as a couple, or with your family. This spiritual practice will help answer the questions you have and it will improve your ability to see where God is at work in your life, and in the lives of those around you. Please answer the following questions during your personal devotional time at the end of the day.

Where have you seen God today? For the children, we say, “what made you happy today?”

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What broke your heart or made you sad today?

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What good thing did you do for someone else today?

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What are you thankful for today?

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