Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

Matthew Chapter Four – Week 51: Temptations

The Kingdom of God will be attacked

Day 350. Proving

Then the devil took him to the holy city, had him stand on the highest point of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written, '***He will command his angels concerning you***' and '***with their hands they will lift you up, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone***.'" (Matthew 4:5-6).

Prove yourself. You claim to be so high-and-mighty. Prove it. You claim to be in the right. Prove it. You think Jesus is alive and can save you – prove it.

At His baptism, Jesus heard our heavenly Father say, *"You are My Son, and I am very pleased with You."* Now a voice asks Him, *"Are you really His Son? Did He really say that? If so, prove it! Prove the Father's love for You!"*

And, to reinforce the point, the voice quotes scripture to Jesus, as if to say, *"Don't worry! God has promised that you cannot fail! Imagine all the followers you could get if people saw you jump off the temple, and float gently to the ground! You'd be famous!*" In this case, the quotations are from Psalm 91:11-12.

Scripture can be mis-used for evil purposes just as well as any other document or words can be.

Have you ever felt tempted to prove a promise or statement of God? Why would that be a wrong thing to do?

Share your answer with those you trust.

Day 351: Testing

Jesus said to him, "Once again it is written: '***You are not to put the Lord your God to the test***.'"

Trying to prove a promise of God is to test God. "God, are you really real?" "God, are you really there?" "God, are you really *good?*" "God, can you really do what you claim you can?" To test God is to insult God. It is to say, *"God, I don't trust you. I don't believe you. Give me something to indicate that I should."*

Jesus' response to His adversary is to quote scripture back: "Do not test God." (in this case, from Deuteronomy 6:16).

Our heavenly Father will do what our heavenly Father will do. While God invites and desires our participation with Him, God does not desire our control nor our mistrust of Him. This hearkens back to the Israelites during their Exodus:

He (Moses) called the name of the place Massah (proving or testing) and Meribah (strife or contention), because of the contending of the Israelites and because of their testing the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?" (Exodus 17:7)

and

Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust me enough to show me as holy before the Israelites, therefore you will not bring this community into the land I have given them." These are the waters of Meribah, because the Israelites contended with the Lord, and his holiness was maintained among them. (Numbers 20:12-13),

reinforced by:

For he is our God; we are the people of his pasture, the sheep he owns. Today, if only you would obey him. He says, "Do not be stubborn like they were at Meribah, like they were that day at Massah in the wilderness, where your ancestors challenged my authority and tried my patience, even though they had seen my work. For 40 years I was continually disgusted with that generation, and I said, 'These people desire to go astray; they do not obey my commands.' So I made a vow in my anger, 'They will never enter into the resting place I had set aside for them.'" (Psalm 95:7-11).

God asks for faith.

When your faith is low, how do you encourage it? How can you determine to have faith in the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit, even when you are tired and hungry (as Jesus was), and everything seems against you?

Share your thoughts with your fellow explorers.

Day 352: Testing once more …

Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their grandeur. And he said to Him, "I will give you all these things if you throw yourself to the ground and worship me." (Matthew 4:8-9)

You'll be in control. You'll be the boss. All will fall down at your feet, and do whatever you want them to.

The allure of Power has seduced humanity since the dawn of time, and people have become destructive to achieve it (just look at war). Jesus is being tempted to become ruler of all, at the cost of pursuing destruction, embracing evil (worshiping the devil).

Like many human societies, the Roman society of Jesus' time openly admired power, and whoever was "on top" was frequently whoever was the most ruthless at the time. Jesus was being tempted with pursuing His aims according to the ways of humanity – by force. You can have fame, fortune, and power – just don't worship God.

What examples can you list of where an aim has been pursued through force, to the destruction of both the pursued and those around them? Have you ever been tempted in this way?

Share your thoughts with your fellow explorers.

Day 353: Response once more.

Then Jesus said to him, "Go away, Satan! For it is written: '***You are to worship the Lord your God and serve*** only ***him***.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and began ministering to his needs.

Go away Adversary! Go away Slanderer! Go away Accuser! We are to worship only God. We are to serve only God.

Jesus again quotes scripture, this time Deuteronomy 6:13. He triumphs all His temptations. One lives by the Word of God. One does not test the Lord. One worships only God and serves only God.

The rest of the writing of Matthew shows how Jesus did those four things.

We all face temptation, at different times and circumstances. When you are tempted, how can you live by the Word of God? How can you avoid testing God? How can you worship only God, and serve only God? This Focus helps us to see the world "upside down" – not as people see it, but as God does. Can you provide some examples? Angels ministered to Jesus' needs. Can you provide some examples of how God has ministered to your needs?

Share your thoughts with those you trust.

Day 354: The start of ministry

Jesus bases his ministry in Capernaum, by the sea of Galilee – and Mathew again quotes scripture, this time from Isaiah 9:1.

Not coincidentally, this is part of the same prophecy which contains, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6).

Matthew is again linking Jesus to the promised Messiah – repeatedly hitting us over the head with it so to speak, asking us, "do you get it yet?" And we reply, "we know, we know!"

We now get the first words of Jesus' ministry, which sound suspiciously like the message John the Baptist was giving:

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near!"

Change your ways, for the time of God is at hand.

Is there anything you need to change, to have God more intimately involved in your life? Write down one thing you could repent of. Try replacing it with the four tangents of Jesus' pursuit of our Father (as per day 353). ☺

Record your attempt and its success or struggles.

Day 355: Disciples

Here is something different about Jesus' ministry compared to His compatriots: his disciples.

First, they were fishermen. They weren't rabbi-followers, they weren't theologically gifted (that we know of), they weren't people desiring a life of rumination on scripture or attendance at temple. They weren't star pupils of anyone or anything. They were *fishermen.* You couldn't get more ordinary, run of the mill, humdrum.

Second, they didn't apply, get screened, and then accepted. *Jesus* called *them.* Jesus *sought them out.* Not only was this weird, it was downright backwards. By rights, any self-respecting Rabbi would have his students carefully screened, accepting only the brightest and most able. There were standards to be maintained! There was a reputation to be garnered and protected! Yet here was Jesus, choosing normal people literally off the beach.

What does Jesus promise them? Work. "Follow Me, and I will change you from fishermen to fishers OF men." "Oh sure, I'll drop everything to follow you." Eh? This wasn't going to be a leisurely life of poring over old texts and arguing as to the proper meaning.

Their fishing used a circular net that had heavy weights around its perimeter. Labor-intensive, the net would be thrown out from the boat time and again, trying to trap the fish below. Fishing involved much strain, long hours, and often little results. Fishing for people would prove also to be strenuous, requiring persistence and dedication (again, often with little results). But, just like fishing for fish, the result would be worth it. Fish would be caught to be eaten; people would be caught to *avoid* being eaten, by eternal destruction, and be given new life instead.

These were people from Jesus' audience, who listened to Him, heard the allure of the nearness of God's kingdom, and said, "I want that. I want that for me, for my family, and for Israel. I want to see the New Creation of God. I want to be part of that. Yes, I will follow You. I will work."

Have you decided to follow Jesus? Are you one of His disciples? Describe how you follow Jesus in your life. How do you work for Him?

Share your thoughts with your fellow Explorers in Christ.

Day 356: Rest

Rest, receive nourishment, feed both body and soul. Reflect on the past week and care for your needs (body and spirit). Pray. Dedicate this day to God. Worship! In the evening get together with a group you trust and share what you would like to from the previous week – good points, hard points, what you've learned, what you've struggled with, etc. Decide again if you wish to continue journeying together or want to stop.

Know that God loves you. Celebrate, Rejoice, Give thanks, talk and walk with God.