

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
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Bread Which Gives Us Life

Matthew 4:1~4

4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

4:2 And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

4:3 And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”

4:4 But he answered, “It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.””

From Epiphany to Lent, we remember the Baptism of Jesus, temptation in wilderness, ministry in Galilee, and training of the disciples. Today, we are going to learn about the temptation in wilderness.

1. Jesus and Temptation

There are two words, “*yu-waku*” (temptation) ” and “*shi-ren*” (test) in Japanese Bible, but both of them have the same original word. If you have different perspective to it, it can be “temptation” or “test”. According to James 1:13-14, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.” “Temptation” comes from Devil who is called “Satan.” You yield to temptation because you have sin. God has never given you temptation; however, He can give you a “test”.

“Temptation” distances you from God, but “test” leads you close to God.

A fishing hook of temptation catches you with sin and desire, which comes from your sin; therefore, it can not catch Jesus who has no sin. However, why did Satan tempt Jesus who has no sin? The answer is that Satan did not know who Jesus was.

Indeed, the Satan called Jesus “Son of God”. Demons, the Satan’s underlings also knew that Jesus was the Son of God. In Luke 4:41, “And demons also came out of many, crying, ‘You are the Son of God!’ because they knew that he was the Christ.” Even before Jesus’ disciple confessed “You are the Son of living God, Christ”, the Satan and his underlings knew Jesus was the Son of God.

Satan called Jesus “Son of God,” but the meaning was just like “a person who has special mission and authority from God.” At that time, people in Jerusalem lost their independence; therefore, they were longing for a Messiah who could politically re-establish their country, which was at the time under Roman Empire. They expected such a change in Jesus. Compare to the Jewish people, Satan and his underlings had better understanding of Jesus as spiritual and global savior. But it’s not the same understanding that Jesus’ disciples confessed “You are the Son of living God” and the Church confess “God’s only Son,” The insistence of the Satan and his underlings was different from these confessions. They knew Jesus had a power to wipe out them; however, they did not know the essence of Jesus as God and true mission of Christ.

A partial knowledge about God and Christ, — and its knowledge is not enough to lead us to faith — has been called “Knowledge of

Devil.” The knowledge, not reach the essence of God and Christ or not lead us to faith has been called so. This was mentioned in James 2:19, “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe — and shudder!” We shall have living knowledge, which will lead us to the salvation, not the knowledge of Devil. It is important to deepen the understanding of the living knowledge.

I am assuming he thought Jesus was an existence like Adam. Adam was first human being; therefore, he did not have mother or ancestors. Adam was created by God Himself. In that sense, Adam was a “Child of God” (Luke 3:38 in New Japanese Bible) I think Satan thought about Jesus like so. Satan had tempted Adam and yield him to temptation; therefore, he believed that he could do the same thing to Jesus. However, he failed. Because Jesus was much greater than Satan or even the people believed.

2. Jesus and Test

I said first that “temptation” and “test” have the same original word. It was a “test” for God that Jesus was tempted in the wildness. God did not tempt Jesus, but it is God who allowed Jesus be tempted in the wildness. And the “Holy Spirit” led Jesus to the wildness.

In our case, testing is used to purify us. Gold and silver become more genuine by melted by fire and taken removed of impurities. It is as if God were to purify us by a “furnace” which is a test.

However, as for Jesus, nothing was needed to be taken out by test. Then why God gave Jesus the test? That is, first , to make Jesus become the savior for all human beings, Jesus needs to experience many kinds of sufferings and pains including tests by God. Jesus is

the Son of God, God the Son, but he became a man. Jesus whom we trust is the one who lives earthly as a believer of God and he was experienced many sufferings as true believers would get.

Second, it was to be proven by the test that Jesus is the Son of God. Many kinds of products made by factories receive a final inspection, get a “pass” sign, and finally shipped out to markets. Inspection and tests are necessary to certify that these products satisfy the standard. Jesus took the same way. God proved that Jesus is truly the Son of God and is the Savior of human beings through the test.

Romans 5:3-4 says, “More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.”. The word which is translated into “character” means “pass certificate”. Jesus preceded to receive the pass certificate from God, and made those who are following Him possible to get pass certificate.

Hymn #213 was written by Fanny Crosby who was blind. She wrote in the second verse about the test Jesus received.

Fasting alone in the desert, tell of the days that are past;
how for our sins He was tempted, yet was triumphant at last.
Tell of the years of His labor, tell of the sorrow He bore;
He was despised and afflicted, homeless, rejected and poor.

Every time I sing this hymn, it reminds me of Hebrews 2:18, which says, “For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” Jesus himself went through the test, and passed the test. He has proven that he was truly the Son of God and our Savior. When we go through tests, we can be comforted and encouraged by this fact, and it is the best comfort for us. us.

3. Intentions of Temptation

Finally, let's think about the meaning of temptation that Jesus went through. What did the temptation mean, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread?" and how did Jesus answer?

This temptation was not a challenge against Jesus; it was only a kind "suggestion." "Satan" means "enemy," and he stands against God and His believers. Even though, he is not always like a savage animal. In a country as the USA, he could imitate himself as if he is on the side of believers. In this case, Satan recognized Jesus was hungry after 40 days fast and sympathetically whispered it into Jesus' ear, that saying, "You are the son of God. Why not satisfy Your hunger by making bread from these stones? You cannot do anything with such starvation. You should eat, because You will be the messiah." It sounds very nice, but Jesus knew the secret intentions of Satan.

"Command the stones become the loaves of bread" secretly meant this, I suppose; "Jesus, You are going to proclaiming the Kingdom of God. But look! How many people suffer from starvation? You want to prioritize their hunger before the things of heaven. Why don't you use your power for ministering the hungry people?"

Even in present time, three fourth people in the world go sleep hungry. Globally, cause of death in the highest degree is none of cancers, heart attack, or brain-hemorrhage. It is starvation. One seventh of global population died without enough nutrition. Children in the area of hunger put the stones into their mouths and try to forget their starving. How good it is Jesus could change them into something to eat?

Jesus didn't say that people need no bread; He said, "Man shall not live by bread alone." In fact, Jesus fed many people with little loaves of bread and fishes. However, He said to His disciples that they feed people by their hands (Matthew 14:16, Mark 6:37, and Luke 9:13). Jesus gave the disciples and us the job to give out the bread to people and make the bread from stones in their mouths.

Starvation happens because of disaster, but the biggest cause is the war. Their crops could be no longer yielded in battle fields. Also, the foods cannot be delivered into the danger area, so that people also starve and die. Christians have been speaking out the peace and gospel to stop the wars, and share anything based on the teaching of love, and deliver the foods within the offering mind to the starving people. That work is now from non-churches and non-Christian people.

The source of "making bread from stones" is the gospel of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus Christ. He did know the importance of giving bread to people, and also knew that God's words should be prioritized. When "Man shall live by every word that comes from the mouth of God," there is the work of love, making bread from stones and it even spreads outward.

Church and Christians are always tempted; but the most dangerous temptation is to prioritize other things before God's words. Of course, we don't throw out the Bible, but people could throw out reading and questioning the Bible and being guided by the God's words, in the way of churches and personal Christian life. We often choose whatever we want and whatever we prefer. We have to know this is how the temptation is.

Jesus said, "Every word comes from the mouth of God." This

phrase reminds me 2 Timothy 3:16. It says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God.” “Inspiration” means “the breath of God” and it teaches the Bible is from the mouth of God. Thing awakes people is only what comes from God. While living, or working for God, we need wisdom and knowledge; but it is temporary if it is from this world. It will not lead people into the God’s Kingdom and gives no solution to the problems of the world. “Every word comes from the mouth of God” is one and only thing gives lives to us and only thing we need. We shall believe and trust in the words of God, and become the followers of Him.

(Prayer)

God Father, we are now being tempted as your Son had been through. Please teach us and plant Your verses in us to see the point of temptations we encounter, and let us overcome by Your Word. Help us remember our Lord when we are tempted, who was tempted as well as we are. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.