Jesus Tempted

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Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. 3 The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4 But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" 5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 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.'" 7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; 9 and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10 Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" 11 Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him. (Matthew 4:1-11)

1. A Fast-paced Culture

One of the most common expressions in everyday life in Korea is "palri palri" which means "hurry up and hurry up." This is the first Korean expression many visitors from overseas learn in Korea. Korea has a fast-paced culture and people are often impatient. Many people believe that this fast-paced attitude has turned companies like Samsung and LG into industry leaders.

2. The term "immediately" in the Gospels

We see a similar attitude in the four Gospels. For example, Mark 1:12 says, "***And immediately the spirit drove him out into the wilderness***." Mark 1:18 also says, "***And immediately they left their nets and followed him***." In the sea of Galilee, when Jesus says to Simon Peter and Andrew, "follow me," Mark says that they followed Jesus immediately.

Why did the Gospel writer use "immediately" to describe Jesus going into the wilderness? Jesus is sent to the world as the son of God, but he is also sent as the servant of God. A good servant would not delay but takes immediate action when a task is given. The more important point is that Jesus was obedient when the Holy Spirit directed him to act immediately.

Jesus may not want to be in the wilderness after his baptism, but he follows the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

3. Jesus Tempted

Why does the Holy Spirit lead Jesus in the wilderness? The Passion translation of the Bible says, "***the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the lonely wilderness in order to reveal his strength against the accuser by going through the ordeal of testing***" (4:1). Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit for a purpose: to be tempted by the devil. Jesus' debate with the devil functions as an assessment of his readiness as God's son for the mission of the Messiah.

How does Jesus reveal his readiness to the devil? After Jesus fasts for forty days and nights he becomes very hungry. The devil knows that Jesus is hungry. The devil says, "***If you are the son of God, tell these stones to become bread***" (verse 3). The devil knows Jesus would begin his ministry as the son of God. The devil challenges Jesus to prove his Messiahship. The devil is asking, "are you really the son of God? Can you prove it by changing these stones to bread? The devil's first temptation attacks Jesus' identity.

Jesus answers, "***It is written: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God***" (verse 4). By quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, Jesus rejects the devil's challenge. This passage has been understood in that we need bread for our physical body, but for our spirit we need God's word.

However, if we read Deuteronomy 8, we notice that is not what Jesus means. Throughout the wilderness experience in the Exodus, the Israelites face many challenges such as no water and food. Yet whenever they are in need of something, God provides what they need in a miraculous way. They have manna because God commands. The people experience that their food in the wilderness is provided by the word of God. Jesus reminds the devil that it was not bread that kept the Israelites alive but His word. Jesus is saying that he does not have to make the stones to bread because God would feed him.

The second test is on popularity. This would be the wonderful opportunity for Jesus to prove that he is the Son of God and the Messiah. The devil takes Jesus to the highest point of the temple and says, "***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***." Quoting Psalm 91:11-12, the devil says God will send His angels to hold Jesus if he throws himself down.

Why does the devil take Jesus to the temple? Malachi 3:1 says, "***See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple."*** In this verse, "my messenger" refers to John the Baptist. "The Lord" means Jesus Christ. The devil knew about a common belief among the Jews that the Messiah would suddenly appear in the sky, coming down to the Temple. However, if we read Psalm 91:11, we notice that the devil leaves out a phrase, "***in all your ways***." Psalm 91 says, when a person follows God's will he or she will be protected.

Jesus responds again from Deuteronomy 6:16, "***Do not put the Lord your God to the test***." In the wilderness, Moses reminds the people how they tested God at Massah, when after God had already fed them with manna, they grumbled that God was going to kill them with thirst (Exodus 17:1-7). The people do not trust that the Lord, who called them out of Egypt, would take care of their needs to the end of the journey. Jesus is saying that he is not going to show a dramatic display to earn popularity among the people as the Messiah.

The third temptation is related to God's plan for Jesus. The devil knows that God wants Jesus Christ to rule the world. After the devil shows Jesus the kingdom of the world with all their splendor, he says, "***All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me***." The devil challenges Jesus by saying, "if you would bow down and worship me, you can have the kingdom of this world right now. The devil is saying that Jesus can be the ruler of the world without dying on the cross.

Jesus orders the devil to leave, saying, "***Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him***" (Deuteronomy 6:13). In Deuteronomy 6, Moses warns the Israelites not to forget the Lord when they enter the promised land and experience prosperity. Many people want prosperity, but they forget that there is a serious danger in prosperity. When people prosper, they tend to forget God.

4. What We Learn from Jesus

What do we learn in Jesus' dealing with the three temptations? Everyone has physical needs and wants popularity and prosperity. Although Jesus was the son of God and the Messiah, he could have temptations to satisfy his physical needs, gain popularity and prosper immediately. But Jesus refuses all of the temptations, because he knows that there would be no better way than trusting in the Lord in any situation.

5. Conclusion

As Jesus begins his new life as the Messiah, he is in the wilderness. What kind of experiences did he have? He was lonely, scared, hungry, dangerous and even tempted by the devil? Did he want to be in the wilderness? Maybe not. It was not his will, but the Holy Spirit led him.

When he was tempted, he did not choose a short-cut to be successful as the son of God. He did not seek to be popular among the people. When the devil tempted Jesus, he rejected all with God's words and sought the will of Lord. Although Jesus was alone, in danger, and in hunger in the wilderness, through the temptation Jesus experienced the guidance of the Holy Spirit, trusted in the Lord, and reconfirmed his identity and mission.

6. Application

In our life journey, we experience two extremes: prosperity and adversity, health and sickness, success and failure, and new life and death. The question we need to think about is, "Are loneliness, trials, hunger, sickness, failure, temptations, and death bad?"

These days, many people are in panic because of coronavirus. About 90,000 infections have been confirmed and 3,000 people have died globally. The coronavirus has caused us intense fear. Even it affects me. Discipleship Ministries of the United Methodist Church planned to have a spiritual pilgrimage to Korea in April this year, and I was planning to join, but the trip was cancelled. Many people are experiencing danger and crisis. They feel like living in the wilderness.

The experience of crisis and worrying about our health and safety reminds us how vulnerable and fragile we are. What do you think God is doing in our situation? In Deuteronomy 8:2, Moses says, "***Remember the long way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments."*** God wants his people to be humble and obey his commandments.

Today is the first Sunday in Lent. As Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights, we might feel that we are in the wilderness. But we need to remember that Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit and the angel of the Lord came to help Jesus after the devil left. I pray that when we come to the end of this season, we may feel stronger in our spirit and that our spiritual disciplines allow us to become more faithful followers of Christ, so that we may overcome any temptations and trials and glorify God's name. Amen.