

be tempted. Jesus by the power of the same Spirit remained unshaken and secure in his identity. Jesus undergoes the struggle and suffering in the wilderness and then leaves in the power of the Spirit!

Every battle with temptation strengthens us in who we are and what God has called us to be and to do. When our identity is threatened there is enormous opportunity for God's Kingdom to be advanced. Temptation will return, but every time it does it's an opportunity to strengthen our identity and for Kingdom breakthrough. Your Father loves you, believes in you, and is proud of you. May you and I walk in that knowledge.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- What are the different appetites that attract us and control us? How can we break them with God's help?
- What are the ways you look for affirmation and identity from others?
- What one thing could we do this week that intentionally does not seek affirmation or recognition?

APPLICATION

Is there something this week where you could 'choose to lose'?

PRAYER

*The Lord bless you and watch over you,
The Lord make his face shine upon you
And be gracious to you,
The Lord look kindly on you
And give you peace*

Pray that you would find your identity in God. Pray that out of this identity you could say 'lead us not into temptation'. Pray that God's Spirit would strengthen & renew you.

PLEASE PRAY FOR...

- **Roy Coles (Mike's Dad), who is in hospital after a serious accident.**
- **Susie Appleby. Pray in particular that Susie could get plenty of sleep to aid her recovery, and that her migraines would cease.**
- **Vanessa Streeton, fighting cancer. Please pray for Vanessa and for her family (including her three year old child)**
- **Charlotte Stacey, who is on the transplant list for a kidney.**
- **Pat Lilley, who is in hospital after a fall at home.**
- **The Haynes family – particularly as they adjust to a new routine.**

This week's study notes were written by Olivia Lambert



St Mark's

**Inspiring each other to
love and follow Jesus Christ...
everywhere in everything**

INDIVIDUAL STUDY NOTES

**Week Beginning:
27th October 2013**

KINGDOM AND COVENANT: JESUS' TEMPTATION

WORSHIP:

Read Psalm 46. Thank God that he is our refuge. Pray for strength in times of fear and trouble. To finish spend a few moments in silence – *'Be still, and know that I am God'*

READINGS: Matt. 4:1-11 (see also Phil. 3:7-14; Heb. 2:18, 4:15; 1 Cor 10:13)

This week we continue our study of the covenant and kingdom – who we are in God and what that means for the kingdom of God – who we are and therefore what we do – 'being' and 'doing'. So far we have looked at this in the Old Testament with the covenant relationship shown through Abraham, Joseph and Moses. Today and next week we look at the New Covenant as revealed through Jesus. The covenant as we have discovered is about the relationship between God and his people – who we are in Him - in other words our identity and all that therefore means for our lives. On God's side, it is marked by His love, faithfulness and grace towards His people. The basis of the covenant is God's promises to his people and that includes us and therefore our acknowledgment of who we are in him, immersed in that love and faithfulness and grace.

The covenant is with the Father which leads to us knowing who we are as His children (our identity) and then leads on to obedience to Him because of our security in that relationship. From that flows out how it is worked out in the Kingdom of God. God is king, we know our relationship to him and have his authority and can show his power in bringing and working for the kingdom.

So why as we look at Jesus, do we start by looking at the temptations of Jesus? Jesus too is in covenant with his Father and his identity is therefore paramount. Our reading from Matthew's Gospel should probably start in the chapter before (look at chapter 3: 13-16) Jesus at his baptism hears the words of the Father. 'This is my son, whom I love, and with whom I am well pleased.' And then we read quite shocking words really – Jesus was led by the Spirit

into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Jesus was led by the Spirit to be tempted! What is going on here?

And what do those temptations focus on – his identity. Here is the testing ground of Jesus' identity. He has just heard the words – 'you are my son' and what does the tempter begin with 'If you are God's son'. This strikes at the heart of who He is.

How often that is also our temptation to doubt who God is and who we are in relation to Him. 'If you are one of God's children, how come you are behaving like that', 'He won't go on forgiving you, you've put yourself outside his love now'. 'If you are one of God's children, how come He doesn't always answer prayer – you're not good enough'.

Jesus temptations were all about how to use His Power that came from God, how to bring about the kingdom. The temptations were for Him to use his power in a wrong way which would have not brought in the kingdom at all – all short-lived or vacuous. The kingdom that Jesus was bringing in was a kingdom of love and sacrifice and self-giving.

The temptations of Jesus focus on three different areas

- If you are God's Son, turn these stones into bread - a temptation about appetite
- If you are God's Son, throw yourself off the temple and God will save you – a temptation about affirmation
- If you are God's Son, bow down to me and I'll give you all the kingdoms of the world – a temptation about ambition

Appetite – Jesus had been fasting for 40 days – use your power to turn these stones into bread to feed yourself – time to end the fast, you have the power. What's wrong with using it to feed yourself? Prove your identity by turning these stones into bread. 'Man shall not live by bread alone' says Jesus 'but on every word that comes from God'. It is very interesting to note in Luke's Gospel that it says the tempter left him for a more opportune time. Later in his ministry Jesus feeds 5000 people and John's Gospel tells us the people tried to make him king but he slipped through the crowd (see John 6:14,15). The temptation returned.

Our appetites clamour for our attention like a child. They can usurp God in our lives, gradually, insidiously. Many are not bad things in themselves but some are. What are our appetites? Food, sex or porn, gym, personal image, clothes, personal comfort, TV, facebook, mobile phone, sport, golf! Appetite temptation puts these things before God. In the end it is about control. These things get to control us, not the other way round. We lose the capacity to say 'No'. Do we see them as temptations or have we long since ceased to see them that way and justified our appetites.

How do we overcome this temptation to do with appetite?

Winning small victories over some appetites can help us overcome bigger ones. In the past the church has used Lenten disciplines to form stronger disciplines. Allowing God to have control over small things can strengthen our resolve in larger areas. See Hebrews 2:18 – Jesus can help us overcome temptation. We need to recognise it in the first place.

Affirmation - Jesus' temptation here was to do something spectacular by throwing himself off the temple and knowing God would not let Him fall. He would be affirmed before the people. They would believe in Him for all the wrong reasons. See how this temptation returned later 'If you are God's son come down from the cross then we'll believe in you'. Jesus himself spotted the temptation before that in the Garden of Gethsemane when they came to arrest him and he told Peter to put away his sword – do you not think I can call on legions of angels to save me? Jesus was affirmed by God at his baptism as we have seen but he wasn't looking for it in his disciples or the people. We need to do the same.

Our identity is so often what we want or need from others and what we crave. We want people to think well of us - what people think of us matters to us. Instead of being sure of our identity in God, we seek the quick hits of affirmation from others and let them shape who we are. This is evident in so many ways – do people like me, do they think I'm good at my job, do people think I'm smart or cool, am I wearing the right things??? This is what advertising feeds on as well as being a way of not affirming who we are in God. It undermines that God loves me just as I am, not if I'm good enough.

Seeking affirmation is addictive. We need to learn to live by the Father's smile not by everyone telling us how good we are!

Don't get me wrong here. I am not saying we should not affirm other people - what we are talking about is where we ourselves find our security.

Ambition

For Jesus the temptation was to use His power to build an earthly kingdom not a heavenly one. Bow down before me says the tempter and I'll give you the kingdoms of the world.

It is not that success or winning is wrong. It is when we need it to give us our identity. Again society's values emphasise this at every turn. It feeds low self worth when we fail to live up to this and also feeds our identity wrongly when we measure ourselves this way and have to be successful, not a loser! In the spiritual realm we are putting our kingdom before God's kingdom. If our identity lies in our personal success we cannot represent God because we want to advance our own kingdom before His.

How important is it to win to you? Do you ever choose to lose? Do you ever do something good or worthwhile and deliberately not make it known? Do we see ambition as a temptation or is it OK? Where does the line get drawn between making the best of ourselves and being successful and when it becomes an end in itself?

I came across a helpful phrase about temptation in some Bible notes a few years ago' Temptation – expect it, detect it, reject it.

In the power of the Spirit

Before we get thoroughly depressed, or blank this all out, or feel complete failures, it is important to go back to where we began. Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to